

Compartment Number Four— Cologne to Paris.

HE was looking through a hole—a square hole framed about with mahogany and ground glass. His face was red, his eyes were black, his mustache—waxed to two needle-points—was a yellowish brown; his necktie blue, and his uniform dark chocolate seamed with little threads of vermilion and encrusted with silver poker-chip buttons emblazoned with the initials of the corporation which he served.

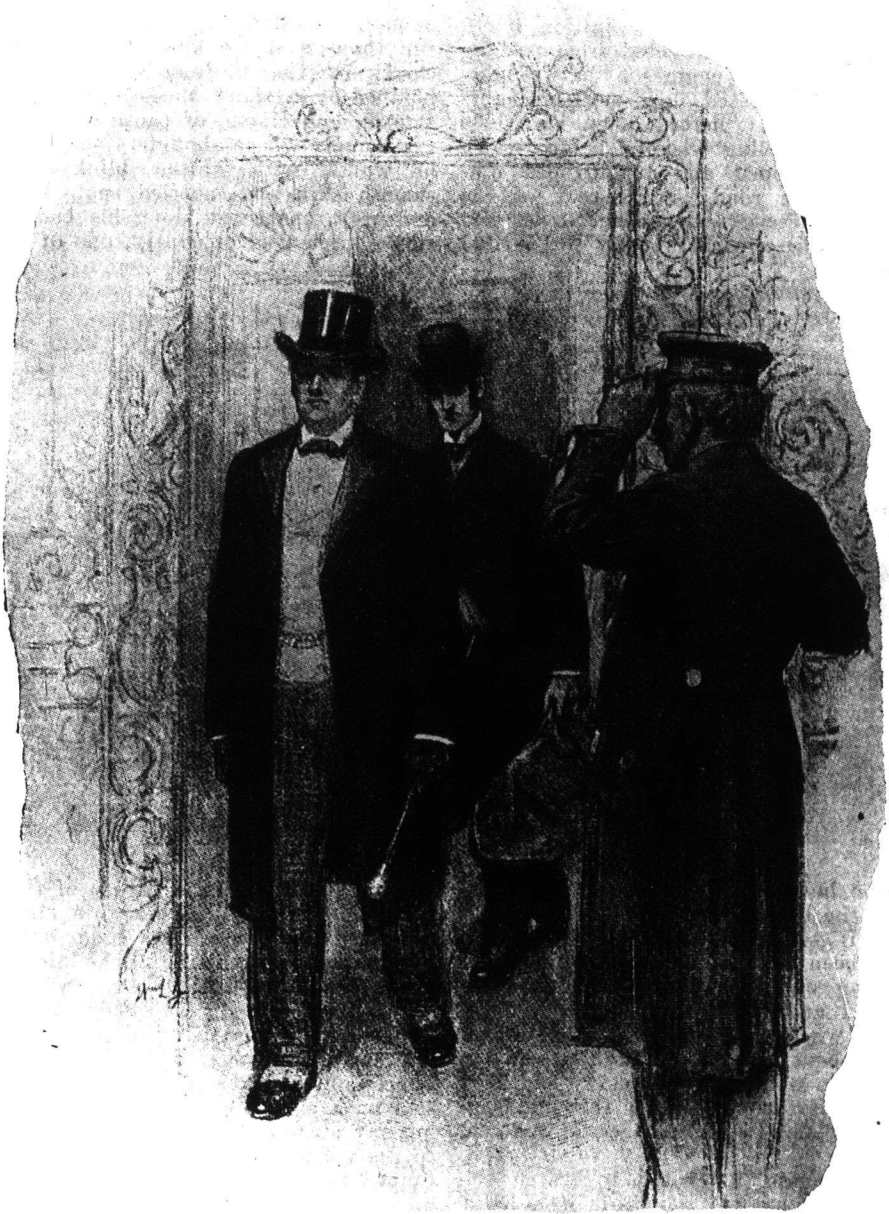
I knew I was all right when I read the initials. I had found the place and the man. The place was the ticket office of the International Sleeping Car Company. The man was its agent.

here—is full. We have only two cars on this train—Monsieur the Director has the last berth."

He said this, of course, in his native language. I am merely translating it. I would give it to you in the original, but it might embarrass you; it certainly would me.

"What's the matter with putting the Circus Director in the special car? Your regulations say berths must be paid for one hour before train time. It is now fifty-five minutes of eight. Your train goes at eight, doesn't it? Here is a twenty-franc gold piece—never mind the change"—and I flung a napoleon on the desk before him.

The bunch of fingers disentangled themselves, the shoulders sank an inch, the waxed ends of the taffy-colored mustache vibrated slightly, and a smile



The Director of the Greatest Show on Earth, smiling haughtily, passed in.

So I said, very politely and in my best French—it is a little frayed and worn at the edges but it arrives—sometimes—

"A lower for Paris."

The man in chocolate, with touches of the three primary colors distributed over his person, half closed his eyes, lifted his shoulders in a tired way, loosened his fingers and without changing the lay-figure expression of his face replied:

"There is nothing."

"Not a berth?"

"Not a berth."

"Are they all paid for?" and I accented the word paid. I spend countless nights on Pullmans in my own country and am familiar with many uncanny devices.

"All but one."

"Why can't I have it? It is within an hour of train time. Who ordered it?"

"The Director of the great circus. He is here now waiting for his troupe which arrives from Berlin in a special car belonging to our company. The other car—the one that starts from

widened in circles across the flat dullness of his face until it engulfed his eyebrows, ears and chin. The effect of the dropping of the coin had been like the dropping of a stone into the still smoothness of a pool—the wrinkling wavelets had reached the uttermost shore-line.

The smile over he opened a book about the size of an atlas, dipped a pen in an inkstand, recorded my point of departure—Cologne, and my point of arrival—Paris; dried the inscription with a pinch of black sand filched from a saucer—same old black sand used in the last century—cut a section of the page with a pair of shears, tossed the coin in the air, listened to its ring on the desk with a satisfied look, slipped the whole twenty-franc piece into his pocket—regular fare, fifteen francs, irregular swindle five francs—and handed me the billet. Then he added, with a trace of humor in his voice:

"If Monsieur the Director of the circus comes now he will go in the special car."

I examined the billet. I had compart-



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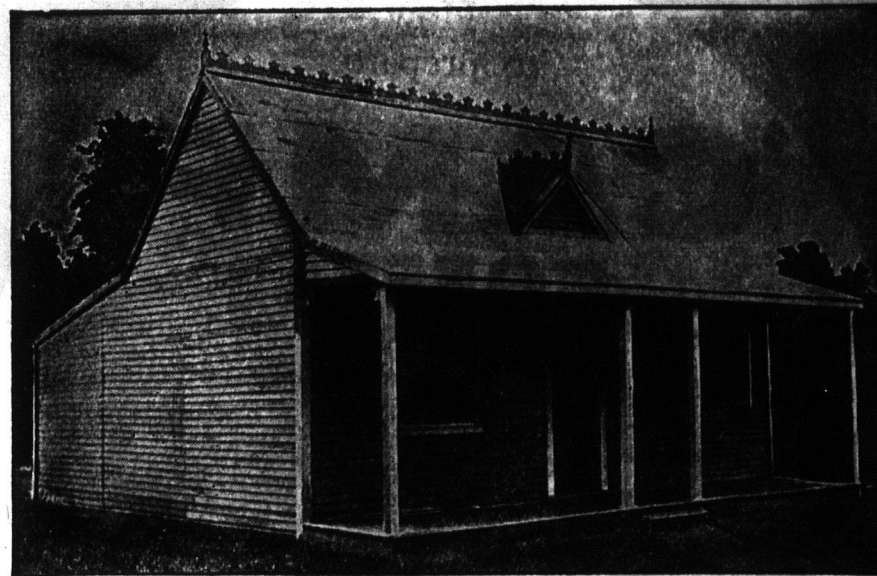
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