POOR DOCUMENT

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THE WEIGHT OF THE CROWN

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CHAPTER XXV.

An Unexpected Honor.

The question was asked a great deal easier than it could be answered. Only Lechmere smiled.

"I fancy I could give a pretty shrewd guess," he said. "The countess has been inspired by a discovery that she has made tonight, and a double of the king might prove very useful under certain circumstances. And in spite of what this young lady says as to the way she baffled the hired spy in the lane, I fancy the countess has an inkling of the truth. We have pretty well established the fact that the king started out this afternoon with certain papers in his pocket."

"Probably an abdication of his throne in the interests of Russia," Maxwell said.

"Precisely. He was hesitating as to whether he would sign or not. He goes to some gambling hell and gets exceedingly intoxicated there. The idea was probably to force a signature out of him as soon as he was in a fit state to hold a pen. Then a vast amount of money would have changed hands. The king would have been invited to drink again, and perhaps have recovered without having the least idea where he was for the next few days. In a word, he would have disappeared. In four and twenty hours all Europe would have heard of the abdication. Now, where are those papers now? The king certainly had them in his possession when he was rescued from the gambling hell."

"I wish you had looked," Maxwell said.

"If I had known this earlier!"

"Unfortunately, nobody knew of it," Lechmere proceeded. "Only our enemies. And when Maxgregor went off from here in the king's dress clothes, he took the papers in the pockets. If Madame Saens has an idea of what has happened, she knows this. Hence her note to Maxaroff. As a matter of fact, our friend the General is in considerable peril."

"In which case somebody ought to go to him at once," Jessie exclaimed.

Lechmere announced his intention of doing so without delay, but Maxwell objected. It would be far better for Lechmere to stay here and keep an eye on Mazaroff. And Maxwell was supposed to be out of the way, nobody would give him a second thought; therefore he was the best man for the purpose. Varney was warmly in favor of this suggestion, and Lechmere had no further objection to offer.

"Let it go at that," he said. "And the sooner you are off the better. There is one great point in our favor, these people can do nothing very harmful so long as those papers are missing. I mean the Foreign Office papers stolen from Countess Saens's bedroom. If we could get them back——"

"They must be got back," Varney said. "The best I can do is to go down to Scotland Yard and report the loss without being too free over the contents of the documents. Once those are back in our hands, our people can afford to be blandly ignorant of what the Mercury said tonight."

"And I should be free to hold up my head again," Maxwell murmured. "But I am wasting time here."

Maxwell disappeared into the darkness and made his way by the back lane into Piccadilly. The streets were quiet now, and very few people about. It was no far cry to the chambers occupied by General Maxgregor, and no time would be lost by going to the house of Countess Saens. Maxwell paused before it a moment. The dining-room blinds were still up, and the lights gleaming inside. But so far as Maxwell could see the room was empty. He lingered as long as he dared in the hope of something happening. He was just turning away when the front door opened and a man came out. In the passing flash of the street lamp Maxwell recognized the man who he had mistaken for the King of Asturia. The likeness became no less strong under Maxwell's close scrutiny.

The man stopped on the doorstep and lit a cigarette, and then he pulled his hat over his eyes and turned up his coat collar, warm as the night was. A hansom crawled along with the driver half asleep on his perch. In a strong German accent the man on the pavement called to the driver.

"Fleet street!" he said. "No. 191b, Fleet Street! Office of the Evening Mercury, you know. Wake up!"

Maxwell felt half inclined to follow. But he thought of the possible danger to Maxgregor, and he was forced unwillingly to abandon his intention. Acting on the impulse of the moment, he ran up the steps of the house and tried the door. To his surprise the lock turned in his hand. At the same moment the blinds in the dining-room were pulled down by the countess herself, and the lights switched off. Maxwell stood with the door just opened; he saw the figure of the countess herself mounting up the stairs. He could hear distinctly the swish of her skirts. Then there was another click, and the hall lights vanished. Countess Saens was going to bed, having forgotten to lock the front door! That all the servants had gone to bed Maxwell felt certain, for the area quarters were all in black darkness.

"Astonishing how careless these clever women are sometimes!" Maxwell muttered as he took his way down the road. "I suppose the servants generally see to that, and her ladyship has entirely forgotten a thing that never comes within the scope of her duties."

Maxgregor's place was reached at length, and Maxwell was glad to see the lights burning. A sleepy porter had not the slightest idea whether the General was in or out. He was just going to bed himself; he never sat up after midnight, and if the gentlemen were out after this without their keys it was their own fault. Maxwell cut short this tirade by going upstairs. He walked straight into Maxgregor's sitting room. It was a dark room on the first floor, with folding doors. On the other side of the folding doors the General was stretched out on the bed. He looked somewhat haughtily at the intruder.

"This is an unexpected honor," he said. "I have met you once or twice, Mr. Maxwell, but that does not give you the right to come into my bedroom in this fashion. In the light of recent events——"

"For Heaven's sake don't take that tone!" Maxwell cried passionately. "It is impossible not to understand what you are alluding to. And it is quite futile just now to protest my innocence. That I am innocent; that sooner or later you will have to apologize for your suspicions is inevitable. Meanwhile, I am here at the request of Mr. Lechmere and Dr. Varney to warn you of your danger. Cleverly as your escape was managed, it has been found out. Let me tell you what has happened?"

The General bowed coldly. He looked on the speaker as the cause of all the trouble. He was not going to accept a mere protestation of innocence in this way. And yet there was a ring of sincerity in what Maxwell said. He was here, also, of his own free will, and his news was serious.

"So that accursed woman has hit the right nail again," he growled. "That letter you speak of means mischief to me. I wonder if the countess knows that I am wounded? I dare say she does. I might have been murdered in my bed if you had not come."

"You would have been murdered," Maxwell retorted. "That is absolutely certain. Are you very ill?"

"No; it was merely a flesh wound in the shoulder. The bullet has been extracted. I lost blood, and I am feeling rather weak at present, but in a day or two I shall be quite myself again."

"How did you manage to keep the thing so quiet?"

"I sent for a doctor friend of mine. He was with me in the first Asturian campaign—a fellow who has a fortune, and loves doctoring as a pastime. He knows a lot about the Balkan business. I asked him to keep this matter a secret, and he has done so. Is there anything else I can tell you?"

"It seems to me that there is a good deal that you can tell me," Maxwell replied. When you walked off with the king's clothes you probably went away with papers that may be used with great effect against Russia if they fall into proper hands—our hands, that is. If you don't mind, I shall be glad to turn out the pockets of that coat."

"That is an excellent idea," Maxgregor said. "What did I do?—oh, I know. The porter took the whole suit down to be brushed; as I don't keep a man he acts as my valet. If you would not mind going down into the hall and asking the fellow?"

Maxwell vanished at once. But the hall porter had departed for the night, so the occupant of another set of chambers said as he opened the outer door with his latchkey. At the same moment a figure bolted past the door, a figure with coat collar turned up and hat pulled down. It was the double of the King of Asturia. Maxgregor's face grew stern as he heard.

"Let us anticipate events," he said. "Put out the lights in my sitting room and close the door. When you have done that put out the lights here also. There is a way into the corridor out of this room without going through the sitting room. Place the key of the sitting room door on the outside."

Maxwell crept back presently, having accomplished his task. For half an hour or more the two sat in the pitch darkness saying not a word to each other. It seemed a long time, but the watchers knew that something was going to happen and stifled their impatience. Presently Maxwell felt that a hand was clutching him by the arm. Maxgregor was whispering something in his ear.

And under the folding doors a long slit of light filtered into the bedroom. Somebody had turned up the light in the sitting room!

CHAPTER XXVI.

Loyal Silence.

It was getting late by this time. Gradually the guests were thinning and the splendid rooms were taking on a deserted appearance. Jessie sat in one of the corridors hidden away behind a bank of palms and azaleas, and longed for the time when she could rest. From head to foot she was aching with fatigue. She had not been used to excitement lately; the close atmosphere of the Bond Street establishment and the want of regular exercise in the pure air had told upon her. Now that the excitement had passed away she realized how tired she was.

She laid her head back against the wall and closed her eyes. So utterly exhausted was she that she did not seem to care what happened. And there would be much to be done in the morning. If only Vera Galloway could be restored to her proper place, Jessie vowed that nothing should prevail upon her to carry on the adventure. She slept just for a moment. She might have stayed there till daylight, only Ronald Hope came along and found her.

At the sound of a human voice Jessie became quite alert and vigorous again.

"How you startled me," she said. "I was asleep. Is there anything fresh, any new complications?"

Ronald dropped into the seat by Jessie's side. He was looking just a little grave and stern. It was possible to detain Jessie there for some little time.

"There is nothing fresh," he said. "I have a few words to say to you, Jessie. Everybody is going, and only a few of Lady Merchaven's intimate friends remain."

"If you are one of them you will not be expected to leave just yet," Jessie smiled. "But why look so serious, Ronald? Have I done anything?"

"Upon my word, I don't know," Ronald said in some perplexity. "I don't like it, Jes. If you look at it from a proper point of view you have no business to be here at all. Lady Merchaven is a dear friend of mine. What would she says if she knew everything? As a matter of fact, she is bound to know everything sooner or later."

"But you can't blame me," Jessie, protested. "Look at my position. I was quite desperate. I had been dismissed from Bond street for no fault of my own; I had a sister practically depending upon me; it was useless in the circumstances to try and find employment elsewhere. I was face to face with something very like starvation, my dear Ronald."

Ronald's face softened, but the perplexed frown on his face was still there.

"Oh, I know it," he said eagerly. "I see your position entirely. At the same time, it is quite wrong. I am looking at the social side of the question. And the worst of the affair is that you must go on now till Vera Galloway comes back. I have been trying to find some way to achieve that without delay. If it can be managed, you must promise never to change your identity again."

Something like tears rose into Jessie's eyes. The dull, tired feeling was coming over her again.

"Don't blame me, dear," she whispered. "Think of my position. I had not met you this afternoon; I did not dream that you still cared for me. And yet I fancy that I would have done the same in any case. A good and noble girl comes to me in great trouble; she asks me to help her out of a grave difficulty to save one she loves. To help her I do this. And she has more or less succeeded. Between the two of us we have gone far to save a nation. Tell Lady Merchaven if you like, but do not spoil everything in the moment of victory."

"I don't want to," Ronald said. "It would be ridiculous to speak just yet. But any moment some unexpected accident may find you out. It may come before bedtime. And what would happen to you then? I am very jealous for the good name of my future wife, Dr. Varney——"

"Dr. Varney is standing by me nobly, and he will see that I am safe," Jessie said. "Dear old boy, don't be afraid. Trust me a little longer, and I am quite sure——"

"My darling, I trust you implicitly," Ronald exclaimed. He bent forward and kissed Jessie's trembling lips. "Only I am so miserably anxious, so fearful lest—— But somebody is coming."

Somebody came down the corridor, pushing the azaleas carelessly aside from time to time. The newcomer was evidently looking for somebody. Then the grey face of Lechmere appeared, white and excited as Ronald had never seen him before. He paused before the others.

"Miss—er—Galloway, I have been looking for you everywhere," he said. "It is of the utmost importance that ——"

"Oh, dear!" said Jessie with a little broken laugh. "Please don't tell me that I have to do anything else tonight. I am utterly worn out. If I could go straight to bed——"

"So you may as far as I am concerned," Lechmere said curtly. "I beg your pardon, but I fancy I have made a discovery of importance. That man whom you took to be the King of Asturia—I mean the man you saw in the Countess Saens' dining room. What became of him?"

"Really, I cannot tell you," Jessie said. "Let me think. I fancy Mr. Maxwell said something about him. Yes, that was it. He said that the man you mention drove to the office of the Mercury. Mr. Maxwell would have followed him, only he could not spare the time."

Lechmere nodded as if pleased about something, but the stern look was still on his face.

"I fancy that is all that I need bother you about at present," he said. "And I don't think that we shall need your services any more tonight, my dear young lady. If you can contrive to see Dr. Varney on your ride before breakfast in the morning, you will be doing everybody a service."

Lechmere darted away as hurriedly as he had come. Evidently he had work of importance before him.

"He has given me one useful piece of information," Jessie said as soon as Lechmere had gone. "If what he remarks is correct, Miss Galloway is in the habit of riding before breakfast. Well, I shall be able to fulfil that part of the programme, Ronald. It will be delightful to be on the back of a horse again, even in a borrowed habit, which I sincerely hope will fit me."

Ronald looked at the mass of chiffon and the quivering fall of drapery before him, and smiled. The dress might have been made for the wearer, so perfectly did it seem to fit her.

"This is quite another matter," Jessie said. "One can do wonders with a little lace and a bow or two of chiffon. But a close-fitting riding habit is quite another thing. I dare say I shall manage. There is only one thing that really fills me with terror."

"I should like to know what that is," said Ronald.

"Why, Countess Saens. I am quite sure that she knows what has taken place—at least, she suspects, and will find out dual identity, or she would never have tried to gain admission to the hospital tonight. I am perfectly sure that she will make another attempt in the morning. She is clever and unscrupulous, and she is certain to get her own way. In the accident ward of a hospital there is always a case or two that needs identity, and there will be the chance of the countess. She professes to have missed somebody, and she will be able to walk through the accident ward. That is all she requires. And I am quite certain that she will do this thing in the course of the morning. Don't you agree with me?"

Ronald was fain to agree with what Jessie said. Perhaps some scheme for baffling the countess was already in the air, as Lechmere would not have suggested that early morning visit to Varney.

"I have been thinking the matter out," Jessie went on. "Why could not Miss Galloway be removed to a private ward? If Dr. Varney called at the hospital he could see the patient and drop a hint to that effect. You see what is uppermost in my mind, Ronald. A private ward affords chance of escape, also chance for me to take Miss Galloway's place and let her come home."

"You are a friend in need," Ronald said as he kissed the red lips again. "It was a lucky thing for Vera Galloway when she thought of you. But there are risks even in this scheme. Suppose the maid who was present when the robbery at the Countess Saens's took place comes forward and identifies you, what then? You will be charged with burglary, and perhaps convicted. The police will find out all about you—your game will figure largely in the newspapers."

Jessie hesitated a little before she replied. Her head fell forward, and she fell almost asleep on Ronald's arm. Nothing seemed to matter to her now; if only she could have a good night's rest.

"I don't seem to care," she murmured. "I don't fancy that the countess would go that far. It isn't as if she stood any chance of recovering the stolen papers. And she would have to give a description of the missing documents, which would not suit her book at all. On the whole, I am prepared to take any risk so that I can spare Vera Galloway further misery."

And Ronald had nothing further to say. It was good to know that he had the love of a girl like this. She could carry out her resolution, and he would maintain a loyal silence for the present.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Lechmere to the Rescue.

With a new object uppermost in his mind Lechmere left Merchaven House and took his way into Piccadilly. The roads were almost deserted now, save for a solitary foot passenger and a dingy night cab. One of these crept along presently, and Lechmere ordered the driver to take him to Fleet Street. In contrast with the West End there was bustle and animation enough in the street that never sleeps. It was near to the hour when the great morning papers went to press; there were lights everywhere, and the hoarse rattle of machinery. Lechmere came at length to the offices of the Mercury and demanded to see the editor. The request was an unusual one at so late an hour, and the clerk asked if the visitor had an appointment.

"I have no appointment at all," Lechmere said. "But at the same time I am going to see the editor. Give my card to Mr. Hunt, and say that I will not detain him many moments."

There was something in Lechmere's manner that caused the clerk to take the card without further protest. Lechmere had before now forced himself in times of emergency on the great ones of the earth, so that he was not going to be baffled by a newspaper editor, important functionary as the latter was. He waited some little time before the clerk returned.

Mr. Hunt was very busy, he said, and was sorry he could not see the gentleman. Perhaps he would like to call later on, or send up the nature of his business? Some very important news had come in late, and in the circumstances it was impossible for the editor to grant an interview to anybody.

Lechmere said he would call again, and turned for the door. But he had no intention of being put off in this way. He paused as a rush of business distracted the attention of the clerk. In a corridor leading to a flight of steps two jaded-looking reporters were talking eagerly.

"Is it a fake or a real thing?" the first one said. "I've just come back from Westminster—scene in the House, don't you know—and Gregg would not even look at us. Said we had a real good thing on."

"Then you didn't get to the bottom of what it was?" the other asked eagerly.

"No, I didn't. Something about the King of somewhere and a row in the office. Anyway, the whole of the staff up in the composing-room are working with closed doors, so that no hated rival shall get a sniff of what is going on. We are evidently in for a big sensation."

Lechmere waited for no more; he gripped his opportunity with both hands. He advanced along the corridor to where the two men were talking, and asked what floor Mr. Hunt's office was on. The two men looked at him with something of admiration on their faces. Hunt was a martinet in his office, and difficult of access at all times.

"Second floor on the right," one of the reporters said with a wink at his companion. "Don't knock, but walk right in. Hunt is always glad to see visitors at this hour. It is a refreshing change after the grind of the night. He'll be quite pleased to see you."

Lechmere grimly expressed his thanks, though the sarcastic force of the words and the wink were not lost on him. He was here to see Hunt, and he was going to do it at any cost. He made his way up the staircase and along to the second floor, where a door with the name of Hunt in large letters attracted his eye. The door of the room was shut, but Lechmere walked in.

The room was empty for the moment. The floor was littered with paper and proofs; on the desk a slip of galley proof lay. The heading attracted Lechmere's attention, and he whistled. Then he sat calmly down to await Mr. Hunt's return. He had no undue trial of his patience, for a moment later the editor of the Mercury bustled into the room.

There was a pleased smile on his face; he seemed to be on the best of terms with himself. But the smile faded away, and the mean, eager face grew anxious as Hunt detected the presence of his visitor.

"Now this is really too bad, Mr. Lechmere," he protested. Lechmere did not fail to notice the agitation of the speaker's voice. "Of course, I had your card. I sent a message down for you. If you had been the king I would not have seen you tonight. I never see anybody after twelve o'clock. I repeat, if you had been the king I should have had to refuse you an audience."

"Sounds exceedingly impressive, not to say regal," Lechmere remarked in a dry tone, and without the slightest suggestion of an apology. "What king do you happen to mean?"

"Why, the King of England, of course," Hunt puffed. "Any living king, as a matter of fact."

"Any king in the Almanach de Gotha —with the exception of the King of Asturia, eh?"

The question was couched in a tone of easy badinage, but its effect on Hunt was wonderful. The face grew grey and his hands trembled. If he had been accused of some crime he could not have looked more agitated. He tried to bluff, but he could only stammer something incoherent.

"Really, I don't know what you mean," he said. "The King of Asturia, you say?"

"My words were quite plain, Mr. Hunt. I came here tonight determined to see you and determined not to be bluffed by all the clerks in your office. Your paper has gone to press, and therefore you must have a few minutes to spare. You need not be afraid. Your composing room door is locked, and the present item of news destined for your readers is not likely to leak out. Will you be so good as to let me have an advanced copy of the paper?"

"Certainly not," Hunt said. "This is an outrage. If you do not leave my office——"

"Sit down," Lechmere said sternly. He might have been speaking to an unruly hound. "You are not going beyond that door without we have an explanation. The King of Asturia was here tonight. If you deny it, I shall give you the lie from that printed proof on the table before you."

Hunt glanced at the long galley slip and wriggled. All his dignity had vanished.

"I am not going to deny it," he said. "The King of Asturia has been here. He came in a cab. I did not send for him, he came of his own free will. He gave me certain information——"

"I have not the slightest doubt of it," Lechemere said drily. "Unfortunately, his majesty has made for himself in London the sort of reputation which is coveted only by a certain class of music hall frequenter and the haunter of the typical Strand bar. There have been occasions when his majesty has exceeded the bounds in the way of intoxicating liquor. Did you see any signs of it tonight?"

Hunt intimated that he had. He was palpably uneasy and uncomfortable. Every admission that he made Lechmere had literally to drag from him.

"The description sounds convincing," Lechmere said. "But suppose I was in a position to tell you that the King of Asturia had not been here in Fleet street at all?"

"Impossible!" Hunt cried. "I saw his majesty; he sat in that chair for an hour. A man in my position is not likely to make mistakes like that. And he gave me certain information that I propose to make a sensation of. What the information is you will know with the rest of the general public, when you get your Mercury at breakfast time."

Lechmere nodded. Beyond the door he could see something in the guise of a foreman printer with a damp news sheet in his hand. He knew at once that here was an early copy of the paper; that early copy he had made up his mind to possess. He rose as if satisfied with his interview.

"Very well," he said. "I will wish you good night. You have done a foolish thing, and, unless I am greatly mistaken, you are the victim of one of the most mistaken cases of identity ever played off on the editor of a great newspaper, but the fault is on your own head. Good night."

Lechmere passed out, closing the door behind him. The printer stood there, evidently waiting for him to go. Lechemere silently drew his purse from his pocket and extracted a ten pound note. This he held up in the glaring light of the passage and pointed to the paper. The printer perspired profusely. Then, with a sudden spasmodic gesture he folded up the paper and placed it in Lechmere's hands, at the same time snatching convulsively for the money. The whole transaction did not take five seconds.

Calm and easy in his triumph, Lechmere walked leisurely down the stairs. Once in Fleet Street he stood under the friendly light of a lamp and opened the paper. As he did so he started. Well in hand as he usually kept himself, Lechmere was surprised tonight.

There it was for anybody to see who had an eye at all; the fifth page was filled with it:—

"The King of Asturia and his people. His majesty visits the Mercury office and speaks freely. Does not care for the responsibilities of State, and has made up his mind to abdicate. Has already signed the declaration to that effect. Prefers Picadilly to the Balkan service. One of the most amazing romances in the history of Europe."

"Good Heavens!" Lechmere cried. "So that is the game! What a lucky thing I came down here! Of all the audacious things that ever happened, this is the most audacious of all."

He crushed the paper in his hand and hurried breathlessly westward at the top of his speed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Power of the Press.

The editorial staff of the Mercury had certainly done their work very well. No details had been spared to make the report absolutely complete. Everybody was reminded that recently there had been a great deal of friction in that corner of the Balkans known as Asturia. It was well known that for many years Russia had coveted that fair province. Up to now the crown of the King of Asturia had been quite safe. But with the advent of the present monarch things were entirely different. King Erno had very early in his career given evidence that he did not appreciate the full measure of responsibility. He was too fond of gaiety and pleasure; he had no patriotism. His people were a stern, hard-living race, and they did not tolerate the gaiety of the new court.

The queen was all very well, but she was only the consort, after all. It was useless for her to be ever on the spot whilst the king was dissipating his fortune and spending the money ground from his people by extra taxation in London and Paris. And latterly eyes had been turned to Vienna, where dwelt Prince Alix, who was known to covet the throne. At any moment there might be a glaring tragedy, and Prince Alix might find himself with the crown. That Prince Alix was notoriously a friend of Russia mattered little at the present juncture.

Lechmere read all this as he hurried along Fleet street. He also read a lot of information that was true, and more that was false. Evidently the Mercury people cared for nothing beyond the sensation of the hour. But after all this came the sting of the thing. The King of Asturia had that night gone down to the Mercury office and demanded audience of the editor. He had been very wild and violent, and the intimation that he was hopelessly intoxicated was not very carefully concealed. The king wished it to be understood that he had done with Asturia. He had not the slightest intention of going back to his capital any more. His abdication was signed, and doubtless by that time a deputation was on its way to Vienna to offer the throne to Prince Alix. Altogether, it was perhaps the most sensational report that ever appeared even in an American paper. It was certain to create a great commotion, and set all the courts of Europe by the ears.

"Well, of all the amazing audacity!" Lechmere muttered as he raced along. "Nothing more daring had ever been done in the history of political intrigue. I wonder if Hunt suspects the truth. Not that it would make any difference to him so long as he could shift the responsibility afterwards, as I daresay he will be prepared with proofs that he was justified in what he did. There is only one way to get even with this thing."

Lechmere arrived at length at the office of the Daily Herald. The paper in question had very little taint of the modern spirit about it. There was no chance, for instance, that it would ever be published for less than a penny. The Herald had no very great reputation for enterprise, but it was sound and safe, and everything therein would be accepted as true. No newspaper in the kingdom carried more weight, no journal had a greater reputation for veracity.

The Herald had not gone to press yet. There was no great hurry, seeing that the feverish rush to capture circulation had never commended itself to the paper's proprietors. There was a sense of decorum about the office that had been lacking in the entourage of the Mercury. The place seemed more dignified; there was no noise; all the corridors had felted floors. Even down in the manager's office the same decorum prevailed.

Lechmere knew that he would have no difficulty in seeing the editor of the Herald. In the first place, that gentleman was an old friend of his; indeed, Lechmere had contributed from time to time many articles on foreign politics. Mr. Eveleigh was at liberty, and would see Mr. Lechmere at once. The editor was lying back in an armchair smoking a cigar.

"I have just finished, my dear fellow," he said. "I hope you have something good for me? Nothing wrong? You look actually excited, a most unusual thing for you."

"I certainly have come along at a pretty good pace," Lechmere admitted. "A most extraordinary thing has happened. If this matter is allowed to pass there is no limit to the damage that it may do. Will you be so good as to cast your eye on that, Eveleigh?"

The editor of the Herald took the Mercury in his hand as if he had been contaminated. There was a smile of contempt on his fine face. But the smile faded away, and an interested gleam came into his eyes as he read. He tossed the paper aside at length.

"Nothing very wonderful," he said. "That is precisely how I should have expected the present ruler of Asturia to behave. It's a fine scoop for Hunt, and one after his own heart. He would set the whole of Europe in a blaze to sell an extra fifty thousand papers."

"Why not? He is an American, and his aim is to make money. He has the excuse that he is not bound by any patriotic scruples. Do you believe that story?"

"It certainly has the impress of truth," Eveleigh said thoughtfully. "Hunt dare not hoax his public. The average Briton would never stand it. Besides, that's Hunt's own writing. He is perfectly certain to have taken the statement down from the royal lips."

"No doubt. Probably with the aid of a stenographer. There are no flies on Hunt, to use a pet expression of his own. Let us assume for the sake of argument that Hunt fully believes that he has had the thing from the principal actor in the drama. But all the same, he didn't. The man who dictated that statement was no more King of Asturia than I am."

Eveleigh looked up brightly. Lechmere was not in the habit of making statements that he couldn't prove.

"As a matter of fact, the king has been at Lord Merchaven's all the evening," he went on. 'I left him there a little while ago. This thing has been deliberately got up by the gang of conspirators who are working here in the interests of Russia and incidentally for their own pockets. When the proper time comes I will name all these conspirators to you. I can even give you the name of the man who played the part for Hunt's benefit. They chose their people carefully, knowing that only the Mercury out of all the London journals would publish that without first consulting the Foreign Secretary. Don't you see the game? Every paper in Paris and Vienna and St. Petersburg will get a copy of that interview in extenso. It will create a perfect furore in Asturia if the lie is not most promptly contradicted. You see what I mean?"

"In the first place, that some clever actor has been playing the king?" Eveleigh asked.

"Yes. It was Countess Saens's idea in the first place. I am afraid that some of our people inspired her with the suggestion: But that is neither here nor there. That lie has to be scotched, and you are the man to do it. After all said and done, the journalistic English authority abroad is the Herald. Therefore the Herald is going to print that wild story of Hunt's tonight and comment upon the audacity of the scheme. Also, you are going to proclaim the fact that the real King of Asturia was known to be at the residence of the Foreign Secretary, Lord Merchaven, at the time when he was supposed to be betraying his private affairs to the editor of the Mercury. If I were not absolutely certain of my facts I would not ask you to do this, Eveleigh. I want you to make a big thing of this. I want you to assume that Hunt has been hoaxed, and call for the prompt punishment of the criminals. Is there time?"

"Oh, there is plenty of time," Eveleigh said thoughtfully. "No trouble on that score. And I think I can manage it. Sit down for a minute or two while I go and see my chief of staff."

Lechmere sat down fluttering over the pages of the Mercury. His restless eye wandered near the column and along the crowded advertisements. Finally his gaze stopped at the agony column. One line there arrested his attention. It was a jumbled cypher, but the training that Lechmere had had in that kind of thing enabled him to read it almost at a glance.

"I thought so," he said. "I felt absolutely certain of my man. So Peretori is in London! I might have guessed that from the first. Well, it seems to me that I am in a position to hoist these people with their own petard. So long as Peretori is not in earnest, well and good. I wonder if there is a telephone anywhere here?"

There was a telephone at the back of the editor's desk, and Lechmere promptly called up Scotland Yard in search of information. After a pause the information came, which Lechmere carefully jotted down in his pocket book. Eveleigh came back with the air of a busy man.

"I'm going to do it, Lechmere," he said. "No thanks needed; it will be a good thing for us. And now I shall be glad if you will go, as I shall be pretty busy for the next hour. I think you will be safe to leave matters in my hands."

(To be continued.)

TENDERS FOR QUEBEC-MONCTON SECTION TO BE CALLED IN JULY

Ottawa, May 25—Sometime in July the national transcontinental commissioners will be able to call for tenders from Quebec to Moncton. There are nine survey parties in the field. It will take about a couple of months yet before the commission will be able to announce definitely which of the two routes, the central or the river, will be selected.

BOGUS GREEK PRIEST MAKES RESTITUTION AND IS RELEASED

Was Caught in England and Extradited to Montreal, Where He Had Robbed His Fellow Countrymen.

Montreal, May 25—Demetriades, who imposed on the Greek colony here in the guise of a priest, organized a church and afterwards decamped with the collections and altar service, made full restitution in court today, and was therefore allowed to go on suspended sentence. He had been arrested in England and extradited, an expense in that connection was incurred, but he took the whole amount into account when making settlement.

"HER EXCELLENCY" COUNTESS OF GREY DECIDED ALL RIGHT

Ottawa, May 25—Lord Elgin has cabled Lord Grey as follows: "My Lord, the question has been raised whether the wife of the governor general of Canada is entitled to be addressed as 'Her Excellency.' No official pronouncement has hitherto been made on this subject, but on the establishment of the commonwealth of Australia, her late majesty, Queen Victoria was pleased to approve of the wife of the governor general being styled 'Her Excellency,' and I am commanded to inform you that his majesty the king has now been pleased to approve of the same style being accorded to the wife of the governor general of Canada, together with such marks of social respect as are usually accorded to the governor general."

Militia Changes.

Ottawa, May 25—(Special)—The following are gazetted: 67th Regiment "Carleton Light Infantry," Captain E. S. Kirkpatrick is transferred to the reserve of officers.

73rd Northumberland Regiment—Lieutenant D. G. Gould is permitted to resign his commission. Provisional lieutenants—R. E. Duncan, J. N. Fraser and J. Barnes are permitted to retire.

62nd Regiment St. John Fusiliers—Lieut. G. C. Jordan is permitted to resign his commission 15th April, 1906.

Big Ontario Timber Limit Sale.

Toronto, May 25—(Special)—J. R. Booth Company, Ottawa, have bought a spruce limit on the Montreal River from the Ontario government for $300,000. They will also pay dues of forty cents a cord on all spruce cut and twenty cents a cord on other woods.

North Shore Mill Burned.

Bathurst, N. B., May 25—The rotary mill owned by the Gloucester Lumber Co., at Middle River, three miles from this town, was totally destroyed by fire last evening.

TYPHOID GERMS FOUND IN MILK

Board of Health Seizes Forty Cans from Bloomfield Farm

MILK WILL BE DESTROYED

Result of Dr. Addy's Analysis Made Known--Train Will Be Watched and Any Milk from Farm in Question Will Be Seized.

The outbreak of typhoid fever in the city has been definitely traced by the officials of the board of health to a portion of the milk supply secured by a dealer at Bloomfield, Kings county.

The officials have expressed themselves for some days as morally certain that this would prove to be the fact but last night full confirmation of their conjectures was given by the finding of typhoid germs in a sample of the milk analyzed by Dr. G. A. B. Addy, bacteriologist.

Following on this discovery the board has seized forty cans of the milk and will destroy it, while further supply from that source is officially prohibited.

Total of Cases, 37.

There were two more cases of typhoid reported Friday, bringing the total number of cases since the commencement of the outbreak to thirty-seven. There have been no deaths, though some of the cases are considered quite serious.

Some weeks ago, and prior to the outbreak in the city, a girl living on a farm at Bloomfield was taken sick. It was at first thought she was suffering from spinal meningitis but, as previously reported, it was determined on Thursday that she had been and is sick with typhoid fever. The infection of this case through the milk, it is now regarded as certain, was responsible for the appearance of the disease in the city. The girl is not now on the farm, having bene moved to other quarters, but she is still sick.

Secretary T. M. Burns and the other officials of the board of health have been actively seeking to hunt down the source of the disease. They found, as previously reported, that twenty-three households where typhoid had gained a footing were supplied with milk by the same dealer. As these houses were in various parts of the city there was a strong assumption that the milk was the vehicle that carried the contamination. Following along this idea, the sources from which the dealer in question secured his supplies were traced. It was found that the milk came from several farms, two of which were at Bloomfield. Further inquiry showed that one of these was the place where the girl was sick. The officials' suspicions were strengthened.

The clue was followed up and a sample subjected to bacteriological examination with the result as stated.

There have been suggestions from some quarters that the typhoid was due to contamination of the water supply but the result of the inquiries of the board of health prove different.

Farms Visited.

On Thursday Secretary Burns and a physician spent the holiday investigating the conditions on the farms in question and returned confirming the report that the sick girl was ill with typhoid and making the board more certain that the milk from that farm had started the outbreak in the city. They also visited the second farm to which reference has been made and there report the sanitary conditions not satisfactory. This visit was followed by a meeting of the board of health held Saturday morning. A report was received from the secretary and physician who spent the holiday at Bloomfield and it showed that there had recently been a case of typhoid fever at one of the farms from which milk was sold to St. John, and the board decided to prohibit the sale of milk from this place until all danger of contagion is passed. The farmer will be called upon to make a number of improvements in the sanitaries about his place.

The sale from the other farm was also ordered stopped until some necessary improvements are made. The board also considered the situation in this city and formulated a number of regulations which will be given legal force as speedily as possible. These will compel milk vendors to provide a dairy separate and independent from their horse stables and will compel the washing by these vendors of all the cans in which milk is shipped from the country. Other regulations to better protect the buyer were passed.

Seizure of Milk.

While convinced that they had traced the disease, the board awaited the result of Dr. Addy's analysis of the suspected milk before taking further steps. Dr. Addy's examination was finished last night and the result was as told—the discovery of the typhoid germs. Secretary Burns was busy until a late hour and one result of the activities was the seizure of some forty cans of milk from the farm where the girl took sick. The milk, he says, will be destroyed and officials of the board will watch the milk train Saturday and seize and destroy any that may come from the farm in question.

D. M. Lawson, milk dealer, has been receiving his supply from three farms, two of which are in Bloomfield, and it is the milk from the latter that has been suspected. Mr. Lawson said last evening that he has cut off the supply entirely from the two Bloomfield farms and will secure all his milk now from Apohaqui. He added that he has no desire to accept responsibility of distributing any milk about which the people can have apprehension and therefore has taken the action referred to.

Toronto Woman Weds Italian Count.

Toronto, May 25—Particulars of the marriage of Mrs. Frederick Moffat, daughter of the late David Walker, of Toronto, and Count Romolo Broglio Dajano, lecturer on Political Economy at the University of Rome, have been received here. The civil and church ceremonies were performed on Tuesday, May 1st, at Luxembourg, the bride and bridegroom going thence to Milan and on to Rome. Count Dajano has rented a villa at Viterbo, in the outskirts of Rome, for the summer, where Miss Phyllis Moffatt, who is now in Italy, will join her mother.

Last Thursday night while Percy W. Thomson and a party of his friends were returning in his automobile from Westfield the machine struck a boulder and was ditched. No damage was done and after a delay of an hour they were again on their way here.