

CHAPTER II.

DETECTIVE PAINCHAUD'S STORY.

WHEN I, Exavier Painchaud, was called on the 10th of May, 1870, to La Banque de Lyon et de L'Espagne, Paris, to investigate the mysterious forging of a cheque for two hundred thousand francs, I had been just six months in the Paris detective department. Before that I belonged to the police department. This was the first important case I had been called to work upon, and, like all young detectives, I was exceedingly anxious to win renown in my profession. Associated with me on the case was one of the most experienced detectives in Paris, who was my dearest friend.

The unravelling of this strange mystery brought a woman into the case which ruined the friendship between us, and finally made criminals of us both. After the lapse of over a quarter of a century I now lay bare the facts of this mystery which attracted so much comment; and also a mystery which arose out of it, neither of which until this day has ever been made public. I would have liked to have carried the secrets to the grave with me, but why I cannot, shall be known.

When I entered the bank manager's private office that memorable afternoon there were present: Henri de Tonancourt, the banker, a thin, clean-shaven, dis-