

The Conspiracy.



T is ten o'clock at night...

Slowly, quietly, steadily the old clock in the still older Cathedral struck ten. After all, why should it hurry? Has it not been there for more than a century? Will it not be there still when the present generation and perhaps the next also will have disappeared?

Though it's only ten o'clock the street is deserted, for in this primitive town of X... with its old-fashioned ways, even the robbers themselves deem it prudent to be under shelter after curfew has sounded its timely warning. But hush — I think, yes I'm sure I hear the sound of quickly approaching footsteps. Though I do not yet see the walker, I am inclined to judge him from his open disregard of the town's stringent rules to be a person of some importance. The minute he steps from the dark street to the brilliant square, I know I was right and wonder would it be rash to judge a second time and say that now it looks as if the moon was complacently caressing his genial brow. I might even go further and say, "Evidently the moon knows what she's about in thus shedding her effulgence on this Masonic hero, Balandreau on his way home from a meeting of the Lodge of United Hearts."

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Every one knows Balandreau !

Is he not one of our most distinguished merchants, one of those who never had a bill of exchange protested, or an invoice recalled ; one of those who had never been entangled in a dishonest transaction ? I see your look of surprise as you ask, "How with such a record did he happen to join the Free Masons?" I am not positively sure, but impute the blame partly to ignorance, or perhaps more justly to ambition and besides it was a good field in which to air his anticlerical ideas, shaping themselves into expressions like the following which would