

giving and bravery. Never allow your conscience to get the better of you, Jacob."

The "sea-elephant" did not see the necessity of refuting so absurd a suggestion.

"You know what General Meyer came for," Saunders resumed. "Was he successful?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because the Jews of the Morast do not like fighting any more than the Commander-in-Chief does."

"But to sack a brewery—" said Saunders.

"Might mean a collision with the police."

"But the police are out of the way to-night."

"Even so, Neumann and his friends might defend themselves with fire-arms," said Jacob. "We Jews sometimes break the law, but we rarely commit crimes of violence. Also we are temperate folk, and the inducement of unlimited beer is inadequate."

"But surely General Meyer offered money," said Saunders in surprise.

"A little, but not enough."

"How much did he offer?"

"Three kronen per head."

"I will double it," said Saunders.

Jacob weighed the proposition carefully.

"Six kronen per head," he said; "that ought to do it."

"It will do it when I say that the work is begun, if not over," said Saunders. "An hour ago a big crowd was en route for Neumann's brewery; a well-disciplined crowd full of fury and malice. If your friends wish to earn their pay they must waste no more time in card-playing."

"I will pass the word round, Excellency. In five minutes my room will be empty."

"Good," said Saunders, producing a note. "That is to pay for the ladies' lemonade. The other matter General Meyer and I will settle up later. Now kindly go and fetch the ladies and let us out by the back way. I want to take them to the 'Persian Vaults.'"

The place where Saunders now conducted his party was situated on the extreme east of the Morast, at a point where the close-built town was thinning out into a disreputable suburb. The houses were small, frequently of one story only, and mean without being picturesque. There were gaps in the alignment: desolate spaces, weed-grown deserts in the summer, snowy solitudes in the winter. They crossed an iron bridge over a frozen canal holding prisoner a few derelict barges on its grassy bosom. Here and there a factory chimney reared its ghostly height into the fog of whirling snowflakes. Vast heaps of earth, miniature snow-mountains, marked the lines of the old fortifications, now rendered superfluous by more modern redoubts on a wider enceinte. Dark forms slunk about, two by two, or three by three, prowling "night-wolves" in search of diversion or villainy. They were in the most dangerous area of the town. More crimes against the person were committed in this semi-oppidan district than in all the other parts of Weidenbruck put together. Saunders did not mention the fact to his companions for obvious reasons. He was confident in his power to afford them complete protection, but he had no desire to harass their nerves with tales of outrage and garrotting.

Presently they came to a long viaduct which carried the main line from Weidenbruck to Vienna, a structure of huge stone arches spanning the low marshland which gave this quarter the title of the Morast.

The arches were nearly all boarded in. Some were used as depositories for tiles or timber or other building materials. Some were converted into doss-houses for the very poor; incredibly damp dormitories whose beds were wooden benches; comfortless caverns warmed only by the unwholesome heat of accumulated humanity; and yet a veritable Paradise to ill-clad poverty compared with the ice-cold venom of the unprotected street.

Into these Saunders did not venture,

*The Weidenbruck equivalent to the Parisian "apaches."

though they formed one of the usual attractions for the fashionable slummer. He was combining business with pleasure, and a peep into those insanitary infernos he considered neither profitable nor amusing.

PRESENTLY they came to an arch, which happened somehow to be much larger than its neighbours, and had therefore been selected for that refined home of entertainment entitled the "Persian Vaults." Three brilliant arc lamps illuminated the gaudily painted facade, which proclaimed its attractions to the outside world, and the words "Persian Vaults"—Perser Gewolbe—were delineated in red globes of light which lit themselves, extinguished themselves, and re-lit themselves at regular intervals with remorseless iteration. Huge paintings of beautiful ladies with amazingly yellow hair and bewildering limbs danced an inspiring measure on the huge tympanum that filled the curve of the great archway.

The necessary oriental touch was given by the doorway, a Moorish arch, cusped and fatted, and painted with a pleasing blending of the seven primary colours. Saunders paid the small sum necessary for admission and led the way into the hall of many delights. It was impossible for the most jaded to be disappointed with the first impression of the interior. There was light and there was music, and both were shrill and assertive. A scheme of red and yellow draperies veiled the walls and the great arc of the roof. Down each side were refreshment bars and side-shows, and in the centre was dancing. Such dancing! Abandon of the wildest description, yet subservient to certain laws of heat and cadence. Slow, stealthy steps suggestive of a beast of prey tracking its victim, then wild rotary movements, savage postures, menacing gestures, the whole a rhythmic mimodrame of primary instincts and barbaric passions.

And the dancers—thick-set, scowling "night-wolves" with low brows, short necks, and greedy eyes; young Jews from the Ghetto, who preferred the siren pleasures of music and female society to the less joyous attractions of the Juden-haus; anarchists, sullen and terrifying even in their diversion. Here and there a well-dressed figure and a clean-shaven cheek showed that the gilded youth did not scorn to travel East in search of full-blooded enjoyment. And the women—drabs from the Goose Market, painted Jewesses, respectable little shop-girls, and seamstresses. Virtue was neither a qualification nor a disqualification. The "Persian Vault" was neither moral nor immoral; it was merely pagan.

Now and again a great train rumbled overhead, and its thunder added a fiercer diapason to the din of the band and the cries and laughter of the revellers.

(To be continued.)

For the Juniors

COMPETITION NO. 3. CHRISTMAS STORY.

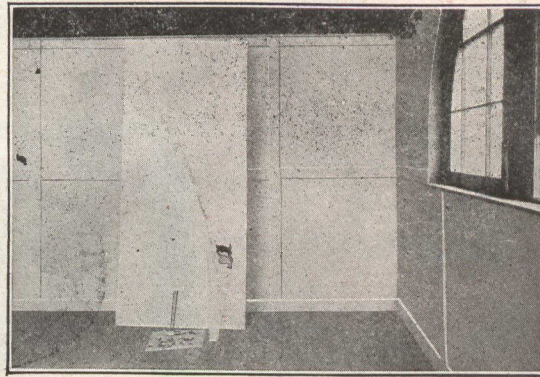
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