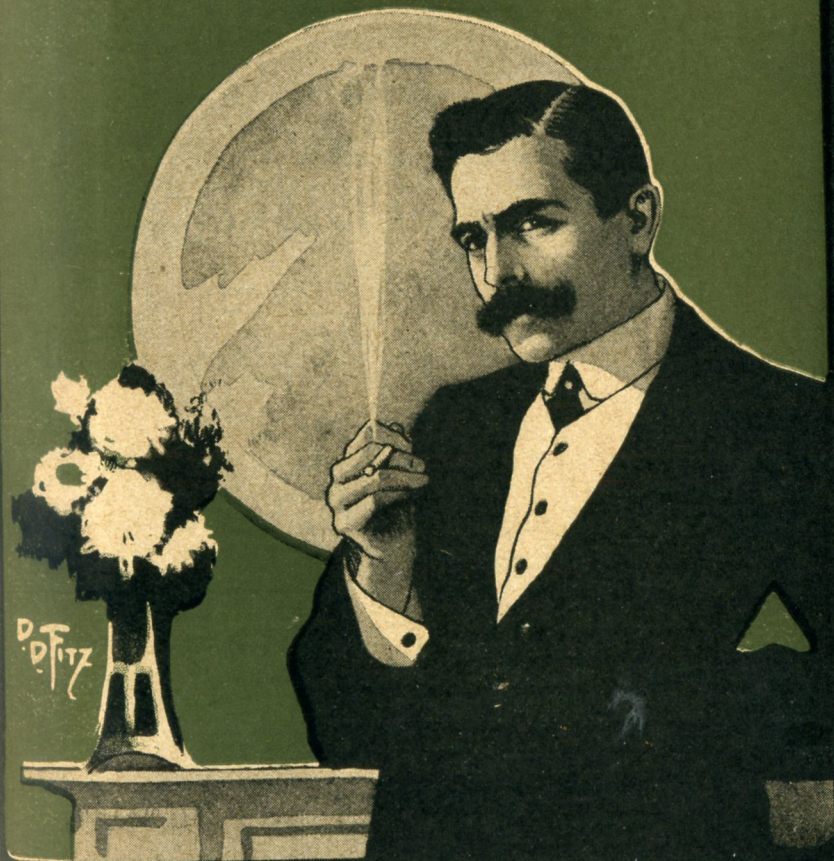


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CHAPTER I.

The Slumbering Brain Wakes.

TAP! Tap! Tap!

It was a wild, inhospitable Christmas Eve. A furious blinding snow-storm had been raging in North Derbyshire since early morning, and a fierce north-easterly gale was driving the snow across the moors, and piling it up in the dales, and whirling it round the summit of the Peak in madly-spinning spirals of smoke-like dust.

Tap! Tap! Tap!

In the drawing-room of Firvale Grange Lady Bamford laid down the book she was trying to read, and glanced uneasily in the direction of the conservatory at the far end of the room. The doleful howling of the wind, and the never-ceasing rattle of the frozen snow as it hurled itself against the window-panes, were getting on her ladyship's nerves, and this oft-repeated tap! tap! tap! was quickly goading her into hysterics.

"I shall be a raving lunatic in another five minutes if that tapping doesn't stop!" she muttered, to herself. "I know what it is, of course. It's only one of the smaller branches of the rose-tree, which is waving to and fro in the wind, and tapping against the conservatory panes. But I'm not myself to-night. My nerves are all unstrung. I'm always like this when Christmas Eve comes round. It's the memory of that Christmas Eve, twenty years ago, I suppose, when I——"

Tap! Tap! Tap!

"I can't stand this another minute!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet. "If Philip won't come down into the drawing-room, I'll go upstairs and join him in the smoke-room. It's inhuman of him to leave me all alone on a night like this!"

She moved towards the door, but ere she had taken a couple of steps her quick ears caught the sound of stealthy footsteps in the conservatory. Transfixed with terror, she paused and half-turned round; and even as she did so the conservatory door swung slowly open and a man stepped into the room—an elderly, wild-eyed man, whose unkempt hair and beard, as well as his dishevelled garments, were thickly encrusted with frozen snow.

"Martin Wraith!" she gasped, half in surprise and half in fear. "That was the meaning of the tapping, then! You were tampering with the conservatory window. But what on earth has brought you to the Grange to-night, and why have you broken in through the conservatory, instead of——"

Suddenly she paused, and caught her breath. The man had moved a step or two nearer the lamp. Its dazzling rays fell full on his twitching face, and she

saw in his eyes what no man had seen in those eyes for twenty long years—the light of reason.

"You appear to notice a change in me!" he said, with a sneering smile. "May I ask what it is?"

"You—you seem to—to have recovered your reason!" she faltered, pressing her hand to her heart.

He made her an ironical bow.

"I congratulate you on your powers of discernment," he said. "You are perfectly right. For twenty years—thanks to you, my lady—I have been insane. To-night, by some strange freak, my slumbering brain has awakened. My reason has returned. My memory has come back. I remember everything!"

A low moan of fear escaped from between her pallid lips. She put up her hand, as though to ward off a blow; but the man neither stirred nor spoke. With folded arms he continued to regard her with eyes that were literally blazing with a malevolent triumph.

At last she could bear his gaze no longer. With a sudden, impulsive movement she flung herself at his feet.

"Be merciful!" she pleaded. "I know that I did you a grievous wrong, but I will make atonement—I swear I will! Any sum you like to name——"

He silenced her with a gesture of disdain.

"You waste your breath," he said coldly. "Could money—could anything you could give me—compensate me for the twenty wasted years of my life? No, no, Lady Bamford, I did not come to the Grange to-night to make terms with you. The time for making terms is past. I merely came to add an hour's anguish to your punishment by informing you beforehand of what I intend to do."

She rose to her feet, and confronted him with a half-defiant air.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I am going to interview the new curate of Firvale Parish Church," he answered.

"The new curate?" she echoed, in bewildered tones.

"Yes; he arrived last night," said Martin Wraith. "He is lodging with Widow Smith. His name is Hugh Palmer."

"Hugh Palmer!"

She recoiled as though he had struck her a blow between the eyes:

"Yes, Hugh Palmer!" he repeated. "I thought the name would surprise you! He is now in Firvale, and I am going to see him. And I am going to tell him everything!"

"No, no!" she cried, clutching him wildly by the arm. "Anything but that!"

He shook her off and moved towards the conservatory door.

"I go to see him now," he said.

She darted after him, and once more seized him by the arm.

"Wait! For pity's sake wait five minutes!" she gasped. "Let me send for Philip. Let us discuss the matter together, and see if we cannot come to terms."

"I have already told you that the time for making terms is past," he said sternly. "All I live for now is revenge, and to-night—this very night—revenge shall be mine!"

As he uttered these words he seized her by the shoulders, and roughly thrust her from him. Then he glided into the conservatory, vaulted through the window, the catch of which he had previously forced, and vanished into the darkness outside.

For an instant, but only for an instant, she remained where he had left her. Then she darted out of the room, and flew upstairs to the smoke-room.

A young man with a well-trimmed beard, and dressed in faultless evening attire, was languidly reclining in an easy-chair, smoking and reading a yellow-back novel.

"Hallo, mother! what's the rumpus?" he exclaimed, when Lady Bamford

burst into the room. "Pon my word, you look as scared as if you'd seen a ghost!"

"I've seen something worse than a ghost," she replied, speaking rapidly and excitedly. "Martin Wraith has been here. He broke in through the conservatory window and waylaid me in the drawing-room."

"What did the lunatic want?"

"He's a lunatic no longer! He has recovered his reason. He knows and remembers everything, and is bent on taking a bitter revenge. Worst of all, Hugh Palmer is here!"

"Here!" he cried, leaping to his feet. "In this house?"

"No; he's lodging in the village with old Mrs. Smith, and Martin Wraith had gone to see him."

Lord Bamford—for such was the young man's title—sank back into his chair with a groan of despair.

"Then all is lost!" he said.

"Not yet!" she retorted, between her clenched teeth.

"Why, what can we do?" he moaned.

"I can do nothing," she said. "In a gale like this, with two feet of snow on the ground, and hampered with skirts, I should be absolutely helpless. But you can do everything. It is nearly three miles from here to the village. Martin Wraith has only just left. You have ample time to overtake him before he reaches the village. If you can't make him listen to reason——"

"I sha'n't try!" he cried, as he once more leapt to his feet. "I sha'n't waste any time in idle talk. I shall do what you did twenty years ago, but with better results, I hope."

And with these enigmatical words he rushed downstairs, donned a cap and covert coat, thrust a revolver into his pocket, and left the house.

CHAPTER 2.

A Half-Told Tale.

IN the one long straggling street of the village of Firvale the drifted snow was well-nigh shoulder-deep on one side of the road, whilst the pavement on the other side was as bare as a newly-swept floor. Although it was not yet ten o'clock, most of the villagers were in bed, and the only customer in the cosy tap-room of the Fox and Hounds was the village constable. He had "just popped in" about nine o'clock to wish the landlord the compliments of the season and he had not yet ventured out again.

"Martin Wraith was in here this afternoon," said the landlord, as he replenished the constable's glass for the third time. "Poor old fellow, he's as crazy as ever. Ah, it was a sad affair, was that, and a mysterious affair, too!"

"How did it happen?" asked the constable, who had only recently been drafted into that part of the county. "I've heard all sorts of tales, but I don't know which of 'em is true. He used to be a doctor, or a lawyer, or something of that kind, didn't he?"

"He used to be a doctor," said the landlord. "He lived in that big house opposite the church, and he had one of the best practices a doctor ever had. He attended all the quality—Lord and Lady Bamford, at the Grange, the Honourable Mr. Palmer, at the lodge, the squire, the rector, and all the rest of them."

"What made him go dotty—drink?"

"No. Twenty years ago this very night he was found lying in the middle of the road, between here and the Grange, with a bullet-hole through his skull. They never thought he'd live, but he did. When he came round, however, he was as mad as a hatter—didn't even remember his own name—and he's been a harmless lunatic ever since."

"And did they never find out who did it?" asked the constable.

"Never," said the landlord; "it was what the papers call an insolvent mystery. He hadn't any relations, and he hadn't saved any money; so the rector got up a subscription for him, and they collected over six hundred pounds, and old Mrs. Moxon has had twelve shillings a week ever since for keeping him and looking after him. Not that he wants much looking after, poor old man, for he's as harmless as a child."

There was an interval of silence, broken only by the roar of the storm outside, and the crackling of the logs on the hearth. Then the landlord spoke again.

"Seen the new curate?" he asked.

"Ay," said the constable. "I saw him this morning. Why, he's only a lad."

"Let me see," said the landlord, as he thoughtfully scratched his chin. "He was twenty-two last August."

"Twenty-two! Why he doesn't look more than sixteen or seventeen!"

"Well, he was born on the last day of August, 1880, so you can reckon it up for yourself," said the landlord. "His father was the Honourable Mr. Palmer—him that I mentioned just now."

"Then he comes of a good family, it seems."

"Good family, indeed!" said the landlord warmly. "Do you know my good man, that the lad, as you call him, only just missed being the Earl of Bamford by the skin of his teeth! That young coxcomb at the Grange is Hugh Palmer's cousin, and if that young coxcomb hadn't never been born—and it's a pity he was!—Hugh Palmer would now have been Lord Bamford."

"You seem to know a lot about him," said the constable, somewhat aggressively.

"And who should know if I don't?" said the landlord. "I was groom to the Honourable Mr. Palmer in them days, and I remember Mr. Hugh being born as well as if it was yesterday. Why, bless your heart, it was me that taught him to ride, and if he can preach as well as he can ride, he'll be a bishop afore he dies."

"Was he born here?" asked the constable.

"Yes. You know that big house on the right-hand side of the road between here and the mill?"

"Firvale Lodge?"

"Yes. It's a boys' school now; but that's where the Honourable Mr. Palmer used to live, and that's where Hugh Palmer was born. When he was twelve years old his father and mother died, and the house was sold up, and he went away, and he's never been nigh the place since, till he came last night to be curate of the parish church."

Whilst they were chatting thus, the subject of their conversation—Hugh Palmer, the new curate—was arranging his books and papers in the modest little sitting-room which was henceforth to be his new home.

In appearance, as the constable had truly said, he was little more than a boy; but every feature of his handsome, beardless face was stamped with strength of character, with honesty and manliness, with truth and purity, with courage and sincerity.

It was quite true, as the landlord of the Fox and Hounds had said, that he had only just missed being the Earl of Bamford by the skin of his teeth. If his uncle, the ninth Lord Bamford, had never married, or if Lady Bamford had never presented the earl with a son, Hugh Palmer would now have been the tenth Lord Bamford. But the earl had married a few weeks after Hugh was born, and his wife had borne him a son, and this son, who was a year younger than Hugh, was now the Earl of Bamford, with a rent-roll of seventy thousand a year, whilst Hugh was a curate on two pounds a week.

It would be untrue to say that Hugh had never heaved a sigh as he had thought of what might have been if his uncle had never married. But he had never allowed

his disappointment to sour his disposition, or to influence his life. After the death of his father, who had practically left him penniless, he had faced the world with characteristic courage and cheerfulness. From school he had won his way to Oxford by winning a scholarship. At Oxford he had taken a high degree, and had subsequently been ordained as a clergyman. And now he had come back to his native village, after an interval of ten years, to be curate at the church where he had been baptised.

"What a night it is!" he muttered to himself, as a gust of wind drove a fusillade of frozen snow against the window-panes. "It isn't fit for a dog to turn out, yet I ought to slip round and see the rector before I go to bed. I promised him I would."

He kicked off his slippers and put on his boots. Just as he was tying the last knot of the second lace, he was startled by a thunderous knock at the door, which opened out of the sitting-room into the street. He sprang to his feet, but ere he could reach the door it was suddenly flung open, and the wild, dishevelled figure of Martin Wraith burst into the room, accompanied by an eddying gust of wind and snow, which swept the papers off the table and sent them whirling round the room like things bewitched.

"At last—at last!" cried Martin Wraith, seizing the young curate's hand, and gripping it till Hugh winced. "At last I shall have my revenge! At last I shall be even with the Jezebel who wrecked my life, and consigned me to a doom that was worse than death! She hoped that she had silenced me for ever; but I lived in spite of her, and to-night I will tear the mask from her face and shatter her plans like a house of cards!"

Hugh gazed at him in mingled pity and bewilderment. Never for an instant did he doubt that the poor mad doctor was passing through a madder fit than usual.

But the doctor saw the pitying look which crossed Hugh's face, and vigorously shook his head.

"No, no, I'm not mad!" he said earnestly. "For twenty years I have been a lunatic—for twenty years my memory has been a blank; but to-night, thank Heaven, my reason has returned—my memory has come back, and, hearing that you were back, I have hastened here to make you the instrument of my revenge. Close the door, and I'll tell you all about it."

Hugh closed the door, and wheeled an arm-chair to the fire.

"Sit down," he said soothingly. "You are a little bit excited."

"Excited!" cried Martin Wraith, as he flung himself into the easy-chair. "Wouldn't you be excited if you'd been dead for twenty years and had suddenly come to life again? Excited—I should just think I am! But I'm not mad—don't run away with that idea. I'm as sane as you are, but I don't know how long my lucid interval will last, and that's why I've come here to-night—to tell you my tale whilst my brain remains clear."

"Don't interrupt me!" he continued, as Hugh was about to speak. "You can have your say when I've finished. I'm sane enough now; but my madness may return at any minute, and if it does before I have told you what I know, all my hopes of revenge will be dashed to the ground, and you will never be Lord Bamford."

"I shall never be Lord Bamford, in any case, I'm afraid," said Hugh, with a slight smile. "My cousin is young—even younger than I—and is quite as likely to live to a ripe old age as I am. Some day, too, he will doubtless marry, and have children of his own; so that there isn't much chance, I'm afraid, of my ever becoming the Earl of Bamford."

"You are the Earl of Bamford now!" cried Martin Wraith. "That young scoundrel at the Grange is an impostor! He has no more right to the title of

Lord Bamford than I have! You—you, Hugh Palmer—are the real Lord Bamford; and I, Martin Wraith, am the only man who can prove it! Listen to me! Twenty-one years ago last July——”

As he uttered these words the air was rent by a loud report, accompanied by a crash of broken glass, and the next instant a bullet flew through the window, and passed within a hairbreadth of the doctor's head.

Uninjured though he was, Wraith leaped to his feet, with an ear-splitting scream of fear. Then he burst into a shrill, manical laugh. The sudden shock to his nerves had proved too much for his newly-recovered sanity. That which he had feared had come to pass. His madness had returned!

Quick as thought, Hugh sprang to his feet and caught him by the arm.

“Keep cool—for heaven's sake keep cool!” he implored. “Remain where you are, and I'll go outside and see——”

The sentence remained unfinished, for at that moment Wraith shook himself free and made a dash for the door. The next instant he had opened it, and was fleeing down the stormswept street with the fleetness of a hunted hare.

Needless to say that Hugh lost no time in giving chase. As he dashed out of the house he caught a glimpse of a second figure running in the direction of a thickly-wooded coppice at the end of the street—in the opposite direction to that which Martin Wraith had taken. For an instant Hugh hesitated how to act. This second figure was doubtless the man who had fired through the window. Should he endeavour to capture him, or should he go after Martin Wraith?

The question was soon answered.

“Martin Wraith is sure to go back to his lodgings,” he mused. “I can see him any time; but if I let this scoundrel escape, I shall never get another chance of finding out who he is. Yes, Martin Wraith can wait; I'll follow the other man.”

He pressed his elbows to his sides, and dashed away in hot pursuit. But it was a fruitless chase. Upon reaching the end of the street the fugitive took cover in the coppice already mentioned; and although Hugh scoured the wood for upwards of an hour, he failed to find any further trace of him.

He then retraced his steps to his lodgings, and from there, after explaining to his landlady what had happened, he made his way to the house in which Martin Wraith had lived for the last twenty years.

Much to his surprise, and somewhat to his alarm, he found that Wraith had not yet returned; and although he remained at the house until nearly daybreak he was obliged at last to come away without having seen him.

Next day was Christmas Day. As there was still no sign of Martin Wraith, the villagers, headed by Hugh, organised themselves into a search-party, and explored every nook and cranny of the neighbouring moors.

It was labour lost. Of Martin Wraith they could find no trace.

Telegrams and messengers were then despatched to all the surrounding villages and hamlets, but again without result. From the moment when Martin Wraith had dashed through the door of Hugh's sitting-room he had disappeared as completely and mysteriously as if he had melted into air.

“I'm afraid there's only one possible conclusion,” said the rector, discussing the matter with Hugh over supper on Christmas Day. “After he left your lodgings he must have wandered on to the moors, where he was finally overcome by the cold, and buried beneath the drifting snow.”

“If you are right,” said Hugh, with some emotion, “the secret he was about to reveal has perished with him, and the story he was about to tell will never now be told.”

CHAPTER 3.

Nelson Lee.

FOUR days elapsed. It was the Monday after Christmas Day. Nelson Lee had just finished lunch, when his landlady rapped at the door and announced that a "young gentleman" wished to see him.

"He says his name is the Rev. Hugh Palmer," she said. "But he's only a boy. Perhaps he's one of them American boy-preachers."

"Perhaps so," said Nelson Lee, with an amused smile. "Anyhow, show him in."

The old lady retired, and presently ushered in our old friend Hugh.

"I have come up to London to consult you, on the advice of my rector," said Hugh, when the customary greetings had been exchanged. "On Christmas Eve a certain statement was made to me by a man who had been mad for twenty years, but who declared that his reason had suddenly returned. If his statement was true, and can be proved to be true, it will completely change the whole current of my life. If it was merely the offspring of a disordered mind—if the man was still mad when he made it—there is nothing more to be said on the matter.

"Sometimes I think the man was still mad, sometimes I think he was sane, and sometimes I don't know what to think. So I have resolved to take my rector's advice, and place the whole of the circumstances before you, exactly as they occurred, and leave you to decide whether the case is worth further investigation or whether I shall be well-advised to take no further steps in the matter."

He then plunged into a detailed account of his interview with Martin Wraith, of its sensational termination, of his fruitless pursuit of the would-be assassin, and of the equally fruitless search for Martin Wraith.

"As we were unable to discover any trace of him," he said in conclusion, "we made up our minds that he must have lost himself on the moors, and that we should find his dead body when the snow disappeared. But we were mistaken. As your know, a rapid thaw set in on the day after Christmas Day, and by Saturday morning every vestige of the snow had gone.

"For the whole of Saturday, and for the greater part of yesterday, we scoured the neighbouring moors in every conceivable direction, but with no more success than before. It is evident, therefore, that Martin Wraith did not perish on the moors, as we had concluded. What, then, has become of him? Is he dead? If so, how did he meet his death, and where is his body? Is he still alive? If so, where is he?"

"These are a few of the questions which seem to me to call for an answer. But over and above all these minor questions there towers the all-important question—all-important to me, that is—was he simply raving, or was he speaking the sober truth, when he said that the present Lord Bamford is an impostor, and that I am the rightful earl? You now know all the circumstances of the case—what is your opinion?"

"Before I express any opinion," said Nelson Lee, "there are one or two points in the case which I should like you to clear up for me. In the first place, what is your exact relationship to the present Lord Bamford?"

"He is my cousin," said Hugh. "His father—the ninth Lord Bamford—and my father—the Honourable Mr. Palmer—were brothers. At the time when I was born the ninth Lord Bamford was a bachelor, so that if he had died immediately after I was born, my father would have become the tenth Lord Bamford, and I should have succeeded to the title when my father died.

"About three weeks after I was born, however, the ninth Lord Bamford married an actress, who thus became Lady Bamford, of course. In July, 1881, she presented her husband with a son. Shortly after this son was born there was an outbreak of diphtheria at the Grange, and the old earl took it, and died. His son, who was then but a few weeks old, then became the tenth Lord Bamford."

"Then, if Martin Wraith was speaking the truth," said Nelson Lee, "there are

only two possible ways in which you can be the real Lord Bamford. Either the late Lord Bamford was not legally married to his wife, or else the present Lord Bamford is not the old earl's lawful son."

"Neither of your explanations is feasible," said Hugh, shaking his head. "The marriage was reported in all the papers at the time, and there are scores of persons who can testify that it was perfectly legal and valid. Also, the present Lord Bamford was born before his father died, and the old earl not only acknowledged him as his son and heir, but he gave a banquet in honour of the occasion, and generally held high revel for the greater part of a week."

"Was it before the old earl died, or was it after, that Martin Wraith was found insensible?"

"It was about eighteen months after the old earl died. He died in July, 1881, and it was on Christmas Eve, 1882, that Martin Wraith was so brutally maltreated."

"And it was never discovered who had maltreated him?"

"No."

"Is Lady Bamford, the ex-actress, still alive?"

"Yes. She and her son, the present Lord Bamford, live at the Grange. She had sole control of the estate until last July, when her son attained his majority, and came into his inheritance."

"Do you think that Martin Wraith was alluding to Lady Bamford when he spoke of 'the Jezebel who had wrecked his life'?"

"I don't know. It never occurred to me to think of the matter in that light."

"Well, let us suppose that I am right. Would not that seem to indicate that it was Lady Bamford who tried to murder him twenty years ago?"

"Yes, I suppose it would."

"Then, if Martin Wraith was speaking the truth, and if I have translated his meaning correctly, the matter stands thus: So long ago as 1882 Martin Wraith was aware that Lady Bamford's son was not the rightful heir to the title and estates. Lady Bamford knew that he was aware of this, and tried to murder him. She failed; but Martin Wraith became a harmless lunatic. A few days ago Martin Wraith recovered his reason, and came to you, and told you that he could prove that the present Lord Bamford was an impostor, and that you were the rightful earl. Before he could give you the proofs of which he spoke, somebody—who had evidently followed him to your lodgings, and was listening outside—fired at him through the window. The shock proved too much for him. His madness returned. He fled from the house, and nothing has since been heard of him."

"Now, if Martin Wraith was speaking the truth, it is obvious that there are only two persons who had any material interest in preventing him revealing what he knows. One of these two is Lady Bamford, and the other is her son. It doesn't matter two straws to anybody else who is the real Lord Bamford, but it matters a very great deal to these two. I think, therefore, that we may take it for granted that it was one of these two who fired at Martin Wraith through the window of your sitting-room."

"It certainly wasn't Lady Bamford," said Hugh. "It was a man."

"Was it her son?"

"It might have been," said Hugh. "It was too dark for me to see the scoundrel very clearly, but his height and build were certainly not unlike the height and build of Lord Bamford. But, look here, you are spinning all these theories, and asking all these questions, as though you believed that Martin Wraith had spoken the truth. Am I to understand, therefore, that you have come to the conclusion that Martin Wraith was sane when he came to see me?"

"Yes; his story is too coherent to have been the invention of a lunatic."

"Then you think that I am the real Lord Bamford?"

"I am sure you are!"

"But how—in what way?"

That is the question I cannot answer. In all probability there are only three people who can answer it—Lord and Lady Bamford, and Martin Wraith.”

“Then it will never be answered,” said Hugh bitterly. “Neither Lord nor Lady Bamford will ever answer it, of course, and Martin Wraith is probably dead.”

“Perhaps—and perhaps not,” said Nelson Lee. “At any rate, I am not going to assume that he is dead until I have actually found his dead body.”

“You will come to Firvale, and try to find him?” cried Hugh delightedly.

“I will,” said Nelson Lee. “He alone possesses the key which will help us to unlock the mystery, and by hook or crook I must find out where he has gone, and what has become of him. It is now a quarter to three. We cannot leave for Derbyshire until four o’clock. If you will call for me at half-past three, I will be ready to go back with you.”

He was as good as his word. They left St. Pancras at four o’clock and arrived at Derby at seven. There was no train to Firvale until 7.35, so that it was half-past eight ere they reached their destination. It was then too late, of course, for Nelson Lee to commence his investigations; and after he and Hugh had supped together at the latter’s lodgings, the detective bade his host adieu, and put up for the night at the Fox and Hounds.”

CHAPTER 4. Jean Moreau.



ON the east side of Chancery Lane stands an imposing block of offices known as the Furnal Chambers. Most of the offices are rented by barristers or solicitors, but on one of the doors on the second floor there is—or there used to be—a small brass plate, bearing the inscription:

JEAN MOREAU, PRIVATE INQUIRY AGENT.

The man who was thus described was a clever young Frenchman, who had formerly been employed in the Secret Service Department of the French police, where his wonderful powers of quick deduction, his consummate coolness in dangerous situations, and his marvellous aptitude for disguising himself, had excited the enthusiastic admiration of his colleagues, and had led some of them to declare that he was the most capable detective in Europe.

Unfortunately, he was as unscrupulous as he was clever. Truth and honour were words which he did not understand. No trick was too despicable for him to play; no advantage was too mean for him to take; no villainy was too black for him to perpetrate, if it would only serve the end he had in view. In spite of all this, however, he might still have continued to adorn the Secret Service Department of the French police if he had not made the mistake of meddling in matters outside his strictly professional career.

It happened thus. In the course of an investigation he happened to discover quite by accident, a private letter from a prominent French Minister referring in insulting terms to the President of the Republic. The Minister was a wealthy man, and Moreau thought he saw a chance of turning a honest (?) penny. He knew that the Minister would be ruined if the letter became public property, so he wrote him an anonymous note, threatening to send the letter to the newspapers unless the sum of a hundred thousand francs was sent to a certain address by a certain time.

Instead of tamely submitting to this barefaced attempt at blackmail, the Minister promptly consulted the Prefect of the Parisian police, who happened to be a friend of his. The prefect, knowing the character of the man, at once suspected Jean Moreau. A raid was accordingly made on Moreau’s lodgings, the letter was

discovered and destroyed, and Moreau was not only dismissed from the force, but was also given a gentle hint that if he was not across the frontier in twenty-four hours he would be arrested and transported.

He was across the frontier in less than six. For a couple of years he lived on his wits in Germany and Spain. Then he came to England, installed himself in an office in Chancery Lane, and advertised himself in all the London papers as "The Greatest Detective of the Century."

He had a fair amount of success. It is true that no self-respecting client ever consulted him, but there is always plenty of "shady" work for a detective, if he is willing to do it, and at this class of work Jean Moreau was an expert. But the pay was poor, and Moreau's tastes were extravagant, so that on the whole, at the time when we first make his acquaintance, he could hardly be said to be doing more than "making both ends meet."

Almost at the same moment that Hugh Palmer was introducing himself to Nelson Lee, Lord Bamford entered the outer offices of Moreau's chambers. He had travelled up to London by the same train as Hugh, but neither of the young men had seen the other.

"I wish to see Monsieur Moreau," he said, addressing the red-haired clerk. "Is he disengaged?"

"Yes, sir," said the clerk. "What name, sir, please?"

Lord Bamford handed him a visiting-card, which the clerk took into the inner office. A moment later the clerk reappeared, and invited him to "step this way."

Lord Bamford obeyed, and found himself in the presence of a youngish man, about the same height and build as himself, but with a clean-shaven face and close-cropped, coal-black hair.

"I have been recommended to consult you by my friend, Sir Harry Ward," began Lord Bamford, when the clerk had withdrawn. "He tells me that he was threatened with an action for breach of promise, and that he placed the case in your hands, with the result that you broke into the lady's house at dead of night, stole all his love-letters—which she was going to produce at the trial—and destroyed them."

"Eet ees most infamously false!" cried Moreau, with an air of pretended indignation. "Sacred name of a dog! I would not be guilty of such——"

"Oh, come!" said Lord Bamford impatiently. "You needn't try to come the injured innocent over me; and you needn't pretend that you cannot speak decent English, either! Sir Harry has told me all about you, so don't let us waste any time in beating about the bush. I'm not particularly pious myself, as you will presently learn, so you needn't be afraid of giving yourself away. You did a good turn for Sir Harry, and I want you to do an equally good turn for me. That's business, isn't it?"

"Sir Harry did not pay me very well," said Moreau ruefully.

"But I will," said Lord Bamford. "I'm worth half a dozen Sir Harrys, and on the day you do the trick for me there'll be a thousand pounds for you."

Jean Moreau was all attention in a moment.

"What is it you wish me to do?" he asked.

"In the first place, I don't want you to ask any questions, because I sha'n't answer them if you do," said Lord Bamford. "You can quite well do all I want you to do without asking awkward questions. Here is the case in a nutshell. A certain man, named Martin Wraith, is in possession of certain secret information which I do not wish him to reveal. In point of fact, I don't mind telling you that if he revealed his information I should be utterly ruined.

"This man has been mad for twenty years, but on Christmas Eve he suddenly recovered his reason, and went to a certain house for the purpose of revealing his secret. Luckily, I got wind of his intention, so I followed him. Unfortunately I got stuck fast in a snowdrift, when taking a short cut across some

fields, and he reached the house before I could overtake him. But that didn't profit him much, for I fired at him through the window, just as he was beginning his story. I didn't kill him—I didn't even hit him—but the sudden excitement upset his equilibrium. In other words, he went clean off his dot again, and took to his heels, and has never been heard of since.

"Now, what I want you to do is this. I want you to come down to Firvale, and find Martin Wraith. Every hour that he remains alive, and at liberty, adds to my danger; for he may recover his reason again at any moment, and reveal his secret. Of course, he may be dead by now, but that won't make any difference to you, for I will pay you your fee whenever you show me his dead body. If you find him alive, I don't ask you to kill him—though I've no doubt you would if I made it worth your while. I'll attend to that part of the business myself. All I ask you to do is to find Martin Wraith, and tell me where he is; and on the day you do this, there'll be a thousand pounds for you. Are you on?"

"But is this all you are going to tell me about the case?" asked Moreau.

"Oh, no!" said Lord Bamford. "I'll tell you lots more, if you wish. I'll tell you all about Martin Wraith, and what he's like, and whom he went to see on Christmas Eve, and what we've done to try to trace him, and anything else that's likely to help you. But I won't tell you why I want to get rid of Martin Wraith, or what his secret is. There's no necessity to tell you that. That's my affair; but if there's anything else you'd like to know—fire away, and I'll answer you to the best of my ability."

For over an hour and a half Moreau questioned and cross-questioned him, and thus acquired all the information which the reader now possesses, except, of course, the reason why Lord Bamford was so anxious to silence Martin Wraith.

"Now, what do you say?" asked Lord Bamford, when the cross-examination was concluded. "You now know everything you need to know. Are you game to tackle the job, or must I go elsewhere?"

"I'll tackle it," said Moreau. "I will go back with you to Firvale at once. What time is the next train?"

Lord Bamford consulted his watch.

"We're just too late for the four o'clock," he said. "We shall have to wait for the half-past five."

"Very good," said Moreau, rising to his feet. "I have one or two little matters to attend to before I leave, so if you don't mind leaving me now, I'll meet you on the platform at St. Pancras at twenty past five."

Lord Bamford accordingly took his departure; and no sooner had he vanished through the office-door than Moreau sank back into his chair and rubbed his hands.

"Poor young fool!" he muttered to himself in French. "In one breath he informs me that he isn't going to tell me what the doctor's secret is, and in the next breath he engages me to go to Firvale and hunt for the doctor. What does he suppose that I shall do with Martin Wraith when I have found him? Hand him over to Lord Bamford without asking any questions? Pas si bete! As soon as I find Martin Wraith I'll drag his secret out of him, and I'll hide him where Lord Bamford cannot find him, and then I'll use the secret for my own advantage."

CHAPTER 5. The First Score.

IT was ten o'clock when Lord Bamford and Jean Moreau arrived at Firvale Grange, so that Moreau, like Nelson Lee, was unable to commence his investigations until next morning.

Immediately after breakfast on Tuesday morning he left the Grange with the express intention of spending the day in exploring the neighbouring moors. In less than an hour's time, however, he was back at the Grange again.

"Hullo! You're soon back," said Lord Bamford, meeting Moreau in the carriage-drive. "I thought you said you should be away all day."

"So I did," said Moreau. "But I've made an important discovery."

"That's good news."

"I'm glad you think so. My discovery is this—Nelson Lee is here!"

"Nelson Lee!"

Lord Bamford's face turned deathly pale. The tones of his voice as he uttered the great detective's name proved how much he feared him.

"What is he doing here?" he asked.

"Hunting for Martin Wraith. I saw him on the moors, but he didn't see me."

"Is he working for Hugh Palmer?"

"Yes. I made inquiries in the village, and I find that Hugh Palmer went up to town yesterday morning, and brought Lee back with him last night. Do you know what this means?"

"It means that you will have to strain every nerve, or Nelson Lee will beat you, and find the missing man first."

"It means more than that. Nelson Lee is the only detective in Europe whom I fear. He's the only man I consider my equal. I've a pretty high opinion of my own abilities, and I'm not in the habit of showing the white feather, but I tell you frankly that, unless we can stop him going any further with his investigations, the odds are just about six to four that he will beat us."

"But how can we stop him?" asked Lord Bamford.

Moreau lowered his voice.

"If you're the sort of man I take you to be," he said, "we can put an effectual stop to Nelson Lee's investigations without much trouble, and with no risk at all."

"How?"

"Nelson Lee is at present at Ramsley Moor. On the east side of the moor there's a thickly-wooded plantation. In the middle of the plantation there's an uninhabited tumbledown gamekeeper's cottage.

"Now, suppose you were to take a revolver, and station yourself inside that cottage? Suppose I were then to disguise myself as a country bumpkin, and were to meet Nelson Lee on Ramsley Moor? Suppose I were to tell him that a man, answering to Martin Wraith's description, was lying in that tumbledown cottage in a dying state? What would he do? He would command me to lead him to the cottage at once, and the moment he stepped inside, you would press the trigger of your revolver—and we should have no more trouble with Mr. Nelson Lee!"

"But, look here," said Lord Bamford, "why shouldn't you shoot him yourself when you've lured him to the cottage? Why should you drag me into the plot?"

"Because I don't choose to do all the dirty work," said Moreau coolly. "It only matters a thousand pounds to me who finds Martin Wraith, but it matters seventy thousand a year to you! Then it's only fair that you should do your share of the work. Besides, if I were to murder Nelson Lee, what's to prevent you turning round on me when I've found Martin Wraith, and refusing to pay my fee, and threatening to denounce me to the police if I make any fuss? No, no, my boy! If I put myself into your power by decoying Nelson Lee to the cottage, you must put yourself into my power by shooting him."

"All right! I'll do it," said Lord Bamford defiantly. "When is it to be?"

"Now!" said Moreau. "It won't take me many minutes to disguise myself."

They entered the house together and made their way to their respective rooms, where Lord Bamford secured his revolver; whilst Moreau proceeded to disguise himself—as only Moreau could disguise himself—as an agricultural labourer.

At half-past eleven Lord Bamford set out for the ruined cottage, and at a quarter to twelve Moreau started for Ramsley Moor.

He discovered Nelson Lee examining the tracks of a band of gipsies, who had been recently encamped on the moor.

"Good-morning, sir!" he said, touching his cap. "Be you one of them there gents as is looking for Dr. Wraith?"

"I am," said Nelson Lee.

"Well, begging your pardon, sir, I think as 'ow I've found him," said Moreau. "I comes from Matlock myself, so I don't know the doctor by sight, but I think the man what I've found is him."

"Where is he?" asked Nelson Lee eagerly.

Moreau pointed to the plantation on the east side of the moor.

"He's over in that wood, sir," he said.

"Alive, or dead?"

"He's alive, sir; but he's moaning something pitiful, and he 'pears to me to be dying."

"Then, take me to him," said Nelson Lee.

They trudged across the moor, and presently came within sight of the ruined cottage.

"He's in there, sir," said Moreau, halting outside the door.

Nelson Lee pulled up, and half turned round. The faintest flicker of a contemptuous smile was playing round his lips.

"Oh, he's in there, is he?" he said, slipping his hand into his pocket.

"Yes, sir," said Moreau, nodding his head.

To his uneasy surprise Nelson Lee still remained standing with his back to the door, and with his lips half parted in that enigmatical smile.

"Aren't you a-going in to 'ave a look at 'im?" asked Moreau, in desperation.

By way of reply, Nelson Lee began to hum the refrain of a well-known nursery rhyme:

"Will you walk into my parlour,
Said the spider to the fly!"

Moreau caught the words, and staggered back as though he had been struck. At the same instant Nelson Lee whipped his hand out of his pocket, and covered the outwitted Frenchman with his revolver.

"It would grieve me very much if I had to hurt you," he said, with a pleasant smile; "so take my advice, and don't allow those hands of yours to wander anywhere in the region of your pockets! On the whole, perhaps it would be safer if you held them up. Quickly, if you please! That's the way! Thank you! Now, what's your little game, Monsieur Jean Moreau?"

The Frenchman hung his head in bitter, shamefaced silence. He had been wounded on his tenderest point. If there was one thing upon which he prided himself it was his marvellous proficiency in the art of disguise.

No wonder, then, that all the wind was taken out of his sails when he found that his first attempt to hoodwink Nelson Lee had resulted in absolute failure. No wonder that he hung his head, and took refuge in sullen silence.

"Come, now! I can't wait all day for an answer!" said Nelson Lee. "I've other matters to attend to. What's the idea? Why are you rigged up in that fantastic attire, and why have you brought me here?"

Moreau raised his head.

"Curse you! You've sharper eyes than I gave you credit for!" he growled.

"When did you first recognise me?"

"When did I first recognise you?" repeated Nelson Lee, with a derisive laugh.

"What a question to ask! My poor, deluded man I spotted you the moment I clapped my eyes on you! Surely you didn't hope to fool me with a simple disguise

like that! I had always understood that you were a past-master in the art of disguising yourself; but, upon my word, if this is the best you can do—well, it's time you took a few lessons, that's all!"

Moreau winced beneath the biting words, which stung him all the more by reason of the fact that he knew that Lord Bamford was just inside the ruined cottage, and was doubtless listening to all that Nelson Lee was saying.

"If you knew who I was all the time," he said, "why did you pretend to be taken in? Why did you ask me to bring you here?"

"Because I wanted to find out what your game was," said Nelson Lee. "What was the idea, may I ask? Were you going to murder me when you had me lured into this cottage?"

"No," said Moreau sullenly. "Of course I wasn't!"

"I'm inclined to believe you," said Nelson Lee. "I don't think you would have the pluck to tackle me yourself. You have doubtless an accomplice, then. Who is he?"

Moreau made no reply.

"Is he lying in wait for me inside?"

A look of defiance leapt into Moreau's face.

"I refuse to answer any more questions!" he said, lowering his hands. "I've let you fool me long enough. I've nothing to fear from you. You can't prove anything against me, and you daren't shoot me; so I'll wish you good-afternoon."

He turned on his heel, and began to walk away. Quick as thought, Nelson Lee sprang after him, and caught him by the scruff of the neck. A few yards from the cottage, on the other side of a low stone wall, was a shallow pond of stagnant water, thickly covered with greenish slime.

"It is quite true that I can't prove anything against you," said Nelson Lee, as he dragged the struggling Frenchman towards the low stone wall. "It is equally true that I dare not shoot you; but there's one thing I both can and dare do, and that's this!"

As he uttered these words he jerked Jean Moreau off his feet, swung him over the wall, and dropped him into the slime-encrusted pond.

"That's a better disguise than your own!" he said, leaning over the wall and watching Moreau's frantic attempts to tear the clinging slime from his face and hands. "Your own mother wouldn't recognise you now! It's no use fumbling for your revolver. I took the precaution of removing that from your pocket as I dragged you to the pond. Au revoir! See you later, perhaps! I'm now going to have a word or two with your accomplice."

He waved his hand in mock farewell, and walked back towards the cottage. By that time, however, Lord Bamford had decided that discretion was the better part of valour. In other words, whilst Nelson Lee had been dragging Moreau to the edge of the pond, his lion-hearted lordship had hurriedly crawled through one of the back windows of the ruined cottage, and had taken to his heels!

Nelson Lee caught a glimpse of a bearded face and a boyish figure scuttling through the wood like a frightened rabbit.

For a moment he toyed with the thought of giving chase; then he shrugged his shoulders, and quietly walked away in the opposite direction.

"Why should I trouble to go after him?" he muttered to himself. "I've found out all I wanted to know. That young fellow was Lord Bamford, and he has evidently brought Moreau down to Firvale to hunt for Martin Wraith. They are dismayed to find that I am on the same tack as themselves, and they are evidently determined to stick at nothing to prevent me finding the missing man.

"Ah, well, forewarned is forearmed! This investigation is not going to be the pleasant little picnic I anticipated. Jean Moreau is by no means a rival to be despised, and, after this afternoon's work, it will be war to the knife between us. So be it. I'm not frightened. I've scored the first trick in the game!"

CHAPTER 6.

Moreau Has an Idea.

THE uppermost thought in Moreau's mind when he scrambled out of the pond was not the desire for revenge on Nelson Lee; neither was it a feeling of anger against Lord Bamford for not having come to his assistance.

Both these sentiments were present in the Frenchman's mind, it is true, but his first and foremost thought as he wrung the foul-smelling water from his clothes, and wiped the slimy green stuff out of his eyes and ears and nose, was the thought of how he could best sneak back to the Grange and change his clothes without Lady Bamford or any of the servants witnessing his humiliating plight.

Like most Frenchmen, he was intensely vain, and abnormally sensitive to ridicule, and he literally turned hot all over when he contemplated the possibility of any of the servants seeing him, and guessing what had happened.

As events turned out, however, his fears proved to be groundless. Not a soul was in sight when he timidly peered over the fence, just opposite the side-entrance to the house, and in less time almost than it takes to tell he cleared the fence, scuttled across the carriage-drive, slipped into the house, flew upstairs, and locked himself in his bed-room.

By the time he had had his bath, and had resumed his ordinary attire, Lord Bamford had returned. The two men met at the bottom of the staircase, in the entrance-hall, and for quite five seconds they silently vied with each other as to which of them could eye the other with the more contemptuous glance.

"Well, a pretty mess you've made of your first attempt to score off Nelson Lee!" said Lord Bamford at last.

"And a pretty sort of ally you've proved yourself to be, haven't you?" retorted Moreau. "Mon Dieu, it makes me sick to think of it! There you stood, just inside the door, with a loaded revolver in your hand, and you never— Pah! It's too disgusting to talk about! For two pins I would throw up the case, and go back to London!"

"That's just about the best thing you could do, if you want my opinion!" said Lord Bamford coolly. "You are only wasting your time here! It's quite evident you're no match for Nelson Lee."

"No match for Nelson Lee!" Moreau almost screamed; and he danced round his companion like a cat on hot bricks—"no match for Nelson Lee! Sapristi! You shall see whether I'm a match for him or not!"

"You're more than a match for him in brag, I admit!" said Lord Bamford, pitilessly. "But when it comes to doing anything—well, you're simply not in it with Nelson Lee. He's all over you all the time! He makes rings round you! He wipes the floor with you! He plays with you like a——"

"Enough!" cried Moreau, his face distorted with passion. "I did not come here to be insulted!"

"No; you came to provide some sport for Nelson Lee, it seems!" remarked Lord Bamford, who was bent on "rubbing in" the Frenchman's discomfiture—partly in order to divert attention from his own ignominious flight, and partly in the hope of goading Moreau into making a desperate attempt to justify his reputation.

"I was only rotting you, of course, when I said you had better go back to London. I brought you down here to find Martin Wraith, and until he's found you will continue to consider yourself in my service, and to draw on me for all expenses. That being settled, the next point to decide is this: Are you going to have another go at Nelson Lee, or are you going to leave Nelson Lee alone for the present and hunt for Martin Wraith?"

"I'm going to hunt for Martin Wraith," said Moreau, somewhat sullenly.

"In which direction?"

"That is more than I can tell you at present. It depends upon the result of certain inquiries, which you, perhaps, may be able to answer."

"What do you want to know?"

"Before I answer your question, I must first tell you that when I went to meet Nelson Lee, about a couple of hours ago, I found him in that three-cornered patch of waste ground on the west side of Ramsley Moor. At the moment when I first caught sight of him he was examining the ashes of a fire in the middle of the patch, and as I crossed over to speak to him I observed a number of impressions on the ground, and other signs which I need not recapitulate, which proved to me beyond all doubt that a party of men and women—probably a band of wandering gipsies—had recently been encamped there. This gave me an idea. In all probability—it is practically certain, I should say—the same idea has occurred to Nelson Lee, so that there's no time to be lost if I mean to get ahead of him."

"But what's your idea?" asked Lord Bamford in a puzzled voice.

"First tell me this," said Moreau. "Were those gipsies—if they were gipsies—"

"They were gipsies," said Lord Bamford, interrupting him. "There were thirty or forty of them, at a rough guess. They had six tents, two carts, a couple of donkeys, a broken-kneed horse, and a ramshackle caravan laden with baskets and things of that sort. They had the impudence to pitch their camp on that three-cornered patch—which belongs to me, of course—about ten days ago, but I never discovered they were there until the morning of Christmas Eve. As soon as I discovered them I interviewed their 'king,' as they call him—and a hulking, savage-looking ruffian he was, I can tell you—and ordered him and his tribe to clear off at once."

"And when did they go?" asked Moreau eagerly.

"At daybreak on Christmas Day."

"Good!" said Moreau, rubbing his hands. "Then they were still encamped on Ramsley Moor on the night of Christmas Eve—the night when Martin Wraith disappeared?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where they have gone?"

"Not I! I never troubled my head about them after they removed themselves off my estate. But why do you ask? Surely you don't think that these gipsies murdered Martin Wraith, or kidnapped him, do you?"

"No. But they may have given him shelter on the night of Christmas Eve, or they may even have given him a lift in their caravan as far as their next halting-place. If they did the latter, his mysterious disappearance from this neighbourhood would be fully accounted for. At any rate, in the absence of any definite clue to work upon, it is clearly my wisest plan to find out where the gipsies have gone, to follow them, to interview their king, and to see if he can give me any information concerning Martin Wraith."

"Do you think that Nelson Lee will adopt the same plan?"

"I think it's very likely. In fact, I might almost say I'm sure he will."

"Then the sooner you get to work the better! Wait here half a minute, and I'll see if any of the servants can tell me where the gipsies have gone."

He hurried off to the servants' quarters, but presently returned, shaking his head.

"No," he said. "None of the servants know anything about them. But there's sure to be somebody in the village who can give you the information, so if I were you I should first begin by making inquiries at the Fox and Hounds, and afterwards at the blacksmith's shop, where most of the gossip of the neighbourhood is retailed. As soon as you've found out where the gipsies have gone, come back here, and I'll lend you a horse, or a horse and trap, or a motor-car, or any other form of conveyance you like, in order to enable you to reach the gipsies' camp at the earliest possible moment."

CHAPTER 7
On the Scent.

IT was half-past two when Moreau left the Grange and set out for Firvale village. Acting on Lord Bamford's advice, he determined to take a short cut across the moor, instead of following the turnpike road; and almost the first thing he saw when he reached the moor was the figure of Nelson Lee, who was walking along the edge of a deep and thickly-wooded ravine, and was evidently still engaged in searching for some trace of Martin Wraith.

"I don't understand this," muttered Moreau to himself. "Why hasn't he gone after the gipsies? He has seen the remains of their encampment on Ramsley Moor. Doesn't he know that they were there on the night Martin Wraith disappeared? Has it never occurred to him that the gipsies might possibly be able to give him some valuable information? If it hasn't, he must be duller witted than I gave him credit for being, or he would surely have lost no time in——"

Suddenly he paused and caught his breath. Far away across the moor, in the direction of the village, his keen eyes had suddenly caught sight of a youthful looking clergyman and a brown-faced, bare-legged gipsy boy! They were hurrying along, glancing first in one direction and then in another, and were evidently looking for somebody.

"That's Hugh Palmer, without a doubt!" soliloquised Moreau. "He has just got news of Martin Wraith. That gipsy boy has brought it. They're looking for Nelson Lee, to tell him the news."

He glanced towards the ravine again. Nelson Lee had begun to descend its precipitous sides, and all that could be seen of him was the back of his head and shoulders. In another instant these, too, had disappeared, and Nelson Lee was lost to view. It was evident that he had not seen Hugh and the boy, and it was equally evident that Hugh and the boy had not seen him.

In an instant Moreau's mind was made up. He quickened his pace, and struck a course across the moor which brought him within speaking distance of Hugh. He calculated with the utmost confidence that Hugh would be sure to ask him if he had seen anything of Nelson Lee, and his calculations proved correct.

Hugh, of course, had never seen Moreau in his life before, and had no idea that Lord Bamford had engaged a detective to hunt for Martin Wraith. The consequence was that when he met a neatly-dressed and respectable-looking young man sauntering across the moor he naturally hailed him and asked him if he had seen anything of a "gentleman about the same height and build as yourself, with a clean-shaven face, and wearing a blue serge suit?"

Moreau pretended to be taken aback by the question. He gazed at Hugh for an instant in feigned astonishment; then he slapped his thigh and ejaculated:

"Well, I never! Surely you are the Rev. Mr. Palmer, aren't you?" he said.

"Yes," said Hugh, in a surprised tone of voice.

"I thought you must be," said Moreau. "What an extraordinary coincidence! And you are looking for my old friend Nelson Lee, aren't you?"

"I am," said Hugh, more surprised than ever. "Do you know Mr. Lee?"

"I should just say I do!" replied Moreau, who was acting his very best. "I was at college with him, and I think I may say that I am his most intimate friend. My name is Meredith. You may have heard him speak of me. No? Then you can't have known him long."

"Have you seen Mr. Lee this afternoon?" asked Hugh.

"Of course," said Moreau. "If I hadn't just seen him how should I have known that you were Mr. Palmer, and that you were looking for him? I had no idea that he was in this neighbourhood until I met him. I am staying at the Hydropathic at Baslow, and I was strolling across these moors when all at once I dropped across Nelson Lee. Naturally, I asked him what he was doing

here, and he told me all about your case; so that's how I guessed you were the Rev. Hugh Palmer."

"And how long is it since you saw him?" asked Hugh.

"About a quarter of an hour ago," said Moreau unblushingly.

"Where was he then?"

Moreau pointed to a hill in exactly the opposite direction to the ravine into which Nelson Lee had vanished.

"He was at the foot of that hill when I left him," he said. "He said he was going to walk to Grindleford. He had a faint hope that Martin Wraith might have wandered in that direction; but, to tell you the truth, I don't think he was very sanguine. In fact, between you and me and the boy, I don't think he has the slightest hope of ever finding the missing man. He was quite disheartened when I left him, I assure you."

"Ah, well, he'll feel better when I've seen him!" said Hugh.

"You have good news for him?" asked Moreau.

"Yes," said Hugh. "This boy has been sent by his father—who is the 'king' of a band of gipsies, who are encamped near Bakewell—to tell me that his father wishes to see me, as he is in a position to give me some valuable information concerning Martin Wraith."

"That's good!" said Moreau. "Lee will be delighted to hear that. He told me, I remember, that he had discovered the remains of a gipsy encampment on Ramsley Moor, but he didn't seem to attach much importance to the discovery."

"That was because he was misled by the village blacksmith," said Hugh. "I haven't seen Mr. Lee myself since late last night, but I understand that as soon as he discovered the remains of that encampment it occurred to him that, if the gipsies had been there on the night when Wraith disappeared, it was just possible that they might have taken the poor fellow along with them. So he hurried back to the village and asked the blacksmith how long it was since the gipsies had left. As a matter of fact, they left on the morning of Christmas Day; but the stupid fellow got mixed with his dates, and told Mr. Lee they had left the morning of Christmas Eve, nearly twenty-four hours before Wraith's disappearance!"

"This, of course, completely knocked Mr. Lee's theory on the head. If the blacksmith hadn't made such a stupid mistake, there is little doubt that Mr. Lee would have been at Bakewell by now. I was terribly annoyed when I heard—quite by accident—of the blacksmith's mistake, and I was just setting out to find Mr. Lee, and tell him he had been misinformed, when this boy arrived."

"And do you think that the gipsy king's information will enable you to find Martin Wraith?" asked Moreau.

"I cannot tell," said Hugh. "He has merely sent word by this boy that, if I will go to Bakewell, and pay him five pounds—which is the reward I have offered for news of the missing man—he will give me some information concerning Martin Wraith. What his information is he refuses to say until he has got the five pounds."

"So you are going to send Nelson Lee to interview the gipsy king instead of going yourself?"

"Yes. I thought it best to do nothing on my own responsibility, but to leave everything entirely to Mr. Lee."

"I think you are wise," said Moreau, who had now got all the information he wanted. "But I mustn't detain you any longer. You will be anxious to find Mr. Lee as soon as possible. If you follow that road, over the crest of that hill, you will probably overtake him about midway between here and Grindleford."

"Thank you," said Hugh.

And he and the boy hurried away, little dreaming that Nelson Lee was less

than a hundred yards away, and that they were deliberately turning their backs on him.

No sooner were they out of sight than Moreau spun round on his heel and flew back to the Grange. Ten minutes later, mounted on a speedy horse, he was on his way to Bakewell.

It was growing dusk when he reached the little town, where he dismounted at the first hotel he came to, and inquired the whereabouts of the gipsy encampment. Learning that it was about a mile to the south of the town, in the direction of Haddon Hall, he left his horse at the hotel and finished his journey on foot.

When he came within sight of the little camp, which had been pitched on the outskirts of a gloomy wood some distance from the road, he perceived that the gipsy king, or the man whom he rightly guessed was the "king"—a burly, coarse-featured giant, answering to the English name of Nathan Smith—was standing at the door of the caravan, smoking a short clay pipe.

"I have been sent to you by the Rev. Hugh Palmer," said Moreau in his most insinuating tones. "I am given to understand that you can give me some information concerning a man named Martin Wraith."

Nathan nodded his head, and held out a grimy hand.

"Lovo!" he said.

Moreau did not know that "lovo" was the Romany for "money," but he understood the gesture, and he slipped a five-pound note into the gipsy's hand.

Nathan carefully examined it, to make sure that it was genuine. Then he thrust it into his pocket, and removed his pipe from his mouth.

"Where is my son?" he asked.

"He follows on foot," said Moreau. "I came on horseback. What can you tell me about Martin Wraith?"

"He was a porro gougeo (an old man) with a grey beard and long, matted hair," said Nathan. "He was witless as a child, and he lost his way on Ramsley Moor on the night before Christmas Day. Am I not right?"

"Yes, that's the man I'm looking for!" said Moreau eagerly. "Where is he now?"

"I know not!" said Nathan, shaking his head: "We found him on the night I have named half buried in a snowdrift. For pity's sake we carried him to our camp, and laid him by the stove in the caravan. Next day we resumed our wanderings. He remained with us until we were entering Bakewell, on the afternoon of Christmas Day, when he suddenly leaped out of the caravan, and flew like the wind along the Buxton Road. So we saw him no more, but somewhere along the Buxton Road you shall surely find him."

"And is that all you have to tell me?" asked Moreau in a disappointed voice.

"That is all," said Nathan gravely. "I heard not of the reward until to-day, or I would surely have sent for you earlier."

"He was mad when you found him?"

"Ay!"

"Was he mad when he ran away from you?"

"Ay! Madder than when we found him, if such a thing were possible!"

"Well, good-night," said Moreau, producing another note from his purse. "There are two of us hunting for Martin Wraith, and I don't want the other man to find him if I can help it. He will probably come to see you some time to-night; and, if you'll promise not to tell him what you've just told me, I'll make you a present of another five pounds. Is it a bargain?"

"Rather!" said Nathan, with a grin.

"Here you are, then," said Moreau, handing him another note with a low, self-satisfied chuckle. "Good-night. Thanks for your information. I'm off to Buxton now."

CHAPTER 8.

How Jean Moreau Searched for Martin Wraith, and Found Him at the Devonshire Hospital, Buxton—How Martin Wraith Stole Away in the Night.

ARMED with this information, the French detective hurried back to the hotel where he had left his horse, and rode post-haste to Ashford, which was the name of the first village on the road from Bakewell to Buxton.

After spending an hour there in vain inquiries for news of the missing man, he journeyed on to the next village, which was named Taddington.

Here again his inquiries met with no success, and, after refreshing himself with a stiff glass of brandy at the Queen's Arms, he remounted his horse and resumed his journey Buxtonwards.

Shortly after leaving Taddington, he came to a little wayside tavern known as the Waterloo Inn. In pursuance of the plan which he had followed ever since leaving Bakewell, he dismounted at the door of this inn, and went inside, with the object of questioning the landlord. But he had no need to question the landlord. No sooner had he crossed the threshold than a scrap of conversation fell on his ears which told him that at last he had struck the trail of the missing man.

"He was an old man, about sixty years of age, I should say, and as mad as a hatter," said a voice in the tap-room. "If it hadn't been for me he'd have been killed, as sure as eggs is eggs! I should think, by the look of him, he'd been wandering in the dale for three or four days, for he——"

That was all Moreau waited to hear. Quivering with excitement, he strode into the tap-room, where he found the landlord and a couple of rustics listening to the tale of a middle-aged man, who appeared to be a better-class farmer. It was the latter whose voice Jean Moreau had heard.

"Excuse me," said Moreau, raising his hat, and addressing himself to the farmer. "I have ridden here from Buxton to ask the landlord if he can give me any news of my poor dear father, who has been missing since Christmas Day. As I opened the door I heard you speak of an elderly man, about sixty years of age, who had evidently been lost for three or four days. That description exactly fits my poor unfortunate father. Is it possible you have seen him?"

"Is he—er—not quite right in his mind?" asked the farmer.

"I am sorry to say he is hopelessly insane," said Moreau, with a well-feigned air of sorrow. "He had brain-fever about six months ago, and has been a lunatic ever since. Acting on the doctor's advice, I brought him to Buxton about a fortnight ago, in the hope that the change would do him good. On the afternoon of Christmas Day he managed to give me the slip, and I've been hunting for him in vain ever since. Tell me quickly, what do you know of him?"

The farmer cleared his throat. He was conscious that he had suddenly become a person of some importance, and he meant to make the most of it.

"I must first tell you," he began, "that I live in the neighbouring village of Wormhill, which is on the other side of Chee Dale. About ten o'clock this morning I left my house for the purpose of coming to see my friend the landlord here with reference to——"

"Yes, yes!" said Moreau impatiently. "But about my poor father?"

"I'm coming to that," said the farmer. "Whenever I come to this public-house I always take a short cut across the dale. I did so this morning. The railway-line runs through the dale, you know, and there's a tunnel at the end, which——"

"But about my father?" pleaded Moreau, who could scarcely contain himself.

"As I was crossing the dale," continued the farmer, "I was astonished to see an elderly man—about sixty years of age, I should say—sitting in the middle of the railway-line, just outside the tunnel. As I knew there was a train just due, I shouted to him to warn him of his danger; but, instead of getting up, he waved

his hand to me, quite friendly-like, and burst into a peal of the queerest laughter I've ever heard.

"The fellow must be mad," said I to myself. So I went down on to the line and had a good look at him. I then discovered that he was not only as mad as a hatter, but was also nearly dead from cold and starvation. His clothes were all wet through and torn and stained with mud; and altogether he looked to me like a man that had been wandering about, without food or shelter, for three or four days at least.

"I tried to make him understand that a train was coming, but he only laughed and wagged his head. So at last I seized him by the scruff of his neck and tried to drag him out of harm's way. Weak though he was, he fought like a savage; but at last I managed to pull him to the side of the line. And half a minute later the train came thundering out of the tunnel and passed right over the spot where he had been sitting. If it hadn't been for me he'd have been cut to pieces, as sure as I'm sitting here!"

"It was very brave of you to risk your life for an utter stranger," said Moreau, in tones of pretended admiration. "And was that the last you saw of him? Did you leave him then?"

"No fear!" said the farmer indignantly. "I'm not quite so hard-hearted as all that! If I'd left him he'd just have sat down on the line again and waited for the next train to run over him."

"Then what did you do?" asked Moreau.

"With a lot of trouble," said the farmer, "I persuaded him to go back with me to my house; and then, as I couldn't get any sense out of him—he didn't even know his own name—I put him in my trap and drove him to Buxton, where I handed him over to the doctors at the Devonshire Hospital. I thought the hospital was the best place for the likes of him. Don't you think I did right?"

"You did perfectly right," said Moreau, backing towards the door. "Then he is now at the Devonshire Hospital at Buxton?"

"I expect he is," said the farmer. "At any rate, I left him there at two o'clock this afternoon."

That was all Moreau wanted to know. Without even thanking the farmer for his information, he rushed from the house, vaulted into the saddle, and galloped off to Buxton.

It was striking nine when he reached the Devonshire Hospital, where he gave his name as "Mr. Gunning," and asked to see the house-surgeon.

"I understand that a patient was brought here this afternoon whom I have every reason to believe is my father," he said, when the house-surgeon appeared. "He was brought to the hospital by a farmer from Wormhill, who found him on the railway-line in Chee Dale."

"Oh, yes! I know the man you mean," said the house-surgeon. "Your father, is he? We couldn't get him to tell us his name, and there was nothing on him to afford any clue to his identity. I had a hazy notion that he might possibly be a man named Martin Wraith, whose disappearance has been the subject of several paragraphs in the local papers lately. In fact, I was going to write to-night to the Rev. Mr. Palmer, of Firvale, who is offering a reward for news of this Martin Wraith, and ask him to come over to Buxton and have a look at the man. However, if he's your father, that settles the question. Is he a native of this part of the country?"

"Oh, no!" said Moreau. "We live in Manchester. About six months ago my father had a severe attack of brain-fever, and he's never been right in his head since. Acting on the doctor's advice, I brought him to Matlock about a fortnight ago; but on Christmas Day he gave me the slip, and it was not until this evening that I was able to get any news of him. May I see him?"

"Certainly," said the house-surgeon. "He is sleeping now, I think. He was

almost moribund when he arrived, but he has picked up wonderfully since we dosed him with stimulants and hot beef-tea. Come this way."

He led the detective into the ward.

"The sight of the other patients seemed to excite him, so we have drawn a screen round his bed," he said, pointing to a screen at the far end of the ward. "I wouldn't wake him, or talk to him, if I were you. It will only disturb him for the night."

"I don't want to talk to him," said Moreau. "I only want to make sure that he is my father."

He cautiously drew the screen aside and glanced at the sleeping figure on the bed. No sooner had he done so than a fierce thrill of triumph shot through his frame. His quest was ended. He had found the missing man. It was Martin Wraith!

"Yes, it's my father," he said, striving to speak calmly. "When can I take him home?"

"When do you want to take him home?" asked the house-surgeon.

"To-night, if possible," said Moreau eagerly.

The house-surgeon shook his head vigorously and emphatically.

"I couldn't think of allowing you to remove him to-night," he said. "To-morrow morning, if you like, but certainly not to-night."

"Very well," said Moreau, with a resigned air. "I will bring a cab for him about ten o'clock to-morrow morning. Good-night, and thank you so much for all your courtesy and kindness."

It was then a quarter-past nine. Four minutes later Jean Moreau was standing at the booking-office window in the London and North-Western Station. Five minutes later still he was in the train. At a quarter to four next morning he stepped out on to the platform at Euston. At twenty minutes past four he was thundering at the door of an old-fashioned, red-brick house in Grinkle Square, not far from the Angel at Islington.

His summons was answered by an ugly and repulsive-looking hunchback, whose height was barely three feet six, but whose long and hairy arms, no less than his short and sturdy legs, gave evidence of enormous strength.

"It is thou, is it?" he growled in French upon seeing Moreau. "Why hast thou awakened me from my sleep at this early hour?"

"Because I have good news for thee, my noble Zacharie," said Moreau, as he pushed his way into the house and led the way into a sparsely-furnished sitting-room. "Our fortunes are made, and thou and I will no longer have to sigh for the rich red wine which we cannot afford to buy."

"Chut! I have heard that tale before," said the dwarf contemptuously. "Thou art for ever catching the goose that lays the golden eggs; but thy geese, alas! either die before the eggs are laid, or they spread their wings and fly away."

"But this goose will neither die nor fly away," said Moreau, as he flung himself into a chair and lit a cigarette at the candle in Zacharie's hand. "Listen. A certain English milord—the Earl of Bamford, to be precise—has engaged me to find a man named Martin Wraith. Martin Wraith possesses certain information which his lordship is most desperately anxious to prevent him making public. His lordship will not tell me what this information is, but I shrewdly suspect that, if the information were revealed, my lord would be my lord no longer. To-night I have found Monsieur Martin Wraith. He is a lunatic, and is now in the hospital at Buxton. To-morrow I bring him here."

"Here?" cried Zacharie in a startled voice. "Why bringest thou the lunatic here?"

"Surely thy brain hath not yet awakened from its slumber," said Moreau with a laugh. "Hast thou not the wit to see that, when I have hidden Martin

Wraith away where Lord Bamford cannot find him, I shall hold his lordship in the hollow of my hand, and shall be able to squeeze him to my heart's content ? ”

Zacherie blinked his ferrety eyes, and nodded his huge, misshapen head.

“ It is what the English call blackmail, then ? ” he said.

“ Precisely,” said Moreau. “ But time presses. It is now half-past four, and I must leave for Buxton by the 5.15 from St. Pancras. I have hurried here to-night to warn thee of our coming, and to bid thee prepare the underground cell. We shall leave Buxton at eleven o'clock, and shall be with thee about half-past three in the afternoon.”

“ But how wilt thou persuade him to come with thee ? ” asked Zacherie.

“ Leave that to me,” said Moreau airily. “ I have already thrown dust in the eyes of the doctor at the hospital. Surely thou dost not doubt my ability to throw dust in the eyes of a lunatic ! And now I must go. Farewell until half-past three.”

He hurried from the house, and made his way to St. Pancras. Leaving at 5.15, he was back at Buxton at 9.35, and at ten o'clock he drove up to the hospital in a four-wheeler.

“ I've come for my father, Mr. Gunning,” he said to the porter in the spacious entrance-hall. “ The house-surgeon said I might take him away this morning.”

The porter stared at him.

“ Haven't you heard ? ” he asked.

“ Heard what ? ” demanded Moreau, turning pale.

“ He escaped in the middle of the night,” said the porter. “ He slipped out of bed when the night-nurse's back was turned, put on his things, and crawled out through one of the windows ! He wasn't missed till he'd got clear away ; and, although the police have been hunting for him ever since, they can't find any trace of him.”

To say that Jean Moreau was furious when he heard the news of Martin Wraith's disappearance is but feebly to describe his state of mind. Like all Frenchmen he was very excitable, and had little or no control of his passion, and for the next ten minutes he stormed and raved like a madman. He cursed the porter who had given him the news ; he cursed the house-surgeon, and the nurse who had let Martin Wraith escape ; he cursed the hospital and everything connected with it, until at last the house-surgeon took him by the shoulders and literally threw him out.

Somewhat sobered by this treatment, he dismissed the cab, in which he had intended to drive Martin Wraith to the station, and made his way to the police-station. As the reader may remember, the porter had told him that the hospital authorities had communicated with the police as soon as Martin Wraith had been missed, and Moreau's object in going to the station was to ask if anything had been heard of the missing man.

“ No, we've had no news of him yet,” said the superintendent, in answer to Moreau's question. “ I've wired his description to all the surrounding villages, and I've told off three of my men to search the neighbouring woods and dales. It is possible that I may hear something later in the day, but up to the present I've heard nothing.”

Having nothing better to do, Moreau spent the remainder of the day in exploring the neighbouring woods and dales on his own account. But it was labour in vain ; and when he returned to Buxton, late at night, the whereabouts of Martin Wraith were still enshrouded in impenetrable mystery.

The following day was New Year's Day. At nine o'clock in the morning after spending the night at one of the Buxton hotels, Moreau once more presented himself at the police-station.

“ Any news of my father yet ? ” he asked, addressing the inspector in charge.

“ Well, I don't exactly know, sir,” said the inspector. “ It may concern your father : and then, again, it mayn't.”

"What have you heard?" asked Moreau eagerly.

"We wired your father's description to Castleton amongst other places," said the inspector. "This morning we've received a report from the constable there stating that a shabbily-dressed old man, with a long grey beard, was seen last night roaming amongst the ruins of Peak Castle."

"Who saw him?" asked Moreau excitedly.

"A youth named Bagshaw, whose father keeps a spa-shop at Castleton," said the inspector. "According to this youth's account, he saw the old man, about nine o'clock last night, wandering about the castle-yard and muttering something to himself which the boy couldn't catch. Presently the man caught sight of the lad, and brandished his arms and howled—so the boy declares—like a wild beast! The boy, of course, was terrified out of his wits, and took to his heels down the castle hill as fast as his legs would carry him. Upon reaching the village he told his tale to the constable, who collected a number of men and hurried up to the castle. By that time, however, the man—if he ever existed—had disappeared, and nothing has since been seen or heard of him.

"That's the story, as reported to us by the Castleton constable. Whether there's any truth in it, or whether young Bagshaw has imagined it all, I don't pretend to say. Even if the story is true, it doesn't follow, of course, that the shabbily-dressed old man was your father. Anyhow, I thought I'd better tell you what we'd heard, and then you could please yourself as to whether you took any further steps in the matter."

"I'll go to Castleton and question the lad, at any rate," said Moreau.

He was as good as his word, and by half-past eleven he was at Castleton—a village about ten miles to the north of Buxton, famous as the site of the celebrated "Castle of the Peak," and the equally celebrated "Peak Cavern."

"Are you Mr. Bagshaw?" he asked, as he entered a quaint little shop not far from the mouth of the famous cavern.

"That's my name, sir," said the proprietor. "What can I do for you?"

"My name is Gunning," said Moreau. "I am seeking for news of my poor, half-witted father, who escaped from the Buxton Hospital on Tuesday night, and has not been heard of since. I understand from the police that your son saw a man last night, who, in many respects, answers to the description of my father. May I see your son for a moment or two, and ask him a few questions?"

The boy was accordingly called into the shop, and proved to be an intelligent sharp-witted youth of sixteen. In reply to Moreau's questions, he described the man whom he had seen at the ruined castle the night before, and his description left no room for doubt that the man whom he had seen was Martin Wraith.

"It was my poor, mad father, without a doubt," said Moreau, in accents of well-feigned sorrow. "Nothing has since been heard of him, I suppose?"

"Well, I'm not sure about that," said the boy's father, breaking into the conversation. "There was a queer thing happened here this morning, and as soon as I heard about it I said to myself, said I: 'That was the man that was up at the castle last night!' But mebbe you've heard about it. Everybody in the village is talking about it."

"No, I've heard nothing," said Moreau eagerly. "What has happened?"

"Well, it was like this," said the man. "About half past nine this morning a party of visitors arrived, and engaged a guide to take them through the Peak Cavern, which is really six caverns, you know, one leading out of another. When they were in the farthest cavern, which is known as Victoria Hall, they were suddenly struck of a heap, as the saying is, by a loud peal of laughter, which seemed to come from somewhere up above their heads.

"The cavern is tremendously high—so high, in fact, that nobody has ever been able to see the roof, not even with fire balloons, and rockets, and things like that. This party that I'm telling you about had nothing but a candle apiece to give them

light, so that, of course, they couldn't see anything much above their heads. One of them, however, declared he could see a man's face, peering through a hole in the cavern wall, about thirty feet from the ground. He said it looked like the face of a very old man, with matted hair and beard and shaggy eyebrows. But none of the others could see it, and as they didn't hear any more laughter, they came away, and contented themselves with telling their tale to the village constable."

"But how could he get into the cavern without being seen?" asked Moreau. "The entrance is occupied in the daytime by a number of workmen engaged in the manufacture of twine, so that it wouldn't be possible for anybody to enter without being observed. At the far end of the entrance, moreover, there's a wooden door, which is always locked at night, and which bars the way to the caverns beyond. Had this door been broken open?"

"No," said Bagshaw, shaking his head.

"Then how could my father possibly have taken refuge in the innermost cave without somebody having seen him enter?"

"He couldn't have got in in the ordinary way, that's certain," said Bagshaw. "But tradition says that in ancient times there used to be a secret passage leading from the castle on the top of the hill to the caverns underneath, and, though nobody has been able to discover this secret way, my own opinion is that your father must have stumbled across it last night. If he did, it would explain how he got into the cavern without anybody seeing him. Anyhow, that's my opinion. You can take it for what it's worth."

Moreau thanked him for his information and left the shop. Although he had little belief in Bagshaw's theory, he nevertheless determined to pay a visit to Victoria Hall, and satisfy himself, beyond all reasonable doubt, that Martin Wraith was not there.

With this object in view, he engaged a guide, from whom he purchased a couple of rockets and a supply of magnesium ribbon. Armed with these and accompanied by his guide, he paid the customary fee, passed through the entrance of the mighty cavern, and entered the first of those wonderful underground chambers, which is known as the Bell House. By means of a narrow, rocky passage, skirting the banks of a gloomy, subterranean stream, he made his way into the second cavern, known as the Grand Saloon. From this by a steep and rugged path, he ascended to the Chancel—an elevated chamber whose rocky sides were encrusted with glistening stalaotites. Descending from the Chancel, he passed into the Devil's Cellar, where his ears were almost deafened by the thunderous roar of a subterranean waterfall. And at last, after passing through the Half-way House, he reached the last of these wondrous caves, which was formerly known as Great Tom of Lincoln, from its resemblance to a huge, inverted bell, but which was christened Victoria Hall after a visit from Queen Victoria in 1842.

Standing in the middle of this cavern, Moreau sent up the first of his rockets, which vanished into the unfathomable space overhead, without revealing anything of importance. The second rocket was attended with a like result, and even the dazzling light of the magnesium ribbon failed to disclose the opening in the wall to which Bagshaw had alluded. Of Martin Wraith no sign or trace was visible.

After spending close on half an hour in exploring the recesses of the cavern, Moreau turned to his guide and intimated that he was ready to return. Although he had never really expected to find Martin Wraith in this underground cave, he was none the less disappointed with the result of his visit, and it was not in the best of humours that he made his way to the Castle Hotel and ordered lunch.

It was then nearly four o'clock. The sun had just set, and the shadows of evening were beginning to steal across the wintry sky. Just as he was sitting down to lunch, he heard the voice of Bagshaw's boy at the door.

"Is Mr. Gunning here?" he heard him ask.

"Mr. Gunning!" he heard the landlord reply. "Who's he?"

"He's a gentleman who came to my father's shop this morning," said the boy. "He's looking for the man I saw last night. I've seen the man again, and——"

That was all Moreau waited to hear. Like an arrow from a bow he darted to the door.

"You've seen my father again!" he cried, seizing the astonished boy by the arm. "When and where have you seen him?"

"I saw him about twenty minutes ago," said the boy. "He was walking up and down Cave Dale, waving his arms and talking to the trees. I only waited long enough to make sure that he was the man I saw last night, and then I hurried back to tell you what I'd seen. I didn't know whether you'd gone away or not; but I asked——"

"Yes, yes! Never mind about that!" said Moreau, who was trembling from head to foot with suppressed excitement. "Where is Cave Dale?"

The boy explained that Cave Dale was the name of a secluded little valley which skirted the foot of the castle hill, and which was entered through a narrow lane which struck to the right from the Tideswell Road at the south end of the square. He offered to show the Frenchman the way; but Moreau had no desire that there should be any witness to his meeting with Martin Wraith, and, after giving the boy a shilling for his information, and after paying for his uneaten lunch, he snatched up his hat and hurried away.

The light was failing fast when he entered the little dale, but before he had traversed a quarter of its length his eager eyes were gladdened by the sight of the man for whom he sought. Martin Wraith—for such it was—was no longer "walking up and down, waving his arms and talking to the trees," but was sitting on a grassy knoll, with his elbows on his knees and his chin on his hands.

"At last!" muttered Moreau to himself. "I'd better not let him see me until I'm close behind him, or else he might give me the slip again. I'll creep round to the back of him, under cover of these——"

Suddenly he paused, for at that moment a second figure made its appearance at the end of the dale.

"Confound the fellow!" growled Moreau under his breath. "He's walking straight towards the spot where Martin Wraith is sitting! If Martin Wraith sees him——"

Again he checked himself, and a look of baffled fury leaped into his eyes. For one half-moment he gazed at the approaching figure in mingled amazement and dismay; then a venomous oath burst from his lips.

"Nelson Lee!" he gasped.

CHAPTER 9. The Devil's Cellar.

WE must now return to Nelson Lee. Needless to say, as soon as he saw Hugh Palmer, the whole of Moreau's lying story was exposed, and the poor curate was made to understand that he had been taken in and done for by the very man Lord Bamford had engaged to find Martin Wraith as soon as possible.

Nelson Lee found and interviewed the gipsies, and questioned them with regard to Martin Wraith. But nothing came of his questionings. The gipsies declared that they had never seen the missing man, and that they had never even heard his name until the detective mentioned it. It was in vain that the detective pointed out that Nathan Smith had sent his son to tell Hugh Palmer that he could give him some news of Martin Wraith. The gipsies still protested that they knew absolutely nothing about the missing man, and the detective accordingly left the lock-up no wiser than when he entered.

A day or two passed without Nelson Lee being able to get on the track, and

then the following paragraph caught his eye as he was looking through a copy of the "Daily Courier."

"STRANGE AFFAIR AT BUXTON.

"Early on Tuesday morning Mr. Joseph Eyre, of Wormhill Low Farm, was astonished to see an elderly man sitting on the railway line at the mouth of the Chee Dale Tunnel. Finding that the man was a harmless lunatic, Mr. Eyre persuaded him to accompany him to Buxton, where he handed him over to the authorities at the Derbyshire Hospital. Later in the day the man was identified as Mr. Richard Gunning, of Manchester, who had been staying at Matlock for the benefit of his health. He was identified by his son, who obtained permission from the house-surgeon to fetch his father away at ten o'clock the following morning. Some time during Tuesday night, however, or early on Wednesday morning, the old man crept quietly out of bed, dressed himself, and made his escape through one of the ward windows. The affair has created a painful sensation at Buxton, and the police have been unremitting in their efforts to trace the poor fellow. Up to the time of going to press, however, their efforts have met with no success."

No sooner had Nelson Lee perused this paragraph than the whole truth flashed into his mind as if by an inspiration. "Mr. Richard Gunning" was Martin Wraith. His "son" was Jean Moreau.

Quivering with excitement he rushed round to the stables. — The horse and trap which he had engaged for the purpose of driving round to make inquiries were just ready, and, after flinging half a sovereign to the astonished groom, he leaped into the trap, lashed the horse into a furious gallop, and drove post-haste to Buxton.

Upon arriving at the hospital he asked the house-surgeon to describe "Mr. Richard Gunning" and afterwards to describe his "son." The house-surgeon complied, and the last shred of doubt was swept out of the detective's mind. The house-surgeon's description of "Richard Gunning" was an exact description of Martin Wraith. His description of the "son" was an exact description of Jean Moreau.

From the hospital the detective drove to the police-station, where the inspector told him the same story he had told to Moreau earlier in the day. It was then a quarter past two. By half-past three Nelson Lee was standing at the counter of the little spa-shop at Castleton. Young Bagshaw was out; but his father was in, and readily answered the detective's questions. By a quarter to four Nelson Lee had heard all about the ghostly figure in the castle-yard and all about the mysterious peal of laughter in the cavern. At ten minutes to four young Bagshaw rushed into the shop and greeted his father with the excited exclamation:

"I've seen him again, father!"

"Seen whom?" cried Nelson Lee, spinning round and facing the boy.

"Mr. Gunning's father—the man I saw in the castle-yard last night!" said the boy. "I was coming down Cave Dale about half an hour ago, and I saw him walking up and down, waving his arms and talking to the trees. I waited a minute or two to make sure it was the same man, and then hurried to the Castle Hotel and told Mr. Gunning!"

"You have told Jean Moreau!" gasped Nelson Lee, moving towards the shop-door.

The boy shook his head.

"I don't know who you mean," he said. "I haven't told anybody except the landlord of the Castle Hotel and Mr. Gunning's son."

"Mr. Gunning's son, as you call him, is a French detective named Jean Moreau," said Nelson Lee. "How long is it since you told him what you have just told me?"

"About five minutes ago," said the boy.

"Is he still at the Castle Hotel?"

"No. He has gone to Cave Dale."

"Where's that?"

The boy repeated the directions he had given to Moreau. Nelson Lee thrust a coin into his hand and dashed away.

With every nerve strung up to concert pitch, he walked rapidly across the square, up the narrow deserted lane, and into the little, gloom-enshrouded dale. Moreau, as the reader knows, saw him coming up the dale, and instantly concealed himself behind a clump of bushes. At the same instant Nelson Lee caught sight of Wraith, and Wraith caught sight of Nelson Lee.

With a startled cry, the poor half-witted doctor leaped to his feet and darted towards the foot of the hill on which the ruined castle stood. Quick as thought Nelson Lee dashed after him, but even as he did so Martin Wraith fell forward on his hands and knees at the foot of the hill and vanished from his sight.

For a moment Nelson Lee was completely bewildered by this sudden and mysterious disappearance. Upon reaching the spot where Martin Wraith had vanished, however, he quickly discovered a narrow opening in the rock, through which there issued a series of rumbling sounds, which proved beyond all possible doubt that Martin Wraith was making his way along some underground passage.

Without a moment's hesitation he switched on the light of his electric lamp, and plunged into the opening. Sometimes crawling on his hands and knees through tortuous, low-roofed tunnels, he gradually worked his way along the underground passage until at last he reached the end, and found himself on a rocky ledge high up on the glistening wall of Victoria Hall.

In the meantime Martin Wraith had also reached the end of the passage, and was climbing down the cavern wall with the swiftness and agility of a mountain-goat. Needless to say, the detective promptly followed his example; but Martin Wraith was the first to reach the ground, and an instant later he was flying like a hunted hare down the lofty, natural arcade which led to the Half-way House.

Lamp in hand, Nelson Lee raced after him; but by the time he reached the Half-way House Martin Wraith had gained the long, low tunnel which led to the Devil's Cellar. This tunnel was over fifty yards in length, and in places was so low that both men were compelled to resort to a stooping position. By the time that Martin Wraith had reached the end of the tunnel, Nelson Lee was close on his heels.

In the Devil's Cellar the madman turned at bay—no longer a harmless imbecile, but a raging maniac. The detective saw the change, and with matchless presence of mind he placed his lamp on a projecting spur of rock and whipped out his revolver.

"Stand, or I fire!" he cried, as Martin Wraith rushed towards him.

Undaunted by the warning, the madman leaped upon him so swiftly and so suddenly that Nelson Lee was instantly swept off his feet, whilst his revolver was sent flying to the other end of the cavern.

Locked in each other's arms, the two men rolled over and over on the rocky floor, mingling the din of their struggle with the booming roar of the subterranean waterfall. For a moment or two Nelson Lee appeared to be gaining the upper hand; but at last, with a superhuman effort, the madman got the detective down and fastened his hands on his throat.

"Victory—victory!" yelled Martin Wraith, with an echoing peal of maniacal laughter. "Now, in truth, you shall surely die, and when you are dead your body shall be cast into——"

The words died away in a gasp of alarm. At that moment the shadowy form of a half-seen man had stealthily glided into the cavern.

It was Jean Moreau!

The French detective, as the reader knows, had seen Martin Wraith crawl

through the opening at the foot of the castle-hill, and had seen Nelson Lee whip out his electric-lamp and creep in after him. As soon as they had disappeared he had emerged from his hiding-place behind the bushes, and had hurriedly examined the opening through which the two men had vanished.

"I don't like the look of this at all," he had muttered to himself. "This appears to be the opening of an underground passage, which doubtless leads to one of the subterranean chambers of the great Peak Cavern. Martin Wraith has evidently been through the passage before, and consequently knows the way. Nelson Lee has an electric-lamp to light him on his way, whilst I have neither a lamp nor any previous knowledge of the place. However, I shall follow them, I suppose. If I stay where I am Nelson Lee will capture Martin Wraith, and all my hopes of blackmailing Lord Bamford will be dashed to the ground. On the other hand, if I follow them into the cavern, and wait until Nelson Lee has secured Martin Wraith, there is just a chance that I may be able to give Nelson Lee a knock on the head, and walk off with Martin Wraith myself!"

With these words, he had crawled through the opening, and had cautiously made his way along the whole length of the underground passage. By the time he had emerged into Victoria Hall, Nelson Lee and Martin Wraith had reached the Devil's Cellar, and had just commenced their desperate struggle. Moreau, of course, had heard no sound of this far-away struggle, but he had found the prints of running feet in the mud on the floor of Victoria Hall, and by means of these tracks he had traced the two men from Victoria Hall to the Half-way House, and from the Half-way House to the Devil's Cellar.

Nelson Lee had placed his electric-lamp on a shelf-like projection of rock just inside the cavern. The consequence was that, as Moreau had crawled through the tunnel which led to the Devil's Cellar, he had seen a haze of light at the end of the tunnel, which had warned him that the men he sought were there.

If he had known that Martin Wraith had overpowered Nelson Lee, and was doing his best to strangle him, the Frenchman would most assuredly have kept out of sight until the maniac had finished his work. But the roar of the subterranean waterfall had prevented Moreau hearing what was happening; and, after waiting in the tunnel for a moment or two, he had glided forward into the cavern in the stealthy fashion already described.

No sooner had he entered the cavern than he would have given all he possessed to have remained in the tunnel for another five minutes! At the moment when he made his appearance, Martin Wraith was kneeling on Nelson Lee's chest, with both hands firmly fixed on the detective's throat. If the madman had not been disturbed there is not the slightest doubt that in five more minutes, at the very outside, the fate of Nelson Lee would have been sealed.

As it was, however, the sudden appearance of the French detective startled Martin Wraith, and caused him for an instant to relax his vigilance. And, in the twinkling of an eye, Nelson Lee caught hold of the madman's hands and tore them from his throat, while at the same instant he hurled the fellow off his chest and flung himself on the top of him.

Foaming at the mouth, and bellowing like an infuriated bull, the maniac fought with hands and feet, with nails and teeth, to regain his lost advantage. Moreau, perceiving that Nelson Lee had not observed him, hastily stepped back into the darkest corner of the cavern, and watched the struggle with the closest attention.

"If Martin Wraith gets the upper hand again," he muttered to himself, "I'll not interfere or show myself until Nelson Lee has been polished off. But if Nelson Lee gets the upper hand, I'll wait until he has secured Wraith, and then I'll pretend to rush to his assistance, and if I see half a chance of giving him a crack on the skull with this——"

He slipped his hand into his pocket, and drew out a short, thick, leaded cane.

Scarcely had he done so, ere Nelson Lee, with a sudden dexterous movement, pinned the madman down and whipped out a pair of handcuffs.

Quivering with suppressed excitement, Moreau waited until his rival had succeeded in fixing the handcuffs on Martin Wraith's wrists. Then he rushed out of his hiding-place as though he had only just arrived in the cavern, shouting at the top of his voice :

"Stick to him, Lee—stick to him, Lee ! I'll help you to secure him !"

His sudden appearance had the same effect on Nelson Lee that his former appearance had had on Martin Wraith—that is, it diverted Nelson Lee's attention for a moment, and instantly the madman raised his manacled hands and dashed them into the detective's face, gashing his brow with the steel rim of the handcuffs, and filling his eyes with blood.

This was Moreau's opportunity. He saw that Nelson Lee had been momentarily blinded by the rush of blood, and in the twinkling of an eye he swung his loaded cane aloft and dealt his rival a sledge-hammer blow on the top of the head that stretched him senseless on the cavern floor.

There were two openings into the Devil's Cellar—the one by which the three men had entered, and another on the opposite side of the cavern. As Nelson Lee rolled over, Martin Wraith leaped to his feet, and made a dash for this second opening.

Quick as thought, Moreau stuck out his foot and tripped him up. But the madman was on his feet again in an instant, and, lowering his head, he rushed at Moreau with a yell of malignant fury.

This novel method of attack took Moreau completely by surprise, and, almost before he realised what was happening he found himself lying on his back gasping for breath, and feeling for all the world as though a battering-ram had struck him in the stomach.

For one brief instant Wraith stood over him, with a look of indecision in his glittering eyes. Then he suddenly uttered a shrill, discordant laugh, spun round on his heel, darted across the cavern, and vanished through the opening above described.

"I must follow him at all costs !" gasped Moreau, as he hurriedly scrambled to his feet. "If I lose him now, Heaven only knows when I may find him again. I can return and settle accounts with Nelson Lee when I've secured Martin Wraith."

Saying which, he snatched up Nelson Lee's electric lamp, and dashed away in hot pursuit of Martin Wraith.

CHAPTER 10.

A Game of Hide-and-Seek—The Underground River.

FROM the Devil's Cellar the path ran steeply upwards to an elevated chamber, known as the Chancel. From here it again descended to a mighty cavern, bearing the name of the Grand Saloon. At the end of the Grand Saloon was a group of broken rocks, known as Roger Rain's House, by reason of the fact that a drizzling mist of water, not unlike a shower of rain, was always trickling through the roof, and bedewing the rocks below.

By the time that Moreau reached the Chancel, Martin Wraith was running, leaping, and sliding down the steep descent which led to the Grand Saloon. It was plain to be seen, however, that the maniac's recent struggles had well-nigh exhausted his strength, for his pace grew slower at every stride, and when he arrived at Roger Rain's House his pursuer was less than a dozen yards behind him.

"He can't escape me now !" muttered Moreau exultingly. "I'll give him a gentle tap on the head—just enough to keep him quiet whilst I settle accounts with Nelson Lee ! And then I'll——"

The sentence ended in a gasp of stupefaction, for at that moment Martin Wraith

took a flying leap over one of the rocks, and vanished from view as suddenly and completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

With the lamp in one hand, and the loaded cane in the other, Moreau bounded to the spot where Martin Wraith had vanished. For a moment the madman's disappearance remained an inscrutable mystery. Then Moreau's eager gaze fell suddenly on a circular opening in the ground, about two feet in diameter, partly concealed by an overhanging mass of rock.

Kneeling down by the side of this hole, Moreau lowered the lamp through the aperture to the full extent of his arm. He then perceived that the opening gave admittance to a narrow, subterranean passage, which was probably natural in its origin, but which had certainly been enlarged and improved by the handiwork of man.

Martin Wraith had evidently jumped down into this passage through the circular hole in the roof; and, as soon as Moreau had grasped this fact, he drew up his lamp, thrust the loaded cane into his pocket, and followed Wraith's example.

An examination of the footprints on the slimy passage floor showed him in which direction Martin Wraith had fled; and, with every nerve strung up to concert-pitch, he raced away in the same direction.

Presently the sullen roar of swiftly-running waters fell on his ears, and a moment or two after the passage suddenly widened out, and he found his further progress barred by a broad, deep, madly-rushing stream, almost worthy to be called a river, which gushed out through a low, arched opening on one side of the passage, and vanished through a similar opening on the other side.

Beyond this underground river—which crossed the passage at right-angles—he distinctly saw the retreating figure of Martin Wraith. The madman, therefore, had evidently crossed the river, but how or where the Frenchman could not at first understand. Presently, however, to his great delight, he perceived a straggling line of stepping-stones, about a yard and a half apart, the tops of which were a few inches under water.

Cautiously, and with his heart in his mouth—for a single false step would have precipitated him into the underground river—he picked his way across the raging torrent and safely gained the other side. By that time Martin Wraith had once more vanished from view; but a few moments later the Frenchman again caught sight of him, no longer running, but limping slowly and painfully, and ever and anon reeling and staggering like a drunken man.

Flushed with anticipation of his coming triumph, Moreau eagerly pressed forward; but ere he could overtake his quarry, the latter suddenly reeled across the passage and once more disappeared. On this occasion, however, there was nothing mysterious about his disappearance, for even before Jean Moreau reached the spot where the fugitive had vanished, he saw that there was an opening in the passage wall, which had formerly been guarded by a massive oaken door, of which nothing now remained but a couple of rusty hinges and a little heap of rotting wood.

Upon reaching this opening Moreau found that it led into a short and narrow passage, which had evidently been hewed out of the solid rock by the labours of some long-forgotten generation of the past. At the end of the passage was a roughly-constructed flight of stone steps, and at the top of these steps was a narrow slit-like doorway, which had also, no doubt, been formerly guarded by a door.

By the time that Moreau arrived at the foot of the steps, Martin Wraith had wriggled through the slit-like doorway at the top. Having accomplished this feat, however, the madman's ebbing strength had given out; and when Moreau also wriggled through the doorway he was dismayed to perceive that Martin Wraith was lying face downwards on the ground, for all the world as though he were dead.

Placing his lamp on the ground, Moreau rolled the madman over on his back and anxiously examined him. To his intense relief he then discovered that Wraith had

merely swooned from exhaustion and over-excitement. There was an expression on Wraith's face, moreover—an expression of calmness and tranquility—which Moreau had never seen there before; and a wild, delirious hope flashed into the Frenchman's brain that Martin Wraith had recovered his reason—that the frenzied and maniacal outburst of the last half-hour had merely been the prelude, as is often the case, to another lucid interval.

"He looks sane enough now," muttered Moreau to himself, "but whether he will continue sane after he comes round is another question. However, I can't afford to waste any time in waiting for him to come round. I must first secure him, so as to prevent his escape if he happens to come round whilst I'm away. Then I must find out where we are; and finally, I must return to the Devil's Cellar and make an end of Nelson Lee."

Musing thus, he took out his pocket-handkerchief and tied it tightly round Wraith's ankles. Unbuckling a leather belt from round his own waist, he passed it round Wraith's arms and pinioned them firmly to his sides. Then he picked up Nelson Lee's electric-lamp and proceeded to take stock of his surroundings.

He then discovered that he and Martin Wraith had made their way into the underground dungeon of Peak Castle. A narrow projecting ledge of stone ran round the dungeon wall in the form of a spiral, beginning near the ground and ending at a low, arched opening near the roof. Having ascended this spiral path, and having passed through this low, arched opening he found himself confronted by a jumbled heap of fallen masonry. Between the various blocks of stone, however, there was just sufficient room for him to crawl on his hands and knees; and a moment or two later, with a muffled cry of triumph, he emerged into the open air, just outside the ruined castle keep.

"So far, so good!" he muttered to himself. "Now for Nelson Lee!"

He retraced his steps into the dungeon. Having satisfied himself that Martin Wraith was still secure, he descended the flight of stone steps and hurried back along the subterranean passage. Scarcely had he crossed the underground river when he stumbled over a stone and measured his length on the ground. It was not a serious fall, but as he fell the electric-lamp flew out of his hand and struck the ground with so much force that the carbon filament snapped in two, and the light, of course, was instantly extinguished.

Muttering angrily, Moreau came to a halt on the brink of the underground river, and debated what he should do. He did not relish the idea of groping his way to the Devil's Cellar without the aid of a light, yet he was equally loth to abandon his idea of "settling accounts" with Nelson Lee.

In the end, after a lengthy deliberation, he decided to go on to the Devil's Cellar; but just as he was about to resume his journey he was startled to see a feeble glimmer of light spring up, about twenty yards in front of him.

Pale with fear, he gazed at the twinkling light in spellbound stupefaction. Somebody was coming along the passage and had just struck a match. Who could it be?

The question was soon answered. After dying down to the merest spark the match blazed up into a clear and steady flame, and by means of its feeble glow Jean Moreau saw the blood-stained face of Nelson Lee!

In the twinkling of an eye the Frenchman divined what had happened. Nelson Lee had evidently recovered from the stunning effects of Moreau's blow sooner than the latter had expected, and by means of their footprints, and with the aid of a box of matches, he had traced the two men into the subterranean passage. The booming roar of the underground river had drowned the sound of his approaching footsteps, so that it was not until he struck the match that Moreau became aware of his presence.

On the other hand, the fact that Moreau's lamp had been extinguished had prevented Nelson Lee discovering Moreau's presence; and even when he struck the

match—his last but one—its feeble light only served to reveal him to Moreau, without revealing Moreau to him.

All this flashed through the Frenchman's mind in a thousandth part of the time it has taken to describe. He saw that Nelson Lee had not perceived him, and he knew that Nelson Lee would shortly arrive on the banks of the underground river. And, knowing this, Jean Moreau glided across the passage and concealed himself in one of the many crevices with which the rocky walls were infested.

All unsuspecting of his peril, Nelson Lee came swiftly down the passage. On the brink of the underground river he paused and struck his last match.

"Humph! This is awkward!" he muttered. "How the dickens have they managed to cross? Ah, I see, stepping-stones! I'd better mark their exact position before my match goes out."

He stooped and peered into the river, holding his match out at arm's length.

"One—two—three," he began.

Then his quick ears caught the sound of stealthy footsteps just behind him.

With a startled gasp, he half-turned round, but, even as he did so, he felt himself seized from behind by a pair of powerful arms, and almost before he had realised what was happening he was swung off his feet and hurled into the roaring torrent.

For one brief instant his wild, despairing cry reverberated through the echoing passage. For one brief instant his struggling form bobbed up and down in the madly-rushing stream. Then the swirling waters sucked him down, swept him through the opening in the rock, and bore him swiftly underground.

CHAPTER 11.

Tricked and Trapped—How Martin Wraith Was Made Prisoner.

WHEN Moreau returned to the dungeon, firmly convinced that he had seen the last of Nelson Lee, he was overjoyed to find that Martin Wraith had not only recovered from his swoon, but was also apparently perfectly sane. Although he was no longer mad, however, it was plain to be seen that his mind was still in an exceedingly feeble condition, and that his nerves were completely shattered, for as soon as Moreau made his appearance a look of terror crossed Wraith's face, and he began to whimper like a frightened child.

"Here you are! Thank Heaven, I've found you at last!" cried Moreau, striking a match, and peering into Wraith's face.

"Who—who are you?" stammered Wraith, gazing at Moreau, half in doubt, half in fear.

"My name is Nelson Lee," said Moreau unblushingly. "I am a private detective. I have been employed to find you by the Rev. Hugh Palmer, of Firvale. After a long and weary search—which I'll tell you all about afterwards—I traced you to this horrible place, which is underneath Peak Castle. As I approached the castle a man ran away, and although I darted after him, he succeeded in giving me the slip. Do you know who the man was?"

"I know nothing," said Wraith, shaking his head. "With regard to all that has happened during the last twenty years my memory is an absolute blank. I remember going to see Hugh Palmer. I think it was on a Christmas Eve; but something happened whilst I was in the house—I can't remember what it was—and I remember nothing of what has happened since. How did I get here?"

"That is more than I can tell you at present," said Moreau, unbuckling the belt which pinioned Wraith's arms and untying the handkerchief which fettered his ankles. "All I know is this. Whilst you were talking to Hugh Palmer somebody fired at you through the window. This sent you mad again, and you took to flight, and have been wandering about the country ever since. As the police were unable

to find any trace of you, Hugh Palmer wired for me. Before I had been searching many days I discovered that Lord Bamford was also hunting for you, and I strongly suspect that it was his lordship whom I saw running away to-night."

"I do not doubt it," said Martin Wraith. "Probably he found me wandering in one of the neighbouring dales, and lured me into this noisome dungeon, and bound me up like this, intending to leave me here to perish of starvation."

"That is exactly my own theory," said Moreau, producing a bunch of keys and unlocking the handcuffs. "Lord Bamford would doubtless be only too glad to see you dead, if what you told Hugh Palmer on the night of Christmas Eve is true."

"What did I tell him?" asked Wraith eagerly. "Did I tell him all?"

"No," said Moreau. "You simply told him that he was the real Lord Bamford; but you didn't tell him how, or why. Between you and me, I rather fancy that Mr. Palmer inclines to the opinion that you were raving when you made that statement."

"I was not," said Wraith, rising to his feet and stretching his cramped and frozen limbs. "What I said was perfectly true. Hugh Palmer is the real Lord Bamford. The scoundrel who at present bears the title is an arrant impostor. And he knows it. And I know it, and I can prove it."

"How?" asked Moreau eagerly.

"It is a long story," said Martin Wraith. "Would it not be better for me to postpone it until I can tell it to you and Hugh Palmer at the same time?"

"Just as you like," said Moreau, biting his lip. "When would you like to see Hugh Palmer?"

"To-night, of course," said Wraith.

"Then I am afraid it will be necessary for you to take a journey to London," said Moreau.

"To London?" cried Wraith, in accents of dismay. "Why?"

"Mr. Palmer went up to London yesterday morning to spend a few days with a friend of his at Islington," said Moreau, lying with all his accustomed glibness. "Whilst crossing Pentonville Road yesterday evening he was knocked down by a hansom, and sustained a fracture of the leg. He is now confined to bed, at the house of his friend at Islington, and will probably have to remain there for another month at least. Of course, if you insist upon seeing him at once, I shall be very pleased to take you up to London, and to pay all the necessary expense. It is now a quarter-past six. We are two miles from Hope Station, and there is a train from Hope to Manchester at half-past seven. If I remember rightly, there is a train from Manchester to London at ten o'clock, arriving at Marylebone about half-past three in the morning. What do you say? Do you feel equal to undertaking so long a journey to-night, or would you prefer to put up at one of the local inns, and wait until you have more fully recovered your strength?"

"I will go to London to-night!" said Wraith, almost fiercely. "I fear to risk a moment's delay, lest my madness should return. On the way to London I will tell you how it is that Hugh Palmer is the rightful Lord Bamford, so that, if I should go mad again before I see him, you will be able to tell him all that I could tell him myself. Now let us go."

Needless to say, Moreau needed no second invitation. He assisted the feeble old man up the spiral path already described, and through the space between the fallen blocks of masonry, and down the zigzag path which led to the foot of the castle hill. Here—on pretence that Wraith must not exert himself too much—he left him five or ten minutes, whilst he ran to the Castle Hotel and saddled his horse, without anybody being the wiser.

The Frenchman and his dupe then started out for Hope, Wraith riding on the horse's back, and Moreau walking by his side. Upon reaching Hope, Moreau stabled his horse at the Hall Hotel, and at half-past seven he and Wraith embarked in the train for Manchester.

By the time they reached Manchester—at half-past eight—Martin Wraith had told Moreau all the Frenchman wished to know—how and why Lord Bamford was an impostor; how and why Hugh Palmer was the rightful heir to the Bamford title and estates.

Moreau drank in every word of the old man's story with avidity, and when Wraith had finished his tale the Frenchman leaned back in the carriage seat and muttered softly to himself:

"It was worth all the trouble and the risk—more than worth it. When once I have lured this old simpleton to Grinkle Square, and have handed him over to the care of Zacharie, my fortune will be made. With the information I now possess, and with Martin Wraith completely in my power, I shall be able to blackmail Lord Bamford to any extent. Oh, yes, it was worth the trouble—more than worth the trouble!"

It need hardly be said that Martin Wraith had no suspicion of the trap into which he was walking. Having unbosomed himself of his story to Moreau, he seemed to feel that a load of anxiety had been taken from his shoulders, and shortly after they had taken their seats in the London train he fell into a peaceful slumber, from which he did not awake until Moreau roused him and informed him that they had reached their destination.

At four o'clock in the morning they stood at the door of the old-fashioned, red-brick house in Grinkle Square. Moreau's ring was answered by Zacharie, the hunchback dwarf. At the sight of this hideous and repulsive-looking creature Martin Wraith recoiled with a shudder of disgust, and, for the first time since leaving Castleton, a vague suspicion of something wrong seemed to cross his mind.

"Who—who is this?" he faltered, turning to Moreau, who had locked the door, and was pocketing the key.

"This is my very good friend, Zacharie," said Moreau, with a winning smile. "I hope that you and he will soon become good friends, because, you see, it is Zacharie who is going to act as your gaoler!"

"Gaoler!"

The words struck a chill of terror to Wraith's heart.

"You are joking!" he gasped. "Where is Hugh Palmer?"

"To the best of my belief and knowledge," said Moreau, "the Rev Hugh Palmer is at present in the picturesque Derbyshire village of Firvale."

"But you said he was here!"

"So I did; but I'm afraid I didn't tell the truth," said Moreau. "I also said that my name was Nelson Lee, which was also untrue. Likewise, I believe, I said that I had been engaged by Hugh Palmer; which was another untruth. As a matter of fact, I was engaged by Lord Bamford. He offered me a thousand pounds to find out where you had gone, and to hand you over to him. I have found you; but I am not going to hand you over to him."

A transient gleam of hope illumined the old man's haggard face.

"Then what are you going to do with me?" he asked.

"I am going to provide you with free board and lodgings for the rest of your life," said Moreau. "There is a cosy little underground apartment in this house, which Zacharie has made ready for your reception, and where you will be well fed and well cared for. As soon as I have seen you comfortably installed in your future home I shall go to Lord Bamford, and I shall say to him, 'I have found Martin Wraith. He has recovered his reason, and has told me his secret. I have hidden him where you cannot find him. For so much down, and so much a month, I will undertake to keep him a prisoner; but if you refuse my terms I shall set him at liberty, and send him to Hugh Palmer.' His lordship, of course, will not be so foolish as to refuse my offer, and the result will be that my good friend Zacharie and myself will live in ease and luxury for the rest of our days. That will be much better than handing you over to Lord Bamford—don't you think so?"

Martin Wraith made no reply. With haggard face and horror-dilated eyes he gazed at Moreau for a second or two in speechless consternation; then, with a low, despairing moan, he suddenly pitched forward on his face, and fell in a senseless heap at the Frenchman's feet.

**CHAPTER 12,
Hush-Money.**

IT was the day after New Year's Day. The bells of the Firvale Church were chiming four o'clock. The sun had just sunk to his rest behind the snow-clad hills, but the golden light of the afterglow still lingered on the topmost boughs of the leafless trees in Firvale Park.

Lord Bamford was sitting in the smokeroom at the Grange with a cigarette between his lips and an open book on his lap.

But he was neither smoking nor reading. His brow was furrowed with a sullen discontented scowl, and ever and anon he twirled the ends of his moustache or plucked at his well-trimmed beard in a manner that was eloquent of irritability and ill-humour.

Suddenly, with a petulant oath, he tossed the cigarette into the fire and flung his book across the room. Then he dragged himself to his feet, and slouched across to the window, which overlooked the carriage-drive.

"I could quarrel with my own shadow this afternoon!" he growled, as he stared at the wintry scene outside. "It's all that beggar Moreau's fault. Why the deuce can't he let me know what he is doing, even if he's doing nothing? Here we are—Friday afternoon—and I've neither seen him or had a line from him since he left here on Tuesday afternoon to go to Bakewell to interview the gipsy king. Upon my word, if I'd known he was going to treat me like this, I would never have engaged him. However, if I don't hear from him by to-morrow morning, I'll follow her ladyship to Nice and let things take their own course. I might just as well be enjoying myself at Nice as moping here, and—"

The sentence ended in a half voluntary cry of relief. Round a bend in the winding carriage-drive there had suddenly appeared the well-known figure of Jean Moreau, clad in a furlined overcoat, smoking a huge cigar, and walking towards the house with the buoyant and elastic step of one who was on the best of terms with himself and all mankind.

"He brings good news! I can see it in his face!" exclaimed Lord Bamford. "He has found Martin Wraith!"

Quivering with excitement he rushed downstairs and met the French detective at the door.

"Welcome—a thousand times welcome!" he cried, grasping Moreau by the hand and dragging him into the hall. "I was beginning to fear that something had happened to you. Where have you been these last three days? What have you done? What have you discovered? What news do you bring of Martin Wraith—good or bad?"

"Good!" said Moreau, as he doffed his hat and overcoat and hung them up on the hatstand.

"You have found him?" gasped Lord Bamford.

"Yes, I've found him," said Moreau quietly.

"Alive or dead?"

"Alive."

"Where is he?"

Moreau shrugged his shoulders.

"He's quite safe," he replied evasively.

"Does Nelson Lee know where he is?"

"No."

"Does Hugh Palmer know?"

"No; nobody knows where he is except myself and the man who is taking care of him for me."

"Then your quest has been crowned with absolute and complete success?"

"With absolute and complete success!" said Moreau decisively.

"Thank Heaven for that!" exclaimed Lord Bamford.

A curious smile hovered round the corners of Moreau's mouth.

"Is that clock right?" he asked, jerking his thumb towards an eight-day clock at the end of the hall.

Lord Bamford glanced at the clock and then at his watch.

"It's five minutes fast," he said. "It is now a quarter-past four."

"And the next train for Manchester leaves Firvale at a quarter to six, doesn't it?" asked Moreau.

"Yes," said Lord Bamford, in accents of surprise; "but you're not going to leave us so soon as all that, are you?"

Moreau nodded his head.

"But why?" asked Lord Bamford. "What is to prevent you spending the night here?"

Again that curious smile hovered round the corners of the Frenchman's mouth.

"When you have heard the story," he said, "I think you will agree with me that it will be more satisfactory for both of us if I leave as soon as possible!"

A bewildered look crossed Lord Bamford's face.

"I don't understand you!" he said.

"You will understand when you've heard my story," said Moreau pleasantly.

"Then the sooner I hear it the better!" said Lord Bamford. "Come upstairs into the smoke-room; there's a fire there, and we shall be able to talk without any fear of interruption."

"One moment!" said Moreau, as Lord Bamford moved off towards the foot of the stairs. "As this is a matter which concerns Lady Bamford quite as much as it concerns myself, I should prefer to tell my story in her ladyship's presence."

"But you can't!" said Lord Bamford.

"How's that?" asked Moreau.

"Because her ladyship is abroad," said Lord Bamford. "She left here on Wednesday morning. She has gone to Nice for a month or six weeks. I had arranged to go with her, but I didn't like to leave England until I heard from you. But why do you wish to tell your story to Lady Bamford? This is no concern of hers. It was I who employed you to find Martin Wraith, and her ladyship has nothing whatever to do with the affair."

Moreau looked him full in the face and deliberately winked. It was a simple action; yet Lord Bamford's face turned suddenly deathly pale.

"What do you know?" he gasped.

"More than you think!" said Moreau significantly. "At any rate, I know enough to surmise that Lady Bamford has quite as much at stake in this affair as you have. In fact, I am inclined to think that her ladyship would be even more relieved than you would be if she knew that Martin Wraith was dead and decently interred. But we are wasting valuable time. If I can't see her ladyship, I can't, and there's an end of it. Let us go to the smoke-room."

The two men accordingly adjourned to the smoke-room, where Lord Bamford closed the door and drew up a couple of easy-chairs.

"By the way," said Moreau, "you've got your cheque-book with you, I hope?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And pen and ink?"

"I've a fountain-pen," said Lord Bamford. "You are thinking of your thousand pounds, I suppose? But you haven't earned it yet, you know! The bargain was that I should give you a thousand pounds when you had found Martin Wraith

and had told me where he was. You have found him, you say, but you haven't yet told me where he is."

"And I'm not going to tell you where he is!" said Moreau coolly.

"Indeed!" said Lord Bamford, with a forced laugh. "Why not?"

"Because I'm not a fool!" said Moreau. "When a man has discovered a goldmine, he doesn't usually make a present of it to somebody else, does he?"

"You speak in riddles!" faltered Lord Bamford.

"Do I?" said Moreau. "Then I'd better explain the riddle. When you came to my office and engaged me to find Martin Wraith, you refused to tell me why you wished to get hold of the man. You simply said that you wished to get rid of him, because he possessed certain secret information which would ruin you if he revealed it, but you declined to tell me what that information was. This rather nettled me, and I then and there made up my mind that, by hook or crook, I would find out what this secret information was which Martin Wraith possessed and which you were so desperately anxious to prevent him revealing to Hugh Palmer.

"I came down here, as you know, on Monday night, and on Tuesday morning I discovered that a band of wandering gipsies had been encamped on Ramsley Moor on the night of Martin Wraith's mysterious disappearance. On Tuesday afternoon, as you also know, I went to Bakewell, where I learned that Martin Wraith had been rescued from a snowdrift by the gipsies, and had travelled with them as far as Bakewell.

"From Bakewell I traced him to Buxton, and from Buxton to Castleton, where I ran him to earth about five o'clock yesterday evening in one of the underground chambers of the great Peak Cavern.

"We had an exciting chase before I finally captured him, and in some mysterious way the excitement wrought such a change in his brain that he once more recovered his reason. In other words, Martin Wraith is no longer mad, but is as sane as you and I. And he remembers everything that happened in 1881 and 1882."

Lord Bamford clenched and unclenched his hands in nervous agitation, but forbore from making any comment.

"With a little judicious lying," continued Moreau, "I not only managed to wheedle his secret out of him, but I also persuaded him to accompany me to a certain house in a certain town, which shall be nameless. As soon as I had lured him inside this house I promptly made a prisoner of him, and handed him over to the watchful care of one of my most trusted assistants. I then came here as fast as the train would bring me to acquaint you with my success."

"I congratulate you," said Lord Bamford, with a feeble attempt to throw a ring of enthusiasm into his voice. "You have done magnificently well. You have beaten Nelson Lee hands down! You have more than justified your reputation as the smartest detective in Europe. But—er—there is one thing—er—which I don't quite understand. Why won't you tell me where Martin Wraith is imprisoned?"

"Surely you can guess?" said Moreau, leaning back in his chair, and blowing half a dozen smoke-rings in quick succession.

"Is it blackmail?" asked Lord Bamford nervously.

"It is," said Moreau calmly.

"I might have known it," said Lord Bamford bitterly. "I was a fool to put myself into your power in this way, knowing your character and history as well as I did. I ought to have insisted upon accompanying you. However, it's too late to mend matters now. I have no alternative, I suppose, but to submit to your extortion. How much do you want? If I double my original offer—if I give you two thousand pounds instead of one—will you hand the man over to me?"

"No!" said Moreau curtly.

"Three thousand?"

"No," said Moreau again. "You don't appear to understand. I've got Martin Wraith, and I'm going to keep him! If you were to offer me twenty thousand pounds, I wouldn't hand him over to you!"

"Then what are you going to do with him?" asked Lord Bamford.

"Your lordship is very dense," said Moreau impatiently. "Can't you see that so long as Martin Wraith is my prisoner, you are absolutely and completely at my mercy? He is the only man who can prove that Hugh Palmer is the real Lord Bamford, and that you are an impostor. So long as I choose to keep him under lock and key, your lordship and Lady Bamford have nothing to fear. If I set him at liberty, both you and Lady Bamford will be under arrest in less than twenty-four hours.

"To put the matter in a nutshell, if you choose to make it worth my while to keep Martin Wraith in close confinement for the rest of his life, you will continue to enjoy an income of seventy thousand a year, and to bear the title of Lord Bamford. If you refuse to make it worth my while to keep Martin Wraith in captivity, I shall hand him over to Hugh Palmer, and in twenty-four hours both you and Lady Bamford will be cooling your heels in one of his Majesty's gaols. Which shall it be?"

"How much do you want?" asked Lord Bamford huskily.

"Ten thousand down, and a thousand a month so long as Martin Wraith remains alive," said Moreau promptly. "Out of an income of seventy thousand a year, you can well afford a trifle like that."

"Shall I be allowed to see Martin Wraith if I agree to your terms?"

"Certainly not! I have been at great pains to keep his whereabouts a secret, and I do not intend that anybody but myself and my assistant shall know where he is imprisoned."

"That's all very well. But supposing he dies next week, what is to prevent you pretending that he is still alive, and continuing to draw your thousand pounds a month for the next ten years?"

"Nothing," said Moreau blandly.

"In fact, he may be dead now, for anything I know," suggested Lord Bamford.

"If you think so," said Moreau, "refuse my terms, and see what happens!"

"Then, again," said Lord Bamford, "you are willing to take a thousand pounds a month just now; what is to prevent you demanding two thousand a month later?"

"Nothing," said Moreau again. "I probably shall. But you can't help yourself, you know. You have put yourself into my power, and you've got to pay the price."

Lord Bamford rose to his feet, and for several minutes paced the room with rapid, agitated strides. Now that it was too late, he realised what a fool he had been to put himself into the power of this unscrupulous Frenchman. He knew, only too well, that Moreau's demands would grow more and more extortionate, and would probably only cease when he had fleeced his victim of every penny he possessed. Yet what could he do?

Suddenly a faint gleam of hope leaped into his eyes. He pulled up in front of Moreau, and regarded him with a keen glance.

"Look here," he said, "you say that you have found Martin Wraith, and that he has told you his secret. How do I know that you are speaking the truth? How do I know that you aren't simply bluffing me? What proof can you give me that you have found Martin Wraith, and that you have wormed his secret out of him?"

"Martha Dobson," said Moreau quietly.

Lord Bamford started, and the gleam of hope died out of his eyes.

"That's enough," he said. "I see you know everything. I accept your terms."

He turned away, and seated himself at the table. "It's my only chance," he muttered under his breath. "I'll offer to spare his life on condition that he tells me where Martin Wraith is imprisoned, and then when he's given me the information, I'll put a bullet through his head."

He drew out his cheque-book and wrote a cheque for ten thousand pounds.

"I think you'll find that's right," he said, as he tossed the cheque across to Moreau. "How shall I pay you the thousand pounds a month?"

"You can either bring it to my office in Chancery Lane on the second of each month, or you can send it there by post," said Moreau, as he placed the cheque in his pocket-book. "How's the time?"

Lord Bamford glanced at his watch.

"Five minutes to five," he said.

"And the station is three miles from here?"

"Yes."

"Then it's time I was off," said Moreau, rising to his feet. "You no longer feel inclined to invite me to spend the night here, I suppose?"

"Hardly," said Lord Bamford, with a curt laugh. "But I'll walk as far as the village with you, if you've no objection. I want to send a telegram to Lady Bamford, telling her that I will join her at Nice to-morrow night."

They descended the stairs together and donned their hats and overcoats. Then Lord Bamford pretended to remember that he had left his gloves in his bed-room.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting," he said, turning to Moreau, who was lighting a fresh cigar. "I've left my gloves in my bed-room, I find. I sha'n't be half a minute."

He flew upstairs, but not to his bed-room. On the same landing as his bed-room was a cosy little room which was known as his lordship's "den." In one corner of this room was a small chest of drawers, and in one of these drawers was a Colt's revolver and a box of cartridges.

Having loaded the revolver in every chamber, Lord Bamford slipped it into one of the outside pockets of his Raglan coat. Then he hurried downstairs again, and a moment later he and Moreau were trudging through the deepening gloom on their way to Firvale Station. It was then five o'clock.

CHAPTER 13.

Dead Man's Hollow.

THERE are moments when even the most resolute of men are compelled to relinquish all hope and to abandon themselves to despair. Such a moment came to Nelson Lee when the subterranean river swept him through the low arched opening in the rocky wall of the underground passage beneath Peak Castle.

Never for an instant did he dare to hope that he would ever see the light of day again. He was quite well aware that the neighbourhood of Castleton was famous for the number of streams which mysteriously vanished underground, or which mysteriously welled up out of the earth. He had little or no doubt, therefore, that sooner or later his body would emerge into the open air; but he was equally convinced that by that time the last spark of life would have been battered out of him.

As events turned out, however, his gloomy forebodings proved to be unfounded, though his safety was not finally assured until he had passed through such a series of horrors as rarely falls to the lot of even the most adventurous.

After crossing the underground passage, the river ran for nearly a quarter of a mile through a narrow, tube-like tunnel, the roof of which was so low that the detective was unable to raise his head above the surface of the water. In consequence of this, as the reader will readily understand, he was subjected to all the

agonies of impending suffocation, and he was on the point of losing consciousness when the tunnel suddenly enlarged, and enabled him to revive his flagging energies with a few deep inspirations.

Presently, however, the tunnel again contracted, and again his head was forced beneath the surface. A little later it again enlarged, only to contract again; and in this way—sometimes completely under water, and sometimes with his head and shoulders above the surface—he was whirled along through a perfect labyrinth of winding tunnels and subterranean passages.

To add to the horror of his position, some of these tunnels were infested with voracious swarms of loathsome, rat-like animals, which jumped on his shoulders, or swam by his side, and fastened their gleaming teeth in his flesh with weird, uncanny squeals of delight.

But why prolong the description? Suffice to say that the river finally emptied itself into a vast, subterranean lake, on the shores of which the detective effected a landing. As he had neither lamp nor matches, he was unable to take stock of his surroundings; but by groping his way round the margin of the lake he at last discovered an opening, through which he crawled, and found himself at the foot of a hill about two miles south of Castleton.

Half dead though he was, his iron will was still unshaken, and by seven o'clock he had made his way back to Castleton. After borrowing a suit of clothes from the landlord of the inn where he had left his horse and trap, and after refreshing himself with a steaming glass of grog, he collected a number of men, armed with lanterns and ropes, and once more set out to explore the great cavern.

There is no need to weary the reader with a detailed description of his explorations. It will be enough to say that he tracked Jean Moreau and Martin Wraith along the secret passage which led from Roger Rain's house, across the underground river, and up the ruined steps which led into the dungeon of Peak Castle. Here he found unmistakable evidence that the two men had quitted the dungeon together, and had descended to the foot of the castle hill.

Upon making inquiries in the village, he learned that a man answering to Martin Wraith's description had been seen riding on horseback in the direction of Hope, with another man, answering to the description of Jean Moreau, walking by his side. It was then eight o'clock, and by half-past eight Nelson Lee was at Hope, where he learned, to his chagrin, that the two men had left by train at half-past seven.

As the train by which they had left had by then arrived in Manchester, there was nothing to be gained by telegraphing. All that Nelson Lee could do was to follow the two men to Manchester as quickly as possible, and endeavour to find out what had become of them. This he did; but it was labour in vain. And although he remained in Manchester until Friday afternoon, questioning cabdrivers, railway porters, policemen, and hotel-proprietors, he was at last compelled to abandon his quest in despair.

He then returned by train to Hope, where he had left his horse and trap, and drove to Firvale, arriving at the latter place about half-past four.

"Well, what news do you bring?" cried Hugh, as the detective entered the young curate's sitting-room.

"No good news, I'm afraid," said Nelson Lee. And he forthwith plunged into a detailed account of his encounter with the gipsies, his visit to Buxton and Castleton, and his sensational adventures in the great Peak Cavern.

"Although I cannot prove it," he said, in conclusion, "there is no doubt whatever in my mind that it was Jean Moreau who knocked me on the head in the Devil's Cellar, and who afterwards pushed me into the underground river. Whether this is so or not, however, it is absolutely certain that Moreau has found Martin Wraith, and that Martin Wraith is now a prisoner in the hands of our opponents."

"Then he won't be a prisoner long," said Hugh dolefully. "They'll murder him."

"I don't think so," said Nelson Lee. "Jean Moreau is a past-master in the art of blackmail—in fact, it was for attempted blackmail that he was dismissed from the French detective force—and it wouldn't surprise me in the least to find that Lord Bamford has no more idea than you and I where Martin Wraith is imprisoned."

"I see the idea," said Hugh, nodding his head. "You think that Moreau has concealed Martin Wraith in some place known only to himself, and that he intends to keep the poor fellow alive, in order to blackmail Lord Bamford by threatenin' to set him at liberty."

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee.

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"I propose, in the first place, to find out where Martin Wraith is confined."

"How?"

"By shadowing Moreau for a few days, or even a few weeks, if necessary. I shall return to London this evening—"

"But Jean Moreau is here," said Hugh, interrupting him. "I saw him walk past, on his way to the Grange, about an hour ago."

"Then he is at the Grange now?" cried Lee.

"Yes."

"Then I must follow him there at once!" said Nelson Lee, snatching up his hat. "It will be quite dark by the time I reach the Grange, and who knows but I may be able to creep up to one of the windows and overhear some interesting conversation? Don't come with me. Your presence would embarrass me. See you later!"

Before Hugh could reply, he opened the door and vanished into the deepening gloom outside. It was then five o'clock, and at that moment Jean Moreau and Lord Bamford were starting from the Grange on their way to Firvale Station.

Midway between the Grange and the village the road dipped down and ran through a gloomy little ravine, known as Dead Man's Hollow. As Nelson Lee was passing through this ravine, he was surprised to see Lord Bamford and Jean Moreau coming towards him from the direction of the Grange. Perceiving that they had not observed him, he hastily concealed himself behind a clump of bushes at the side of the road, intending to wait until they had passed, and then to shadow them back to the village.

This intention, however, was never destined to be carried out. Dead Man's Hollow was the spot which Lord Bamford had selected for the consummation of his little plot, and, just as the two men were passing the bushes behind which Nelson Lee was concealed, Lord Bamford suddenly spun round on his heel and dealt Jean Moreau a sledge-hammer blow on the side of the head which felled the Frenchman to the ground. Then, with a stifled cry of triumph, he flung himself down on the prostrate detective and clapped the muzzle of his revolver to Moreau's temple.

"So you flattered yourself that you had got me completely under your thumb, did you?" he cried, in an exultant voice. "You thought you were going to live on me for the rest of your life, did you? It was a brilliant idea, I admit; but I rather think I've knocked the bottom out of it, my friend. It is my turn to dictate terms now. Unlike you, however, I don't intend to be harsh or extortionate. If you will tell me where you have hidden Martin Wraith, I will spare your life, and you may keep the cheque I have just given you. If you refuse my terms, I shall put a bullet through your brain. What shall it be? Quick! Where have you hidden him?"

Moreau gurgled something which Nelson Lee could not catch. Then Lord Bamford burst into a ringing peal of mocking laughter.

"Fool—fool!" he cried. "Did you really believe that I meant to spare your life? Not so, my deluded friend. You know too much. I've got the information I desire, and now I'm going to make an end of you—thus!"

As he uttered these words, he pressed the trigger of his revolver; but the weapon missed fire, and, ere he could fire again, Nelson Lee burst through the bushes and leaped upon him from behind.

With one hand the detective grasped Lord Bamford by the collar of his coat, and pulled him backwards off the Frenchman's chest. With the other hand he seized the revolver, and wrested it from his lordship's grasp. Then, as easily as a man might lift a child, he swung the would-be assassin into the air and flung him headlong into the ditch.

By that time Jean Moreau had scrambled to his feet, and was calmly rearranging his disordered dress. For a man who had apparently been within an inch of losing his life he was remarkably cool and self-possessed. There was an ugly swelling on the side of his head where Lord Bamford had struck him, and his throat was disfigured with livid finger-prints. His hat was crushed into a very fair imitation of a concertina, and the back of his fur-lined overcoat was thickly plastered with powdery snow. Yet his manner was absolutely devoid of the slightest trace of anger or excitement, and there was even a suspicion of a humorous twinkle in his eyes as he glanced from Nelson Lee to Lord Bamford, and back again from Lord Bamford to Nelson Lee.

"I suppose," he said, addressing Nelson Lee, "you think you have performed a very noble act by saving the life of your bitterest rival?"

"Not at all," said Nelson Lee. "On the contrary, I consider that I have done society a very bad turn indeed by preserving the life of one of its biggest scoundrels. But I couldn't stand quietly by and see murder done, you know."

"There would have been no murder," said Moreau quietly.

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"You will permit me to differ from you on that point," he said. "The muzzle of Lord Bamford's revolver was closely pressed to your temple, and it is hardly likely that the weapon would have missed fire a second time."

Moreau grinned from ear to ear.

"That's just where you are mistaken," he said. "The revolver would have missed fire a second time, and a third time, and a fourth time, and a fifth time, and a sixth time. Look at it!"

Nelson Lee examined the revolver, and discovered to his amazement that it did not contain a single cartridge. Every one of the six chambers was absolutely empty.

He glanced across the road at Lord Bamford, who had meanwhile picked himself up, and was staring at the two detectives with the frightened, shamefaced air of a well-whipped cur.

"Did you know that your revolver wasn't loaded?" asked Nelson Lee.

"He didn't!" said Moreau, before Lord Bamford could reply. "The explanation of the scene which you have just witnessed is this. Last night, as you know, I tracked Martin Wraith to the Peak Cavern. When I discovered him, he had got you down, and was doing his best to strangle you. I rushed to your assistance, but before I could secure him he gave you a knock on the head."

"Falsehood number one," said Nelson Lee. "It was you that gave me that knock on the head."

"Can you prove it?" asked Moreau quietly.

"No, but——"

"Then don't interrupt," said Moreau. "As I was saying, before I could secure the madman, he gave you a knock on the head and took to his heels. Needless to say I instantly gave chase, and pursued him through an underground passage, which finally led into the open air. Here he managed to give me the slip, and although I scoured the neighbourhood for the whole of last night and the whole of this morning, I was unable to find any further trace of him."

"Falsehood number two," said Nelson Lee.

"What do you mean?" demande ! Moreau.

"I'll tell you presently," said Nelson Lee. "Pray continue your interesting story."

"Having lost all trace of Martin Wraith," continued Moreau, "I came to the Grange this afternoon to inform Lord Bamford of my failure. Like you, he refused to believe my story. In plain English, he accused me of having kidnapped Martin Wraith—though why in the world I should take the trouble to kidnap a lunatic goodness only knows! However, I was so insulted by his lordship's infamous accusation that I demanded that he should give me a cheque for my services up to date, and permit me to wash my hands of the whole affair.

"He gave me the cheque, and I then started out for the station with the intention of returning to London. Lord Bamford volunteered to accompany me to the station, but just as we were starting out, he asked me to excuse him whilst he ran upstairs for his gloves. Unseen by him, I followed him upstairs, and saw him load a revolver and slip it into one of the outside pockets of his overcoat. I knew, of course, what he meant to do; so as soon as we were clear of the house, I quietly picked his pocket of the revolver, removed all the cartridges, and put the revolver back without his being any the wiser. So you see, my dear Mr. Nelson Lee, my valuable life was never in the slightest danger, and your melodramatic interference was entirely uncalled for."

Again Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"How much of this am I expected to believe?" he asked.

Moreau thrust his hand into the pocket of his fur-lined overcoat, and pulled out half a dozen revolver cartridges.

"There is the proof," he said, dropping the cartridges one by one into the snow at his feet.

"That only proves that you picked Lord Bamford's pocket," said Nelson Lee.

"It doesn't prove that the rest of your story is true. As a matter of fact, I happen to know that the greater part of it is false. For instance, it is quite untrue that you lost all trace of Martin Wraith after chasing him into the open air last night."

"I did," protested Moreau. "I spent the whole of last night and the whole of this morning in scouring the neighbourhood of Castleton, but without discovering the slightest trace of him."

"That is what you said before," said Nelson Lee. "But you appear to forget what Lord Bamford said when he knocked you down just now. Shall I repeat what he said?"

"Just as you like," said Moreau indifferently.

"So you flattered yourself that you had got me completely under your thumb, did you? You thought you were going to live on me for the rest of your life, did you?" Those were his lordship's words," said Nelson Lee.

"Very possibly they were," said Moreau. "But haven't I already told you that Lord Bamford accuses me of having kidnapped Martin Wraith? He thinks that I have hidden Martin Wraith away somewhere, in order that I may squeeze money out of his lordship by threatening to set the lunatic at liberty. But the fact that Lord Bamford chooses to believe this doesn't make it a fact, does it?"

"Perhaps not," said Nelson Lee. "Nevertheless, Lord Bamford is quite correct."

"You believe that I have kidnapped Martin Wraith?"

"I do. But I don't believe that Lord Bamford ever accused you of having done so. On the contrary, I believe that you went to the Grange this afternoon for the sole purpose of telling Lord Bamford that you had hidden Martin Wraith in some place known only to yourself; and I believe that you forced Lord Bamford to give you the cheque to which you referred just now by threatening to set Martin Wraith at liberty."

"And you believe all this, simply on the strength of a few foolish words which you happened to overhear when Lord Bamford knocked me down?"

"Oh, dear, no! I knew last night that you had kidnapped Martin Wraith."

Moreau started, but quickly recovered himself.

"That is an easy thing to say," he said. "You can't prove it."

"I think I can," said Nelson Lee. "You have twice declared that you lost all trace of Martin Wraith last night, and I have twice informed you that the statement is false."

"I am aware of that," said Moreau. "But again I say you cannot prove it."

"And again I say I think I can," said Nelson Lee. "After you had given me that knock on the head in the Devil's Cellar——"

"It wasn't I," said Moreau. "It was Martin Wraith."

"After you had given me that knock on the head in the Devil's Cellar," continued Nelson Lee, ignoring the interruption, "you pursued Martin Wraith through an underground passage which led into the ruined dungeon of Peak Castle. There you overpowered him, and afterwards, on some pretext or other, you persuaded him to go with you to Hope, from which place you took him by train to Manchester."

"Well?" said Moreau, as Nelson Lee paused: "is that all?"

"That is all I have been able to discover at present," said Nelson Lee. "But it is enough to prove that you were lying when you said you had lost all trace of Martin Wraith, and it is enough to prove that you have lured him into your clutches, and have made a prisoner of him."

"If you believe this ridiculous story," said Moreau, "why don't you do as Lord Bamford did? Why don't you knock me down and clap a revolver to my head, and threaten to blow my brains out unless I tell you where Martin Wraith is hidden?"

"Because I know a better way than that of finding out where he is hidden," said Nelson Lee.

"Indeed," said Moreau, with a sneering laugh. "Well, whatever your way may be, I think I may venture to prophesy that it will be no more successful than Lord Bamford's was."

"We shall see," said Nelson Lee; and with this significant remark he turned on his heel and walked away.

CHAPTER 14.

Forewarned is Forearmed.

AS soon as Nelson Lee had vanished round a turn in the road the sneering, smile disappeared from Moreau's lips, and his face grew suddenly hard and stern. With studied deliberation he picked up his crumpled hat and carefully moulded it into something approaching its original shape.

With equal deliberation he took out his pocket-handkerchief, and carefully dusted the snow off his overcoat and trousers. Then he turned to Lord Bamford, who was still standing on the edge of the ditch, shivering like a frightened child.

"If your lordship has no objection," said Moreau, in tones of icy politeness, "we will now return to the Grange."

"You haven't time," faltered Lord Bamford. "Your train leaves at a quarter to six, and it is half-past five now."

Moreau made no reply, but calmly walked away in the direction of the Grange.

"Why are you going back to the Grange?" asked Lord Bamford, hurrying after him.

"Because I wish to do so," answered Moreau curtly.

Not another word would he say until they had arrived at the Grange, and were

once more seated in the smoke-room, where he took Lord Bamford's cheque from his pocket, tore it into fragments, and tossed it into the fire.

"That cheque was for ten thousand pounds," he said. "As a reward for your conduct in Dead Man's Hollow I will now trouble you to make another cheque, and this time you will kindly make it out for twenty thousand."

Lord Bamford meekly obeyed. Moreau glanced at the cheque, and placed it in his pocket-book.

"Now listen to me," he said. "Although you did not succeed in murdering me this afternoon, I have a very shrewd suspicion that you mean to have another try, and I may not always be so lucky as I was this afternoon. Under these circumstances I am going to arrange matters in such a way that you will not be able to get rid of me without involving yourself and Lady Bamford in absolute ruin. To-night I return to London. From London I shall write to the man who has charge of Martin Wraith, and I shall tell this man that in future I shall write to him every day. I shall also tell him that if ever a day passes without receiving a letter from me, he is to take Martin Wraith to Nelson Lee. So now you understand what will happen if ever you succeed in murdering me. On the day after I am murdered, the man who has charge of Martin Wraith will receive no letter from me. In accordance with my instructions he will take Martin Wraith to Nelson Lee, and in less than twenty-four hours both you and Lady Bamford will be under arrest. Have I made myself clear?"

"Quite!" said Lord Bamford, in a husky voice. "But what about Nelson Lee? You appear to forget that he knows where Martin Wraith is imprisoned."

"How so?"

"He was evidently hiding behind those bushes when I—when I—knocked you down, you know."

"Well?"

"I asked you where Martin Wraith was imprisoned, and you told me he was at 160, City Road, Manchester."

Moreau burst into a contemptuous laugh.

"You fool!" he said. "You don't suppose I was speaking the truth, do you? I knew that your revolver was unloaded, and I was merely fooling you, in order to see how far you intended to carry your treacherous plans. As your fingers were tightly compressing my windpipe, I don't suppose that Nelson Lee could hear what I said in reply to your question. But even if he did hear what I said it doesn't matter. The address which I gave you was a false one. Martin Wraith is not within a hundred miles of Manchester."

"Is he in London, then?"

"That's my business," said Moreau curtly. "Lend me a railway-guide. I've missed the quarter to six, and I want to find out what is the earliest train by which I can return to London."

"Hadn't you better stay the night here?" suggested Lord Bamford.

"And be murdered in my sleep!" said Moreau, with a mocking laugh. "No, thank you. I quite understand that you would like to get rid of me before I write to the man who is taking care of Martin Wraith, but it can't be done. I return to London to-night, and the letter will be posted within an hour of my arrival. For the second time—a railway-guide, if you please."

Lord Bamford produced a Bra'shaw, and handed it to his companion.

"If I leave Fivvale at five minutes past seven, I arrive at Buxton at ten minutes to eight," soliloquised Moreau, as he deftly turned over the pages. "There's a train leaves Buxton at five minutes past eight, and arrives at Derby at 9.36. After waiting at Derby one hour, I leave at 10.35, and arrive at St. Pancras at half-past one to-morrow morning. That will suit me admirably. There's a short cut across your park from here to the station, isn't there?"

"There is," said Lord Bamford, somewhat surprised by the question.

"So that it would be quite easy for you to cut across the park after I had gone and lie in wait for me on the road to the station?" said Moreau.

"I have no intention——" began Lord Bamford, but Moreau checked him with an impatient gesture.

"Once bitten, twice shy!" he said. "I'm taking no more risks. I'm not going to let you out of my sight, not for a single instant, until I am safely in the train."

"Does that mean that you wish me to accompany you to the station?"

"Yes."

"Then the sooner we start the better," said Lord Bamford. "It's nearly six o'clock now."

"There's no hurry," said Moreau coolly. "We need not start from here until twenty minutes or a quarter to seven."

"But your train leaves at five minutes past seven, you say?"

"That's so."

"Well, we can't walk three miles in twenty minutes."

"We are not going to walk," said Moreau, as he gently tapped the swelling on the side of his head where Lord Bamford had struck him.

Lord Bamford spat out a venomous oath.

"Don't swear," said Moreau reprovingly. "It's bad form. As I told you before, I'm taking no more risks, so kindly oblige me by ringing that bell, and ordering the brougham to be brought round to the front door at twenty minutes to seven."

Inwardly fuming with baffled rage, Lord Bamford rang the bell and gave the necessary order. At twenty minutes to seven they took their seats in the brougham—Moreau inside, and Lord Bamford on the box. At seven o'clock they arrived at Firvale Station, and five minutes later the Buxton train steamed in.

As they walked across the platform to the train Moreau suddenly perceived the well-known figure of Nelson Lee. The latter had evidently shadowed the two men to the station, and at the moment when Moreau caught sight of him he was in the act of slipping into a third-class compartment near the guard's van.

"What's the matter?" asked Lord Bamford, observing Moreau's involuntary start of surprise.

"Nothing," said Moreau shortly.

Without another word he took his seat in an empty first-class compartment, and a moment later the train resumed its journey.

"So that's how the land lies, is it?" he muttered to himself. "Nelson Lee intends to shadow me in the hope that I shall lead him to the house where Martin Wraith is imprisoned. That's what he meant by what he said at Dead Man's Hollow. Ah, well! Forewarned is forearmed. I'll write to Zacharie in the train, and I'll post the letter as soon as I get to London, but I'll not go near the house in Grinkle Square for a month or six weeks at least."

"Forewarned is forearmed."

By a curious coincidence, Lord Bamford, at that very moment, was making use of the same expression.

"Forewarned is forearmed," he was muttering under his breath, as he hurried out of the station. "Monsieur Moreau says he is going to write to the man who has charge of Martin Wraith as soon as he gets to London. Then my course is clear. By hook or crook I must prevent Monsieur Moreau getting to London. I must remove him from my path before he has time to write to the man in charge of Martin Wraith. It is now five minutes past seven. The London train leaves Derby at 10.35. I can just do it."

With these enigmatical words he opened the door of his brougham.

"Home, my lord?" said the coachman.

"Yes," said Lord Bamford. "And drive like the very deuce!"

CHAPTER 15.

The Face at the Window.

AS the reader will remember, Jean Moreau had said to Lord Bamford at the Grange: "Although you did not succeed in murdering me this afternoon, I have a very shrewd suspicion that you mean to have another try." A little later he had said: "I quite understand that you would like to get rid of me before I write to the man who is taking care of Martin Wraith."

Both these statements were perfectly correct. Lord Bamford *did* mean to have another try, and he was anxious—desperately anxious—to get rid of Moreau before the latter wrote to the man who had charge of Martin Wraith.

Moreau flattered himself that he had effectually checkmated Lord Bamford's schemes by compelling his lordship to accompany him to the station. For once in a way, however, the Frenchman had made a slight miscalculation, and of this miscalculation Lord Bamford was bent on taking the fullest advantage.

Firvale Grange was thirty-one miles from Derby, and Lord Bamford was the owner of a motor-car which was easily capable of generating a speed of twenty miles an hour. It was five minutes past seven when Moreau left Firvale, and he was due to arrive at Derby at 9.36. At Derby he had an hour to wait, as the London train did not leave until 10.35. Such being the case, it will readily be seen that when Lord Bamford stepped into his brougham outside Firvale Station at five minutes past seven, he had exactly three hours and a half in which to return to the Grange, disguise himself, mount his motor-car, and travel to Derby.

All this had flashed through Lord Bamford's mind when Moreau was poring over the railway-guide in the smoke-room at the Grange. During the drive to Firvale Station his lordship had mentally arranged his plan of campaign, and as soon as Moreau's train had left, Lord Bamford, as already explained, had jumped into his brougham, and had ordered the coachman to drive like the very deuce!

The coachman obeyed, and at a quarter to eight the brougham pulled up at the bottom of the broad flight of steps which led to the main entrance of Firvale Grange.

A livered footman ran down the steps to open the carriage-door, but long before he reached the bottom Lord Bamford had opened the door himself, and was bounding up two steps at a time.

"Where is Templeton?" he asked, addressing the footman and referring to his motor-man.

"In the servants' hall, my lord," replied the footman.

"Tell him I want the Panhard as quickly as possible," said Lord Bamford. "Tell him to take the car round to the Ramsley gate, and to wait for me there. I shall be ready in about three-quarters of an hour."

The footman hurried off in search of the motor-man, and Lord Bamford flew upstairs to his bed-room.

By eight o'clock he had shaved off his beard and moustache, and had cropped his hair quite close to his head. The difference which this made in his personal appearance was little short of marvellous. Even Lady Bamford herself would never have recognised him.

But Lord Bamford had no intention of resting content with merely shaving off his beard and moustache. He knew that he had a lynx-eyed and suspicious opponent to encounter, and he did not mean to leave anything to chance. On the occasion of his coming of age, a few months previous, he had given a fancy-dress ball, at which he had appeared in the character of a naval lieutenant. The uniform which he had worn at this ball was still in his wardrobe. By twenty minutes past eight he had taken off his ordinary clothes, and had transformed himself into a clean-shaven, boyish-looking naval officer.

He next paid a flying visit to his "den," where he stuffed a loaded revolver into one pocket, an ivory-handled dagger into another, and a bottle of chloroform into a third. He then returned to his bed-room and hastily donned the

"goggles," the double-breasted overcoat, the peaked cap, and the sheepskin gloves, which he always wore when motoring. It was then half-past eight.

For obvious reasons he had no desire for any of the servants to see him in his new disguise. That was why he had ordered the car to wait for him at the Ramsley gate, instead of having it brought round to the door. For the same reason he now left the house by means of the library window, and made his way to the Ramsley gate without anybody being the wiser. For the same reason also he approached the motor-car from behind, and was careful to keep out of the dazzling circle of light, which was cast by the powerful lamp in front.

"I don't want you to come with me, Templeton," he said, as he took his seat in the car. "I'm going to drive her myself to-night."

"Very good, my lord," said the motor-man, who was only too glad to get back to the light and warmth of the servants' hall. "You'll find everything in working order, I think. Shall I sit up until your lordship returns?"

"No, thanks," said Lord Bamford. "I'm not coming back to-night. There's enough petrol in the tank to last for a thirty-mile spin, I hope?"

"There's enough for a hundred miles, my lord," said Templeton.

"Good," said Lord Bamford. "Good-night."

As he uttered the last word he touched the lever, and a moment later the motor-car was spinning along the snow-clad road with the speed of an express train.

There is no need to describe the run to Derby, which was uneventful to the last degree. Suffice to say that the car maintained a uniform speed of over seventeen miles an hour, with the result that Derby was reached about a quarter past ten. By twenty minutes past Lord Bamford had arranged with the proprietor of an hotel not far from the Midland station to take charge of the car until he returned to claim it. By five-and-twenty past he had divested himself of his goggles, of his cap and coat and gloves, and had donned a naval cap and an ordinary pair of brown leather gloves, which he had taken the precaution of bringing with him. Five minutes later he was standing on the station platform with a first-class ticket for London in his pocket.

The London train was already in the station, and, with every nerve strung up to concert pitch, he strolled along the platform and glanced into the various compartments.

"If there's anybody else with him in the carriage I shall have to wait until they get out," he muttered to himself. "I may even have to wait until we get to London; but if he's alone——"

His soliloquy ended in a stifled exclamation of satisfaction, for at that moment he caught sight of Moreau reclining in the corner seat of a first-class compartment near the middle of the train. And the Frenchman was alone.

Having purchased a couple of evening papers, Lord Bamford boldly walked up to the door of the compartment and opened it. Moreau, who was trying to sleep, opened his eyes on hearing the click of the opening door, and carelessly glanced at the new arrival. It was plain to be seen that he had no suspicion that this youthful-looking naval officer was the man who had tried to murder him in Dead Man's Hollow, for as soon as Lord Bamford had taken his seat in the opposite corner of the compartment, Moreau once more closed his eyes and relapsed into his former state of somnolence. A moment or two later the whistle blew and the train began to glide out of the station.

For nearly half an hour Lord Bamford contented himself with reading, or pretending to read, his evening papers. At the end of that time he drew out his handkerchief and thrust it into the pocket in which he carried the bottle of chloroform. Moreau was apparently asleep by this time.

Stealthily and silently Lord Bamford removed the stopper from the chloroform bottle without removing it from his pocket, and allowing the chloroform to soak into his handkerchief. Scarcely had he done so ere Moreau began to stir. Then

he suddenly opened his eyes and sniffed suspiciously. His keen sense of smell had detected the pungent odour of chloroform.

"Do you smell——," he began, half rising from his seat; but even as he spoke Lord Bamford suddenly leaped across the compartment, clutched him by the throat with one hand, and clapped the saturated handkerchief over his mouth with the other.

Never was a surprise more complete or more successful. It was in vain that Moreau kicked and fought and struggled. Never for an instant did Lord Bamford relax his grip upon the Frenchman's throat; never for an instant did he remove the handkerchief from the Frenchman's mouth and nostrils.

Presently Jean Moreau's struggles grew feebler and more erratic, until at last he sank back on the carriage seat in a state of profound unconsciousness. No sooner had he done so than Lord Bamford unbuttoned his victim's overcoat and began to rifle his pockets in search of some clue to the hiding-place of Martin Wraith. For a little while he sought in vain, but presently he came across a letter which had evidently been written in the train, and which was addressed to Monsieur Zacharie Dupont, 16, Grinkle Square, Pentonville, London, W.C. He opened the letter, and found to his supreme delight that it was the letter which Moreau had written to the man who had charge of Martin Wraith.

"So this is where Martin Wraith is hidden," muttered Lord Bamford, as he thrust the letter into his pocket. "I was only just in time, for he evidently meant to post this letter as soon as he arrived in London. My plans have worked out even more successfully than I had dared to hope. All that now remains to be done is to make an end of Moreau, to drop his dead body overboard, and then proceed to London and make an end of Martin Wraith."

As he uttered these words he drew out his ivory-handled dagger; but even as he did so his eyes fell on a face at the carriage window, and he started back with a low, hoarse cry of terrified surprise.

For the face was the face of Nelson Lee!

CHAPTER 16.

At Bay—How Nelson Lee Had Tracked His Quarry to the Train, and Had Arrived in Time to Prevent Foul Play Upon His Rival.

THERE was a world of grim significance in the low, hoarse cry which rose to Lord Bamford's lips when his eyes fell on the face of Nelson Lee, close pressed against the outside of the carriage window.

It was not only a cry of startled surprise; it was not only the terror-stricken cry of a man who had been caught red-handed in the perpetration of a cowardly crime; it was also, and in equal degree, a gasping cry of stupefied bewilderment. Under the circumstances, Lord Bamford's bewilderment was only natural. At half-past five he had parted from Nelson Lee in Dead Man's Hollow, fifty miles away. An hour and a half later his lordship had driven Jean Moreau to the station, and had seen the Frenchman depart in the Buxton train, which was the only train by which it was possible to get to Derby in time to catch the London express.

Lord Bamford had remained on the platform until the train had steamed out of Firvale Station, and he was ready to swear that Nelson Lee had not been one of the passengers.

Then how had Nelson Lee contrived to transport himself from Dead Man's Hollow to the footboard of the London express? And what unlucky chain of events had brought the great detective to the outside of that particular carriage window at the very moment when Lord Bamford was on the point of consummating his cold-blooded crime?

Yet the explanation was a perfectly simple one.

At the conclusion of his wordy duel with Jean Moreau in Dead Man's Hollow, Nelson Lee had turned on his heel, and had walked away in the direction of the village. As soon as he was out of sight, however, he had stealthily retraced his steps, and had shadowed the two men back to the Grange. Although he had not been able to overhear their conversation (which had taken place, as the reader knows, in the smoke-room upstairs), he had seen the footman open the stable-yard gate, and he had heard him shout to the coachman that Lord Bamford wanted the brougham at half-past six to drive Monsieur Moreau to the station.

Having obtained this important piece of information, Nelson Lee had hurried back to the village, and had told Hugh Palmer all that had happened.

"So this is how the matter stands at present," he had said, in conclusion: "Moreau has kidnapped Martin Wraith, and has hidden him away in some place known only to himself. He hasn't murdered him, as you feared, and he doesn't intend to murder him. He intends to keep him in captivity, in order that he may blackmail Lord Bamford by threatening to set the poor fellow at liberty.

"To put the case in a nutshell, so long as Lord Bamford is willing to pay Jean Moreau's price, Jean Moreau is willing to keep Martin Wraith under lock and key, and to prevent him revealing his secret. If ever Lord Bamford grows tired of being blackmailed, if ever he refuses to pay what Moreau demands, then Moreau will set Martin Wraith at liberty, and will hand him over to you or me."

"And that will never be," said Hugh despondently. "Lord Bamford isn't a fool, and he'll be only too willing to pay whatever Moreau demands, rather than allow the Frenchman to set Martin Wraith at liberty."

"I agree with you," said Nelson Lee. "If we were to wait for Jean Moreau to set Martin Wraith at liberty, we should wait for ever. The only thing for us to do, therefore, is to find out where Wraith is imprisoned and set him at liberty ourselves."

"That's more easily said than done, I'm afraid," said Hugh. "Moreau is apparently the only man who knows where Martin Wraith is concealed, and you can hardly take him by the throat and drag the secret out of him."

"Strange to say, that's exactly what Moreau advised me to do," said Nelson Lee, with a laugh. "When I told him to his face that I knew he had kidnapped Martin Wraith, he said: 'If you believe this, why don't you do as Lord Bamford did? Why don't you knock me down, clap a revolver to my head, and threaten to blow out my brains unless I tell you where Martin Wraith is imprisoned?'"

"And what did you say to that?" asked Hugh.

"I said I knew a better way than that of finding out where Martin Wraith was concealed."

"Were you in earnest, or were you simply bluffing?"

"I never bluff."

"Then you have a plan?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

The detective answered the question with another.

"If Moreau has kidnapped Martin Wraith," he said, "isn't it more than likely that he will sometimes go to have a look at his prisoner?"

Hugh nodded his head.

"I see the idea," he said. "You intend to shadow Jean Moreau, in the hope that sooner or later he will lead you to the house where Martin Wraith is hidden?"

"Precisely!" said Nelson Lee. "Moreau is now at the Grange; but the brougham has been ordered to be ready to drive him to the station at half-past six. It is evident from this that he means to leave by the Buxton train at five minutes past seven."

"And where do you think he is going?" asked Hugh. "To Manchester?"

"That is more than I can tell," said Nelson Lee. "But wherever he is going, I am going to follow him."

He was as good as his word. At a quarter to seven he left Hugh's lodgings and walked to the station. At seven o'clock he saw the brougham drive up, with Lord Bamford on the box and Jean Moreau inside. He heard the latter ask for a ticket to Derby; and as soon as the Frenchman had left the office Nelson Lee procured a ticket for the same place. When the train arrived, he glided swiftly across the dimly-lighted platform and slipped into an empty third-class compartment near the guard's van. He flattered himself that neither Lord Bamford nor Jean Moreau had seen him. But this, as the reader knows, was scarcely correct. It is true that Lord Bamford did not see him; but the lynx-eyed Moreau did, and divined his rival's plan in the twinkling of an eye.

"He intends to shadow me, in the hope that I shall lead him to the house where Martin Wraith is imprisoned," he muttered to himself, as the train steamed out of the station. "That is what he meant by what he said at Dead Man's Hollow. Ah well! Forewarned is forearmed. I'll write to Zacharie in the train, and I'll post the letter as soon as I arrive in London; but I'll not go near the house in Grinkle Square for a month or six weeks at least."

There was a five minutes' wait at Buxton, and in that short space of time Jean Moreau purchased a sheet of paper and an envelope. On the journey from Buxton to Derby he wrote his letter to the hunchback who had charge of Martin Wraith.

"My dear Zacharie," he wrote. "This is only a hurried note, written in the train. I will write more fully to-morrow. But in the meantime I wish to lose no time in telling you that Lord B. attempted to murder me this afternoon, but was, happily, unsuccessful. I have a shrewd suspicion that he means to try again, and I have more than a suspicion that Nelson Lee is shadowing me. Under these circumstances, I have decided to keep away from Grinkle Square for the next few weeks. But I shall write to you every day, so that if ever you do not hear from me for twenty-four hours you will know that Lord B. has murdered me. You must then avenge my death by offering Martin Wraith his freedom on condition that he swears not to denounce you to the police. If he accepts your terms—and I have no doubt that he will—you must put him in a cab and send him to Nelson Lee.—Thine in haste,

JEAN MOREAU."

Having enclosed this note in an envelope, he addressed the letter to "Monsieur Zacharie Dupont, 16, Grinkle Square, Pentonville, London, W.C." Then he thrust the letter into his pocket, intending to post it at St. Pancras Station.

At 9.35 the train arrived at Derby. Here there was an hour to wait, and for the whole of that hour Nelson Lee remained on guard outside the door of the first-class waiting-room, where Moreau had taken shelter.

At twenty minutes past ten Jean Moreau came out and strolled to the booking-office, where he obtained a first-class single for St. Pancras. Nelson Lee did the same, and a few minutes later the London train steamed in.

Closely shadowed by Nelson Lee, Moreau crossed the platform, and took his seat in an empty first-class compartment near the middle of the train. The next compartment was also empty, and was promptly taken possession of by Nelson Lee, who was anxious to keep as close to his rival as possible, in order not to lose sight of him in the inevitable crush at St. Pancras.

As soon as the two detectives had taken their seats, they both did exactly the same thing—they curled themselves up in the corners of their respective compartments, and settled down for "forty winks." In consequence of this, Nelson Lee saw nothing of the youthful-looking naval officer who strolled up to the train just before it started, and took his seat in the same compartment as Jean Moreau. About half an hour later, however, he was roused from his doze by the muffled sound of a desperate struggle in the next compartment.

Quick as thought he sprang to his feet and applied his ear to the wooden partition between the two compartments. By that time, however, the sounds of the struggle had ceased; but a few moments later he distinctly heard the crackle of tearing paper, followed by a stifled cry of exultation.

It was at that moment—as the reader has doubtless guessed—that Lord Bamford tore open Moreau's letter, and discovered that Martin Wraith was imprisoned.

"I can't understand this at all," muttered Nelson Lee uneasily. "I thought there was nobody but Moreau in the next compartment; but those sounds which I heard just now were certainly the sounds of a struggle, and it is ridiculous to suppose that Moreau was struggling with himself. There must be at least one other man in the compartment, and this man has overpowered Moreau, or Moreau has overpowered him. In either case my duty is clear. By hook or crook I must have a peep into the next compartment, and find out what has happened."

He took off his heavy overcoat, and lowered the window on the left-hand side of the compartment. A violent gale of wind and snow was blowing straight across the railway track, and the moment he opened the window the wind whisked off his cap and blew it to the other side of the compartment.

"I'd better try the other door," he mused, as he pulled up the window again. "I shall be more sheltered from the wind on that side of the train."

He donned his cap and lowered the other window. He put out his hand and turned the handle, but found that the door was locked. That, however, was not a serious obstacle, for he never travelled without a railway-key, and in less time almost than it takes to tell, he unlocked the door, and stepped out on to the footboard of the swiftly-moving train.

So violent was the force of the wind, even on the lee-side of the train, that he had quite an exciting struggle before he succeeded in closing the carriage door. The cold, moreover, benumbed his hands, and the blinding snow made it almost impossible for him to see, whilst the ceaseless jolt of the madly-rushing train threatened every moment to dislodge him from the footboard. Notwithstanding all this, however, he never for an instant toyed with the thought of relinquishing his purpose, but cautiously groped his way along the quivering ledge until he reached the window of the next compartment.

The sight which met his eager gaze as he peered through the misty pane sent a thrill of horror through his frame. Jean Moreau was lying in a huddled heap on the carriage seat, and was obviously unconscious. Standing over him, with an ivory-handled dagger in his hand, was a beardless youth, in the uniform of a naval officer.

For an instant, but only for an instant, Nelson Lee stared at the officer's face in mystified perplexity. Then a gleam of intelligence leaped into the detective's eyes. He had seen through the disguise.

"Lord Bamford!" he gasped.

The words had scarcely crossed his lips ere Lord Bamford caught sight of him, and staggered back with a hoarse cry of terified surprise. For one brief moment his lordship stood rooted to the spot with mingled fear and bewilderment; then he spun round on his heel, and sprang to the door on the opposite side of the compartment.

Knowing that all the doors on the left-hand side of the train were unlocked, and that all the doors on the right-hand side were locked, Nelson Lee whipped out his revolver, smashed a hole in the carriage window with the butt-end of the weapon, and thrust the barrel through the hole. By that time, however, Lord Bamford had lowered the window, and was in the act of opening the door.

"Stand, or I fire!" shouted Nelson Lee, at the top of his voice.

But the threat was wasted breath, for even as the detective spoke, Lord Bamford stepped out on to the footboard and disappeared from sight.

Quivering with excitement, Nelson Lee pulled out his key, unlocked the door,

and scrambled into the compartment. After a hasty glance at Moreau, who was already beginning to show signs of returning consciousness, he darted to the open door on the opposite side of the compartment, and anxiously peered out. The train at that moment was passing through a long, deep cutting, the sloping sides of which were many feet deep in drifted snow. So much Nelson Lee could see by the light which streamed through the carriage windows; but beyond this moving zone of light was a dark unfathomable void. Of Lord Bamford he could see nothing.

"Confound him! He's more pluck than I gave him credit for!" he growled. "He has evidently jumped off the footboard, trusting to the snow to break his fall. If I wait to stop the train I shall lose all chance of capturing him. Willy-nilly, I must do as he has done!"

He stepped out on to the footboard, and was just about to launch himself into space when his eye fell on a track of footprints running along the footboard in the direction of the guard's van.

"Humph! This puts a different complexion on the case!" he muttered under his breath. "Those footprints have only just been made, and, consequently, they are bound to be those of Lord Bamford. He has apparently taken a stroll along the footboard before jumping off!"

"But perhaps he hasn't jumped off!" he continued, as a sudden idea occurred to him. "Perhaps he is hiding in one of the carriages farther along the train. At any rate, before I jump I'd better make sure that he isn't still in the train."

Suiting the action to the word, he groped his way along the footboard in the direction of the guard's van. When he reached the end of that particular coach however, he was astonished to find that the footprints suddenly ceased.

"This is where he jumped off, I suppose," he mused. "Anyhow, it's evident that he didn't walk any farther along the footboard. If he didn't jump off he must have turned round the end of the coach, and climbed up on to the roof."

With the object of putting this theory to the test, he gently laid his hand on the lowermost of the iron steps which ran up the end of the coach. The space between the coaches was too dark for him to see anything, but the moment he laid his hand upon the step he felt a well-defined footprint in the snow with which the step was covered.

That settled the question, of course. Lord Bamford had evidently climbed up on to the carriage roof, and, without a moment's hesitation, the detective set to work to do the same.

In the meantime, Lord Bamford had been anxiously watching the detective's movements by lying at full length on the carriage roof, and peering over the edge. When he saw Nelson Lee disappear into the space at the end of the coach he knew that the crisis was at hand, and a low, exultant chuckle rose to his lips.

"I've got him now as safe as houses!" he murmured.

Swiftly but silently he screwed himself round, so as to face the end of the coach. At the same time he whipped out his revolver, and slid his hand across the snow until the muzzle of the weapon was only an inch or two from the end of the roof. With his arm slightly bent, he waited until the detective's head came into sight, and then, with lightning-like rapidity, he straightened his arm, and thrust the weapon into Nelson Lee's face.

With matchless presence of mind, Nelson Lee flung up his hand and grasped Lord Bamford's wrist. At the same instant Lord Bamford pressed the trigger; but a dexterous twist of the detective's hand turned the barrel an inch or two to the left, and the bullet flew harmlessly past his cheek. The next instant, with a superhuman effort, he hauled himself on to the roof, and fastened his hands on Lord Bamford's throat.

Nothing daunted, Lord Bamford fought with fists and feet to regain his lost advantage. For fully half a minute the two men rolled over and over on the snow-clad carriage roof in a reckless hand-to-hand encounter. Then all at once Nelson Lee woke up to the fact that they were slipping down the convex roof, and were almost at the edge.

He made a desperate attempt to shake his assailant off, but the effort proved in vain, and an instant later the two men slid over the edge of the roof, and fell headlong through the darkness, locked in each other's arms.

CHAPTER 17.

How Nelson Lee was Caught Napping by Lord Bamford, and was Thrown for the Second Time Into a River.

IT was lucky for Nelson Lee that he and Lord Bamford rolled off the carriage roof on the left-hand side of the train. Whilst the two men had been struggling, the train had emerged from the cutting previously mentioned, and was travelling, at the moment of the catastrophe, along a fairly high embankment. If they had slid off the roof on the right-hand side of the train they would have fallen in the six-foot, and although the track was thickly covered with snow there is little or no doubt that both of them would have been seriously injured. By falling on the left-hand side of the train—which was running, of course, on the left-hand side of the metals—they fell clear of the track altogether, and, after rolling down the snow-clad slope of the embankment, they finally found a resting-place in a soft and fleecy snowdrift at the bottom.

In another respect, however, Nelson Lee was decidedly unlucky. Half-buried in the snowdrift at the bottom of the embankment was a large iron roller, which had been used the day before for rolling the adjoining field. The farmer to whom it belonged had left it out all night, intending to use it again next day; but in the meantime the snowstorm had arrived, and had almost completely buried it. When Nelson Lee and his prisoner plunged into the drift, the detective's head collided with this roller with so much force that he lay for a moment stunned; and before he had time to collect his scattered wits Lord Bamford wriggled himself free, and took to his heels.

By the time that Nelson Lee was able to scramble to his feet Lord Bamford was a couple of hundred yards away, and was already congratulating himself that his escape was as good as accomplished.

"It's too dark for him to track me by means of my footprints in the snow," he muttered to himself, as he slackened his speed. "For the same reason it's impossible for him to see me, and the wind is making too much row for him to hear me, even if he happened by chance to follow in this direction. I've nothing more to fear from Nelson Lee, that's certain, and I don't think I've much to fear from Moreau. If the Frenchman isn't dead by now he'll certainly be too ill to go on to London to-night. He'll probably be taken out of the train at Leicester and sent into the hospital. All I've got to do, therefore, is to make my way to the nearest farm-house, and hire a horse and trap to drive me to Leicester. From Leicester I'll take the first train to London, where I'll go to the house in Grinkle Square, and settle accounts with Martin Wraith."

Whilst he was thus engaged in building castles in the air, Nelson Lee was fumbling in his pocket for his pocket electric lamp. It was with the aid of one of these ingenious lamps, as the reader may remember, that he had tracked Martin Wraith into the great Peak Cavern. That particular lamp, as the reader may also remember, had been stolen by Jean Moreau; but Nelson Lee had a second lamp in his bag at the Firvale Inn, and it was this second lamp which he now drew from his pocket and carefully examined.

To his great relief he found that the lamp had not been damaged by his fall, and the instant he pressed the button a dazzling beam of light flashed out, and lit up the surface of the snow for several yards around. One glance sufficed to show him in which direction Lord Bamford had fled, and a moment later, like a bloodhound on the scent, he was following the track of the fugitive's feet across the snow-laden field.

Before he had covered fifty yards Lord Bamford happened to glance back. The detective at that moment was climbing over a gate, over which Lord Bamford had climbed a few minutes earlier, and the gleam of his electric-lamp was consequently clearly visible to Lord Bamford, who stared at it for quite ten seconds in stupefied dismay.

"A lantern!" he gasped. "Where the deuce has he—— But perhaps it isn't Nelson Lee. No, of course, it can't be Nelson Lee! It's some farmer chap. No it isn't! The light is coming this way, and it's an electric-light, unless I'm greatly deceived! It's Nelson Lee for a thousand pounds! He's following the track of my footprints!"

He pressed his elbows to his sides and broke into a run. At the end of five minutes he again turned round. The light was still behind him, and was, if anything, a trifle nearer than before.

Lord Bamford now began to be genuinely alarmed. Nor was his alarm diminished when a few minutes later he found his further progress barred by a broad and swiftly-rushing river. Owing to the pitchy darkness, he almost ran into the river before he realised his danger; but he checked himself in the nick of time and once more glanced behind him.

The light was then no more than a hundred yards away, and was coming nearer every second. To cross the river was impossible; for it was swollen with melted snow, and was rushing between its high, steep banks with the force and fury of a mountain torrent. Higher up it was apparently frozen over, for ever and anon huge slabs of ice came drifting down the stream, their dim and shadowy shapes flashing past Lord Bamford like half-seen phantoms from some other world.

"If only Nelson Lee would oblige me by tumbling into this river, as I very nearly did myself, my troubles would be at an end," soliloquised Lord Bamford. "But he has got a light, so there's no fear——"

Suddenly he paused, and a thrill of suppressed excitement shot through his nerves. A daring idea had occurred to him. There was a narrow footpath running along the riverside, quite close to the edge. Here and there, on the land side of this footpath, was a snow-laden bush or a solitary leafless tree. Nelson Lee had a light, and consequently he would instantly perceive any object that happened to be lying on the path.

"It's a little bit risky, but I'll do it!" muttered Lord Bamford to himself. "With decent luck it ought to come off!"

With these enigmatical words, he dashed away along the footpath at the top of his speed. As he ran he unbuttoned his coat and took out a leather pocket-case. Still running, he removed all the papers from the case, and thrust them into his pocket. Then he dropped the case on the ground, quite close to the edge of the river, and exactly opposite one of the trees already mentioned.

Having done this, he still continued to run at full speed along the path for twenty or thirty yards. Then he doubled back parallel with the footpath, but a dozen yards to the right of it, and concealed himself behind the tree referred to above.

Scarcely had he concealed himself when Nelson Lee came running up, his electric lamp held out in front of him, and his eyes fixed on the track of the footprints in the snow. At the sight of Lord Bamford's pocket case lying on the ground, the detective uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. He naturally thought that it had accidentally fallen from Lord Bamford's pocket, and, thinking that it might contain some valuable clue, he promptly stooped down to pick it up.

This was Lord Bamford's opportunity. With a single panther-like bound he leaped upon Nelson Lee from behind and hurled him into the swollen stream.

Then, as he heard the splash and the startled cry which followed his dastardly act, he calmly turned on his heel and walked away, muttering softly to himself.

"So much for Nelson Lee! Now for London and Martin Wraith!"

CHAPTER 18.

Trapped!

AFTER hurling Nelson Lee into the river in the manner already described Lord Bamford ploughed his way through the blinding snowstorm, and ultimately reached the turnpike road. It was then about half an hour after midnight. After trudging along the road for a short distance he came to a small farmhouse, where he roused the astonished inmates, and offered the farmer a couple of pounds to drive him to the Midland station at Leicester.

"Make it fifty shillings and I'll do it," said the farmer.

Lord Bamford "made it fifty shillings," and at one o'clock they started off in an old-fashioned, ramshackle gig, drawn by a horse that was nearly as old as Lord Bamford himself.

Leicester was barely fifteen miles away, but, owing to the "crocky" condition of the horse, and owing also to the terrible state of the road—which in places was nearly knee-deep in drifted snow—it was a few minutes after five o'clock when the trap at last pulled up outside the Midland station.

A sleepy-eyed porter came forward to meet them, and respectfully touched his cap.

"When is the next train for London?" asked Lord Bamford, as he sprang out of the trap and handed the farmer his promised fifty shillings.

"The 5.10 is in the station now, sir," said the porter. "She'll be off in half a minute. You've just time to catch her, if you hurry, but I'm afraid you won't have time to get a ticket."

"I've got my ticket," said Lord Bamford, for he had booked to London at Derby, and the ticket was still in his pocket.

He tossed a shilling to the porter, and dived into the station. The guard was blowing his whistle as he rushed on to the platform, and he had barely time to swing himself into the nearest carriage ere the train began to move.

The train was an express, and was timed to do the journey to St. Pancras in exactly two hours. On the present occasion, however, the journey took two hours and a quarter, and it was close upon half-past seven when Lord Bamford alighted from the train, crossed the deserted platform at St. Pancras, and jumped into a hansom. A quarter of an hour later—at a quarter to eight in the morning—he stepped out of the hansom, paid his fare, and rang the front door-bell of No. 16, Grinkle Square.

Receiving no reply to his summons, he rang the bell a second time. Almost before the echoes of the peal had died away he heard a shuffling sound, as of slipped feet coming down a bare, uncarpeted passage. Then came the rattle of a chain the creaking of a bolt, and the click of a lock. Then the door swung slowly open for an inch or two, and disclosed the hideous face of Zacharie Dupont, the hunchback dwarf.

So repulsive was the face, so ape-like and inhuman, that Lord Bamford involuntarily started back, with a shudder of loathing and horror.

The hunchback observed the action, and bared his yellow teeth in a low, resentful snarl.

"Vell, vat is it—vat you vant?" he demanded, in a harsh, croaking voice.

Lord Bamford pulled himself together, and politely raised his cap.

"Is it that you are Monsieur Zacharie Dupont?" he asked, in his best French. Zacharie growled an affirmative.

"And who are you?" he asked, in the same language.

"I am a friend of Jean Moreau's," said Lord Bamford, lying with his customary facility. "He has sent me here to give you certain instructions, and to help you to carry them out. But aren't you going to ask me to step inside?"

"What proof have I that you are speaking the truth?" asked the hunchback suspiciously. "How do I know that you come from Monsieur Moreau?"

Lord Bamford was prepared for this. He thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out Moreau's signet-ring, which he had taken from the Frenchman's finger, after chloroforming him in the train.

"Monsieur Moreau said I was to show you this if you questioned my good faith," he said.

Zacharie glanced at the ring, and nodded his head.

"Come in," he said, opening the door to its widest extent.

He stepped aside to let Lord Bamford enter. Then he closed and locked the door, and led his visitor into a sparsely-furnished sitting-room.

"It's beastly cold in here," said Lord Bamford, as the hunchback lit the gas. "Haven't you a fire anywhere?"

"Only in the kitchen," answered Zacharie.

"Then let us go into the kitchen," said Lord Bamford, who had observed that the sitting-room window overlooked the square, and that anybody who happened to be passing the house would be able to see whatever took place inside the room. As he intended to overpower Zacharie if the latter proved obstinate he naturally preferred to be as far away from the road as possible.

Little suspecting the true reason which had prompted Lord Bamford's request, the hunchback led him into the kitchen.

"You haven't told me your name yet," he said, as Lord Bamford seated himself in front of the fire, and spread out his hands to the grateful warmth.

"There is no need for me to tell you my name," said Lord Bamford airily. "It is enough that I am a friend of Monsieur Moreau, and that he has authorised me to act on his behalf. How is Martin Wraith?"

The hunchback started at this unexpected question, but quickly recovered his self-control.

"I know not what you mean," he said. "Who is Martin Wraith?"

"Don't be an idiot!" said Lord Bamford impatiently. "You need not fear to speak openly before me. I know all about the affair. Jean Moreau kidnapped Martin Wraith on Thursday night, and brought him here on Friday morning. He then went up to Firvale Grange to squeeze some money out of Lord Bamford. He told me all about this case before he went, and he wired to me yesterday afternoon to meet him at Charing Cross Station at nine o'clock last night."

"Jean Moreau was in London last night?"

"Yes."

"Why did he not come here?"

"Because he knew that Nelson Lee was shadowing him."

"Where is he now?"

That was exactly what Lord Bamford would have liked to know himself. He had chloroformed Jean Moreau in the train, midway between Derby and Leicester, and had left him there. What had happened since he did not know. For anything he knew, Jean Moreau might be dead, or he might be lying ill at Leicester; or he might have been brought on to London, and might, even at that very moment, be on his way to Grinkle Square.

It need scarcely be said, however, that Lord Bamford had no intention of confessing to the hunchback that he was ignorant of Moreau's whereabouts.

"He has gone abroad," he said. "He left Charing Cross by the boat express at nine o'clock last night, and by this time he is in Paris."

"When is he coming back?"

"Never!"

"Never?" gasped Zacharie. "How is that? What has happened?"

"Oh, nothing has happened that need alarm you!" said Lord Bamford reassuringly. "But Nelson Lee has discovered that Martin Wraith was kidnapped by Jean Moreau. He doesn't know that Martin Wraith is here, so he is shadowing Moreau in the hope that the latter will ultimately lead him to the place where Martin Wraith is hidden. Under these circumstances, Jean Moreau has decided that he will never come near this house again. He has got over fifty thousand pounds out of Lord Bamford, so that he can well afford to drop the detective business altogether. In other words, he has decided to retire into private life, and to settle down in Paris as a peaceful, law-abiding citizen."

Zacharie stared at him in mingled amazement and dismay. He had no suspicion that Lord Bamford had invented this lying tale. He believed every word of it.

"But what is to become of me?" he asked. "Surely Monsieur Moreau does not intend to desert me, after all I have done for him?"

"Certainly not," said Lord Bamford. "It was entirely on your account that he wired for me to meet him at Charing Cross last night. He dared not come to see you himself, because he knew that Nelson Lee was shadowing him; so he asked me to come here this morning and tell you to follow him to Paris by the first available boat. He is staying for the present at the Hotel St. Petersburg, in the Rue Caumartin, and he will remain there until you join him."

He pulled out his purse and produced a ten-pound note.

"He asked me to give you this, to pay your fare and your travelling expenses," he said, as he handed the note to Zacharie.

"When am I to start?" asked the latter.

"By the train which leaves Charing Cross at ten o'clock this morning," said Lord Bamford. "You are not to take anything away from the house except your own belongings. The furniture and everything else is to be left exactly as it stands. If there are any compromising papers in the house, you are to burn them before you leave; but, otherwise, you are to leave things as they are. Moreau will write from Paris, and settle with the landlord about the rent, and arrange for the sale of the furniture."

"But what about Martin Wraith?" asked Zacharie. "Am I to set him at liberty?"

"By no means," said Lord Bamford. "At present it is only suspected that Moreau kidnapped him. Nobody—not even Nelson Lee—can prove it; but if you were to set him at liberty, he would straightway go to Nelson Lee and tell his tale, and in less than twenty-four hours there would be warrants out, both for Moreau and yourself."

"Then what am I to do with him?" asked Zacharie. "I can't take him with me. Am I to leave him in the house to perish of starvation?"

"Certainly not!" said Lord Bamford. "That would be nearly as bad as setting him free."

"Then what am I to do with him?" asked Zacharie for the second time.

"I'll show you!" said Lord Bamford grimly. "Where is he?"

The hunchback rose to his feet, turned up a corner of the matting, and opened a trapdoor.

"Behold him!" he said.

Lord Bamford stooped down and peered into the dimly-lighted vault. Martin Wraith had partly recovered from the stunning effects of Zacharie's blow, and had raised himself into a sitting posture on the floor. The hunchback's mastiff was crouching on all-fours in front of him, regarding him with watchful, glittering eyes.

As Lord Bamford had shaved off his beard and moustache, Martin Wraith very naturally failed to recognise him. Lord Bamford, of course, recognised Martin Wraith the instant he set eyes on him, and he had need of all his self-control to avoid betraying his exultant triumph to his hunchback companion.

"Victory at last!" he muttered under his breath. "In spite of Nelson Lee, in spite of Jean Moreau, I have found the man who knows my guilty secret, and in two more minutes I shall have silenced him for ever!"

He thrust his hand into his pocket in search of his revolver. Then he suddenly remembered that he had lost it in the struggle with Nelson Lee. He had still his ivory-handled dagger; but he feared to enter the vault until all was over, lest Martin Wraith should pierce his disguise and betray him to the hunchback.

"Have you a revolver?" he asked, turning to Zacharie.

Zacharie's cheeks grew suddenly pale.

"Are you going to kill him?" he gasped, in a frightened whisper.

"Of course I am," said Lord Bamford coolly. "That's one of the principal objects of my visit."

"But Moreau—does he know? Does he approve?"

"Certainly! I am obeying Moreau's orders. Martin Wraith is no further use to him now, and he has decided that the safest way of getting rid of him is to put a bullet through his head."

"But how will you dispose of the body afterwards?" asked Zacharie.

"I'll explain all that by-and-by!" said Lord Bamford impatiently. "For the second time, have you a revolver?"

"There's one in my bed-room," said Zacharie.

"Fetch it!" said Lord Bamford curtly.

The hunchback turned to obey, and even as he did so the silence was rent by a violent ring at the front-door bell, followed by three loud knocks.

A ring and three knocks.

The hunchback started as though he had been shot. For one brief instant he stared at Lord Bamford in stupefied bewilderment. Then a gleam of intelligence leaped into his eyes, and a spasm of fury convulsed his face. He had been tricked. Lord Bamford had lied to him. For there was only one man in the world who announced his arrival at No. 16, Grinkle Square by a ring and three knocks.

Lord Bamford saw the change in Zacharie's face, and instantly divined its cause. With matchless presence of mind he seized the hunchback by the collar of his jacket, swung him off his feet, and dropped him through the open trapdoor. Quivering with excitement, he closed the door and bolted it. Then he snatched up the kitchen poker and glided into the sitting-room, the window of which, as already explained, overlooked the square in front of the house.

One stealthy peep through the window sufficed to confirm his worst fears. He was trapped. The man at the door was Jean Moreau!

CHAPTER 19.

In the Nick of Time.

IN order to explain how Jean Moreau came to be standing outside the door of No. 16, Grinkle Square, at eight o'clock on Saturday morning, we must put back our story to eleven o'clock on Friday night; we must once more board the London express, about twenty miles north of Leicester; and we must once more enter the compartment in which Lord Bamford chloroformed Jean Moreau, and robbed him of the letter which contained the address of the house in Grinkle Square where Martin Wraith was imprisoned.

The reader will remember that as soon as Lord Bamford had secured this precious letter he drew out an ivory-handled dagger, and was just about to plunge it into

Moreau's heart, when he suddenly caught sight of the face of Nelson Lee peering through the carriage window.

In panic-stricken alarm, his lordship hurriedly opened the door on the opposite side of the compartment, crawled along the footboard, and climbed up on to the carriage roof. The detective followed suit, and, after an exciting struggle on the roof, the two men fell off the train and rolled down a sloping embankment.

Lord Bamford then took to his heels, and at last, having lured Nelson Lee to the edge of a river, he pushed the detective in, made his way to the nearest farmhouse, hired a horse and trap, drove to Leicester, caught the 5.10 train to London, and turned up at No. 16, Grinkle Square at a quarter to eight on Saturday morning.

Just about the same time as the two men rolled off the carriage roof Jean Moreau opened his eyes, and staggered drunkenly to his feet. Needless to say, he had no idea of what had happened whilst he had been unconscious. He only knew that a boyish-looking man, in the uniform of a naval lieutenant, had entered the compartment at Derby, and had subsequently hurled himself upon him, clapped a chloroformed handkerchief to his mouth, and kept it there until he had lost consciousness.

Shortly before his senses had ebbed away he had recognised his assailant as Lord Bamford, but of all that had happened since—of the theft of the letter, of Nelson Lee's appearance, of the struggle on the roof—he was absolutely and completely ignorant.

Now, when a man is coming round, after a stupefying dose of chloroform, his condition is very similar to that of a drunken man. That is to say, his brain is more or less befogged, he is incapable of thinking clearly, he talks and acts in a foolish fashion, and he has little or no control over his limbs.

All this passes off, sometimes in a few minutes, sometimes not for an hour or two, but always for a certain length of time the man remains in a fuddled condition, in which he is not responsible for his actions.

It was so with Jean Moreau. The first thing he did upon rising to his feet was to stare at the lamp above his head with an air of stupid bewilderment. Then he lost his balance, and sat down on the carriage floor with a bump that nearly dislocated his spinal column.

If he had been wise he would have remained in this position until the effects of the chloroform had completely passed away. But he was not in a condition to act wisely, and, after several futile attempts, he once more struggled to his feet.

He then perceived for the first time that the carriage door was open. In his fuddled state of mind he concluded from this that Lord Bamford had only just left the compartment and was probably on the footboard outside. Scarcely knowing what he was doing, he staggered towards the door, but even as he did so his legs gave way beneath him, and a sudden dizziness came over him.

He made a wild attempt to recover his balance, but the action came too late, and the next instant, with a stifed cry of alarm, he stumbled forward and pitched headfirst through the open door.

For once in a way, however, the fates were kind to him. The drifted snow, which was piled up shoulder-high by the side of the track, received his falling form as gently as a feather bed. Moreover, the sudden plunge into the ice-cold snow acted like an electric shock to his nerves, and galvanised his dormant faculties into life as if by magic.

When he stumbled through the carriage-door he was muddled, dazed, and stupefied. By the time he had scrambled out of the snow he was as clear-headed, as keen-witted, and as self-possessed as ever.

Instinctively he thrust his hand into the pocket in which he had placed the all-important letter. Then a venomous oath burst from his lips. The letter was gone! Lord Bamford had stolen it. Lord Bamford knew where Martin Wraith was imprisoned.

This discovery filled Jean Moreau with mingled dismay and despair. Knowing nothing of what had happened whilst he had been unconscious, he naturally thought that Lord Bamford had merely crawled along the footboard and had taken his seat in one of the adjoining compartments. That is to say, he was firmly convinced in his own mind that Lord Bamford was still on board the London train, and he knew sufficient of his lordship's character to know that the first thing he would do upon reaching London would be to go to the house in Grinkle Square and endeavour to murder Martin Wraith.

"I must follow him at once!" he muttered under his breath. "I can't overtake him, of course, before he reaches Grinkle Square, but if Zacharie can only manage to keep him at bay for an hour or two, I may still be in time to prevent him murdering Martin Wraith."

Fired by his hope, he buttoned up his coat and trudged off down the railway-line in the wake of the vanished train. After battling with the wind and snow for two long, weary hours, he at length arrived at Loughborough, where he learned to his chagrin that the last train for Leicester had just departed.

After waiting nearly an hour in a vain attempt to hire a trap, he resumed his journey on foot. At a quarter past five, more dead than alive, he staggered into the Midland station at Leicester. A farmer's gig was just driving away.

It was the trap which had brought Lord Bamford to Leicester. If Moreau had been five minutes earlier, he would have seen Lord Bamford jump out of the trap and dive into the station.

"When is the next train to London?" asked Moreau, addressing the clerk at the booking-office window.

"The 5.10 has just gone," replied the clerk.

"That isn't what I asked!" snapped Moreau. "What's the next?"

"5.32," said the clerk, somewhat shortly. "Want a ticket?"

Moreau shook his head and limped away. Twenty minutes later he took his seat in the train, and at a quarter to eight he stepped out on to the platform at St. Pancras. At that moment Lord Bamford was ringing the bell at No. 16, Grinkle Square.

Having chartered a hansom, the Frenchman drove to Grinkle Square, arriving there on the stroke of eight o'clock. He dismissed the hansom, stole to the door of No. 16, and gently turned the handle.

The door was locked. He applied his ear to the keyhole. Not a sound was to be heard. He peered in through the sitting-room window. Nothing had been disturbed.

"Everything appears to be tranquil," he mused. "I really believe his lordship hasn't arrived yet. At the same time, I'd better be prepared."

He pulled out his revolver and examined it. It was loaded in every chamber. He glanced behind him. The square was deserted. Then he rang the bell, and knocked three times at the door.

There was an interval of silence. During that interval, as the reader knows, Lord Bamford flung the hunchback into the vault, and bolted the trapdoor. He then snatched up the kitchen poker and glided into the sitting-room, where he cautiously peered through the window, and saw that the man at the door was none other than Jean Moreau.

"I guessed as much!" he muttered. "I thought it must be Moreau when I saw that startled look on Zacharie's face. Ah, well, I've tricked Jean Moreau once, and I think I can do it a second time! At any rate, I'll try."

Imitating Zacharie's shuffling footsteps, he made his way along the passage, and stealthily planted one foot against the bottom of the door; then he turned the key, and made a great pretence of trying to pull the door open.

"Is that Zacharie?" demanded Moreau.

"Yes!" growled Lord Bamford, in a very fair imitation of the hunchback's voice.

"Is Lord Bamford here?"

"No."

"Has he been?"

"No; nobody has been."

All this time Lord Bamford was holding the door fast with his foot, and was tugging at the handle with one hand, whilst the other hand gripped the poker.

"What's the matter?" shouted Moreau. "Why don't you open the door?"

"I can't," replied Lord Bamford. "The cursed thing has stuck! Give it a push from the inside."

Suspecting nothing, Moreau thrust his revolver back into his pocket. He then applied his shoulder to the door, and gave it a sudden and vigorous push.

At the same instant Lord Bamford removed his foot, with the natural result that the door flew suddenly open, and Moreau fell, floundering on his hands and knees on the bare, uncarpeted floor of the dimly-lighted passage.

In the meantime Lord Bamford had stepped back a pace or two, and the moment Moreau fell he swung the poker aloft and brought it down with all his strength on the top of the Frenchman's head.

Half stunned though he was, the latter instantly sprang to his feet and whipped out his revolver. Ere he could fire, however, Lord Bamford dropped the poker, seized the Frenchman round the waist, and literally threw him to the other end of the passage.

As the Frenchman fell, he struck the ground with so much force that he lay for a moment completely dazed. Before he could collect his scattered wits, Lord Bamford spun round on his heel and closed and locked the door. He then snatched up the poker again and rushed towards his prostrate foe, who was lying in a huddled heap at the far end of the passage. At that moment Jean Moreau's doom appeared to be sealed, for he was absolutely and completely at the mercy of his bitterest foe. But once again the Fates befriended him.

Poker in hand, Lord Bamford bounded down the passage, and had almost reached the end, when all at once the ground seemed suddenly to melt away from under his feet. With a superhuman effort he threw himself forward, and fell on his knees on the farther edge of a large, square hole which had suddenly and mysteriously made its appearance in the wooden floor of the passage. Quivering with excitement, gasping with bewilderment, he hurriedly scrambled to his feet; but even as he did so a clawlike hand shot up through the hole and seized him by the ankle.

Half mad with fear, he kicked and struggled to free himself from the iron grip of his unknown foe. But it was all in vain. Inch by inch he was dragged back towards the hole, until at last, with a wild, despairing shriek, he tumbled backward over the edge and disappeared from view.

As he vanished through this mysterious hole a grim, triumphant chuckle was heard. Then came a sickening crash, followed by a stifled moan, then the silence of the grave.

CHAPTER 20.

In which Jean Moreau Receives an Unexpected "Facer," but Prepares to Make the Best of it.

THE hand which dragged Lord Bamford down was the hand of Zacharie. When Lord Bamford flung him into the underground vault in the manner already described, the hunchback landed on his feet, and thus escaped with no more serious injuries than a slight sprain of one ankle and a general shaking up.

Martin Wraith, who was still seated on the floor of the vault, with the mastiff mounting guard over him, had witnessed the hunchback's startling descent in speechless stupefaction; but as soon as he saw that Zacharie was unhurt he burst into a torrent of excited questions.

"What has happened?" he asked. "Who was the man who peered into the vault just now? Why has he thrown you down to keep me company?"

The hunchback made no reply. Having rearranged his disordered dress, he limped across to the opposite wall of the vault and passed his hand along the masonry. In the middle of one of the stones was a circular steel plate about the size of half-a-crown. Having placed the end of his thumb on this plate, he gave a gentle push, and the next instant, to Martin Wraith's amazement, a portion of the wall swung back and revealed the narrow opening of an underground passage.

This underground passage, as Zacharie knew, was exactly underneath the passage which led from the kitchen to the front door. In the roof, which was formed by the wooden floor of the passage overhead, was a square trapdoor which opened downwards, and which was secured by a ponderous iron bolt. By the side of this trapdoor were two steel hooks, from which was suspended a rope-ladder. It was Zacharie's intention to swarm up this ladder, to open the trapdoor, and to shout to Moreau to be on his guard against treachery.

No sooner had he entered the underground passage, however, than he heard the front door suddenly fly open, whilst an instant later he heard Jean Moreau fall on his hands and knees, and he heard Lord Bamford strike him with the poker. As the hunchback sprang to the foot of the rope-ladder he heard Lord Bamford hurl the Frenchman to the far end of the passage. As he swarmed up the ladder he heard Lord Bamford close and lock the front door. And just as he reached the top of the ladder, and stretched out his hand to withdraw the bolt, his ears caught the sound of Lord Bamford rushing down the passage, with the evident intention of attacking Moreau a second time.

With eager, trembling fingers the hunchback seized the end of the bolt and gave it a lusty tug. At the very instant that the bolt slid out of its socket Lord Bamford trod on the upper surface of the square trapdoor, with the natural result that the trapdoor instantly dropped open, and Lord Bamford felt as though the ground had suddenly melted away from under his feet.

As already described, he threw himself forward and fell on his knees on the farther edge of the open trapdoor. Zacharie at that moment was standing on the rope-ladder, with his head almost touching the wooden boards. He saw Lord Bamford fall—he saw him scramble to his feet—and in the twinkling of an eye he thrust up his hand and seized Lord Bamford by the ankle.

What happened next has already been told. After a short but furious struggle the hunchback dragged his captive back, until at last Lord Bamford fell backwards over the edge of the open trapdoor and tumbled headlong into the underground passage.

The moment Lord Bamford began to fall, the hunchback, of course, let go his hold on the victim's ankle, since he had no desire to be dragged off the ladder by the weight of Lord Bamford's body. At the same moment, also, the hunchback gave vent to a low, triumphant chuckle, which was followed an instant later by a sickening thud as Lord Bamford's head struck the hard stone floor of the underground passage. Following this came a low, vibrating moan, like the moaning of the wind beneath the eaves. Then the huddled heap on the passage floor grew strangely silent, strangely still.

Flushed with triumph, the hunchback scrambled down the ladder and rolled his victim over on his back. He peered into the staring, glassy eyes, he applied his ear to the slightly open mouth, he raised one rigid arm and let it fall again.

"You'll trouble us no more, my worthy friend, whoever you may be!" he muttered under his breath.

He turned away, and was about to ascend the ladder again, when Moreau's face appeared at the trapdoor.

"Is he badly hurt?" asked Moreau anxiously.

"Come down and see for thyself!" said Zacharie—in French, of course.

Moreau darted down the ladder and peered into Lord Bamford's upturned face. Then he staggered back, with a low, hoarse cry of mingled dismay and despair.

Lord Bamford was dead. He had broken his neck, and death had been instantaneous.

"What ails thee?" asked Zacharie wonderingly. "Thou art not sorry that the man is dead?"

"Sorry!" echoed Moreau, with a hollow laugh. "Dost thou know what thou hast done? Dost thou realise what this means to thee and me? Dost thou know who it is that thou hast killed?"

"Not I!" said Zacharie, shrugging his rounded shoulders. "Who is he?"

"Lord Bamford!" answered Moreau. "By killing him thou hast shattered all my plans like a house of cards! Thou hast swept away for ever all our dreams of future wealth! Thou hast killed the goose that would have laid the golden eggs!"

The hunchback stared at him in sullen, shamefaced silence. Then a gleam of hope leaped into his beady eyes.

"Thou art forgetting Martin Wraith," he said eagerly. "He alone can prove that Hugh Palmer is the rightful Lord Bamford. Canst thou not squeeze money out of Hugh Palmer by offering to deliver Martin Wraith into his hands?"

"Thou art a fool!" said Moreau contemptuously. "Hugh Palmer has no need of Martin Wraith now. He is Lord Bamford's next-of-kin, and he now succeeds to the title and estates as a matter of course. He was the real Lord Bamford before, but he could not prove it without the help of Martin Wraith. He does not need to prove it now. At the very moment when this fellow died, Hugh Palmer became, in the eyes of the law, the new Lord Bamford."

"But he will not know that he is the new Lord Bamford until he hears that this fellow is dead," said Zacharie. "Canst thou not get money out of him before the truth comes out?"

Moreau nodded his head.

"Thou art not such a fool, after all!" he said approvingly. "Thou hast given me an idea."

He fell on his knees by Lord Bamford's side, and set to work to rifle the dead man's pockets. In one of them he found the stolen letter; in another he found a printed form, bearing the name of the Wortley Hotel at Derby, and certifying that a motor-car had been left at that hotel "at owner's risk."

"This explains everything," he muttered to himself, as he gazed at the printed form. "I could not understand how he had got to Derby in time to catch the London express, but it is evident now that he drove there in his motor-car."

He turned to Zacharie, and briefly described the events of the previous day. The hunchback then related his own adventures, and when the two confederates had finished their respective tales, Jean Moreau proceeded to unfold his plans for the future.

"When I was at Firvale Grange yesterday," he said, "Lord Bamford told me that Lady Bamford was at Nice, and that he was going to join her there in the course of a day or two. What I propose to do, therefore, is this. I shall go to Hugh Palmer and tell him that I have found Martin Wraith. I shall pretend to be disgusted with Lord Bamford, and I shall offer to tell Hugh Palmer where Martin Wraith is concealed on condition that he gives me a certain sum of money.

"Hugh Palmer, of course, will have no suspicion that Lord Bamford is dead. He will think that his only chance of securing the title and estates is to find Martin

Wraith, and get him to reveal his secret information. Without a doubt, therefore, Hugh Palmer will be only too glad to agree to my terms. If he hasn't the money, he will borrow it from his friends, and as soon as we have got the money we'll set Martin Wraith at liberty and skip across to South America."

"Thou hast the wit of half a dozen men!" said Zacharie enthusiastically. "With the twenty thousand pounds Lord Bamford gave thee yesterday, and the money thou wilt receive from Hugh Palmer, we sha'n't have done so badly, after all!"

"And the best of it all will be," said Moreau, with a chuckle, "I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that I have worsted Nelson Lee at every single point!"

Little did he dream, as he uttered this boast, what the future held in store for him.

CHAPTER 21.

Nelson Lee Smells a Rat.

EXACTLY twelve hours after the above-recorded conversation Hugh Palmer was disturbed, when putting the finishing touches to his sermon for the morrow, by a gentle tap at his sitting-room door. He opened the door, and found, to his amazement, that his visitor was Nelson Lee.

"Back already?" he exclaimed, as he dragged the detective into the room, and pushed him into an easy-chair. "What news do you bring? Have you discovered where Jean Moreau has hidden Martin Wraith?"

The detective shook his head.

"I haven't," he said. "As you know, I left here at seven o'clock last night, with the intention of shadowing Moreau until he led me to the house where Martin Wraith is imprisoned. From here I shadowed him to Buxton, and from Buxton to Derby. At Derby he took train for London, and I naturally did the same. We travelled in adjoining compartments, and about half an hour after we had left Derby I heard a series of suspicious sounds in the next compartment. I crawled along the footboard, and peered in through the window. I then discovered that Lord Bamford, disguised as a naval lieutenant, had stupefied Moreau with chloroform, and was just about to murder him."

He described the struggle on the carriage roof, the roll down the embankment, the race across the snow-clad fields, and how Lord Bamford had hurled him into the river.

"When I rose to the surface," he continued, "I speedily discovered that it was utterly impossible to breast the current, and, consequently, I had no choice but to allow the river to carry me along at its own sweet will.

"After I had drifted in this fashion for the best part of three miles, the current swept me underneath the overhanging branches of a tree. More by luck than skill I managed to catch hold of one of these branches, and after a prolonged struggle I succeeded in hauling myself out of the water and effecting a landing.

"By this time I was so exhausted and so numbed with cold that I could scarcely walk. Fortunately, there happened to be a gamekeeper's cottage not far from where I landed; but by the time I had crawled to the door, and had roused the astonished inmates, my strength was spent, and I was foolish enough to faint.

"I soon came round, but, realising that discretion was the better part of valour, I gladly fell in with the gamekeeper's suggestion that I should go to bed, and remain there until morning.

"When I awoke it was broad daylight. My clothes had been dried whilst I had been sleeping, and at nine o'clock I bade my humble host adieu, and started out for Leicester. I had little or no hope of finding any further trace of Lord Bamford,

but I had a faint hope that Moreau might have been taken out of the train at Leicester, and that I should find him in the infirmary there.

"I will not weary you by describing all the investigations I made in Leicester and the neighbourhood. It is enough to say that I finally ascertained that Moreau had either jumped out of the train, or had fallen out, about six miles north of Loughborough. He had then walked to Loughborough, and had tried to hire a trap to drive him to Leicester. Failing in this, he had walked to Leicester, and had left for London by the 5.32 express this morning. I also ascertained that a man answering to the description of Lord Bamford had arrived at the Leicester station a few minutes before Moreau, and had left for London at 5.10.

"It was half-past four this afternoon before I finished my investigations. As Moreau was then in London, it was obvious that my only hope of picking up the scent again was to go to London, post myself outside his office in Chancery Lane, wait until he appeared, and then resume my original plan of shadowing him until he led me to the house in which he had hidden Martin Wraith.

"There was nothing to be gained, however, by going to London at half-past four on Saturday afternoon. I determined, therefore, to come back here to tell you what had happened, and to explain what I intend to do. I shall remain here for a day or two, as I fancy that Moreau is likely to return. Then I shall track him to London."

CHAPTER 22.

How Moreau Met Hugh Palmer—An Unexpected Encounter.

IT was seven o'clock on the following Monday evening, and quite dark, when Moreau and his faithful hound alighted from the train in Firvale Station. By a curious coincidence, Hugh Palmer happened to be on the platform, so that he was the first man Moreau saw when he stepped out of the train.

"Good-evening, Mr. Palmer!" he said, approaching Hugh and raising his hat. "You are not going on by this train, I hope?"

"No," said Hugh, somewhat stiffly. "But, excuse my asking, to whom have I the honour of speaking?"

"Surely you remember me?" said Moreau, with a peculiar smile.

Hugh stared at the Frenchman, and wrinkled his brow. He was quite well aware who it was, but it did not suit his purpose to proclaim his knowledge too soon.

"I seem to remember your face," he said. "Let me see. Oh, yes, I've got it now! You're the man I met on the moors some time ago—the man who falsely pretended to be Nelson Lee's friend—the man who told me that Nelson Lee had gone off in the direction of Grindleford, when in reality he was exploring a ravine quite close at hand. Oh, yes, I know you now! You are Jean Moreau, the French detective. But what do you want of me?"

"I have come to ask you to grant me a private interview."

"A private interview?" repeated Hugh.

"Yes. I wish to submit certain proposals to you which are of vital interest to your future welfare. If you are disengaged this evening, or to-morrow evening—if it will suit you better—"

"I am disengaged now," said Hugh, interrupting him. "But what is the nature of the proposals you wish to submit to me?"

It was now Moreau's turn to shrug his shoulders. "You can hardly expect me to explain my proposals here," he said, glancing round the crowded station. "If you will permit me to walk back to your lodgings with you, I shall be happy to answer your question in the fullest possible manner, and I promise that I won't detain you more than half an hour at the very outside."

Hugh appeared to hesitate.

"Why do you hesitate?" demanded Moreau. "You won't bind yourself to

anything by granting me an interview. You will simply listen to what I've to say, and then, if you can't see your way to fall in with my proposals, you will wish me good-night, and the matter will be ended."

"All right," said Hugh abruptly. "Come along."

He led the way to the red-tiled cottage where he lodged. The front door of this cottage, as previously mentioned, opened straight out of the street into Hugh's sitting-room. Hugh opened the door by means of a latchkey, and signed to Moreau to enter. Moreau stepped across the threshold, and the mastiff slunk in after him.

"Hallo! You've brought a dog with you, I see!" exclaimed Hugh, catching sight of the mastiff for the first time.

"Yes," said Moreau. "He pleaded so hard to come with me that I hadn't the heart to leave him behind."

"I have a great objection to dogs in my room," said Hugh, with a frown. "I should very much prefer that you left him outside."

"But why?" said Moreau. "He won't annoy you, I assure you. He'll sit at my feet, as quiet as a lamb, and you'll never know that he's in the room. See."

He placed his hat on the table, and flung himself into an easy-chair. He held up his hand, and the mastiff immediately curled himself up at his feet.

Again Hugh appeared to hesitate. He was not acting now. He was really and truly undecided what to do. After a moment's reflection, however, he closed the door, threw off his hat, and seated himself in front of Moreau.

"And now for your proposals," he said. "Why have you asked for an interview? What have you to say to me?"

Moreau glanced round the room before he replied. On one side were the front door and the window. Another side was taken up by the fireplace and two small cupboards. On the third side was an open piano. On the fourth side were a small round table, on which stood the lamp, and a second door.

"Where does that door lead to?" asked Moreau suspiciously.

"To the kitchen," said Hugh.

"Is there anybody in the kitchen?"

"I don't think so," said Hugh. "If there is, it will only be my landlady, and she's nearly stone-deaf, so you need not be afraid of her overhearing you."

"May I take the liberty of making sure that there's nobody in the kitchen?"

"Certainly!"

Moreau rose to his feet and crossed the room. Again the mastiff slunk after him. He opened the door, and peered into the little kitchen. It was empty. He closed the door, and was about to return to his seat, when he was startled to perceive a sudden look of horrified dismay leap into Hugh Palmer's face. It was gone in an instant, and the next moment Hugh was smilingly inviting him to be seated again.

Moreau paused before he accepted the invitation. His suspicions had been aroused. What was the meaning of that look of dismay which had flitted across Hugh Palmer's face?

Once more he glanced round the room, and even as he did so he saw that the mastiff had slunk across to the piano, and was sniffing at the outside of the case.

"Your dog appears to have a taste for music," said Hugh, with a forced laugh.

"Evidently," said Moreau. "At any rate, his curiosity seems to have been roused; and, do you know, I feel just as curious myself. It is really marvellous how quickly a dog will scent the presence of a human being. I wonder if you would object to my taking a look inside that piano?"

"Why in the name of fortune should you wish to look inside a piano?" said Hugh, with a laugh that was far too boisterous to be genuine.

"Somebody might be hiding inside, you know," said Moreau significantly.

"Inside a piano?" said Hugh. "What a ridiculous idea!"

"Maybe," said Moreau curtly. "Anyhow, I'll make sure."

"You will do nothing of the kind!" cried Hugh, rushing across the room and seizing him by the arm. "I refuse to allow you——"

The sentence ended in a startled gasp, for at that moment Moreau tripped him up, and sent him sprawling on his back.

The Frenchman then made a dart towards the piano. He stretched out his hand to open the case, but even as he did so the mastiff uttered a startled yelp, the top of the piano was suddenly thrust open, and the head and shoulders of Nelson Lee appeared!

CHAPTER 23.

Which Shall It Be—Confession or Imprisonment?

"**M**ANQUER d'aplomb! Pouf! Quoiqu'il soit, cela ne m'est jamais arrive jusqu'à present, grace à Dieu! Souvent je me suis trouve en circonstances de plus grand danger, ou dans un embarras terrible, mais mon sangfroid ne me jamais échappe. Dans aucun cas ai-je perdu la tete!"

This was one of Moreau's favourite and most oft-repeated boasts. Translated into English, it meant that Jean Moreau was—or claimed to be—a perfect paragon of coolness and self-possession—that he had never been known to lose his head—that he had always, at all times and under all circumstances, retained his presence of mind, and kept his wits about him, no matter how great the danger or how desperate the situation to which he had found himself.

In nine cases out of ten a boast is a lie. In this particular instance, however, there is no denying the fact that Moreau's boast had a large amount of truth in it. It was an exaggeration, of course, to say that he had never lost his head, but the occasion on which he had done so certainly might have been counted on the fingers of one hand.

As a rule, to give him his due, the presence of danger served only to steady his nerves and sharpen his wits, and the greater the danger—the more desperate the situation in which he found himself—the greater was his coolness.

Never was this more strikingly exemplified than at the moment when Nelson Lee, like an animated jack-in-the-box, popped up out of the piano in Hugh Palmer's sitting-room. The mastiff's strange behaviour, and the look of dismay on Hugh Palmer's face, had made the Frenchman suspect that somebody was concealed inside the piano. But never for an instant did he suspect that the hidden man was Nelson Lee.

The manner in which Jean Moreau received this staggering blow was a tribute alike to his presence of mind and his consummate self-control. Inwardly his heart stood still, and the blood in his veins seemed suddenly turned to ice, but outwardly he remained as calm and as unconcerned as when he had entered the room. No terrified start, no blanching of the cheeks, no startled cry—not even an involuntary gasp—betrayed his inward fear and dismay. The slightest elevation of his eyebrows, an expressive shrug of his shoulders, a low, contemptuous laugh—these, and these alone, were the only comments Moreau made on the startling reappearance of his feared and hated rival.

"Well, have you nothing to say to me?" asked Nelson Lee, who was somewhat taken aback by Moreau's self-possession.

Again Moreau shrugged his shoulders.

"What would you have me say to you?" he asked. "If I were to say that I am surprised that the Reverend Mr. Palmer has been guilty of a dirty and dishonourable trick——"

"What's that?" cried Hugh, who had meanwhile sprang to his feet. "A dirty and dishonourable trick? Do you imply those epithets to me?"

"I do!" said Moreau boldly. "I gave you credit for being a gentleman, but I was evidently mistaken."

"What do you mean?" demanded Hugh hotly.

"I mean what I say," retorted Moreau. "You have been guilty of a dirty and ungentlemanly trick. I asked you to grant me a private interview, and you consented. You invited me here, and you told me that we were alone."

"Never!" said Hugh, interrupting him. "If I had told you a lie like that I should have been guilty of a dishonourable act. But I didn't. I told you there was nobody in the kitchen, which was perfectly true, but you never asked me if there was anybody in this room."

For the third time Moreau shrugged his shoulders, whilst at the same time he extended the palms of his hands in that characteristic fashion which only a Frenchman can achieve.

"There are spoken lies, and there are acted lies!" he said sententiously. "You may not have said in so many words, 'There is nobody in this room but ourselves,' but you certainly endeavoured—by gesture, by manner, and by indirect allusion—to make me believe that we were alone. However, that is neither here nor there, as you English say. Putting aside all questions of dishonourable conduct, the broad fact remains that you had arranged for Mr. Nelson Lee to be present, unknown to me, at an interview which I had distinctly requested you to regard as strictly private and confidential. If this means anything, it means that you are not prepared to grant me the private interview for which I ask. Such being the case, there is no longer any reason why I should trespass further on your valuable time. I have asked you to grant me a private interview, and you have refused. That is all. There is nothing more to be said on the subject, and it only remains for me to express my regret, and to wish you a very good evening!"

As he uttered these words, he picked up his hat, whistled to the mastiff, and moved towards the door.

"One moment," said Hugh. "You told me at the station that you wished to see me, in order to lay before me certain proposals of vital interest to my future welfare. You have since explained that your proposals have reference to the selling of certain valuable information which you have obtained whilst in Lord Bamford's service. What is the nature of your information? Does it relate to the present whereabouts of Martin Wraith?"

Moreau pursed up his lips.

"That is a matter which I absolutely decline to discuss in the presence of Mr. Lee," he said.

"If that is your only objection," said Nelson Lee, "it can soon be removed. I'll go for a stroll, and you can say what you have to say to Mr. Palmer whilst I'm away."

"Will you pledge your word of honour that you won't attempt to listen to our conversation?" asked Moreau, who was desperately anxious to come to terms with Hugh before the murder of Lord Bamford was discovered.

"I will," said Nelson Lee.

"Then I'm willing to fall in with your suggestion," said Moreau. "If you will leave Mr. Palmer and myself together for an hour or so, and will promise not to play the part of eavesdropper, I will explain my mission, and lay my proposals before him."

"Agreed!" said Nelson Lee, who was secretly delighted at the turn events were taking.

He took out one of his visiting-cards and scribbled a few words in pencil on the back. He donned his hat and overcoat, and opened the door. With his hand on the handle, he paused and beckoned to Hugh.

"Read and burn!" he said, slipping the card into Hugh's hand. "Au revoir! See you later."

The door closed, and he was gone.

Hugh glanced at the card, and wrinkled his brow in mystified surprise. For this was what he read :

“By hook or crook keep Moreau engaged in conversation until it is too late for him to catch the last train back to London. If you can prevent him arriving in London before eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, I think I can discover where Martin Wraith is imprisoned.”

CHAPTER 24.

In which Moreau Proves More than a Match for Hugh.

HUGH glanced at Moreau, who had seated himself in the easiest chair, and then at the clock. It was a quarter past eight. The next train for London left Firvale at nine o'clock. It would be easy, so Hugh flattered himself, to delay Jean Moreau's departure until that train had gone.

But there was another train after that—a train which left Firvale at 11.49—and the message on the card distinctly said, “Keep Moreau engaged in conversation until it is too late for him to catch the last train back to London.”

“That means that I must keep him here till a quarter to twelve, to be absolutely safe,” muttered Hugh to himself—“three hours and a half! It's a pretty big order, but I'll do it, even if I have to tie him down in his chair!”

Musing thus, he crossed the room and dropped the card into the fire. At the same instant, a reckless look swept over Moreau's face, and he half rose from his chair.

He had seen Nelson Lee take out a card and scribble something on the back. He had seen his rival hand the card to Hugh, and he had heard him utter the significant words, “Read and burn.”

Even as he rose, however, an incident occurred which caused him to change his mind, and, instead of flinging himself upon Hugh, he sank back into his chair again, and proceeded to roll a second cigarette.

The incident which caused him to change his mind was this: The fire had recently been mended, and on the top were several lumps of half-burnt coal.

When Hugh dropped the slip of pasteboard into the fire, it alighted on the sloping surface of one of these wedge-shaped pieces of coal, where it instantly began to smoulder and turn black at one end.

Before it had time to burst into flame, however, it suddenly curled up, under the influence of the heat, rolled towards the front of the grate, fluttered through the bars, and dropped between two of the gills of the old-fashioned ashpan.

Moreau witnessed the whole of this performance, and instantly made up his mind to bide his time, and to secure what remained of the card at the first available opportunity.

Hugh, unluckily, only saw the first part of the performance—that is to say, he only kept his eye on the card until he saw it begin to smoulder and turn black; then he turned his back on the fire and addressed himself to Moreau.

“And now to business, Monsieur Moreau,” he said. “What is the nature of the proposals you wish to lay before me?”

“Before I answer that question,” said Moreau, as he lit his cigarette, “I must first exact a pledge of secrecy from you. I have come here to-night, as I have already explained, for the purpose of offering to sell you certain valuable information. In order to obtain that information, I have had to commit a breach of the law, and have thereby rendered myself liable to a long term of imprisonment.

“Under these circumstances you can hardly expect me to put myself in your power by telling you what I have done, unless you first give me a solemn pledge of secrecy. In other words, before I say anything more, I must ask you to give me your sacred word of honour that, whether you accept or reject my offer, you won't reveal a single word of what I am about to tell you to any living soul.”

"Not even to Nelson Lee?" asked Hugh.

"Not even to Nelson Lee," said Moreau. "You promise?"

"No, I can't promise that," he said.

Moreau shrugged his shoulders.

"I thought I was speaking to a man!" he said sneeringly. "It now appears that I am talking to an infant, who is afraid to take a single step without the support of his guardian angel. However, since you are so timid, I will put my request in a different way. If you accept my offer you may tell Mr. Lee as much as you like. If you refuse my offer you will tell him nothing. Will you agree to that?"

"No!" said Hugh bluntly. "You must remember that I didn't invite you to come here; and consequently it is for me, and not for you, to lay down the conditions on which you shall tell me your story. So far as I am concerned, it is a matter of perfect indifference whether you tell me anything or nothing; but if you decide to lay your proposals before me you must clearly understand that I hold myself at liberty to repeat every single word you say to Nelson Lee, whether I accept your offer or whether I refuse it."

Moreau ground his teeth, and crushed back a venomous oath.

"Suppose I agree to that," he said, "will you pledge your word that before you repeat my story to Nelson Lee you will make him swear that he won't take any legal action against me?"

"No, I won't even promise that," said Hugh.

"Then I will tell you nothing!" said Moreau angrily.

"All right. Please yourself!" said Hugh cheerfully.

As he uttered these words he half turned round, so as to be ready to spring to the door if Moreau attempted to take his departure; but Moreau neither stirred nor spoke.

His declaration that he would tell Hugh nothing had merely been the outcome of an angry impulse, of which he was already beginning to repent.

He had meant it at the time, and had really intended to leave the house at once and return to London by the nine o'clock train. When it came to the point, however—when he realised that if he carried out his threat he would be giving up all hope of squeezing any money out of Hugh—his resolution began to waver.

He was loth to run any risk, but he was even more loth to abandon his cherished schemes of blackmail, and, in the end, after a brief deliberation, he decided to take the risk and to tell his story, on the conditions which Hugh had laid down.

"Very well, it shall be as you wish," he said. "I will tell you what I've done, and I'll make you my offer, and you can please yourself about telling Nelson Lee.

"And now for my story. On the Monday after Christmas Day Lord Bamford came to my office in Chancery Lane and engaged me to come down here and find out what had become of Martin Wraith. I came, and on New Year's Day I found Martin Wraith, took him to a certain house in a certain town which shall be nameless, and placed him in charge of one of my friends.

"The following day I came to Firvale Grange, and interviewed Lord Bamford. I wish to be perfectly frank and honest with you, so I will at once confess that I gave his lordship the choice of two alternatives. 'Pay me a thousand pounds a month,' I said, 'and I will engage to keep Martin Wraith a prisoner for the rest of his life. Refuse my offer, and I send him to Nelson Lee.'

"Lord Bamford chose the first alternative, and agreed to pay me a thousand pounds a month so long as Martin Wraith remained alive and in captivity. But Lord Bamford has now disappeared.

"Under these circumstances, I have decided to throw Lord Bamford over, and to try to come to terms with you. As I said just now, I wish to be perfectly frank and open with you, so I won't pretend that my action is due to remorse or to conscientious scruples, or to anything of that kind. It is purely a matter of money, so far as I am concerned.

"Martin Wraith is now as sane as ever he was. He is the only man who can prove that you are the real Lord Bamford. Without his evidence you will never succeed to the title. With his evidence you will be the Earl of Bamford, with an income of seventy thousand a year, in less than a month. Nobody knows where Martin Wraith is hidden except myself and my friend. Nelson Lee's idea, I know, is to shadow me until I lead him to the house where my prisoner is confined. But now that I have told you all this I shall never go near the house again—that is, of course, if—you are foolish enough to reject my offer."

"And what is your offer?" asked Hugh.

Moreau answered his question with another.

"Is it worth twenty thousand pounds to you," he asked, "to be able to prove that you are the real Lord Bamford?"

"Suppose I say yes?" replied Hugh. "What then?"

"Have you twenty thousand pounds?"

"I haven't twenty thousand shillings!"

"But you have wealthy and influential friends. Could you raise a loan of twenty thousand pounds in, say, three days' time?"

"I suppose I could."

"Very well," said Moreau. "If you will come to my office in Chancery Lane next Saturday and give me twenty Bank of England notes for a thousand pounds apiece, I will make you a present of Martin Wraith's address."

"And I am to do all this," said Hugh, "on the strength of your unsupported word! I am to have no proof that you are speaking the truth—no proof that Martin Wraith is a prisoner in your hands—no proof, in fact, that you know any more about the present whereabouts of Martin Wraith than I know myself!"

Moreau pulled out the letter which Martin Wraith had written in the underground vault at No. 16, Grinkle Square.

"If I show you this letter," he said, "will you swear to give it back to me as soon as you have read it?"

Hugh promised, and Moreau handed him the letter. Hugh read it and re-read it, and read it again. Then he handed it back.

"Are you satisfied now that I am speaking the truth?" asked Moreau.

"I won't go so far as that," said Hugh. "I must consult Nelson Lee before I give you a definite answer."

Moreau shook his head.

"That won't do for me," he said. "I must have your answer before I leave this house!"

"Then you will have to wait until Nelson Lee returns," said Hugh.

Moreau glanced at the clock. It was a quarter to nine.

"I had hoped to return to London by the nine o'clock train," he said. "If I am to wait for Nelson Lee that's out of the question. But there's a later train, isn't there?"

"There's a train at 11.49," said Hugh.

"Will Nelson Lee be back before then?"

"How can I tell? You heard what he said when he went out."

"Yes, I know. He said he would go for a stroll, and leave us alone for an hour or so. But he afterwards wrote something on a visiting-card, which he asked

you to read and burn, and I thought perhaps he might have written down where he was going, and when he would return."

"Then you thought wrong!" said Hugh. "He said absolutely nothing on the card about where he was going or how long he intended to be away."

"Then what did he say in his message on the card?"

"That's my business!" said Hugh curtly.

"And mine too, perhaps!" said Moreau significantly. "However, we'll let that pass. I'll wait here until half-past eleven, and if Nelson Lee hasn't returned by then, I'll give you one more chance of accepting or refusing my offer. If you accept, well and good. If you still decline to give me a definite answer, I shall consider that you have refused my offer, and you will never see or hear of Martin Wraith again. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," said Hugh.

There was an awkward pause, which lasted for nearly ten minutes. Hugh was pondering over the story which Moreau had just told him, whilst Moreau was racking his brains to devise some scheme for securing the visiting-card without attracting Hugh's attention.

"I must invent some excuse for getting him out of the room for half a minute," he said, as he puffed at his cigarette. "What excuse can I invent? I have it! I'll ask him for a glass of water. His landlady is out, so he'll have to fetch the water himself, and I can secure the card whilst he's in the kitchen."

He tossed his cigarette into the fire and pulled out a brandy-flask.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Mr. Palmer," he said, "but would you mind giving me a tumbler and a little cold water? I've had nothing to eat since I left London, and I'm beginning to feel rather faint."

Hugh crossed the room, and opened the door which led into the kitchen. With eager, glittering eyes Moreau glanced towards the ashpan, and half rose from his chair again. At the same instant, however, the back door opened, and the landlady entered the kitchen.

"Ah! You've just returned in the nick of time, Mrs. Smith," said Hugh. "Will you please bring me a tumbler and a jug of cold water?"

Moreau sank back into his chair with a muttered oath of mingled vexation and chagrin. His trick had failed. He gulped down his brandy-and-water with as much grace as he could muster, and relapsed once more into sullen silence.

At ten o'clock he suggested that Hugh should "step across" to the Fox and Hounds, and see if Nelson Lee was there. Hugh rang the bell, and asked Mrs. Smith to go. She returned with the news that Nelson Lee was not there.

At a quarter to eleven the Frenchman pretended that his watch had stopped, and asked Hugh to lend him his watchkey, hoping that Hugh would have to go up to his bed-room for it. But again his hopes were dashed to the ground, for Hugh politely explained that his watch was a keyless one, and that he didn't possess such a thing as a key.

At last the clock chimed half-past eleven.

"Ten minutes more!" muttered Hugh to himself. "The train leaves at eleven minutes to twelve, and it's a good ten minutes' run from here to the station, so that if I can keep him here for another ten minutes, I shall have done all that Nelson Lee requires."

"Are you going?" he asked, as Moreau rose to his feet.

"I am," said Moreau. And he added under his breath: "But I'm not going till I've got that visiting-card!"

"It seems a pity to go without seeing Nelson Lee after waiting all this time," suggested Hugh.

"It does," admitted Moreau. "Suppose you take a look outside, and see if there's any sign of him. If he happened to be coming down the road, there would be still time for you to consult him, and give me your answer before I leave."

Suspecting nothing, and thinking that it would serve to waste a few more minutes, Hugh readily fell in with this crafty suggestion. At least, he pretended to fall in with it. He had a shrewd suspicion that Nelson Lee had gone to London by the nine o'clock train, and, consequently, he did not consider it worth his while to take the trouble to look out for him. Instead of walking out into the middle of the road, therefore, as Moreau expected he would do, he merely opened the door, stepped across the threshold, stole to the outside of the window, and peered into the room, so as to make perfectly sure that Moreau did not attempt to leave the house whilst he was away.

The moment Hugh left the room, Moreau dropped on his knees in front of the fire, thrust his fingers between the gills of the ashpan, and fished out the coveted card. No sooner had he done so than the mastiff, which was lying at full length on the rug, raised its head and uttered a warning growl.

Having secured the card, Moreau rose to his feet and eagerly examined it. One half of the card, as already explained, had been partly charred by the heat, but the writing on the other half was still as distinct as when Nelson Lee had written it.

Ere Moreau had time to read it, however, the mastiff suddenly leaped to its feet, with a startled bark, whilst at the same instant Hugh rushed back into the room, and caught the Frenchman by the throat.

"You blackguard," he cried, shaking Moreau as a terrier shakes a rat, "that's what you were waiting for, is it? That's why you asked me to go outside! You saw the card fall out of the fire, and you wanted to have a look at it before you left. But you haven't read it yet, I know, and I'll take jolly good care——"

That was all he was allowed to say. Whilst he had been speaking, the mastiff had been growing more and more excited, and, just as Hugh uttered the words recorded above, the huge brute suddenly sprang at him from behind, and fastened its teeth in the calf of his leg.

With an involuntary cry of pain, Hugh relaxed his grip on Moreau's throat, and in the twinkling of an eye the latter wrested himself free.

"Hold him! Good dog! Hold him!" he cried. Then he darted across to the lamp, and eagerly scanned the mutilated card. And this is what he read:

.....keep Moreau engaged in
until it is too late for him
last train back to London
prevent him arriving in
fore eleven o'clock to-morrow
I can discover where
aith is imprisoned

For a moment, but only for a moment, Moreau gazed at the card in mystified bewilderment. Then an inkling of the truth stole into his brain, and he rapped out a furious oath.

"I see it all!" he muttered to himself. "Nelson Lee has gone to London, probably by the nine o'clock train. By some means or other he has obtained a clue to the whereabouts of Martin Wraith, and he thinks that if I can be kept out of the way until eleven o'clock to-morrow morning he'll have time to follow up his clue, and find the house where Wraith is imprisoned."

He glanced at the clock. It wanted twenty minutes to twelve. He had nine minutes in which to catch the train.

He snatched up his hat, and turned to Hugh, who was still struggling with the mastiff.

"Good-bye for the present!" said Moreau, with a mocking bow. "If I drop across Nelson Lee in London, I'll tell him you played your cards remarkably well, but the mastiff euchred you."

He sprang to the door, and whistled to the dog. The latter immediately shook

Hugh off, and bounded after Moreau. A moment later both man and dog were tearing down the village street with the fleetness of the wind.

Despite the pain of his wounded leg, Hugh instantly dashed away in hot pursuit. But the chase was a hopeless one from the first, and by the time Hugh reached the bottom of the station hill Jean Moreau and his dog had vanished through the big wooden gates.

The train was already in the station. The guard had waved his lamp, the driver had blown his whistle, and the wheels were beginning to revolve.

"First-class smoker!" yelled Moreau as he raced along the platform.

A porter sprang on to the footboard of the moving train, and opened a carriage door. Then his eye fell on the mastiff.

"You can't take that dog into the carriage with you, sir," he said, as Moreau bounded up.

Moreau thrust a florin into the porter's hand.

"I'll put him into the van at the first stopping-place!" he panted.

He sprang into the carriage; and the mastiff followed suit. The porter slammed the door, and sprang down on to the platform. Then Hugh dashed into the station, just in time to see the tail-lights of the train vanish round the curve.

"Failed!" The word burst from Hugh's lips with something suspiciously like a sob. "It's the only thing that Nelson Lee ever asked me to do for him, and I've made a mess of it!"

Poor Hugh! He thought he was eternally disgraced because he had allowed Jean Moreau to outwit him. Possibly it might have been some consolation to him if some little bird could have whispered in his ear that Nelson Lee was destined to be just as completely outwitted by this same intrepid Frenchman within the next few hours.

CHAPTER 25.

Startling News for Moreau.

THE 11.49 from Firvale was due at Derby in time to catch the South Express, which would have landed Moreau at St. Pancras a few minutes after six o'clock in the morning. Midway between Buxton and Derby, however, a carriage left the rails, and although no serious damage was done, the line was blocked for close upon a couple of hours. In consequence of this delay it was nearly eight o'clock when Moreau stepped out of the train, and found himself once more in London.

His last encounter with Nelson Lee had made the Frenchman wary, and he had no intention of walking into another trap.

"Nelson Lee is in London," he argued to himself. "Hugh Palmer has had time to wire to him that I left Firvale by the midnight train. If Nelson Lee has found Martin Wraith, he will be waiting for me at the house in Grinkle Square. If he hasn't found Martin Wraith, he will either be lurking outside this station, or else outside my office in Chancery Lane, for the purpose of shadowing me until I lead him to the house where Martin Wraith is imprisoned. Clearly, then, I mustn't go near Grinkle Square, nor near Chancery Lane, until I've ascertained exactly how the land lies. I'll go to Buster's."

"Buster" was the nickname of a notorious "fence" (a receiver of stolen goods), whom Moreau had frequently employed in some of his shadiest cases, and who lived in a grimy, tumbledown house in Dobbler's Court, which is the name of an ill-famed alley in Bermondsey, almost exactly opposite St. Katherine Docks. He was well-known to the police, having spent at least a third of his life in gaol, and was altogether a man after Moreau's own heart.

It was a quarter to nine when Moreau reached Dobbler's Court, and by nine o'clock he had placed the fence in full possession of all the facts of the case.

"So now you understand how matters stand," he said, in conclusion. "I daren't go to the house in Grinkle Square, and I daren't either write or telegraph to Zacharie, until I know for certain that Nelson Lee isn't there. What I want you to do, therefore, is this: I want you to go to Grinkle Square and spy out the land. Knock at the door of No. 16, and if it's opened by a hunchback, tell him I've sent you, and ask him if it's safe for me to come. If the door is opened by Nelson Lee, or by a policeman, you'll know that the game is up, and you'll have to pretend that you're a tramp, or a beggar, or something of that kind, who has called to solicit alms. In either case, of course, you will come back here and give me your report as quickly as you can."

"And you'll wait 'ere till I come back?"

"Of course," said Moreau.

"Righto!" said Buster. "I twig the idea."

He donned his greasy cap, and left the house. He was absent about an hour and three-quarters, and returned to Dobbler's Court at twenty minutes to eleven."

"Hullo, you've come back, I see!" he said, on seeing Moreau.

"Come back?" said Moreau. "What do you mean? I haven't been out."

"Walker!" said Buster, with a cunning leer. "Tell that to somebody wot doesn't know! You've been to your office whilst I've been away."

"I've never set foot outside this house since you left," said Moreau.

"Then your clerk's a blessed liar!"

"My clerk?" repeated Moreau, bewildered.

"Yes," said Buster—"that red-headed chap wot sits on a stool in your outer office in Chancery Lane."

"You have seen him?"

"Yes, I went from 'ere to Grinkle Square, and, as everything seemed quiet and peaceful-like, I knocked at the door of No. 16. It was opened by that hunchback chap, so I gave him your message, and he told me I was to tell you that all was O K, and that nobody had been nigh the house since you left."

"I then started back for 'ere, and at the bottom of Lombard Street I met your clerk."

"Hullo, young man," sez I, 'you're 'aving a day off whilst the boss is away, are you?'

"No blessed fear!' sez he. 'The boss isn't away. He's very much on the job this morning.'

"But the boss is at my 'ouse," sez I. 'He's waiting there till I go back.'

"Oh, no, he isn't!" sez he. 'He's at the office, and don't you forget it! He turned up this morning at ten o'clock as fresh as paint, and the first thing he did was to give me this note to take to a man at the far end of Mile End Road. He said I needn't hurry back——'

That was all Moreau wanted to hear. He sprang to his feet, with a curious imprecation.

"Is this the truth you're telling me?" he gasped.

"Of course it is!" said Buster in an aggrieved voice. "Why should I tell you a lie? It strikes me that if anybody's lying, it's either you or your clerk. You've either been to your office this morning, or you haven't."

"I haven't!" said Moreau. "The whole thing is a plant of Nelson Lee's! He has disguised himself as me, and has gone to my office in Chancery Lane to overhaul my private papers and seek for some clue to the whereabouts of Martin Wraith! The man who turned up at my office at ten o'clock this morning was Nelson Lee. By sending my clerk with a bogus message to Mile End Road he has got the place to himself for a couple of hours. He is now engaged in rummaging my books and papers, and if he succeeds in opening my private safe, all is lost."

He snatched up his hat and sprang to the door. Then he paused, and held out his hand.

"Lend me a life-preserver," he said.

Buster whipped out a short, thick, loaded cane, and thrust it into Moreau's hand. The Frenchman then dashed out of the house, raced to the end of the court, and hailed a passing hansom.

"The Holborn end of Chancery Lane!" he said as he jumped in. "And drive like the very deuce!"

CHAPTER 26.

An Unexpected Slice of Luck.

JEAN MOREAU was right. Nelson Lee had taken a leaf out of his rival's book. As Moreau suspected, he had disguised himself as Moreau, and had gone to the latter's office in Chancery Lane to hunt for some clue to the fate of Lord Bamford and the whereabouts of Martin Wraith.

It need scarcely be said that Nelson Lee had not embarked on an audacious enterprise of this kind without first taking the most elaborate precautions to guard against surprise.

Having handed his card to Hugh, with the significant order "Read and burn," he walked to the station, caught the nine o'clock train, and arrived in London at two o'clock on Thursday morning. As it was then too late—or, rather, too early—to commence his operations, he chartered a hansom and drove to his rooms in Gray's Inn Road.

He unlocked a tin despatch-box, swept the unopened letters inside, locked the box, and went to bed.

He rose at half-past six, and by a quarter to eight he had transformed himself into an exact facsimile of Jean Moreau. Half an hour sufficed for breakfast, and at a quarter past eight he took a seat in a hansom and gave the order:

"Lordship Park, Stoke Newington."

Ten minutes after he had left his rooms, a telegram arrived from Hugh: "Failed, M. left for London 11.49 last night. Could not wire earlier, as office not open till 8 a.m. Hope this will be in time to prevent awkward complications.—PALMER."

In blissful ignorance of the fact that his rival was in London, Nelson Lee drove to Stoke Newington, and rang the bell of a handsome house in Lordship Park.

"Is Mr. Salter at home?" he asked of the housemaid who answered his ring.

"Yes, sir. Do you wish to see him?"

"Please."

"What name, sir?"

"Mr. Nelson Lee."

The housemaid ushered him into the drawing-room, where he was presently joined by Mr. Henry Salter, a private inquiry agent, with an office not a hundred miles from the Guildhall.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed as he entered the room. "What's the meaning of this? You told my housemaid you were Nelson Lee."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"So I am!" he said in his natural voice.

Salter nearly jumped out of his skin. He strode across the room, turned the detective with his face to the window, and stared at him with open-mouthed admiration.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he gasped at last. "I've seen some clever disguises in my time—I flatter myself I can do a bit in that line myself—but this beats all the disguises I ever saw. Upon my life, if it was not for the voice, I'd be willing to go into court and take my oath that you were Monsieur Moreau! What's the little game?"

"I wrote to you from Firvale last Sunday," said Nelson Lee, "asking you to have certain stations watched by men who knew Jean Moreau by sight, and to wire to the Rev. Hugh Palmer if Moreau was seen to leave for the north."

"You did," said Salter, "and I carried out your instructions. One of my men, I understand, saw Jean Moreau entrain at St. Pancras at half-past two yesterday afternoon, and wired to Mr. Palmer as instructed. There was no mistake, I hope."

"Oh, no—no mistake at all!" said Nelson Lee. "The fact of the matter is this. I am in want of certain information concerning the fate of a couple of men who have recently disappeared. If I can have an hour alone in Moreau's office, I hope and believe that I can obtain this information. Moreau is at present out of town, and I have every reason to believe that he won't return before eleven o'clock this morning."

"So you are going to take his place at the office?" said Salter.

"Exactly!" said Nelson Lee. "I'm going to turn up at his office at ten o'clock, and I'm going to send his clerk away with a bogus message to a non-existent man at the other end of London. In this way I shall get the office to myself, and in an hour's time—perhaps in less—I shall have obtained the information I require."

"It's risky," said Salter, shaking his head. "Suppose Jean Moreau happens to return a little bit earlier than you expect? Suppose he happens to pop his head into his office when you're hard at work rifling his drawers and papers? It isn't very likely to occur, I'll admit, but all the same it's a danger you've got to reckon with. If I were you, I should take a man who knows Jean Moreau by sight, and I should post him outside the office, and I should give him instructions to keep a sharp look-out, and to let you know the moment he saw Monsieur Moreau approaching."

"That's the very thing I've come to see you about," said Nelson Lee. "I knew you wouldn't be down at your office until ten o'clock, so I drove up here to ask you for the name and address of that young fellow who was at St. Pancras yesterday afternoon, and who wired to Mr. Palmer. He knows Jean Moreau by sight; he is evidently accustomed to this kind of work; and, altogether, he's just the man I want. What is his name, and where does he live?"

"His name is Toyne," said Salter. "He lodges at No. 156, Loretia Road, which is a small side-street off Kennington Road. He's a decent young fellow. Don't get him into a scrape if you can help it."

"I won't," said Nelson Lee, as he picked up his hat. "Many thanks for your help. Good-morning."

He re-entered his hansom, and drove to Loretia Road, arriving there about half-past nine. He explained his plans to Toyne, and presented him with a small brass whistle.

"Now, you quite understand what I want you to do?" he said, in conclusion. "You will drive with me as far as the Law Courts. At the Law Courts we shall dismiss the hansom, and turn into Chancery Lane. We shall then separate, as I do not wish us to be seen together more than I can help, and you will walk up Chancery Lane on the left-hand side of the road, and I on the right-hand side."

"On the right-hand side, just above Cursitor Street, is a block of buildings known as Furnival Chambers. Moreau's office is on the second floor, up two flights of stairs. As soon as you have seen me turn into this building, you will cross the road and post yourself outside the door. If Moreau doesn't turn up, you will have nothing to do but to walk up and down in front of the door, without attracting too much notice to yourself, until I come down and tell you that I no

longer need your services. If Moreau does turn up whilst I am in the building, you will instantly rush to the bottom of the stairs, the moment you catch sight of him, and blow that whistle as loudly as ever you can. You will then slip away before Monsieur Moreau sees you, and make tracks for your lodgings, or anywhere else you like."

"And what will you do when you hear the whistle?" asked Toyne.

"I shall make my escape by the rear of the building," said Nelson Lee. "You see, I am going to commit a breach of the law by tampering with Monsieur Moreau's property, and I should be liable to be sent to prison if he were to arrive before I had time to get away."

"Then wouldn't it be better for me to wait for you after I have blown the whistle?" suggested Toyne. "I might be able to render you some assistance, if anything happened to cut off your retreat."

"No. I would rather you disappeared as soon as you have blown the whistle," said Nelson Lee. "I promised Mr. Salter that I wouldn't get you into any scrape, and I don't want to drag you any deeper into this business than I can possibly help. The chances are ten to one that I shall have finished and left the place before Monsieur Moreau arrives. But, if he should arrive whilst I am there, then all that I require you to do is to blow that whistle and disappear. Is that perfectly clear?"

"Perfectly," said Toyne.

"Then come along," said Nelson Lee.

They entered the detective's hansom and drove away. As they rattled over Westminster Bridge they perceived that a thick yellow fog was rising from the river and was drifting away towards the north. By the time they reached the Strand the fog was so dense that several of the shops had already switched on the electric light.

At the Law Courts they alighted, and groped their way up Chancery Lane, Nelson Lee on one side of the road and Toyne on the other. At two minutes past ten Nelson Lee turned into Furnival Chambers, whilst Toyne crossed over the fog-enshrouded street and took his stand outside the door.

Moreau's office, as already stated, was on the second floor. Properly speaking, there were two offices, an outer one and an inner one. The outer office was entered from the landing at the top of the stairs, and was divided down the middle by a long mahogany counter, one end of which was screened off as a writing-desk. The inner office could only be entered through the outer one, for which purpose there were two doors, one on the inside of the counter, for the use of Moreau and his clerk, and one on the outside of the counter, for the use of clients. A person in the inner office, therefore, could only reach the landing outside by passing through the outer office.

In the outer office, in addition to the counter and desk were a copying-press, on a wooden stand, and a couple of stools. In the inner office were a knee-hole desk, three or four chairs, a bookcase, and a ponderous piece of furniture, consisting of an iron safe, with drawers above and below.

"What a fool I shall look if Moreau happens to be here already!" muttered Nelson Lee, as he toiled up the two flights of stairs. "He may have given Palmer the slip last night, and he may have come straight to his office this morning; in which case there will be nothing left for me to do but to take to my heels in ignominious flight!"

His fears, however, proved to be groundless. Upon reaching the landing at the top of the second flight of stairs he saw that the red-haired clerk had just arrived, and was in the act of unlocking the door of the outer office. It was evident from this that Moreau himself had not yet arrived. And as soon as the

clerk had entered the office Nelson Lee marched boldly in and saluted him with a cheery "Good-morning!" in a perfect imitation of the Frenchman's voice.

The clerk was evidently surprised to see his employer down so early, but it was plain to be seen that he had not the remotest suspicion that the man before him was not Jean Moreau.

"Good-morning, sir!" he said, as he switched on the electric light, and hung up his hat, and proceeded to unbutton his overcoat. "How quickly this fog has come on. Do you think it's going to last?"

"It looks like lasting," said Nelson Lee. "Er—you needn't trouble to take off your coat. I want you to take a note to a client of mine in Mile End Road."

"In Mile End Road?" repeated the clerk, pulling a wry face.

Nelson Lee made no reply. He raised the flap of the counter, and seated himself at the desk. He scribbled half a dozen lines on a sheet of paper, enclosed it in an envelope, and inscribed it with a name and address which existed only in his imagination.

"Shall I take a hansom?" suggested the clerk.

"Oh, no!" said Nelson Lee. "It's only a paltry case, and I sha'n't get much more than the price of a cab fare out of it myself. You must walk, but you needn't hurry. If you're back here by half-past twelve that'll do for me. Here's the note. There's no answer."

He handed the note to the clerk, who thereupon donned his hat and left the building. How he met Buster at the bottom of Lombard Street; how he told Buster that Moreau was at the office; how Buster insisted that Moreau was at Dobbler's Court; how Buster returned to Dobbler's Court, and told Jean Moreau what he had heard; how Moreau instantly guessed that the man at the office was Nelson Lee—all this the reader already knows.

As soon as the clerk had left the office, Nelson Lee immediately set to work to carry out the object of his visit. First of all he inspected the rear of the building, and made himself acquainted with the various means of exit. He then returned to the outer office, closed the door, pulled out a bunch of skeleton-keys, and opened the two doors which led into the inner office. Having switched on the electric light in the inner office, and having drawn down the blind, he returned once more to the outer office, and opened the door an inch or two, in order that he might hear Toyne's whistle if Moreau returned before he had finished his labours.

"It's no use wasting any time here," he mused, as he glanced round the outer office. "It isn't likely that Moreau would keep any important documents in those drawers underneath the counter, or in that writing-desk. I shall find the information I require in one of the drawers of the knee-hole desk in the inner office, or else in the safe. I'll begin with the knee-hole desk."

Musing thus, he entered the inner office, leaving the doors ajar, and set to work with his skeleton-keys on the locks of the drawers in the knee-hole desk. When all the drawers had been opened, he carefully examined all their contents, which consisted almost entirely of books and papers. But, although he discovered sufficient evidence, in connection with other cases, to send Jean Moreau to penal servitude for the rest of his life—although he found the solutions of three of the biggest mysteries of recent years, he found nothing—absolutely nothing—relating to Lord Bamford's fate, or the whereabouts of Martin Wraith.

"Half-past ten!" he muttered, glancing at his watch. "That's half an hour wasted. However, I've settled one point at any rate. If the clue for which I am seeking is anywhere in this office, it's in that safe."

He crossed the room and examined the outside of the safe.

"Pretty old, by the look of it," he mused. "Picked up cheap in an auction

room, I should say. What's the lock? Ho, ho! Simple, unsophisticated Barron, patented in 1778. It won't take me long to pick that, thank goodness!"

He whipped out his bunch of skeleton-keys, but even as he did so his quick ear caught the sound of a footstep on the landing. A moment later the door of the outer office was pushed open, and the rustle of silken skirts fell on his ears.

"A woman!" he muttered, under his breath. "This is more than I bargained for! However, I must invent some excuse for sending her away as speedily as possible."

There was an impatient tap on the counter. Nelson Lee put on his most business-like air, and walked into the outer office.

"An extremely pretty woman, still on the sunny side of fifty, richly and stylishly dressed and robed in costly furs, was standing at the counter.

"Ah, good-morning, Monsieur Moreau!" she exclaimed, when Nelson Lee appeared. "I am so glad to have found you! I was afraid you might be away from home. Are you alone?"

"I am alone; but I am very busy this morning, madam," said Nelson Lee. "It is impossible, I am afraid, for me to grant you an interview this morning."

"But you must!" she exclaimed, stamping her foot. "I've come all the way from Nice for the sole purpose of consulting you."

Nice! The name sent a thrill of excitement through Nelson Lee's nerves. He remembered to have heard that Lady Bamford—whom he had never seen—had left Firvale on New Year's Eve, and had gone to Nice for a month or six weeks. Was it possible—could it be—that the woman before him was Lady Bamford?

Her next words settled the point beyond all doubt.

"I really believe you don't recognise me, Monsieur Moreau," she said. "I am Lady Bamford, the mother of Lord Bamford, of Firvale Grange. You saw me at the Grange, you know, a day or two before I went to Nice."

Nelson Lee bowed. He could not trust himself to speak. His heart was thumping noisily against his ribs, and his brain was in a mad whirl of suppressed excitement.

"I happened to pick up an English newspaper at Nice on Tuesday morning," she continued, speaking rapidly and excitedly, "and the first thing which caught my eyes was the startling headlines: 'Sensational Affair! Attempted Murder of Nelson Lee! Flight and Escape of His Assailant!' Upon reading the account, I found to my horror, that the man who had attempted to murder Nelson Lee was my son, Lord Bamford.

"Now, what does all this mean, Monsieur Moreau? Lord Bamford is your—client—you know more about his private affairs than any other living man—and it is to you that I naturally turn for information. Why did Lord Bamford attempt to murder Nelson Lee? Where did he go when he fled? Where is he now?"

She paused, and Nelson Lee glanced at his watch. It was twenty minutes to eleven.

"I'll do it," he soliloquised. "This is an unexpected slice of luck, and I should be a fool not to take advantage of it. Both Lady Bamford and Martin Wraith possess the key to the mystery I have set myself to solve. Both of these can give me all the information which is necessary to prove that Hugh Palmer is the real Lord Bamford. If I send her ladyship away, and open the safe, and find out where Martin Wraith is imprisoned, I shall still have to wait until I have liberated him before I obtain the proofs I require. On the other hand, if I grant Lady Bamford an interview, I sha'n't have to wait at all. She thinks I'm Jean Moreau, and, consequently, with a little judicious pumping, I ought to have no difficulty

in persuading her to tell me the whole story of how it comes about that Hugh Palmer is Lord Bamford."

He waved his hand towards the door on the outside of the counter which led into the inner office.

"Kindly step into my private office," he said. "I am very busy this morning, as I have already told you; but I think I can spare you a quarter of an hour, at any rate."

She entered the inner office, and seated herself in one of the chairs. Nelson Lee followed suit, closing the door on the inside of the counter, but leaving the other ajar.

At that moment Jean Moreau was climbing into a hansom at the end of Dobler's Court, and was giving the order, "The Holborn End of Chancery Lane. And drive like the very deuce!"

CHAPTER 27.

Cornered.

"NOW, what is it your ladyship wishes to know?" asked Nelson Lee, as he seated himself on the opposite side of the knee-hole desk.

"In the first place," she replied, "where is Lord Bamford?"

"I do not know. I have neither seen his lordship, nor heard from him, for more than a week."

"Why did he try to murder Nelson Lee?"

"Because he wanted to get rid of him, I suppose."

"Why? Has Nelson Lee found Martin Wraith?"

"Oh, dear, no! He only wishes he had."

"You speak very confidently. Have you found Martin Wraith?"

Nelson Lee pursed up his lips.

"Pardon me," he said, "that is a question I must decline to answer. It would be a gross breach of professional etiquette for a detective to discuss his client's private affairs with a third person. Lord Bamford is my client, not your ladyship, and any information I may have obtained, any discovery I may have made, whilst in his lordship's employ, is as sacred as the secrets of the confessional."

"But there are no secrets between myself and Lord Bamford," she urged. "In this affair I am as much your client as Lord Bamford. It was Lord Bamford who engaged you, I admit; but he really engaged you as much on my behalf as on his own. If you knew everything, you would see in a minute that you need not fear to speak as freely to me as to Lord Bamford."

"But I don't know everything," said Nelson Lee, "and for that reason I hesitate to run the risk of committing a breach of confidence. Of course, if your ladyship likes to tell me everything, I may possibly see my way to reconsider my decision, and tell you what I know, and what I have done."

He held his breath to catch her reply. He had baited the hook. Would the fish bite?

For a moment Lady Bamford did not speak. Nelson Lee glanced at his watch again. It was a quarter to eleven. Then her ladyship spoke.

"When Lord Bamford engaged you," she said, "he simply told you he wished you to find Martin Wraith. He also gave you to understand, I believe, that he was desperately anxious to get rid of Martin Wraith, in order to prevent him revealing a certain secret. He did not tell you what this secret was, but doubtless you have guessed."

"I imagine," said Nelson Lee, "that Martin Wraith is in possession of certain

information which would prove that your son is an impostor, and that Hugh Palmer is the real Lord Bamford."

"That is only part of the secret," she replied. "If Martin Wraith were to reveal the whole of what he knows, he would not only ruin Lord Bamford, but he would send me to penal servitude for the rest of my life."

"For attempting to murder him, twenty years ago?" suggested Nelson Lee, quite calmly.

Lady Bamford started, and turned pale.

"Lord Bamford has told you, then?" she gasped.

"Lord Bamford has told me nothing," said Nelson Lee. "I am merely putting two and two together. But we are wasting time. Is your ladyship prepared to make an end of all this mystery—to tell me everything—or must I once again remind you that I am very busy this morning?"

She paused a moment before she replied. Then a look of reckless determination crossed her face.

"I will tell you everything," she said. "Now that Lord Bamford has disappeared, it is with me that you will have to deal in future, so I may as well make a clean breast of the whole affair, and then we shall know exactly how we stand.

"To begin at the very beginning, I must first tell you that I was formerly an actress. Towards the end of 1879, when I was playing a small part at the Gaiety, I made the acquaintance of the ninth Lord Bamford. He soon began to pay me marked attentions, which culminated in a proposal, and in September, 1880, we were married.

"After my marriage, of course, I left the stage, and went to live at Firvale Grange. In July, 1881, I presented my husband, much to his delight, with a son and heir.

"At that time my husband's brother, the Hon. Mr. Palmer, was living at Firvale Lodge, which is now a boys' school. Mr. Palmer had married somewhat early, and his wife had borne him a son about three weeks before my marriage. This son was christened Hugh. He is now the Rev. Hugh Palmer, and he was rather more than twelve months old when my baby was born.

"When my baby was five weeks old—that is to say, in August, 1881—there was an outbreak of diphtheria in the village. Several of the servants at the Grange were attacked, and before the end of the month my husband also took the disease. Martin Wraith, who was then the principal doctor in the place, attended him; but, in spite of all he could do, my husband died. My baby then became the tenth Lord Bamford; whilst at the same time, under my husband's will, I became entitled to an income of fifteen thousand a year so long as the baby lived, and until he attained the age of twenty-one.

"So much of my story everybody knows. My marriage with the ninth Lord Bamford, the birth of my son, the death of my husband—all these were reported in the papers at the time. But now comes the secret part of my story—the part which is only known to Lord Bamford, myself, and Martin Wraith. Two days after my husband's death——"

The shrill blast of a loudly-blown whistle re-echoed through the building.

"What's that?" said Lady Bamford, breaking off with a sudden start.

Nelson Lee crushed back a savage imprecation. He knew what it was! It was the signal that Moreau had arrived—just when Nelson Lee was on the point of obtaining the key to the mystery. It was a cruel blow. But, still, there might yet be time.

"It's only somebody blowing a whistle," he said hurriedly. "Pray continue your story. Two days after your husband's death——"

"But there's somebody running up the stairs," she said. "I can hear them. What has happened?"

"Never mind what's happening outside," he said. "Finish your story. Two days after your husband's death——"

She gazed at him with wide-open eyes. She saw that every fibre of his being was quivering with suppressed excitement. Her suspicions were aroused. As for Nelson Lee, he was almost beside himself with mortification and chagrin.

"Answer me at once," he said fiercely. "What happened two days after your husband's death? Tell me instantly!"

She rose from her chair, and faced him with flashing eyes. The footsteps were now on the landing outside.

"I will tell you nothing!" she said coldly. "I believe——"

That was all he waited to hear. He sprang from his chair, and darted into the outer office. At the same instant the door was flung open, and Moreau rushed in, with a life-preserver in his hand.

Hoping to take the Frenchman by surprise, Nelson Lee made a dash for the door. But Moreau was too quick for him. With lightning-like rapidity he lashed out with the loaded cane and dealt his rival a vicious blow between the eyes.

Half-stunned by the blow, Nelson Lee reeled backwards, and measured his length on the floor. Nothing daunted, he leaped to his feet again. But even as he did so Moreau whipped out his revolver, and levelled it at his head.

"Hands up, or I fire!" cried Moreau exultingly. "Hands up, my worthy friend. You've put yourself into my power this time and no mistake, and, by gad, I'll have my pound of flesh!"

Nelson Lee held up his hands. He knew that he was cornered—that he was standing, as it were, on the brink of professional ruin—yet his face betrayed neither fear nor despair. He was not a braggart, like his rival. He did not boast, as Moreau did, that he had never been known to lose his presence of mind. But when it came to the pinch, there was no man in the world—certainly not Jean Moreau—who was worthy to be named as his equal for absolute coolness and perfect self-possession.

"I must bide my time," he muttered to himself, as he held up his hands in obedience to Moreau's command. "I'm helpless so long as he keeps his eye on me; but he doesn't yet know that Lady Bamford is in the inner office, so that if her ladyship should suddenly reveal herself the probabilities are that she will distract his attention for a moment; and then will come my chance!"

"When last we met," continued Moreau, still covering him with the revolver, "you offered me the choice between confession and imprisonment. I am sorry I can't return the compliment. I have now got the chance of sending you to prison, and I wouldn't barter such a glorious chance for all the confessions in the world. At the same time, if you have any explanation to offer before I send for a policeman, I shall be happy to hear it."

"Explanation!" said Nelson Lee, with a fine air of pretended indignation. "I like that. Surely, if anybody is entitled to demand an explanation, it is myself. Who are you? Why have you faked yourself up to look like me? What is your object in coming to my office and assaulting me in this outrageous fashion? What do you mean by pretending that we have met before, and by threatening to send for the police? Upon my word, if it wasn't for this lump on my head, I should almost be tempted to think that I was dreaming. You disguise yourself as me, you force your way into my office, you knock me down, you threaten me with a revolver, and then you talk about sending for a policeman. Sapristi! if this is your idea of a practical joke, I'll make you pay for it, as sure as my name is Moreau!"

"Very clever. Very well done!" said Moreau, with an ironical smile. "But

what's the use of it all? You know the game is up, so why prolong the comedy? At the risk of boring you, I will venture to repeat another of the wise remarks you made to me when last we met. On that occasion you said to me, 'You are a very good actor, Monsieur Moreau, but your histrionic powers are wasted here!' That's what I say to you now. You are a very good actor, Mr. Nelson Lee, but——"

"Nelson Lee! Good heavens! is it Nelson Lee?"

It was Lady Bamford who spoke, and her words rang out across the office in a perfect wail of mingled horror and dismay.

Standing beside the open door of the inner office, invisible to Moreau, she had listened to the foregoing conversation with bated breath. She had guessed from Moreau's opening words that the man to whom she had been talking was not the man he had pretended to be, but it had never crossed her mind that he was Nelson Lee. The consequence was that the moment she heard Jean Moreau pronounce the great detective's name—the moment she realised that she had been unbosoming herself to her deadliest foe—she was instantly overwhelmed with consternation and dismay, and almost before she knew what she was doing, she staggered to the open door with the agitated query, "Nelson Lee! Good heavens! is it Nelson Lee?"

To say that Moreau was startled by this sudden apparition is to put the matter too mildly. For once, at any rate, his vaunted presence of mind deserted him. To use a colloquial expression, he "nearly jumped out of his skin" at the sound of Lady Bamford's voice, whilst the sight of her horror-stricken face so completely "knocked the wind out of him" that he literally gasped for breath.

"You—you here!" he gasped, staring at her in stupefied bewilderment. "What——"

"Take care! He's going to attack you!"

Again it was Lady Bamford who spoke—screamed would be the better word. But her warning came too late. Whilst Moreau had been speaking he had allowed his eyes to wander from the face of Nelson Lee to that of Lady Bamford.

This, as the reader knows, was all that Nelson Lee was waiting for, and in the twinkling of an eye he darted forward and struck up the Frenchman's arm with so much force that the revolver went flying to the other end of the office. At the same instant he lunged out with his other fist, and dealt his rival a blow on the chest that knocked him clean off his feet.

Flushed with triumph, he then sprang over the Frenchman's prostrate form, and darted towards the door. Ere he reached it, however, Jean Moreau scrambled to his feet, and leaped upon him from behind, whilst at the same time he rent the air with excited yells of "Murder! Police! Thieves!"

In response to his shouts, the occupants of the other offices on the second floor flocked out on to the landing in a state of seething excitement. Their example was quickly followed by those on the other floors, and in an incredibly short space of time the building echoed with the sound of opening doors, the hum of excited voices, and the tramp of hurrying feet.

It was a desperate situation—one of the most desperate situations in which Nelson Lee had ever found himself. But never for an instant did his self-possession fail him. Finding that he could not shake the Frenchman off, he spun round on his heel, and flung himself backwards against the wall with all the force at his command.

As Moreau was against him, with his arms round Nelson Lee's neck, the effect of this manœuvre was to dash the Frenchman against the wall.

So violent was the shock that Moreau was completely winded, and in less time than it takes to tell, Nelson Lee adroitly wriggled himself free, seized his rival round the waist, and literally threw him to the other side of the counter.

Snatching up Moreau's revolver, he then rushed out on to the landing. Seeing that he was armed, the crowd retreated with cries of alarm, and before they had recovered from their panic, he had gained the head of a flight of stairs which led down into the yard at the rear of the building.

By the time he reached the foot of these stairs the crowd above had regained their presence of mind, and a moment later, with Moreau at their head, they came thundering after him in hot and furious pursuit.

But it was then too late. They streamed out into the fog-enshrouded yard, just in time to see him scale the wall and drop down on the other side.

They followed his example, and saw him again, but only for an instant, on the roof of a low outbuilding at the back of the Patent Office. And after that they saw him no more.

As a matter of fact, after dropping off the roof of the outbuilding at the back of the Patent Office, he made his way into the courtyard of Staple Inn, and from there into Holborn, where he found, to his surprise, that Toyne was awaiting him.

"This is rank disobedience!" said Nelson Lee, with a frown. "I told you to go home as soon as you had blown the whistle."

"I know you did," said Toyne. "But I guessed you would make your escape in this direction, so I thought I'd just wait here for a minute or two, in order to make sure that you had got away all right. Did Moreau see you?"

"He did," said Nelson Lee.

"Did he recognise you?"

"Yes; but I got away before he could unmask me, so he'll never be able to prove it was me. Would you like to help me again?"

"Indeed I would!" said Toyne eagerly.

"Then go back to Chancery Lane, and keep an eye on the door of Furnival Chambers. I'll join you there as soon as I've changed my disguise. If Moreau leaves the office before I arrive, shadow him, and report yourself at my rooms to-night."

They were then at the end of Gray's Inn Road. Without a word, Toyne hurried off towards Chancery Lane, whilst Nelson Lee walked briskly to his rooms, where he hurriedly doffed his present disguise, and disguised himself afresh as a seedy-looking groom, with a close-cropped wig of sandy hair, and short side-whiskers to match.

In this rig-out he retraced his steps to Chancery Lane, where Toyne was sauntering to and fro in front of Furnival Chambers.

"Yes, Moreau's still in his office," he said, when Nelson Lee had made himself known. "I took the liberty, a few minutes ago, of stealing upstairs as far as the second floor, and I distinctly heard him talking to somebody in his office. It was a woman, I think, by her voice."

"Yes; it is Lady Bamford," said Nelson Lee. "But I sha'n't worry about her. I shall simply watch until Moreau comes out, and then I shall shadow him, in the hope that he will lead me to the house where Martin Wraith is imprisoned. Thank you for all your help. Good-morning."

"Must I go?" asked Toyne ruefully.

"Please," said Nelson Lee.

"Mayn't I wait, and——"

"No," said Nelson Lee decisively. "Your presence would only embarrass me. Good-morning."

Somewhat reluctantly, Toyne walked away. Then Nelson Lee took up a position outside the entrance to Furnival Chambers, and settled himself down to watch and wait for Moreau's reappearance.

CHAPTER 28.

The Stolen Letter.

AFTER losing all trace of Nelson Lee in the neighbourhood of the Patent Office, Jean Moreau abandoned the chase in despair, and retraced his steps to his office.

"Well, what news? Did you catch him?" asked Lady Bamford, as he entered the outer office and closed the door.

"No," said Moreau tartly. "He has given us the slip, and I've lost the chance of a lifetime—all through you!"

"All through me?" said Lady Bamford, in an injured voice. "How am I to blame?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"If you had only kept out of sight for another five minutes," he said, "I should have held him in check until I had time to send for a policeman and give him into custody. He would then have been marched off to the station, where they would have stripped off his disguise and found that it was Nelson Lee. As it is, by startling me in the way you did, you distracted my attention, and made it possible for him to escape, so that now I shall never be able to prove that it was Nelson Lee."

"I'm sorry," said Lady Bamford regretfully. "But I was so completely taken aback when I heard who it was that the words slipped out of my mouth and I staggered to the door before I knew what I was doing. However, apart from the fact that Nelson Lee has escaped, there's no great harm done, is there?"

"That remains to be seen," said Moreau. "He has been here since ten o'clock, and Heaven only knows what he may have discovered!"

He hurried into the inner office, with Lady Bamford at his heels.

"He has been through these drawers, I see," he said, as he opened the drawers of the knee-hole desk one after the other. "But that doesn't matter very much. He wouldn't find what he was looking for in these drawers."

"What was he looking for?" she ventured to ask.

"A clue to the whereabouts of Martin Wraith," he replied.

Lady Bamford clapped her hands. Lord Bamford had never written to her all the time she had been abroad, and, consequently, she knew nothing of the kidnapping of Martin Wraith, nothing of the blackmailing of Lord Bamford, nothing of his Lordship's visit to Grinkle Square, and nothing of his death at the hands of Zacharie. She had wit enough to understand, however, that if Nelson Lee had been searching Moreau's office for a clue to the whereabouts of Martin Wraith, it followed, as a matter of course, that Moreau himself had obtained such a clue.

"Then you have found out where Wraith is hiding?" she cried joyfully.

Moreau made no reply. He pulled out a bunch of keys and unlocked the safe. On one of the shelves, inside the safe, was the letter he had written to Zacharie on the night when Lord Bamford had attacked him in the train. The envelope, as the reader may remember, was inscribed with the address of the house in Grinkle Square, and the letter was full of references to Martin Wraith and what was to be done with him if anything happened to Moreau.

This letter, as the reader will also remember, had been stolen by Lord Bamford, and had been found in his lordship's pocket after Zacharie had murdered him. From force of habit, Moreau had slipped it into his pocket at the time, and had afterwards pitched it into his safe, along with several other letters. He had practically forgotten all about it until he heard that Nelson Lee was at his office, and it was the fear that Nelson Lee would find this letter which had blanched his cheeks and had caused him to exclaim to Buster:

"If he succeeds in opening my private safe all is lost!"

When he found that the letter was still in the safe his relief found vent in a heartfelt sigh of satisfaction.

"So far so good," he muttered, under his breath. "All may still be well, if only Lady Bamford has had the sense to hold her tongue!"

He turned to Lady Bamford, and held up the fateful letter between his finger and thumb.

"See this letter?" he said. "If Nelson Lee had found this letter he would have known where Martin Wraith is hiding. Do you wonder, then, that my heart stood still when I heard that he had disguised himself as me, and had come to my office, and had sent my clerk away on a bogus errand, and had got the place to himself?"

"I don't indeed!" she said. "You must have been beside yourself with anxiety. But how did you get to know that he was here?"

"It's too long a story to tell just now," he said. "Suffice to say that I heard the news at the house of a friend of mine, and immediately drove here as fast as a hansom could bring me. I was afraid he would have found the letter before I arrived; but it now appears that he didn't, so that he is still as ignorant as ever of the whereabouts of Martin Wraith."

"Then his little plot has completely failed?" said Lady Bamford, with a sigh of relief.

"That remains to be seen," said Moreau, for the second time. "It is true that he has failed to find any clue to the whereabouts of Martin Wraith, but how much has he wormed out of your ladyship? If he has bluffed you into telling him your secret, then all is lost as surely and completely as if he had found this letter!"

As Moreau uttered these words he locked up the safe, replaced the keys in his pocket, and laid the letter on the kneehole desk, intending to destroy it when Lady Bamford had gone. On the top of the letter he placed a heavy paper-weight, then he seated himself in his office-chair, and motioned to Lady Bamford to seat herself in one of the other chairs.

"Now let us begin at the very beginning," he said. "How long had you been here when I arrived?"

"About twenty minutes," she replied.

"What brought you here?"

She explained, as she had previously explained to Nelson Lee, that she had hurried over from Nice in order to question Moreau. She further explained that Nelson Lee had asked her to tell him everything, and how she had just been on the point of revealing her secret when Moreau had arrived.

"Then you really told him nothing of importance?" said Moreau, when she had finished her tale.

"Well, I told him that Martin Wraith was in possession of certain information which would prove that Hugh Palmer was the real Lord Bamford."

"That doesn't matter. He knew that before."

"I also told him that if Martin Wraith revealed all he knew I should be sent to prison."

"That doesn't matter, either. He had already guessed as much for himself."

"But I practically confessed that it was I who tried to murder Martin Wraith twenty years ago."

"That was undoubtedly the most serious admission you made. But it doesn't really matter. There were no witnesses to your confession, so he can't do anything."

"Then you think I have nothing to fear from him?"

Moreau shook his head.

"I didn't say that," he said. "You, I, all of us, have always something to fear from Nelson Lee so long as he remains alive. For the present, however, we are completely safe, and if your ladyship acts sensibly there is no reason whatever why your secret should ever be revealed. But everything depends on your ladyship now."

"On me? What do you mean?" she asked, in a puzzled voice.

He answered the question with another.

"What is your present income?" he asked.

"Ten thousand a year," she replied. "The late earl left me fifteen thousand a year until my son was twenty-one, and two thousand a year afterwards. Lord Bamford, however, knew that I could prove that he had no right to the title, if I chose, so as soon as he was twenty-one he drew up a deed by which he settled ten thousand pounds a year on me so long as he remained Lord Bamford."

"Then if Martin Wraith were to reveal his secret," said Moreau, "Lord Bamford would cease to be Lord Bamford. Hugh Palmer would step into his place, and your ten thousand a year would dwindle to two?"

"Of course. And I should be sent to prison into the bargain."

"So that your ladyship is just as anxious as Lord Bamford that Martin Wraith should not reveal his secret?"

"Of course."

Moreau rubbed his hands. Zacharie had murdered Lord Bamford, and had thereby put an end to all hope of blackmailing Lord Bamford. The attempt to blackmail Hugh Palmer had ended in failure. But Moreau now began to see another opening for his leech-like talents. He would blackmail Lady Bamford!

"You asked me a little while ago," he said, "what I meant by saying that everything now depended on your ladyship. I will tell you. I found Martin Wraith on New Year's Day, and I lured him to a certain house and made a prisoner of him. I then went to the Grange and interviewed Lord Bamford, who promised to pay me a thousand pounds a month so long as I kept Martin Wraith under lock and key. A few days ago Lord Bamford made his insane attempt on the life of Nelson Lee. He then took to flight, and nothing has since been seen or heard of him. If he is found he will be sent to a long term of penal servitude; but whether he is found, or whether he remains in hiding for the rest of his life, it is quite clear that he will never be able to pay me the thousand pounds a month he promised me.

"Under these circumstances, I naturally ask myself the question, what am I to do with Martin Wraith? He has now recovered his reason, and has told me all his story. I have been at great trouble and expense to capture him. Am I to lose all this money? Am I to give up all hope of receiving any reward for my labour and skill?"

He paused, but she did not speak. She was beginning to see what he was driving at, but she preferred to wait for him to come to the point.

"If I continue to keep Martin Wraith a prisoner," he went on, "your ladyship will continue to enjoy your freedom and your ten thousand pounds a year. On the other hand, if I set Martin Wraith at liberty, Hugh Palmer will become the Earl of Bamford, and your ladyship will go to prison!"

Again he paused but again she made no comment.

"So far as I am concerned," he continued, "it is a matter of perfect indifference whether I keep Martin Wraith a prisoner or whether I set him free. But, which ever I do, I must be paid for it. That is to say, if your ladyship is willing to pay me I am willing to continue to keep Martin Wraith in solitary confinement for the rest of his life. But if you are not prepared to pay my price, I shall immediately seek

an interview with Hugh Palmer, who will doubtless be only too glad to pay me what I ask in return for Martin Wraith's address.

"That is what I meant when I said that everything now depended on your ladyship. It is for you to decide whether Martin Wraith shall remain a prisoner in my hands, or whether he shall be set at liberty and sent to Hugh Palmer. Which shall it be?"

"How much do you want?" she asked in a low voice.

"Five hundred pounds a month so long as Martin Wraith remains alive—half of what Lord Bamford promised me," he said. "That will still leave your ladyship with an income of four thousand pounds a year, which is surely better than two thousand pounds a year and a lengthy term of penal servitude!"

"If I agree to pay you this sum," she said, "will you allow me to see Martin Wraith?"

"Certainly not!" he answered promptly. "You will neither be allowed to see him nor to know where he is living. I do not wish to cast any reflection upon your ladyship's character, but you tried to murder Martin Wraith twenty years ago, and I have no desire to give you the chance of trying again!"

"But if I am not to be allowed to see Martin Wraith," she urged, "how am I to know that you are speaking the truth? What proof have I that you have found Martin Wraith, and that he has told you his secret?"

Moreau made the same reply that he had made to a similar question from Lord Bamford.

"Martha Dobson!" he said curtly.

Lady Bamford started.

"That's enough," she said. "I see you know everything!"

"Then you will pay me the sum I ask?" he queried.

Before she had time to reply there was a footstep in the outer office, followed by a rap on the counter.

"Excuse me half a moment," said Moreau, rising to his feet. "I don't suppose it's anybody of importance, but my clerk is out at present, so I must just slip into the outer office and explain that I'm engaged."

He opened the door on the inside of the counter, and stepped into the outer office. The moment his back was turned, Lady Bamford's eyes lit up with a gleam of exultant triumph. She was seated in one of the chairs, with her left arm resting on the top of the knee-hole desk. Less than half a yard away was a heavy paper-weight, and underneath that paper-weight was the letter which contained the address of the house where Martin Wraith was imprisoned!

"If I could only get rid of Martin Wraith, Moreau's hold on me would be gone," she mused. "I could then refuse to pay him a single penny, and could safely defy him to do his worst. But I can't get rid of Martin Wraith until I know where he is imprisoned. Moreau said that if Nelson Lee had found that letter he would have known where to look for Martin Wraith. Then if I were to read that letter I should know where to look for Martin Wraith!"

She glanced at the open door. She could not see Jean Moreau, but she could hear him explaining to somebody at the counter that he was engaged with another client. Then she glanced at the coveted letter, half hidden beneath the paper-weight.

"I'll risk it!" she murmured between her clenched teeth.

Scarcely daring to breathe, and trembling with suppressed excitement, she stretched out her hand and stealthily raised the paper-weight. From where she sat the envelope was upside-down, so that she could not read the address. With her other hand she drew the letter towards her, and was just about to turn it round when she heard Jean Moreau coming back.

For an instant, but only for an instant, she hesitated what to do. Then, with the swiftness of a lightning-flash, she replaced the paper-weight on the table, and thrust the letter between the folds of her fur-lined cloak.

Scarcely had she resumed her former position ere Moreau re-entered the office and closed the door.

"It was only a man who wishes to consult me about a cheque he has forged," he said, as he seated himself once more in his chair. "I've told him to call again in half an hour's time. Now, what is your ladyship's answer to my offer? Do you accept my terms, or must I go to Hugh Palmer?"

"I accept your terms," she said. "I have no alternative."

"You will pay me five hundred pounds a month so long as Martin Wraith remains alive and a prisoner in my hands?"

"Yes. When do you want the first instalment?"

"Now!" said Moreau promptly.

"But I haven't my cheque-book with me," she objected. "I left it in my writing-case at the Metropole."

"Then I will call for the cheque about three o'clock this afternoon," he said.

"Very good," she replied, rising to her feet. "I am staying at the Metropole until the end of the week, so that if you have any fresh news for me—any news of Lord Bamford, for example—you will know where to find me."

She turned on her heel and moved towards the door. Moreau escorted her as far as the top of the stairs; then he shook her warmly by the hand, and returned to his office.

"How long will it be before he finds that the letter is gone?" she muttered to herself, as she hurried down the stairs with every fibre of her being quivering like a harp-string. "If I can only manage to get outside the building and lose myself in the fog before he discovers his loss—"

Her musings ended in a startled gasp, for at that moment she heard Jean Moreau raise his voice in a blasphemous imprecation, whilst an instant later she heard the patter of swiftly-running feet coming down the stairs.

Half crazy with excitement, scarcely knowing what she was doing, she gathered up her skirt and flew down the remaining stairs with the fleetness of a hunted hare. Upon reaching the bottom, she darted across the entrance-hall, and was just about to rush into the fog-enshrouded street, when her feet slipped on the greasy tiles and she stumbled forward on her knees. She was up again in a moment; but even as she scrambled to her feet, Jean Moreau sprang down half a dozen stairs cleared the hall with a single, flying leap, and caught her by the arm.

"You—you Jezebel!" he hissed, his face distorted with passion. "You've stolen the letter containing Martin Wraith's address! Give it back to me at once, or, by Heaven, I'll—"

The threat was never uttered, for at that moment a broken-down groom sprang through the door. This groom, as the reader has doubtless guessed, was none other than Nelson Lee. Standing just outside the door, he had overheard Jean Moreau's words, and had thereby gained the information that Lady Bamford possessed a letter containing Martin Wraith's address. He had intended, as the reader knows, to wait for Moreau, and shadow him. In view of this new development, however, he instantly determined on a change of plan.

"I must prevent that letter falling into Moreau's hands again," he muttered to himself. "I must get it myself if I can."

"Ello! What's all this about?" he exclaimed, as he darted through the door. "You let that lady alone, mister, or it'll be the worse for yer!"

"You mind your own business!" said Moreau, with an oath.

"I'm a-goin' to!" said the supposed groom. "It's the business of every

Englischman wot's worthy the nime ter sukker a femile in distress! And this is 'ow I'm a-goin' ter to it!"

As he uttered these words, he lashed out with his left, and dealt the Frenchman a scientific undercut that literally lifted Moreau off his feet and landed him on his back at the foot of the stairs.

"Now, jest you come along o' me, missus!" he said, turning to Lady Bamford. "I'll see yer safely 'ome, and, if this reptile molests you again, I'll give 'im inter custody!"

With these words, he caught her by the arm, and, almost before she had realised what was happening, he had dragged her through the door, round the corner, and into Cursitor Street, where the fog was so dense that objects half a dozen yards away were quite invisible.

"Where—where are you taking me?" faltered Lady Bamford, as he dragged her along towards Castle Street. "This isn't the way to my hotel."

"I don't suppose it is, lydy," said Nelson Lee, quite cheerfully. "But it's the way to duff that chap in Chancery Lane. He'll never think of looking for us up a narrow side-street like this."

He kept her on the run till they reached the corner of Castle Street; then he dropped her arm and slackened his pace to a walk.

"You're O K now," he said. "We'll jest turn up 'ere into 'Olborn, and then, if you'll tell me the nime of yer hotel, I'll be 'appy to hescort yer as far as the door."

By that time, however, her presence of mind was beginning to return. During the last few minutes she had acted like a woman in a dream. The sound of Moreau's footsteps coming down the stairs had thrown her into a state of incoherent panic; and everything that had happened since—her fall at the foot of the stairs, Jean Moreau's attack, the sudden appearance of a champion in the shape of this unknown seedy-looking groom, the breathless run along Cursitor Street—all this had happened with such bewildering rapidity that she had never really been conscious of what she was doing; but had allowed herself to be swept along the stream of events like the helpless, half unconscious victim of some hideous, unreal nightmare.

Now that she was safe from immediate danger, however, her customary composure and her natural caution began to reassert themselves. She was grateful so this unknown groom for rescuing her from Moreau's clutches; but, at the same time, she was anxious to get rid of him at the earliest possible moment, in order that she might be free to read the stolen letter.

"I don't think I'll trouble you to come with me any farther," she said, as she came to a halt and fumbled for her purse. "I am very much obliged to you for helping me to get away from that low fellow in Chancery Lane, and I quite appreciate your kindness in offering to see me to my hotel. After what has happened, however, I don't feel equal to any more walking; so will you kindly add to my indebtedness by running to the nearest cab-rank, and fetching me a hansom? I will wait here until you return."

Nelson Lee averted his face to hide his chagrin. This did not suit his book at all! He knew that Lady Bamford had a letter in her pocket, and knew that that letter contained the address of the house where Martin Wraith was imprisoned. He had calculated on walking with her as far as the Metropole, and he had devised a cunning scheme for stealing the letter on the way, reading it, and slipping it back into her pocket before they reached the hotel.

"I don't think it would be sife to leave yer standin 'ere all by yerself," he said. "That fellow might tike it inter 'is 'ead to come this wy, yer know. Adn't yer better walk with me as far as the rank in 'Olborn, and then——"

The sentence ended in a muttered imprecation, for at that moment the rumble of wheels was heard, and an instant later an empty hansom loomed up through the fog, not half a dozen yards from where they were standing.

Quick as thought, Lady Bamford held up her hand.

"Disengaged?" she asked, as the cabby pulled up.

"Yes'm! Where to?" he replied.

"Hotel Metropole."

She thrust a coin into Nelson Lee's unwilling palm, and sprang into the hansom. An instant later—almost before Nelson Lee had realised what was happening—the hansom and its occupant were swallowed up in the fog, and he found himself alone with a two-shilling piece in his hand!

"Done! Spoofer! Fairly had!" he muttered ruefully. "If she'd known what I was after she couldn't have outwitted me more neatly. Ah well! It's no use crying over spilt milk. I've lost Lady Bamford, but there still remains Jean Moreau. I must go back to my original plan, and shadow him."

With which attempt at consolation he retraced his steps into Chancery Lane, and resumed his vigil outside the door of Furnival Chambers.

CHAPTER 29.

Lady Bamford Visits Grinkle Square.

THE moment Lady Bamford found herself alone she drew out the stolen letter and eagerly devoured its contents.

"Sixteen, Grinkle Square, Pentonville, London, W.C.," she mused as she glanced at the envelope, after reading the letter. "So that's where Martin Wraith is imprisoned, is it? And the name of the man who is looking after him is Zacharie Dupont. Now, what had I better do? Whom can I get to help me to get rid of Martin Wraith? I know what I'll do, I'll go to Grinkle Square myself."

Lady Bamford was not the sort of woman to let the grass grow under her feet, and when once she had made up her mind to go to Grinkle Square she lost no time in putting her project into execution.

As soon as she reached the Metropole, she wrote a cheque for a couple of pounds and cashed it at the office. She then sallied out again, and made her way to a second-hand clothes shop in the Borough.

"I am about to take part in some amateur theatricals," she said to the proprietor. "I am cast for the part of a low-class woman from one of the London slums. Can you supply me with a dress and a shawl and a pair of boots suitable for a woman of that description? They must not be too new-looking. In fact, the older and more threadbare they are the better."

The shopkeeper produced a copious assortment of unlovely-looking garments, from which she selected a stained and faded dress, made in the style of half a dozen years ago, and patched and mended in twenty different places. A threadbare shawl and a pair of second-hand boots, very much down at the heels, were added to the parcel. And then, having paid for her purchases, she entered a cab and drove back to the Metropole.

She decided to postpone further operations until she had dined. Dinner over, she retired to her private room, where she took off her evening-gown and all her jewellery, and donned the dress she had purchased in the Borough. Having

made it still more disreputable-looking by tearing it in half a dozen places and pinning it together with pins, she put on the long grey cloak she had bought in the Strand earlier in the day. This completely concealed the dress, and when she had donned a plain black hat and had drawn on a pair of gloves, there was nothing in her appearance to suggest that she was otherwise than respectably dressed.

Having crammed the boots and the shawl into a small black handbag, she opened one of her trunks and took out a small Spanish dagger in a sheath and a tiny silver-plated revolver. The latter was loaded in every chamber, and, along with the dagger, was quickly transferred to her pocket. Then she picked up the handbag, gave a last glance at herself in the glass, and boldly marched downstairs.

There were several people on the staircase and in the hall; but, thanks to the long grey cloak, her appearance attracted no unusual attention. After leaving the hotel, she turned her footsteps towards the Embankment, and a few minutes later she came to a halt in the neighbourhood of Cleopatra's Needle. It was then quite dark, of course; and, although the fog was not so dense as it had been earlier in the day, it was sufficiently dense to hide her movements from anybody twenty yards away.

After a quick glance round, to make sure that she was unobserved, she seated herself on one of the seats and opened her bag. In feverish haste she took off her dainty shoes and put on the clumsy thick-soled boots she had bought in the Borough. Having taken off her hat and cloak, she let down her neatly-dressed hair and screwed it up into an untidy-looking "bob" at the back of her head. She covered her head and shoulders with the shawl, and pinned it under her chin. She soiled her hands in the mud of the gutter and rubbed them over her face. Then she gathered up the empty bag, the hat and shoes and the long grey cloak, and dropped them into the river. Half a minute later she was on her way to Grinkle Square.

It was half-past nine, Zacharie Dupont, the hunchback dwarf, rose from his stool in front of the kitchen fire and stretched out his long, misshapen arms in a tired yawn.

"Half-past nine!" he muttered to himself, in French. "Moreau can't be coming. I'll just have a look at Monsieur Wraith, to make sure that he's all right, and then I'll go to bed."

He rolled up the cocoon-matting which covered the kitchen floor, and unbolted the circular trapdoor which gave admittance to the underground vault in which Martin Wraith was imprisoned. He opened the trapdoor and was about to descend the iron ladder, when he was startled by a ring at the front-door bell.

"I wonder who it can be?" he mused, as he hastily closed and bolted the trapdoor and replaced the matting. "It can't be Moreau, for he always rings and knocks three times. Possibly it's a telegram from Moreau—"

He glided into the front room and cautiously peered through the window. Then a sigh of relief struggled to his lips. It was the bedraggled figure of a dirty, untidy-looking woman, with her dress in rags and with a shawl over her head.

"A beggar!" muttered the hunchback angrily. "The impudent slut! I'll teach her to come ringing my bell at half-past nine at night!"

He shuffled to the door and threw it open.

"Vat you vant?" he demanded, glaring at the woman as though he would devour her. "Be gone away, or I send for ze police!"

Lady Bamford—for such it was, of course—had started back in horror at the

sight of the hunchback's hideous face; but with a superhuman effort she conquered her repulsion and came a step or two nearer.

"All right, old cocky! Keep your 'air on!" she said. "I'm not a-going to heat yer! I've brought a message for Mister Zachariah Dewpoint. Is that you?"

"Yes, I am Zacharie Dupont," said the dwarf. "But who are you?"

"Know Buster?" asked Lady Bamford.

The hunchback started, and nodded his head.

"Well, I'm the lydy wot keeps 'ouse for 'im!" said Lady Bamford unblushingly. "He couldn't come 'isself, so he's sent one as 'is deppity. But ain't yer going to ask me to step inside?"

The hunchback hesitated for a second; then he signed to her to enter. He closed and locked the door, and led the way into the kitchen.

"And now for your message?" he said. "It is about Monsieur Moreau?"

"Guessed it in once!" said Lady Bamford, as she calmly seated herself and unpinned her shawl. "You've got to go to Buster's, in Dobbler's Court, as quick as you can."

"To Dobbler's Court?" echoed Zacharie, in terms of bewildered surprise.

"Vy must I go to Dobbler's Court?"

"'Cos Mister Moreau's dying!" she replied.

"Dying!" cried Zacharie, turning pale. "Dying?"

Almost before Lady Bamford had finished her tale he snatched up his hat, and moved towards the door. It never occurred to him to ask himself if her story was true. The news that Moreau was dying—that Moreau had sent for him—swept all other thoughts from his mind.

"Lock ze door when I am gone," he said. "If anyone comes whilst I am away, don't let zem come in, but say to zem zat I am busy to-night, and zey must come again to-morrow."

"Right you are!" said Lady Bamford, striving to conceal her triumph at the success of her plot.

She accompanied him to the door, and let him out. She locked the door behind him, and listened to the music of his retreating footsteps. Then a gleam of malignant triumph leaped into her eyes.

"At last!" she muttered, under her breath. "Even if he takes a cab, he can't get back in less than an hour. And five minutes will probably suffice to find Martin Wraith and give him his quietus!"

Lady Bamford returned to the kitchen and lit a candle.

"I shall most likely find him in one of the attics," she mused.

She crept up the creaking stairs, with the candle in one hand and the revolver in the other. But Martin Wraith was not in any of the attics. She explored the rooms on the second floor and on the first floor. But he was not there. She knew that he was not in the kitchen, and she could find no trace of him in either of the sitting-rooms. A numbing sensation of despair began to creep over her. She repeated the search. She even peered into all the cupboards and closets; but it never occurred to her to look underneath the matting on the kitchen floor.

"I don't believe he's here at all!" she exclaimed at last. "Moreau must have murdered him. I've searched every nook and corner of the house—— But, stay! I haven't explored the outbuildings in the yard. Perhaps he's there. Yes, that where he is, without a doubt."

Quivering with excitement, she unlocked the back door and stepped out into the yard. The wind immediately blew out her candle. She returned into the house, and procured and lit a lantern. Then she sallied on into the little yard again.

There were two outbuildings in the yard—a washhouse and a coalshed. The coalshed door was slightly ajar, but the washhouse door was heavily padlocked, and the window had recently been boarded up on the outside.

"This is where he is," she muttered exultingly. "He's in the washhouse."

She had neither the skill nor the time to pick the lock, and she knew not where to look for the key. She rummaged in the coalshed, and found a ponderous hammer. Placing her lantern on the ground outside the washhouse door, she attacked the padlock with the hammer. After several ineffectual attempts she at last broke off the staple. Then she opened the door and peered inside.

She thought she saw a man lying on the floor, but it was too dark to see distinctly. She picked up her lantern, and held it high above her head. Then she suddenly staggered back with a wild, weird shriek of horror. The lantern dropped from her trembling hand, and fell to the ground with an echoing clang. For one brief instant she swayed and reeled unsteadily; then her senses fled, and all became dark.

Needless to say it was not long before Zacharie discovered that he had been hoaxed. Bursting with rage and fear, and instinctively guessing the identity of his strange visitor, he chartered a hansom, and drove post-haste to Grinkle Square. Having dismissed the hansom at the corner of the square, he stole to the door of his house and gently turned the handle. The door was locked. He applied his ear to the keyhole and peered in through the front room window. All was dark and silent as the grave.

"She has gone away," he muttered to himself in French. "She has found the body of Lord Bamford, and has gone back to her hotel."

He whipped out his pocket-knife and forced back the catch of the window. He crept into the silent house, stole across the front room, and down the passage into the kitchen. The kitchen door was open.

"I knew it!" he groaned. "I am too late. She has been into the yard, and she has seen the body of Lord Bamford."

Suddenly through the open door there floated a sound that was half a sigh and half a moan.

The hunchback started and turned pale. He snatched up the poker and sprang to the door. He peered out into the yard, which was fitfully illumined by the light which streamed through the kitchen window. Then a horrible peal of exultant laughter burst from his lips.

On the rough, uneven flags in front of the washhouse door lay the senseless form of Lady Bamford. At her feet lay the hammer with which she had broken open the door. By her side lay an overturned lantern.

For an instant—but only for an instant—the hunchback stared at the prostrate form in mingled triumph and bewilderment. Then the truth burst on him like a thunderclap.

"Sapristi! I see it all!" he chuckled. "The sight of the body was too much for her ladyship's nerves. She broke off the lock with that hammer, and then she opened the door, expecting to find Martin Wraith inside. As soon as she glanced inside and saw what was really there she fainted."

An aimless movement of Lady Bamford's arms, and another feeble moan, warned him that her ladyship's swoon was passing away. Dropping the poker, he strode out into the yard and raised her in his strong, misshapen arms. With scarcely an effort he flung her over his shoulder and carried her into the house. Then he halted for a moment to reflect.

"The little room beneath the roof," he muttered at last. "She'll be safe enough there."

He carried her up three flights of stairs, and flung her down on the bare, uncarpeted floor of a little room which was lighted in the daytime by a tiny skylight

in the roof no bigger than an ordinary window-pane. He rifled her pockets and relieved her of her money, her dagger, and her revolver. Then he locked and bolted the door on the outside, and hobbled downstairs, to make sure that Martin Wraith was safe, and to repair the damage to the washhouse door.

CHAPTER 30.

Lady Bamford Takes French Leave.

JEAN MOREAU stepped out of his hansom at the door of No. 16, Grinkle Square. Having paid and dismissed the driver, he rang the bell and knocked three times, as was his custom, and almost before the bell had ceased to ring the door was opened by the surprised and delighted Zacharie.

"Welcome—a thousand times welcome!" cried the hunchback, in French, of course, as he seized Jean Moreau's hand and literally dragged him into the house. "I could scarce believe my ears when I heard thy familiar thrice-repeated knock."

"Buster has told me something of the way in which thou wast fooled," said Moreau, warming his hands at the fire; "but I should like to hear the story from thine own lips."

The hunchback thereupon described how Lady Bamford had come to the house, and had tricked him into believing that Moreau had sent her; how he had left her in the house whilst he had gone to Dobbler's Court to find Moreau; how he had returned to find her in a faint; how he had discovered that she had seen the body of the murdered Lord Bamford; and how he had carried her into the house, and had locked her up in the little room beneath the slates.

"Before she recovered consciousness," he said in conclusion, "I took the precaution of emptying her pockets. I will show thee what I found."

He opened a drawer, and took out a purse, some loose coin, a small revolver, and a dagger.

"It would have gone ill with Monsieur Wraith if she had found him," he said grimly, as he handed the things to Moreau.

Moreau glanced at them somewhat indifferently, and tossed them on the table.

"Is that all the story?" he asked.

"That is all," said the hunchback, hanging his head. "I know thou wilt think I was to blame in the matter, but I acted for the best."

"Maybe," said Moreau curtly. "Nevertheless, thou hast done thy worst to ruin all my plans. Not content with murdering Lord Bamford, and thereby killing the goose that would have laid the golden eggs, thou hast now given Lady Bamford a hold on us which I fear will be hard to shake off. Before she came here on Thursday night she believed—as everybody else believed—that Lord Bamford was hiding from justice. She now knows that he is dead, and that one of us has murdered him."

"What of that?" growled Zacharie. "She has never left the house since she saw the body, and thou hast only to say the word, and I will silence her for ever!"

"Thou art a fool!" said Moreau contemptuously. "Hast thou not wit enough to see that, now that Lord Bamford is dead, Lady Bamford is the only person from whom I have any hope of getting blackmail? I have frightened her by threatening to set Martin Wraith at liberty, and she has promised to pay me five hundred pounds a month so long as I keep him under lock and key. If thou wert to kill her, who would pay me then? What use would Martin Wraith be to me then?"

"There would still remain Hugh Palmer," said the hunchback. "He does not know that Lord Bamford is dead, and he would gladly pay for news of Martin Wraith."

"I have my doubts on that point," said Moreau. "I've interviewed Hugh Palmer once, and the result was not encouraging. He has unlimited faith in Nelson Lee, and thinks that Nelson Lee is sure to find Martin Wraith in the end. Of course, when he sees in the papers that Nelson Lee's dead body has been fished out of the Thames—as it will be in the course of a day or two—he may possibly change his mind, and try to come to terms with me. In the meantime, let us go and see her ladyship."

The hunchback produced a ponderous key, and the two men tramped upstairs.

Lady Bamford—still attired in the tattered garments she had purchased in the Borough—was seated at a rough deal table reading an ancient magazine by the light of a solitary candle. When Moreau and the hunchback entered the room she raised her head, glanced at them in silence, and then went on with her reading.

"Good-evening, my lady," said Moreau, somewhat taken aback by this cool reception.

"Good-evening," she replied, without looking up.

Moreau ground his heel into the floor, and choked back an oath. The hunchback grinned from ear to ear.

"Ma foi! Elle ne manque pas de sangfroid, n'est ce pas?" he whispered, which may be colloquially translated as, "She's a cool 'un, isn't she?"

Moreau did not deign to reply, but advanced a few steps nearer the table, and struck it with his clenched fist.

"Lady Bamford!" he said angrily.

She placed the tip of a finger on the line which she was reading, and slowly raised her head.

"Well?" she asked, pretending to stifle a yawn.

"I demand that you give me your attention," he said. "This is not a time for trifling. Close that book, and listen to what I am going to say."

She closed the magazine, and folded her hands demurely on her lap.

"I'm listening," she said sweetly.

"You came here intending to murder Martin Wraith," said Moreau. "Thanks to Zacharie, your intention was frustrated. But, although you did not succeed in murdering Martin Wraith, you discovered a certain fact which I had hoped you would never discover."

"I quite believe that," she murmured, with a faint smile.

"You discovered that Lord Bamford is dead," he went on, ignoring the interruption. "You suspect, no doubt, that he was murdered; but, as a matter of fact, his death was purely accidental."

"No doubt," she said sarcastically. "When a man is accidentally killed, it is quite the usual thing, of course, to hide his body in a washhouse, and board up the window, and barricade the door, and sprinkle quicklime on the body!"

Moreau bit his lip.

"I admit that it would be difficult to convince a court of law that his death was accidental," he said. "But we'll let that pass. You have discovered that Lord Bamford is dead—that he has been murdered, if you like. May I venture to ask what use you propose to make of that information?"

"I will answer your question with another," she said. "What do you propose to do with Martin Wraith?"

"That depends upon your ladyship," he said. "When you were at my office on Thursday morning, you promised to pay me five hundred pounds a month in

return for which I agreed to keep Martin Wraith a prisoner for the rest of his life. Are you still prepared to carry out that bargain?"

"I am not!" she said decisively. "I am not prepared to pay you a single farthing!"

He bowed.

"Then I must set Martin Wraith at liberty?" he asked.

"Just as you like," she replied, shrugging her shoulders.

"You know what will happen if I do? Martin Wraith will tell his story to the police, and you will be arrested for conspiring to defraud Hugh Palmer out of his rights, and also for attempting to murder Martin Wraith twenty years ago."

"And you will be arrested for murdering Lord Bamford!" she added, with a sweet smile.

They gazed at each other for a moment or two in silence, then she burst into a contemptuous laugh.

"I thought you knew me better than to try to frighten me with idle threats," she said. "It was all very well to try that game on before, but I have made an important discovery since then. I have discovered that you have committed murder, so that you are as much in my power now as I am in yours. By setting Martin Wraith at liberty you can send me to prison. By revealing my discovery to the police I can send you to the scaffold. Then why should I pay you to keep Martin Wraith a prisoner, any more than you should pay me to say nothing about the murder of Lord Bamford?"

Again Jean Moreau bowed.

"Is that your final answer?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You refuse to pay me the five hundred pounds a month which you promised me?"

"I do."

"In other words, you defy me to do my worst?"

"Not at all. There is no defiance about it. So long as you keep Martin Wraith a prisoner I am willing to keep silence with regard to what I saw in your wash-house. On the other hand, if you set Martin Wraith at liberty, I shall immediately denounce you to the police for the murder of Lord Bamford."

Moreau shrugged his shoulders.

"Your ladyship appears to overlook the fact that you are a prisoner," he said. "If you were at liberty—if you were free to go where you liked and do what you liked—I admit that I should be as much in your ladyship's power as you are in mine. But how can I be in your power—how can you denounce me to the police—when you are shut up in this room, with no means whatever of communicating with the outer world?"

"You cannot keep me shut up for ever!" she answered carelessly. "You will soon grow tired of keeping a couple of prisoners—Martin Wraith and myself—with nobody to pay you for our food, and with absolutely nothing to gain at the end of it. Even supposing you kept me shut up for a year, you would be no better off at the end of the year than you are at the present moment, for I should still refuse to pay you a single penny."

For the third time Moreau bowed.

"Very good," he said. "You have told me your plans. I will now tell you mine. To-morrow morning I shall go to Firvale and interview Hugh Palmer. As he does not know that Lord Bamford is dead, he will be only too glad to give me any sum I ask in return for Martin Wraith's address. Having obtained the money, I shall write the address of this house on a slip of paper, seal it up in an envelope, and make him swear that he will not open it for forty-eight hours. I shall then

return to this house, and Zacharie and I will pack our traps and make tracks for foreign climes.

"A few hours after we have disappeared, Hugh Palmer will arrive with the police. They will find Martin Wraith, and they will also find your ladyship. Martin Wraith will tell his story, and your ladyship will be marched off to the lock-up. You will then be at liberty to denounce us to the police for the murder of Lord Bamford; but by that time we shall have taken up our abode in some safe retreat, where, sooner or later, we shall have the pleasure of reading in the papers how your ladyship was brought up for trial and sentenced to penal servitude for the rest of your natural life!"

Lady Bamford's face turned deathly pale. The confident look died out of her eyes, and her jaunty, careless air gave place to one of mortification and humiliation. She saw that Moreau was more than a match for her—that he had beaten her at her own game—that she was still as much at his mercy as ever—that she had no alternative but to yield to his extortions and pay the blackmail he demanded.

"Well," said Moreau, after a moment's pause, "now that you have heard my plans are you still of the opinion that I am as much in your ladyship's power as you are in mine?"

"No," she answered, in a low, husky voice. "As you truly observed, I had overlooked the fact that I am a prisoner. If I were free, I could snap my fingers at you. As it is, I have no choice but to accept your terms and——"

The rest of the sentence was drowned by a violent pealing of the front-door bell. In obedience to a sign from Moreau, the hunchback hobbled downstairs and opened the door,

"Where's Moreau?"

Both Moreau and Lady Bamford heard the question, and recognised the voice of Buster.

"He is engaged at present," they heard the hunchback reply.

"Engaged be blowed!" said Buster. And his hoarse, excited voice was as clear and distinct in the attic as though he were just outside the door. "Take me to 'im at once! I've himportant news for 'im! Nelson Lee is after us!"

Moreau staggered back as though he had been struck. For the moment all thought of Lady Bamford was forgotten. With a furious oath he sprang to the attic door and rushed downstairs in a perfect whirlwind of excitement.

In the twinkling of an eye Lady Bamford saw her chance. Moreau, Buster, and the hunchback were all downstairs, and the attic door was open.

Quick as thought she glided out on to the landing. There were two flights of stairs, one leading down into the front passage, and another leading into the kitchen. The three men were conversing in eager, excited tones at the foot of the front flight of stairs. She stole down the back stairs and crept into the kitchen.

A gleam of triumph leaped into her eyes when she saw her purse and money, her dagger and her revolver, all lying on the kitchen table. She snatched up the purse and the money, and slipped them into her pocket. The three men were still conversing in the front passage.

Revolver in hand she stole to the kitchen door; but it was locked, and Zacharie had the key. For a moment she was in despair. Then a slice of luck befel her.

"Let us go upstairs and tell Lady Bamford," she heard Moreau say.

She heard the tramp of footsteps on the stairs. She waited until they were

half-way up the second flight; then she glided along the passage, opened the front door, and darted out.

As she sprang down the steps she heard an excited shout from the top of the stairs. They had discovered her flight. She answered the shout with a silvery peal of mocking laughter. Then she hurried across the deserted square, doubled back along Grinkle Lane, and mingled with the crowd in Pentonville Road.

"I mustn't waste any time in getting back to the Metropole," she mused, as she hurried towards King's Cross. "If Nelson Lee is after us it won't be many hours before Jean Moreau is arrested and Martin Wraith is found, and then they'll start looking for me. My best plan will be to go straight to Firvale Grange to-night, gather together all the money and jewellery I can lay my hands on, and then disappear as quickly and as quietly as I can before the truth is known."

She turned into a shop at the bottom of Pentonville Road, and purchased a hat and a cloak, by means of which she transformed herself into a fairly respectable member of society. She then made her way to St. Pancras Station, where she ascertained that the next train for Derby was due to leave in twenty minutes' time. She spent the interval in the ladies' waiting-room, from which she did not emerge until she heard the warning cry:

"Any more for Derby and the North?"

As she darted across the crowded platform she suddenly caught sight of Zacharie. The hunchback had apparently been sent to watch the station, no doubt by Moreau's orders. She contrived to slip into an empty compartment without attracting his attention; but just as the porter closed the door, and just as the train began to move, the hunchback turned and saw her.

His hideous face was instantly transfixed with a look of malignant fury. With a venomous oath he darted towards the carriage door, but in his haste he stumbled over a portmanteau which was lying on the platform. And when he scrambled to his feet the train was almost out of the station, and Lady Bamford was leaning through the carriage window, waving her hand to him in mocking farewell.

CHAPTER 31.

The Listener at the Window.

"DIDN'T I say so?" said Moreau, when Zacharie returned with the news. "I told you she would go straight to Firvale! She thinks that all is lost, now that Nelson Lee is on the right track; so she's gone to the Grange to secure as much plunder as possible, and then she's going to flee the country! I must follow her by the next train."

"Follow her!" cried Buster and the hunchback in one breath. "What for?"

"For money!" said Moreau curtly. "Now that Nelson Lee is on the trail the game is up so far as I am concerned. I shall have to change my name and take refuge abroad; but I must have money first, and I must have it at once, and I must have it from Lady Bamford!"

"But how wilt thou get it?" asked Zacharie. "Now that she is free she can afford to snap her fingers at thee. How wilt thou persuade her to give thee any money now?"

"Leave that to me," said Moreau significantly. "I know a way. Give me the time-table."

The hunchback produced a Bradshaw, which Moreau hurriedly consulted.

"She will arrive at Firvale at half-past one to-morrow morning," he said. "The earliest train by which she can leave is at six o'clock. It's now ten minutes past nine. There's a train from Marylebone at nine forty-five, which will land me at Firvale at a quarter past three to-morrow morning. If I can get a hansom at King's Cross I can just do it; but I mustn't waste any time."

"And wot price us?" asked Buster, as Moreau hurried into the passage, where his hat and coat were hanging. "Wot are we going to do?"

"You're going to stay here till I come back," said Moreau.

"And when will that be?"

"To-morrow night, if all goes well," said Moreau.

He donned his hat and coat, and left the house. He chartered a hansom at King's Cross, and drove to Marylebone. He caught the train, and alighted at Firvale at a quarter past three on Tuesday morning.

As he tramped along the deserted country road which led to the Grange, a closely muffled figure glided after him. The figure was that of Hugh Palmer. The young curate had been called out to the bedside of a dying parishioner. On his way back to his lodgings he was compelled to pass the end of the road which led to the station, and great was his surprise to see Jean Moreau walk out of the station and stride away in the direction of the Grange.

"What is he after now, I wonder?" muttered Hugh, who had no idea that Lady Bamford had returned. "There's nobody at the Grange except the servants, so why is he going there, and at this time of the morning, too? There's mischief afoot, I'm sure! At any rate, I'll follow him, and keep an eye on him until I find out what he's after!"

It was then about twenty minutes past three, and the sun was not due to rise until four o'clock; but there was a brilliant moon, and her silvery light enabled Hugh to keep his eye on Moreau for the whole of the time that the latter was passing through the slumbering village and down the winding turnpike road which led through Dead Man's Hollow to the gates of Firvale Park.

In the meantime, however, a sable bank of cloud was slowly drifting across the sky, and almost at the same moment as the Frenchman passed through the gates, the clouds closed over the moon, and plunged the scene into all but total darkness.

Despite the early hour, it was evident that the inmates of the Grange were already astir. There was a light in the library window, another in the drawing-room, and another in the entrance-hall. Two windows on the first floor, and one on the second floor, were brilliantly illumined, and smoke was issuing from several of the chimneys. The big wooden doors which led into the stable yard were slightly ajar, and through the chink came a haze of yellowish light and a clatter of hobnailed boots.

"Her ladyship does not mean to let the grass grow under her feet, that's evident," muttered Moreau, as he rang the bell. "She's now engaged, no doubt, in packing up her valuables, and she appears to have ordered the carriage to be ready to convey her to the station in time to catch the six o'clock train for the South. Ah well! she'll change her plans when——"

His ruminations were interrupted by the opening of the door. A sleepy-eyed footman stared at him in disguised astonishment.

"Good-morning!" said Moreau, with a cheerful nod. "I am an early bird this morning, aren't I? But you know the proverb—'It's the early bird that catches the worm.' I wish to see Lady Bamford."

The footman shook his head.

"I doubt if she will see you, sir," he said. "Her ladyship is only here for an hour or two. She has run over from the South of France, in order to ascertain if anything has been heard of Lord Bamford, and she leaves again by the six o'clock train. She is very busy, and I very much doubt if she will be able to spare the time to grant you an interview."

"Oh, yes she will!" said Moreau, airily. "You tell her ladyship that I am here, and she'll see me quickly enough."

He stepped into the hall, and the footman closed the door.

"Where is her ladyship?" asked Moreau.

"I don't quite know, sir," replied the footman. "She was in the drawing-room a few minutes ago; but I rather fancy she has gone upstairs since then. However, if you will kindly step into the library, I will go in search of her ladyship, and tell her——"

Before he could complete his speech Lady Bamford herself came tripping downstairs, with a jewel-case in her hand. Upon seeing Moreau she started, and turned pale, but instantly recovered herself.

"Monsieur Moreau!" she cried, advancing towards him with outstretched hand. "This is indeed an unexpected pleasure. As you have probably heard, I only arrived from the South of France at half-past one, and I am leaving again by the six o'clock train. I had no idea that you were anywhere in this neighbourhood, or I should most certainly have made an effort to see you before I left. How good of you to come to see me—and at such an unearthly hour, too! But I am afraid it is too much to hope that you have any news for me—any news, I mean, of my poor dear misguided son?"

Moreau gasped for breath. He was not easily taken aback; but such consummate coolness, such perfection of acting, completely staggered him.

"I am sorry to say that I do not bring you any news of your son," he said thickly. "At the same time, there are one or two little matters which I should very much like to discuss with your ladyship, if you would grant me the favour of a few minutes' private conversation."

"With the greatest pleasure in the world!" said Lady Bamford. "I am frightfully busy just now—in fact, I have hardly a minute to call my own—but I could not think of sending you away, after all you have done for my poor dear son."

She turned to the footman.

"Is there a fire in the library?" she asked.

"Yes, my lady," he replied.

"Are the lamps lit?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Then come this way, Monsieur Moreau," she said.

Followed by the Frenchman, she led the way to the library. Two lighted lamps stood on the table, and two more on the mantelpiece, but in spite of this wealth of illumination the room presented anything but a cheerful appearance, for a recently-lighted fire was smouldering in the grate and was smoking villainously. In the hope of remedying this defect, the housemaid had opened the window an inch or two, but, as the curtains were closely drawn, neither Moreau nor Lady Bamford observed this fact.

The moment her ladyship had closed the door her whole appearance and manner changed. Her face, which had hitherto been wreathed in smiles, suddenly grew hard and stern. Her jaunty, careless air was instantly replaced by one of mingled

hauteur and defiance. She turned on Moreau, and confronted him with eyes that glittered vindictively.

"Now kindly explain yourself!" she said, between her clenched teeth. "Why have you followed me here? What do you want?"

"Money," said Moreau laconically.

"How much do you want?" she asked.

"How much money have you?" was his answer.

"Very little," she replied. "I arrived here this morning with sevenpence-halfpenny in my pocket, and, although I have found Lord Bamford's keys, and have ransacked his safe, and his writing-desk, and his private drawers, I have only been able to find about twenty-five pounds. That, and the jewels in this jewel-case, are all I have in the world at the present moment."

"But you have money in the bank?"

"Not a cent! I thought I had about seven hundred pounds, but when I came to examine my passbook at the Metropole the other night, I found to my horror that I had just two pounds! I drew that out before I came here, and I have since expended it—all but sevenpence-halfpenny—in clothes and railway fare."

"What is the value of those jewels?"

"Four or five thousand pounds, probably."

"Good! Then, if you will give me twenty pounds in cash, and all those jewels

"Twenty pounds and all these jewels!" cried Lady Bamford. "Impossible! That would only leave me five pounds for myself—five pounds to live upon for the rest of my life!"

"Not at all. You told me yourself, not many days ago, that Lord Bamford had settled an income of ten thousand pounds a year on you."

"True; but that was only so long as Lord Bamford lived. Now that Lord Bamford is dead my income ceases—or, at least, it drops to two thousand pounds a year, which I inherit under my late husband's will."

"If you accept my terms," said Moreau quietly, "you will not need to flee the country or to live abroad under a false name."

She shook her head.

"It is impossible for me to remain in England now that Nelson Lee has escaped," she said. "He is sure to find Martin Wraith, and before that happens I must disappear."

"If you will give me twenty pounds, and the contents of that jewel-case," he said, "I will go back to London to-night, and I will give Martin Wraith a sleeping-draught from which he will never awake. Your anxieties will then be at an end. Your reign of terror will be over. The shadow of the prison-gates will no longer darken your life. Your secret—and my secret, too—will never be known. The fate of Martin Wraith, like that of Lord Bamford, will for ever remain a mystery. Several years at least will elapse before Hugh Palmer will be allowed to succeed to the titles and estates, and for all those years you will continue to enjoy your present income of ten thousand pounds a year. Even when Hugh Palmer has become the new Lord Bamford, you will still be able to claim your two thousand pounds a year, and to live and die in the odour of respectability. As for myself, I shall disappear as soon as I have disposed of Martin Wraith, and you will never see or hear from me again."

"Those are my terms. Give me those jewels and twenty pounds, and I will rid you of Martin Wraith this very night. Refuse, and I shall tell Hugh Palmer what I know."

"I accept your terms," she said, in a low, vibrating voice. "But, before I pay you, I must have some proof that you have kept your promise. I must know that Martin Wraith is really and truly dead, and that you have not played me false."

Moreau shrugged his shoulders.

"Then come to London with me," he said—"come to London, and see the deed done!"

She pondered for a second or two.

"I will," she said, at last. "I am bound to go to London in any case either to-day or to-morrow. I came away in such a hurry last night that I hadn't time to fetch my things away from the Metropole, and in one of my trunks there's a letter I stole from your office—the letter containing the address of the house where Martin Wraith is imprisoned. The trunk is locked, of course, but the sooner I fetch it away, and destroy the letter, the better for all of us!"

"Quite so," said Moreau. "When can you be ready to start?"

"I have already ordered the carriage to be round at half-past five in order to drive me to the station in time to catch the six o'clock train," she said. "Will that suit you? You can drive with me to the station, and we can travel to London together."

Moreau shook his head.

"I daren't travel in the daytime for fear of being seen and recognised," he said. "I must remain here until it is dusk, at any rate. If we leave by the five o'clock train this evening we shall arrive at King's Cross at half-past nine, and can then—"

"Ssh! What was that?"

It was Lady Bamford who spoke. She held up her hand, and glanced towards the closely-curtained window.

"I thought I heard someone moving outside the window," she explained.

Moreau sprang to the window and flung aside the curtains.

"A false alarm!" he said. "There's nobody here."

But for once in a way the Frenchman was mistaken, and no sooner had he closed the window and drawn the curtains than the figure of Hugh Palmer rose up from the ground and glided away towards the gates of the park.

"Half-past five!" he muttered, as the stable-clock chimed the half-hour. "And the train leaves at six o'clock! Half an hour in which to do three miles. I can just do it. In fact, I must do it, for it is of the utmost importance that I should see Nelson Lee at the earliest possible moment, and tell him what I've heard."

CHAPTER 32.

Run to Earth.

AT six o'clock the following morning—or almost exactly at the same moment as Hugh Palmer stepped into the train at Firvale Station, the detective left his rooms and resumed investigations. Having learned that Moreau had sent for a hansom about seven o'clock the previous night, and had driven away in the direction of London Bridge, he spent the rest of the day in trying to find the driver of the hansom. His inquiries had led him into the neighbourhood of Grinkle Square, and this had accounted for Buster's alarming intelligence to Moreau that the detective was after them.

Nelson Lee's efforts to find Martin Wraith, however, had met with no success,

and at seven o'clock in the evening, worn out and dispirited, he returned to his rooms, to find Hugh Palmer awaiting him.

"At last!" cried Hugh, wringing the great detective's hand. "I've been waiting here since eleven o'clock this morning. I wired to you from Derby, telling you that I was coming to see you, and that I had important news for you; but your landlady informed me that you left the house about an hour before my telegram arrived. She couldn't tell me where you had gone, or when you would be back, so I decided that I would wait until half-past seven and then, if you hadn't returned, I would take my news to Scotland Yard."

"Is your news so urgent as all that?" said Nelson Lee, with a slight smile. "Couldn't it have waited until to-morrow?"

"Indeed no!" said Hugh. "When I tell you that Moreau and Lady Bamford will arrive at King's Cross at half-past nine to-night, that they are going to the house where Martin Wraith is imprisoned, and that Moreau is going to murder Martin Wraith, you will understand, I think, that there isn't much time to be lost!"

The detective pushed Hugh into a chair, and seated himself in front of him.

"Tell me all about it, quickly!" he said. "Where is Moreau now?"

"On his way from Firvale to London, I expect," said Hugh. "I was called up about two o'clock this morning, to visit a sick parishioner. As I was returning to my diggings, I was surprised to see Jean Moreau coming down the road which leads from the station. He had evidently come up from London by the train which arrives at Firvale at a quarter-past three.

"I have since ascertained that Lady Bamford arrived a couple of hours earlier, having travelled up from London by the train which arrives at half-past one. I was unaware of this when first I saw Jean Moreau, and, consequently, it struck me as strange that he should be going to the Grange when there was nobody there—as I thought—except the servants. I determined, therefore, to follow him and to keep my eye on him until I found out what he was after.

"I saw him ring the bell at the Grange, and I saw one of the footmen open the door and let him in. I then crept up to the outside of the door, and, by listening at the keyhole, I heard Lady Bamford say that she was very busy, as she was leaving by the six o'clock train, but she would grant Jean Moreau a private interview if he would step into the library.

"As soon as I heard this I stole round to the library window. To my great delight, I found that it was slightly open, and by crouching on the ground outside I was able to hear every word that passed between them."

He then repeated the substance of the conversation recorded in the previous chapter, concluding by describing how Lady Bamford had heard him moving outside the window, and how Moreau had looked out, but had failed to perceive him.

"So now you know my news," he said. "What do you make of it all? Do you think Lord Bamford has been murdered?"

"I do," said Nelson Lee. "I have suspected as much for some time, and now I am sure of it. You heard Lady Bamford say that his lordship was dead, and you heard her accuse Jean Moreau of murder. She also spoke of something she had seen in Moreau's washhouse, from which it is perfectly clear—in my opinion, at any rate—that Lord Bamford has been murdered, probably by Moreau, and that his body is now concealed in the Frenchman's washhouse."

"My own opinion to a T!" said Hugh. "And, unless you act at once, Martin Wraith will share Lord Bamford's fate."

"True," said Nelson Lee. "By hook or crook we must find Martin Wraith, and set him free before Jean Moreau and Lady Bamford arrive. Did neither

of them ever mention the name of the street or the number of the house where Martin Wraith is imprisoned ? ”

“ Never,” said Hugh.

“ But you heard Lady Bamford say that the letter she had stolen from Moreau’s office was in one of her trunks at the Metropole ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And you heard her say that that letter contained the address of the house where Martin Wraith is imprisoned ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Then our course is clear,” said Nelson Lee. “ It is now half-past seven. We will drive to the Metropole, interview the manager, and get permission to examine her ladyship’s trunks. Having obtained the letter containing Martin Wraith’s address, we will drive to the house where he is imprisoned. Having set him free, we will wait until Moreau and Lady Bamford arrive, and then——”

He left the sentence unfinished, but the grim look on his face boded ill for Monsieur Moreau.

He opened a drawer and took out a revolver and a bunch of skeleton-keys. The keys he slipped into his pocket, but the revolver he handed to Hugh.

“ Put that in your pocket,” he said. “ We have a desperate man to deal with, and it is just as well that you should be armed as well as myself. Are you ready ? ”

Hugh nodded his head. He was too excited to speak.

“ Then come along,” said Nelson Lee, picking up his hat. “ We shall get a hansom in Holborn just as soon as if we sent for one.”

They descended the stairs, and left the house. As luck would have it, an empty hansom was passing the door, and a moment later they were on the way to the Metropole.

It was ten minutes to eight when they reached the hotel. On inquiring for the manager they were informed that he had just gone out, but was expected back in five or ten minutes. As a matter of fact, however, he did not return until a quarter-past eight.

“ Well, what can I do for you, Mr. Lee ? ” he asked, when the customary greetings had been exchanged, and Nelson Lee had introduced Hugh. “ You’re not after one of our guests, I hope ? ”

“ I’m afraid I am,” said Nelson Lee.

“ Which of them ? ”

“ Lady Bamford.”

The manager heaved a sigh of relief. The reputation of the Metropole was very dear to him, and the scandal of a public arrest would have done the hotel no end of harm.

“ You’re too late,” he said. “ Lady Bamford isn’t here. She arrived on the night of the seventh, and engaged a bed-room and a private sitting-room——”

“ Can you give me the number of her bedroom ? ” asked Nelson Lee, interrupting him.

“ No. 83,” he said. “ As I said before, however, her ladyship is no longer here. She went out on the morning of the eighth, and returned in the evening for dinner. After dinner she went out again, and we have neither seen or heard from her since.”

“ I was aware of all that,” said Nelson Lee. “ But her ladyship’s luggage is still here, I understand, and my object in coming here this evening is to ask you to give me permission to examine it.”

The manager's manner changed at once.

"Then I'm afraid you have come on a fruitless errand," he said coldly. "Why do you wish to examine her ladyship's luggage?"

The detective briefly explained the circumstances of the case.

"I am afraid you will think me very disobliging," he said, "but I really cannot see my way to grant your request. Although Lady Bamford is not actually staying here at the present moment, she has never taken her name off our books, consequently, we are still responsible for the safe custody of her belongings. If I were to allow her luggage to be tampered with I should lay myself open to an action at law, to say nothing of the injury which would be done to the reputation of the hotel if it became known that we were in the habit of letting outsiders go into the rooms of our guests and pry into their luggage. Lady Bamford may be all you have painted her, but that doesn't alter the fact that neither you nor I nor anybody else has the slightest legal right to pry into her trunks, or to take away a single thing belonging to her. On these grounds—much as I should like to help you—I have no alternative but to decline to accede to your request."

Although Nelson Lee had not expected this refusal, his face betrayed neither disappointment nor surprise. He merely shrugged his shoulders and smiled an enigmatical smile. Hugh, on the other hand, sank back into his chair and regarded the manager with a look of mingled dismay and despair.

"Do you really mean that?" he gasped. "Do you really mean that you won't allow Mr. Lee to examine her ladyship's trunks?"

"I do," said the manager firmly. "Mr. Lee is only a private detective—that is to say, he is only an ordinary citizen in the eyes of the law—but even if he were the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police I should still feel constrained to refuse the request. Two blacks don't make a white, and if Lady Bamford has broken the law that is surely no reason why I should also break the law by allowing an outsider to tamper with her luggage. Of course, if you like to lay your information before the police, and obtain a search-warrant—"

"But there isn't time," urged Hugh. "It is now a quarter to nine, and Moreau and Lady Bamford will arrive at King's Cross at half-past. Unless we can rescue Martin Wraith within the next hour he will be murdered. But how can we rescue him unless we can find out where he is imprisoned?"

Before the manager could reply Nelson Lee interposed.

"If all else fails," he said, "we must go to King's Cross, and shadow Moreau and Lady Bamford from there to the house where Martin Wraith is imprisoned. I don't want to do this unless I am compelled, for there is always the risk that they may leave the train at Finsbury Park, or change their minds and come by the Midland, in which case we should lose the scent altogether. In many ways, moreover, it would greatly facilitate our task if we could find Martin Wraith and set him free before his enemies arrive, which we cannot possibly do, of course, if we have to shadow them from the station. It was for these reasons that I was so anxious to secure the letter containing Wraith's address. However, if I am not to be allowed to open her ladyship's trunks, I must fall back on another plan."

"What's that?" asked Hugh and the manager in one breath.

"I prefer not to reveal my plans at present," said Nelson Lee, with a peculiar smile.

He turned to the manager.

"There is a telephone in the entrance-hall, I believe?" he asked. "May I use it?"

"Certainly," said the manager.

"Thanks!" said Nelson Lee, rising from his chair and moving towards the door.

Hugh rose to follow him, but the detective waved him back.

"Wait here until I come back," he said. "I shan't be more than two or three minutes."

As he uttered these words he strode out of the office, closing the door behind him, and leaving Hugh alone with the manager. In less than five minutes he returned, picked up his hat, and beckoned to Hugh.

"Come along, Mr. Palmer!" he said. "It's high time we were off."

"But your plan?" said the astonished manager. "Won't you tell me what it is?"

"To-morrow," said Nelson Lee, with something like a chuckle.

And, without another word, he shook the manager by the hand and hurried away with Hugh at his heels.

"To whom did you telephone?" asked Hugh, as soon as they were outside the hotel.

"To nobody," said Nelson Lee. "My inquiry about the telephone was merely a blind—a ruse to get out of the office without the manager following me."

"Then where did you go?" asked Hugh.

"To bedroom No. 83!" said the detective quietly.

Hugh pulled up with a gasp of stupefaction.

"You went upstairs, to Lady Bamford's room?"

"And stole the letter!" said Nelson Lee coolly. "I opened the door by means of my skeleton-keys. I then switched on the electric light, and hurriedly examined her ladyship's trunks. By a great slice of luck, the letter was in the very first trunk I opened—and here it is!"

He drew the letter from his pocket and flourished it in Hugh's face.

"At last we have run our quarry to earth!" he said, in tones of suppressed excitement and triumph. "At last we have discovered the whereabouts of Martin Wraith!"

"And where is he?" asked Hugh, who was trembling in every limb.)

The detective pointed to the address on the envelope.

"At No. 16, Grinkle Square," he said. "Zacharie Dupont is the name of the man who has charge of him—the man whom you and I are now about to interview."

He held up his hand and beckoned to the driver of a passing hansom.

"Disengaged?"

"Yes, sir. Where to?"

"Grinkle Square, Pentonville," said Nelson Lee as he and Hugh stepped into the hansom. "Drive as quickly as you can, and drop us at the corner."

CHAPTER 33.

Nearing the End.

IT was twenty minutes past nine. The moon, which was only a few hours past the full, was high above the horizon, and Grinkle Square was bathed in silvery radiance. In the kitchen of No. 16 two men were playing dominoes. One was Buster and the other was Zacharie Dupont, the hunchback dwarf.

"I don't know 'ow it is, but I feel as sleepy as a boiled hawl to-night!" said Buster, as he laid down the double-six. "If I was sure as Moreau wouldn't come back to-night I'd go to bed, when we've finished this game. Wot's your opinion? D'yer reely think he will turn up to-night?"

Before the hunchback had time to reply there came a ring at the front-door bell.

"There he is!" cried Buster, throwing down the pieces and springing to his feet. The hunchback smiled and shook his head.

"Zat not Monsieur Moreau," he said, as he rose from the table. "Monsieur Moreau always ring ze bell once and knock tree times."

"Then who can it be if it isn't Moreau?" asked Buster, with a quaver of anxiety in his voice.

Again the hunchback shook his head.

"I do not know," he said. "But I soon find out."

"Keep the door on the chain till yer sees who it is," suggested Buster, as the hunchback hobbled away.

"For sure," said Zacharie.

He shuffled out of the kitchen and along the bare, uncarpeted passage which led to the front door. The door was locked and chained and bolted. He turned the key and withdrew the bolts; then he opened the door as far as the chain would allow, and peered through the chink.

No sooner had he done so than a gasp of terror burst from his lips. Two men were standing outside the door, their faces brilliantly illumined by the light of the moon. One of them was a youthful-looking clergyman, whom Zacharie had never seen before; the other was Nelson Lee!

For an instant, but only for an instant, the hunchback was literally paralysed with surprise and fear. Then with a swift and sudden movement, he slammed the door in the detective's face. Ere he could lock it, however, the detective applied his shoulder to the outside of the door, and with one prodigious effort snapped the chain in two. He then sprang through the open door, seized the hunchback by the throat, whilst at the same instant Hugh Palmer slipped into the passage and quietly closed and locked the door.

"The game is up, Monsieur Zacharie Dupont!" said Nelson Lee, shaking him as a terrier shakes a rat. "Will you surrender quietly, or must I——"

The question ended in an involuntary cry of pain, for at that moment the hunchback suddenly wound his powerful arms around the detective's waist and fastened his teeth in Nelson Lee's arm.

Quick as thought Hugh sprang to the detective's assistance. Clenching his fist he dealt the hunchback a sledgehammer blow on the side of the jaw that, in the case of any ordinary man, would probably have dislocated it.

On Zacharie, however, the blow had little more effect than if Hugh had flicked him with the corner of his pocket-handkerchief.

He still hung on to Nelson Lee's arm, with his long, yellow teeth embedded in the flesh, and Hugh was just about to repeat the blow, when he suddenly heard a sharp, metallic click which appeared to proceed from the region of the kitchen.

Nelson Lee heard the click, and instantly divined its purport.

"There's somebody in the kitchen!" he cried excitedly. "He has just unlocked the back door, and is evidently bent on making this escape. After him—quick! I can manage this chap. You go after the man in the kitchen!"

As the reader knows, the "man in the kitchen" was Buster. When he heard the front door suddenly burst open, he snatched up the poker, intending to rush to Zacharie's assistance. Almost at the same moment, however, he heard the voice of Nelson Lee calling upon Zacharie to surrender.

"Heavens, it's Nelson Lee!" he gasped, turning deathly pale. "Wot a mercy I 'eard 'is voice afore I showed myself! It's all hup now! Mister 'Umpty-Dumpty can take care of 'isself. I'm hoff!"

Suiting the action to the word, he darted to the kitchen door, and hurriedly unlocked it. No sooner had he done so than he heard the detective shout to Hugh that there was somebody in the kitchen; whilst an instant later he heard Hugh thundering down the passage.

With trembling fingers he seized the handle of the door, and tried to drag it open. To his dire dismay, he found that it was bolted, and ere he had time to withdraw the bolt Hugh dashed into the kitchen with the loaded revolver in his hand.

"Hands up, or I fire!" cried Hugh, pausing in the doorway, and covering Buster with the revolver.

Buster spun round on his heel, and glared at Hugh like a wild beast at bay.

"Hands up—quick!" said Hugh again.

But the words had scarcely crossed his lips ere Buster suddenly flung up his arm and sent the poker whizzing through the air.

Hugh sprang aside just in time to avoid the flying missile. Up to that moment his revolver had been levelled at Buster's head, but when he sprang aside, of course, he necessarily altered the direction of the weapon, and in the twinkling of an eye Buster rushed across the room, seized his arm and wrested the revolver from his grasp.

Nothing daunted, Hugh grappled with his assailant at close quarters, and, after a brief but desperate wrestling-bout, they both rolled over on the floor, locked in each other's arms.

Despite the fact that Buster was nearly twice his weight and more than twice as strong, Hugh managed for a time to hold his own.

Presently, however, superior weight and superior strength began to tell their tale, and at last, with a herculean effort, Buster rolled Hugh over on his back and planted one knee on the young curate's chest.

The revolver had fallen from his grasp in the course of the struggle, but was lying close at hand. He picked it up, and thrust the muzzle into Hugh's face.

"This'll teach yer——" he began.

But even as he spoke Nelson Lee sprang through the open door and leaped upon him from behind.

With a single blow the detective sent the revolver flying from the scoundrel's hand; then, seizing Buster by the scruff of the neck, he dragged him off Hugh's chest, rolled him over on his face, and whipped out a pair of handcuffs. Tossing the handcuffs to Hugh, he planted his knees in the small of Buster's back, and caught hold of one of the scoundrel's arms.

Quivering with excitement, Hugh scrambled to his feet and caught hold of the other arm, and in less time almost than it takes to tell, Buster's arms were twisted behind his back and the handcuff's slipped over his wrists.

"And now to secure the hunchback!" said Nelson Lee, as he sprang to his feet. "I had to stun him before he would take his teeth out of my arm; but I didn't dare to wait to truss him up, as I heard that you were getting the worst of your encounter with Buster."

They retraced their steps into the passage, where Zacharie was lying at full length on the bare, uncarpeted floor.

The detective had stunned him with a blow behind the ear, but the effects of the

blow were rapidly passing away, and it was plain to be seen that his complete recovery was only a matter of a minute or two.

"Catch hold of his feet!" said Nelson Lee. "We'll carry him into the kitchen and tie him down in one of the chairs."

Hugh grasped the hunchback by the feet, and the detective caught hold of his arms. In this way they carried him into the kitchen, and seated him in one of the wooden chairs.

A clothes-line hung on a nail on one of the walls, and by means of this they lashed the hunchback in the chair, and pinioned Buster in another.

"So far so good!" said Nelson Lee, when their task was finished. "We have carried the fortress by storm, and we have overpowered the garrison. The end of our quest is now in sight. All that remains now to be done is to set the prisoner free, and to prepare for the reception of Moreau and Lady Bamford."

He consulted his watch.

"Half-past nine!" he exclaimed. "We haven't too much time, by Jove! They'll be here in another twenty minutes!"

Five minutes had elapsed. It was five-and-twenty minutes to ten. Nelson Lee and Hugh had explored every single room in the house, but had failed to find the slightest trace of Martin Wraith.

"They must have made away with him!" said Hugh gloomily. "He isn't here, that's certain."

"You are easily discouraged," said Nelson Lee, though, truth to tell, he was not feeling very cheerful himself. "We haven't explored the outbuildings yet."

They adjourned into the little yard at the back of the house. As they passed through the kitchen they saw that Zacharie had quite recovered from his stupor and they also observed that when he saw them open the kitchen door his face turned ashen-grey with fear.

"I believe we're on the track at last!" said Hugh, as they stepped out into the yard. "You saw how the hunchback changed colour when he saw where we were going?"

Then his eyes fell on the washhouse.

"He's in there, without a doubt," he cried triumphantly. "As you see, the window has been boarded up on the inside, and the door has been fitted with a new and ponderous lock."

The detective shook his head.

"I don't think he's in there," he said, with a peculiar intonation in his voice.

"But if he isn't, why——" began Hugh. Then he suddenly caught his breath. "The washhouse!" he gasped. "I remember now! Lady Bamford said to Moreau: 'I have only to tell the police what I saw in your washhouse to send you to the scaffold! Is it possible——'"

He left the question unspoken, but Nelson Lee understood, and gravely nodded his head.

"I think so," he said. "At any rate, we can soon make sure."

He whipped out his bunch of skeleton-keys, and adroitly picked the lock. He opened the door, and flooded the little washhouse with the clear white light of his pocket-electric lamp. Then he turned away with a shudder of horror.

"It's Lord Bamford!" he said. "I guessed as much. Even if we don't find Martin Wraith, our visit will not have been in vain. Come away!"

They retraced their steps into the house. It was then twenty minutes to ten.

"If Martin Wraith is anywhere in this house," said Nelson Lee, as he closed the kitchen door, "he must be somewhere underground. If he is in an underground apartment, there must be a trapdoor in one of the floors of one of the rooms. Let us explore."

"Where shall we begin?" asked Hugh.

"We'll begin with the two rooms at the front," said Nelson Lee. "We'll then examine the passage floor, and afterwards, if that gives no result, we'll roll up this matting and examine that floor."

They quitted the kitchen, and once more entered the bare, uncarpeted passage with the intention of making their way into the rooms at the front.

No sooner had they stepped into the passage, however, than Nelson Lee pulled up with a ringing cry of triumph.

"See!" he cried, pointing to the middle of the passage floor, "there's a trapdoor there! How blind we have been not to notice it before!"

It was the trapdoor, as the reader may remember, through which the hunchback had dragged Lord Bamford to his doom.

It led into a subterranean passage which communicated with the underground vault, in which Martin Wraith was imprisoned, by means of a secret door composed of revolving masonry.

"Yes, this is a trapdoor sure enough!" said Hugh, after a hasty examination. "But what's the use of a trapdoor that is bolted on the underside, as this appears to be? It would serve all right for getting out of a place; but how on earth could anybody ever get in if the door was fastened on the inside?"

"It's a trapdoor, and that's enough for me!" said the detective shortly. "Fetch that hammer which we saw in the coalshed."

Hugh fetched the hammer, and a few minutes later they had smashed the door into splinters, and were scrambling down the rope-ladder which led into the underground passage. It was then a quarter to ten.

"We're at fault again," said Hugh, gazing round the narrow passage with an air of the utmost disappointment and dejection. "There's no sign of Martin Wraith here, unless that is a sign."

He pointed to a dark-red stain at the foot of the ladder. It marked the spot where Lord Bamford had met his death.

Nelson Lee made no reply. He was examining the wall at one end of the passage.

"What are you doing?" asked Hugh curiously.

"I'm trying to find a door," said Nelson Lee. "There must be one somewhere you know."

"Why?"

"If there isn't another door leading out of this passage," said Nelson Lee, "how did the man get out who bolted that trapdoor? He couldn't very well go out through the trapdoor and bolt it on the inside when he himself was on the outside."

"Of course not," said Hugh. "I hadn't thought of that. There's bound to be another door somewhere."

"And it's bound to be at this end of the passage," said Nelson Lee. "If it were at the other end it would lead into the street. However, I can't find it, and I daren't waste any further time in looking for it. Let us return to the kitchen."

"Why to the kitchen?" asked Hugh.

"Look at the direction of this passage," answered Nelson Lee. "If there's a door at this end, as there must be, where will it lead to?"

"To some place underneath the kitchen," said Hugh.

"Of course," said Nelson Lee. "And if the man who bolted the trapdoor passed through another door at this end of the passage, and entered an underground apartment underneath the kitchen, how did he get out of that underground apartment?"

"Through another trapdoor in the kitchen floor!" cried Hugh, with a flash of inspiration.

"Exactly!" said Nelson Lee. "Come along! It's now ten minutes to ten, so that Moreau and Lady Bamford may arrive at any moment."

They swarmed up the ladder and hurried back into the kitchen. The floor, as already explained, was covered with a square of cocoanut matting. Hugh caught hold of one corner of this, and Nelson Lee the other. Then they commenced to roll it up, but before they had rolled up a couple of yards the trapdoor came into view.

"At last!" cried Nelson Lee, as he fell on his knees beside the circular trapdoor. "At last our quest is ended! At last we have found——"

The rest of the sentence was drowned by a violent pealing of the front-door bell, followed by three short, sharp knocks.

"Moreau and Lady Bamford!" gasped Nelson Lee.

And, almost before the words were fairly out of his mouth, the hunchback suddenly put forth all his enormous strength, snapped the cords which bound him, and rushed from the room, yelling at the top of his voice:

"Flee! Flee for your life, Jean Moreau! Nelson Lee is here!"

With a furious cry the detective leaped to his feet and darted into the passage. By that time the hunchback had reached the door, and had turned the key. Ere he could withdraw the bolts, however, the detective seized him by the scruff of his neck, swung him off his feet, and literally threw him to the other end of the passage, where Hugh immediately flung himself upon him and pinned him to the ground.

"Shoot him if he offers any further resistance!" cried Nelson Lee, as he hastily withdrew the bolts. "Sorry I can't stay and help you to secure him, but I've Moreau to look after."

As he uttered these words he opened the door and sprang down the steps. In the meantime both Moreau and Lady Bamford had heard the hunchback's warning shout, and had taken to their heels in different directions.

The square, as already explained, was flooded with brilliant moonlight, by means of which the detective saw that Lady Bamford was making for Pentonville Road, whilst Moreau was making for a narrow lane which led past the New River Head to the back of Sadler's Wells Theatre.

Without a moment's hesitation, Nelson Lee dismissed her ladyship from his thoughts, and dashed away in pursuit of Moreau. Fear lent wings to the Frenchman's feet; but, in spite of this, his rival rapidly overhauled him, and at the end of the deserted lane already described, Nelson Lee put on a magnificent spurt, cleared the intervening space with a flying leap, and hurled himself on Moreau from behind.

For the space of nearly a minute they struggled in each other's arms. Except themselves, not a soul was in sight, and Nelson Lee disdained to shout for help. Single-handed, he had worn his famous rival down, and single-handed he meant to overpower him, and hand him over to the police.

But the fates willed otherwise. With a final herculean effort, the Frenchman broke away and whipped out his revolver.

Whether he intended to make a last attempt on Nelson Lee's life or whether he

really intended to shoot himself, will never be known. He whipped out his revolver and stepped back a pace or two. At the same instant Nelson Lee rushed at him a second time, and seized him by the throat. For one brief instant the struggle was renewed; then a loud report rang out, and the Frenchman slid through his rival's arms, and sank to the ground in a pool of blood.

Almost before the echoes of the shot had died away, the figures of excited men came flocking into the lane like a swarm of bees. Presently a couple of constables strolled up, and a little later a doctor appeared on the scene.

But both the constables and the doctor were too late. Jean Moreau was past all human aid, and beyond all legal penalties.

The rivalry was ended. Jean Moreau was dead.

CHAPTER 34.

Martin Wraith's Story.

IT was midnight. Moreau's body had been removed to the mortuary, and Zacharie and Buster had been handed over to the police. Martin Wraith had been freed from his fetters, placed in a cab, and driven to Nelson Lee's rooms, where he was now ensconced in an easy-chair in the front of a cheerful fire, with the great detective on one side, and Hugh Palmer on the other.

"If I am to begin at the very beginning of my story," he said, "I must first describe the position of affairs in the middle of 1879. At the time the late Lord Bamford and his only brother, the Hon. Lionel Palmer, were living at Firvale Grange. Lord Bamford was twenty-nine, and his brother was twenty-four. Both were bachelors, and both were very great friends of mine.

"At that time, as you know, I was the only doctor in the neighbourhood; and, although I was a good deal older than the two brothers, I was not a married man, and, consequently, I was able to spend most of my spare time with them, hunting fishing, shooting, and so forth.

"In October, 1879, the Hon. Lionel Palmer married, and went to live at Firvale Lodge, at the other end of the village. About the same time Lord Bamford made the acquaintance of a certain Miss Rosie Verrill, a young actress of considerable skill, who was then playing a small part at the Gaiety Theatre, in London. Her father had just been sentenced to twenty years' penal servitude for forgery and embezzlement; but, in spite of this fact, and in spite of the earnest advice of his friends, Lord Bamford announced his intention of marrying her.

"On August 31st, in the following year, 1880, Mr. Palmer's wife gave birth to a son, who was christened Hugh."

He turned to Hugh.

"That was you, of course," continued Wraith. "If Lord Bamford had died the day after you were born, your father would have become the new Lord Bamford, and you would have succeeded to the title when your father died. But three weeks after you were born—that is to say, on September 23rd, 1880—Lord Bamford married Miss Rosie Verrill, and in July, 1881, she presented him with a son and heir.

"A few weeks after the birth of this son and heir there was an outbreak of diphtheria in the village. Lady Bamford (as we must now call Miss Rosie Verrill) took the disease in a very mild form, and quickly recovered. But her husband

Lord Bamford, was not so fortunate. He sickened of the disease on August 27th, and in three days he was dead. At the moment when he died, of course, his baby-son became by law the new Lord Bamford.

"Two days after Lord Bamford's death the baby also took the disease—took it badly, and died in less than twenty-four hours. His death took place in the middle of the night, and there was nobody in the room at the time except Lady Bamford and myself.

"As soon as I announced that the baby was dead, her ladyship locked the bed-room door, and gripped me by the arm.

"'Do you know what this means to me?' she asked, in a low, hoarse voice.

"'Yes,' said I. 'It means that Mr. Lionel Palmer is now the new Lord Bamford and that your ladyship will have to leave the Grange.'

"'It means more than that,' she replied. 'Shortly before his death my husband made a will, in which he left me fifteen thousand a year until my son attained the age of twenty-one. When my son reached the age of twenty-one, or if he died before he was twenty-one, my income was to drop to a paltry two thousand a year. My son is now dead. If he had lived, I should have had fifteen thousand a year for the next twenty-one years. I shall now have only two, and shall have to leave the Grange into the bargain.'

"She dropped my arm, and regarded me fixedly for a moment or two. Then she signed to me to lower my head.

"'You and I are the only persons who know that my son is dead,' she whispered, 'If you could procure a living baby, and smuggle it into the house before to-morrow morning, and take this dead child away, who should ever know or suspect that the living child was not my son? I should then continue to enjoy my fifteen thousand a year, and——'

"She gripped me by the arm again.

"'I would make you an allowance of five thousand a year so long as you lived, as the price of your help and silence,' she said. 'Will you do it?'

"To my eternal shame and dishonour, I accepted her ladyship's offer. One of my patients, a woman named Martha Dobson, who lived in a lonely cottage on the other side of the moors, had given birth to a son on the very day that the little Lord Bamford had been born. For the sum of fifty pounds I induced this woman to part with her babe, which I smuggled into the Grange that very night whilst the dead child was taken to Martha Dobson's cottage, and afterwards buried as her son. Mrs. Dobson, I may say, died a few months later, and to the day of her death she never knew that her son was at the Grange.

"Lady Bamford paid me my first five thousand pounds on the day after the exchange, and for the next eighteen months everything went on swimmingly. Not a soul in the place ever suspected for an instant that the child at the Grange was not the young Lord Bamford; but every time I saw Mr. Lionel Palmer and his wife and little son, and realised that it was they who ought to be reigning at the Grange, my conscience reproached me for the despicable part I had played.

"At last my remorse became so great that I could stand the strain no longer,

and on Christmas Eve, 1882, I went to the Grange, saw Lady Bamford, gave her back her five thousand pounds, and told her that I was going to interview Mr. Palmer and make a clean breast of the whole affair. Her ladyship wept, and threatened, and cajoled; but I refused to be moved from my purpose, and left the Grange with the firm intention of proceeding to Firvale Lodge and confessing everything.

“What happened next you have doubtless guessed. Lady Bamford left the Grange immediately after my departure, crossed the park, and lay in wait for me in Dead Man’s Hollow. As I was passing the bushes, behind which she was hiding, she fired at me with a revolver. The bullet struck me in the head, but I retained my senses sufficiently long to see her dart into the middle of the road and raise her weapon for a second shot. Ere she could fire again, however, the sound of approaching wheels was heard, and even as she turned to flee I lapsed into unconsciousness.

“The next twenty years of my life are an utter blank. I remember absolutely nothing of what happened, after I lost consciousness, until last Christmas Eve when I suddenly seemed to awake out of a trance, and found myself in old Mrs. Moxon’s cottage at Firvale. I asked the old woman to tell me what had happened, and she told me that I had been found lying in Dead Man’s Hollow, twenty years before, with a bullet wound in my skull. She also told me that the doctors had performed an operation on my skull, by means of which they had saved my life but that for the last twenty years I had been a harmless lunatic, supported by the charity of the villagers.

“I asked for news of the people at the Grange, and learned that Lady Bamford was still alive, and that she and her supposed son were spending Christmas at the Grange. I then asked for news of Mr. Lionel Palmer and his family, in reply to which the old woman told me that both Mr. Palmer and his wife had died when Hugh was twelve years old, and had left him practically penniless. Hugh, she said, had become a clergyman, and had arrived at Firvale that very day to take up his duties as curate at the parish church.”

Again he turned to Hugh.

“As soon as I heard this,” he said, “I determined to come to your lodgings and tell you that the supposed Lord Bamford was really Martha Dobson’s son, and that you, now that your father was dead, were the real and only Lord Bamford. Before doing so, however, I could not resist the temptation of going to the Grange and gloating over Lady Bamford. It was an insane thing to do—just the sort of thing a recently recovered lunatic might be expected to do—for she promptly sent the supposed Lord Bamford after me, and he fired at me through your window before I had time to tell you my tale.

“The rest you know. Although the bullet missed me, the shock proved too much for my reason, and I rushed out wildly into the blinding snowstorm. Where I hid myself, or how I spent my time, during the next few days, I do not know; but when my reason returned I was lying amid the ruins of Peak Castle, and a man was bending over me, who said his name was Nelson Lee. On pretence of taking me to see Hugh Palmer, he persuaded me to accompany him to the house in Grinkle Square; but as soon as we were safely inside he threw off his mask,

told me that his real name was Jean Moreau, that he had been engaged to find me by the supposed Lord Bamford, and that he intended to keep me a prisoner for the rest of my life as a means of extorting blackmail. Upon hearing this, I fell to the ground in a dead faint, and when I came round I found myself in that underground vault from which you released me a couple of hours ago."

He rose to his feet, and stood before Hugh with bowed head and downcast eyes.

"I have now told you my story, Mr. Palmer," he said. "I have not attempted to shield myself in any way whatever, and I do not wish to do so now. I frankly confess that I was guilty of a most dishonourable and despicable act when I assisted Lady Bamford to palm off Martha Dobson's son as the little Lord Bamford. But for this, your father would have succeeded to the title and estates in 1881, and you would have followed suit in 1892, when your father died. As a consequence of my act, your father never bore the title at all, and you have been kept out of your rightful position for ten long, weary years. Under these circumstances, I feel that it is too much to hope that you can ever forgive me for——"

Hugh checked him with uplifted hand.

"I forgive you from the bottom of my heart," he said. "If you sinned, you were sorely punished for your sin. Moreover, to the best of your ability you have striven to make atonement for your sin, and, so far as I am concerned, you shall never hear a reproachful word."

The old man tried to speak, but emotion choked his utterances. Silently he held out his hand, and silently Hugh grasped it. Then the quick whirr of a distant bell fell on their ears.

"The telephone!" said Nelson Lee, springing from his chair. "Excuse me half a minute!"

He left the room, and presently returned with a radiant face.

"Our triumph is now complete!" he said. "They have telephoned from Scotland Yard to say that Lady Bamford has just been arrested at Charing Cross Station!"

Conclusion.

The rest is soon told. Lady Bamford was duly tried for attempting to murder Martin Wraith in 1882, and also for conspiring to defraud Hugh Palmer of his lawful inheritance. She was convicted, and sentenced to twenty years' penal servitude, which was five years more than was meted out to Buster.

Zacharie was at first charged by the police with the murder of Lord Bamford; but, as they were unable to produce any direct proof of his guilt, the jury disagreed, and a new trial was ordered. At the second trial the jury again disagreed, in consequence of which the police withdrew the murder charge, and placed him on his trial for being an "accessory after the fact," and also for conspiring with Moreau to kidnap Martin Wraith. On both these counts the jury unanimously found him guilty, and he was sentenced to penal servitude for the term of his natural life.

Hugh Palmer, as a matter of course, succeeded to the title and estates, and is now one of the most popular landowners in Derbyshire. Martin Wraith resides at Firvale Lodge, which Hugh presented to him, along with an income sufficiently large to keep him in comparative luxury for the rest of his days.

Nelson Lee, at the moment when these lines appear in print, is spending a brief vacation at Firvale Grange, and it is safe to say that, of all the guests whom Hugh has entertained since he came to his own, there is none to whom he has accorded a more hearty welcome than the brilliant young detective who, by his masterly handling of the "Bamford Peerage Case"—as it was called—proved once more that in skill, in courage, and in all that constitutes a successful detective, he stands to-day without a serious rival.

THE END.

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