

which led to a disastrous discovery. When I handed in my report, I fully realized that it would prove a certain man's death-warrant; but I had no choice: it was his life or mine, and, after all, it was justice—he had betrayed his trust."

Dick's eyes fell as if shamed; his head drooped forward on his breast. An expression of profound pity crept into the elder man's face. As if anxious to close a subject unutterably painful to both, he added quickly, "Influenced by motives of humanity, I tried in indirect fashion, to save the culprit; but, as you know, in vain."

"The penalty has been paid," replied Dick sombrely. "As you say, after all, it was justice. Grim, savage, but still justice. The punishment even of a betrayed trust, however, should end with the life forfeited. In this case, as you know right well, it has not ended; and the shame of what follows rests upon my innocent shoulders. Put yourself in my place, Monsieur Marcel," he cried passionately; "imagine yourself bereaved as I have been, robbed as I have been! Would you not count it your duty, your solemn duty, to prevent further sacrilege? To recover what desecrating hands have ruthlessly stolen? Would you not feel that your honour, your happiness, were alike at stake? Could you, in my place, tamely submit to the ignominy? Ignore it? Go through life with that ever-present horror? Eat, drink, sleep with the ghastly remembrance for ever haunting you? No, no, a thousand times, no! You would act as I am prepared to act; you would risk your life, if need be, to accomplish your purpose."

The other shook his head slowly and in melancholy fashion.

"At your age, my young friend," he answered, "I should probably have argued as you argue; but time brings wisdom and teaches us to bow our heads to the inevitable. Deeply as I sympathize with you, acutely as I feel the truth of all you have urged, I cannot close my eyes to the hopelessness of the task you have set yourself. Supposing you find Aram Kalfian, do you imagine he will tamely abandon what he has risked so much to obtain? He dares not—his own life would pay the forfeit. If you enlist the services of the police, the whole miserable story will become public property—yet what can individual action do in the face of a vast conspiracy? These men are always on their guard against attack; at the first breath of alarm, what you seek would be passed on from hand to hand out of your reach. Your one solitary chance would be to gain by stratagem what you will never obtain by force. Kalfian knows you by sight, I suppose?" he added, after a moment's reflective pause.

"Yes," was the grim reply. "He is not likely to forget me; at our last interview I had him at my mercy; my pistol was at his head. Would to God I had blown his brains out!"

"Thank heaven, rather, that you were saved from such criminal folly," said Monsieur Marcel, sternly. "Had you yielded to such a mad impulse, at the present moment you would be within prison walls, and your name would be a target for the world's scorn."

Dick coloured hotly at the reproof, seeing which the other continued— "What about my nephew? Does this man know him also?"

"No; they have never met." "Then he must take the lead in this matter," was the quick reply. At this moment young Alston, who had been bending forward, his ear close to the door, suddenly straightened his figure, and came towards them, one hand half-raised as if in warning.

"So nothing will suit you, Ted," cried Monsieur Marcel, in clear, ringing tones, "and you, Mr. Franks, but a trip round the world? Well, I like your spirit! We will drink good luck to the expedition. My dear boy, you are nearest to the bell; please ring."

SOME considerable time elapsed before the summons was obeyed, which monsieur filled by dragging out atlases and Baedekers, and making a great show of consulting them; finally, a man-servant appeared—not, both visitors noted—the one who had previously admitted them. This was a good-looking young fellow, with dark eyes set rather closely together; there was nothing suspicious about his manner as he promptly executed the orders given him by his mas-

ter, beyond a certain cat-like stealthiness of movement which seemed natural to him, and the fact that, as he set wine and glasses on the table, he favoured each of his visitors with a prolonged stare.

"That will do, Jean," said Monsieur Marcel affably, "leave the door open as you go—it is insufferably hot in this room!"

By the time the glasses had been filled and emptied, the soft pat, pat of Jean's footsteps had died away in the distance.

"We are safe now for the moment," said the master of the house hurriedly. "I was remarking when we were interrupted, Ted, that you, being unknown to Kalfian, must be the one to approach him."

Dick hastily interposed. "Your nephew, sir, is the best friend I have in the world," he said; "but even he knows nothing of this miserable story, although he has volunteered to fight for my cause, he is completely ignorant of its justice or injustice."

"It is yours, my dear boy," placidly remarked the person mentioned, "that suffices for me. This much, however, I have gathered from what you have said. Firstly, Kalfian has in his possession property of yours which you are determined at all risks to regain; secondly, for private reasons, it is inadvisable to seek the aid of law or police. Am I right so far?" Dick bent his head gravely. "Then you have only to describe the object stolen to me; and my uncle to point out the fellow, and I will answer for the rest. I will follow him up like a sleuth-hound; willing or not, he shall be made to disgorge, I promise you!"

The eyes of the other two men met over Ted's head in a glance of grave interrogation. Neither of them seemed to be convinced by his cheery optimism.

The elder first broke the silence.

"It is just possible," he said, addressing Dick, "that my nephew might succeed where you are bound to fail; but to do this he must be taken further into your confidence. The subject is too painful a one for you to discuss—without entering into particulars, have I your permission to give Ted a few strictly necessary details?"

Again Dick bent his head in silence: then rising slowly, walked towards the window and turning his back to the room, gazed with unseeing eyes out into the street.

TED made a half-involuntary movement to recall him; a keen distress was depicted on his sensitive face; it was hateful to him to have in a sense to force his friend's confidence. Yet how could he help without a fuller knowledge? It was clearly impossible! With a resigned sigh, he turned to his uncle, and the latter nervously whispered a few words in his ear. Only a few words, but their ghastly purport stole the colour from the young man's cheeks, leaving them a chalky pallor. Recalling Dick, Monsieur Marcel said gravely:

"I spoke only the truth when I told you I was in ignorance of Kalfian's present movements; but I knew a meeting of the 'Circle' is held to-night; it is probable that it is convened especially to hear his report." Dick shuddered, and the elder man continued. "I will attend it, and let you know the result. Where are you putting up?"

The young man gave the address of a small hotel in the Rue St. Honore; and then Monsieur Marcel, having first made sure that the coast was clear, himself ushered the two friends out.

His last words, uttered in nervous haste, and with many backward glances over the shoulder, were:

"Return to your hotel and do not stir from it until you hear from me. I shall communicate with Ted, it will be less dangerous. I am giving you all the aid I can," he whispered in Dick's ear, "at considerable personal risk; in return, I ask your solemn promise that you will never come here again; and that you will send me neither message nor letter. Remember," here his voice took a note of solemn warning, "what has happened once, may happen again, and will, if it is ever suspected that I have meddled in the matter."

(To be continued.)

Defined.—"A tip is a small sum of money you give to somebody because you're afraid he won't like not being paid for something you haven't asked him to do."—The Bailie (Glasgow).

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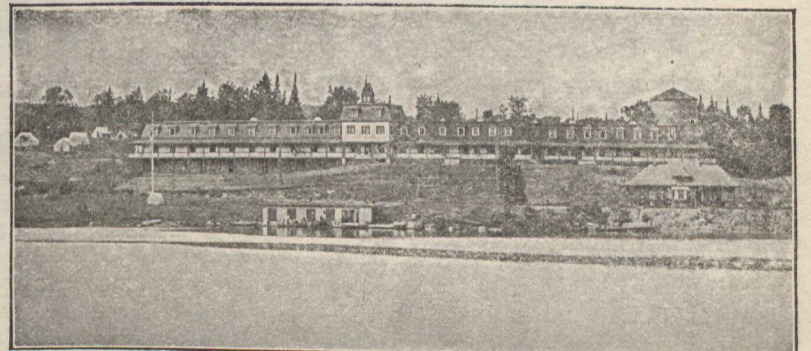
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