

# THE EMPEROR'S DETECTIVE.

BY PERCY ANDREÆ.

*Illustrated by* ROBERT SAUBER, R.B.A.

## V.—THE INCIDENT OF THE ARREST OF WALTER RALEIGH AND THE MAN WITH THE MISSING FOREFINGER.



MAY pass over the next four-and-twenty hours of my life in silence. The reader, I fancy, will not be particularly concerned to hear anything I could say regarding the effect produced upon my mind by the terrible calamity of which I had been the unwilling cause, nor could I hope to do anything like justice to the subject.

Suffice it to say that I was dominated by a feeling of total callousness as to what the future might bring me, and that, could I have undone what was done by sacrificing every hope and ambition that had ever stirred my soul, I would have willingly submitted to the sacrifice. I cannot say with certainty whether, during this earliest period of utter, crushing desolation, I was alive to any sense of the personal danger in which I stood. I know that upon the first occasion of my venturing again into the streets of Berolingen, which I did the day after the masked ball, I became conscious that my movements were being watched. But the circumstance excited no other feeling in me than one of contemptuous indifference. The idea of flight had never entered my head. The possibility of my being arrested and tried for murder or manslaughter may have occurred to me; but that is all. It excited no fear in my breast, for I would not have cared a snap of the fingers for the severest sentence any judge in Christendom could have passed upon me.

I had spent, so far as I can remember, two whole days and nights in this desperate frame of mind, waiting for a development of some sort or other, and caring but little what it might prove to be, when an occurrence befell that aroused my faculties once more from the state of lethargy into which they had lapsed and gave me food for much puzzled thought.

I have already stated that, after the tragedy in the palace garden, I found my

footsteps dogged wherever I went. For what purpose, or at whose behest, I knew not nor cared to inquire. I dodged my pursuers and eluded their vigilance, not with any desire to escape from them, but merely for the pastime it afforded me. On one such occasion—it was the second night after the masked ball—when I had successfully given my self-constituted body-guard the slip and was returning home to my lodgings by a circuitous route through a lonely part of the city, I was stopped by a couple of men, one of whom asked me the way to a certain spot in the neighbourhood. Something in the fellow's physiognomy put me on my guard, and instead of replying I stepped quickly back—fortunately just in time to prevent the second one from attacking me in the rear. This latter ruffian had a knife in his hand, which I seized and wrenched from him before he could bring it into play, and the next moment I had landed a blow on his companion's chest which sent him reeling into the gutter. The promptness of the action evidently confounded the worthy couple, for the man whose knife I had appropriated fled instantly with great precipitation, whilst his mate, after picking himself up from the heap of refuse on to which he had fallen, followed with as much speed as he could command.

I proceeded on my way, a good deal exercised in my mind by this occurrence. That the attack had been a premeditated one there could be no doubt. I knew the faces of both the men, having met them, during the last two days, on more than one occasion, though without suspecting the existence of any connection between them and those who had been shadowing me. On reaching my lodgings I saw one of these latter posted in a doorway on the opposite side of the street, and, angered at the insolence of the thing, I crossed over and approached him deliberately.

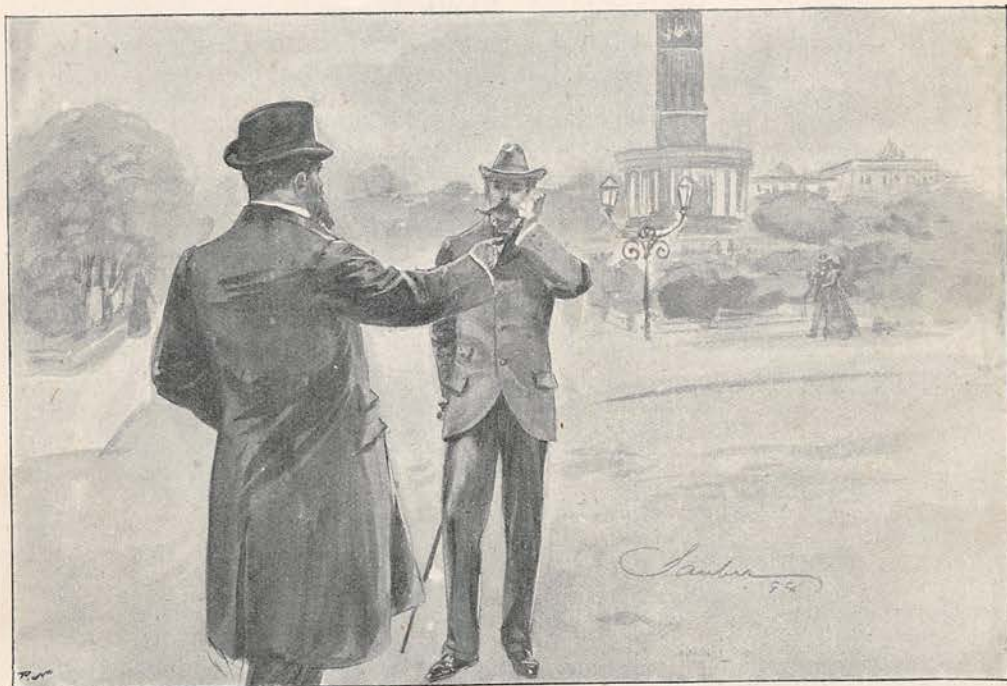
He did not stir, but awaited my coming as one would that of an old acquaintance,

nodding a friendly greeting as I reached him.

"You scoundrel!" I said, measuring him from top to toe, "tell your employer, whoever he is, that it takes more than one arm, and more than one knife, to give the happy despatch to Walter Raleigh. As for this thing, you may return it to your vile accomplice, and let him know that if he comes within reach of this fist again he shall not escape as easily as he did to-night."

Saying which, I threw the knife at the fellow's feet, and turning my back upon him walked across the street to my lodgings. The look of blank astonishment on his face,

in the full light of the noonday sun, when I was traversing the Siegesplatz, or Place of Victory, which fronts the Gate of Brandenburg, I did not gain a view of my assailant's face at all. All I became aware of was the peculiar shrieking noise of a bullet as it whizzed close by my left ear, followed by a stinging sensation in the lobe of that organ. There was no report—at least, I heard none—which proved that the weapon from which the bullet had been discharged was an air-gun, or some similar kind of devil's instrument. Glancing instinctively in the direction whence the shot must have been fired, I saw a man running at full speed between the



"You had better get your wound dressed at once."

as the knife fell with a clanging sound on the pavement, was a perfect picture. But it was not until the next day that I comprehended its full meaning.

Taken by itself, I should not have thought this miserable attempt upon my life worth recording in these pages. But it was repeated the following day in so bold and determined a manner, and was this time accompanied by such strangely contradictory circumstances, that I could not pass it over without omitting a very peculiar link in the chain of events which I am presenting to the reader.

On this second occasion, though it happened

trees of the Thiergarten, which skirts the square in the west.

Before I had time to determine in my own mind whether it would be worth while under the circumstances to attempt to capture the scoundrel, there being about two hundred yards between us, and he having the advantage of an easy escape into the thick of the forest, I saw that someone else had taken up the chase, and I stood still to await the result. This, however, was a foregone conclusion, for long before the pursuer, who must have been walking some fifty yards behind me, reached the outskirts of the wood, the fellow had disappeared altogether

from view, and further pursuit became useless.

The whole thing had passed without attracting the slightest notice among the public in the square, and pressing my handkerchief to my ear to staunch the blood that was flowing from it, I now hurried across the place towards the spot where my would-be assassin had vanished. Judge of my astonishment when I came up with the man who had given chase to the fellow and recognised in him one of those who had been shadowing me for the last three days. It was, in fact, the very individual with whom I had spoken the night before on returning home after my tussle with the two villains in the street.

"You have been hit," he said, before I could address him. "You had better get your wound dressed at once."

"It is a mere scratch," I answered, "and requires no dressing. What is of more importance to me is to know who the villain is that fired at me."

"He is evidently no friend of yours," the man answered, with grim humour.

"So I presume," I said. "Perhaps he is one of yours."

The same surprised look came into the man's face that I had noticed in it the previous night, when I threw the assassin's knife at his feet.

"I cannot prevent you from thinking so," he replied, "but I know no more of the fellow than you do."

"Then why do you follow and watch me?" I asked.

"I obey my orders," he said.

"Orders? From whom?"

"That is my concern."

"Are you a police officer?"

In lieu of answering he merely shrugged his shoulders and smiled knowingly.

"I can scarcely suppose," I went on, "that you have been set at my heels to protect me from the attacks of these murderous villains."

"I have no instructions on that score," he answered. "It would be well, though," he went on, "if you walked rather less abroad than you do; and," he added confidentially, "if you will take a hint from me, you will change your lodgings. You have some determined enemies, and, if I am not much mistaken, they will effect their purpose yet, unless you take measures to elude them."

With this he gave me a nod that was intended to be encouraging, and left me standing. I was now scarcely much wiser

than before, save that I knew, what I had not known previously, that I had two sets of shadows to deal with, the object of one of which was to take my life, and that of the other God knows what.

It was by no means an enviable situation. Although my worst enemy cannot accuse me of being a coward, I must confess to having experienced a thrill of dismay at the prospect before me, and for the space of a moment or two I even meditated flight from the dangers surrounding me. But I discarded this latter idea at once. Berolingen just now possessed an attraction for me which, call it morbid or not, was far too powerful to be outweighed by considerations of personal safety. It is said that those whose hands are tainted with innocent blood are subject to a strange spell which forces them to hover near the scene where the deed of horror was committed. Perhaps I was under the influence of some such spell. At any rate, I felt irresistibly drawn to the vicinity of the Imperial palace, and spent hours and hours, both by night and by day, watching every outlet of the building in the expectation of seeing the remains of my erstwhile love borne out for burial.

At last I had a new channel into which to divert my thoughts. It was towards evening on the day of my adventure on the Siegesplatz, and I was packing up my belongings prior to quitting my lodgings—for I had decided, not unwisely, I think, to follow my strange adviser's counsel and quit my present quarters—when the following note was delivered into my hands by a street messenger—

"I shall expect you to-night at the usual time and place. If you value your safety, do not fail to come. H. v. R."

It was certainly short and to the point, but it surprised me beyond measure. Truth to say, engrossed as I had been with the one overwhelming memory of the event at the masked ball, I had scarcely given any further thought to Herr von Retzow and his double dealings. It had occurred to my mind once or twice that it was perhaps he upon whose instructions my life was being sought, but I was too indifferent as to the source of these desperate attempts to dwell at any length upon the subject. As for the possibility that I should ever again enter into personal intercourse with this man, I would have ridiculed the bare idea of such a thing.

Nevertheless, in spite of the cool presumption that characterised this message, and my strong suspicion that its writer was the real

originator of the attacks upon my life, I decided without a moment's hesitation to comply with the summons. After all, I reflected, anything was preferable to the state of harassing uncertainty in which I was living, and though in venturing into the house at the Thiergarten I might be taking my life in my hands, I would at least go prepared not to part with it save at a heavy cost to those who should attempt to deprive me of it.

Having once formed this resolve, I felt my interest in things mundane revive again, and after passing the evening in hunting for some suitable quarters where I might hope to escape the unwelcome notice of my persecutors should I require such a hiding-place after that night, I repaired towards midnight to the well-known house near the Thiergarten.

The door was opened by the servant who had received Herr von Retzow and myself on the night when I first formed the famous police agent's acquaintance. Following a purpose of my own, I asked the man whether Colonel von Stauffenberg was within. He looked surprised at the question, but replied promptly that his Excellency was at Potshof, in attendance upon his Majesty. This I knew to be true, for I had been in Potshof myself that very forenoon, and had seen the Colonel in the flesh driving with the Emperor in the Lustgarten. I would have questioned the man further, but, having answered my first inquiry, he cut my next one short by saying that, "the Herr Commissar awaited me," and inviting me with a polite gesture to follow him.

I had no other alternative but to comply, and a moment later I was ushered into the presence of Herr von Retzow. I slipped my hand into my hip pocket to assure myself that my revolver was handy, and then advanced into the room with an air of affected indifference. It was the same apartment in which I had partaken of his hospitality on the first occasion of my visiting the house, and I remembered its features well. There were three doors in the room, one by which I had entered, and one in each of the side walls. In the middle of the apartment stood a large square table, and near the window at the further end a small desk. At the latter sat Herr von Retzow himself, engaged with a heap of papers that were piled up in front of him.

He turned round in his chair as I entered and regarded me for a moment sharply.

"So you have come, after all, my dear Sir Walter," he said. "You have acted wisely."

There was not a trace of that harsh, forbidding accent in his voice which had repelled me so strongly when I last met him in Wittichau. Did he, I wondered, want to cajole me into keeping silent upon what I had seen and heard there?

"Doubtless," I said, "you have the best reasons for knowing that my coming would be uncertain. But, as you see, I am not so easily removed."

"Which means, I suppose, that you credit me with the intention of removing you," he answered coolly.

"If I needed proofs," I rejoined, "I should find little difficulty in producing them. I have not forgotten Wittichau."

He rose quietly from his seat, and looked me full in the face.

"Has it never occurred to you, my friend," he asked suavely, "that you made an unconscionable fool of yourself on that occasion?"

I believe I coloured like some raw school-boy at the cool effrontery of the question. But, the devil knows, the man had a way of saying these things that took one's breath away.

"Maybe I did—from your point of view," I said. "But I am no abettor of treason and treachery, and I would have you know it."

"Bravely spoken, but none the less foolishly," he replied; "nor does it alter the fact, friend Sir Walter, that by your officious rashness on the occasion in question you narrowly missed spoiling the detective work of months."

"Ah!" I exclaimed, "would you have me believe—pooh! I am too old a bird to be caught by that kind of chaff. Was it excess of loyalty, pray, that caused you to send four bullets after me at Wittichau?"

I thought I had stumped him this time. But not a bit of it. He met my eye as frankly and fearlessly as ever.

"All things considered," he said deliberately, "I am not so sure that you deserved to escape as lightly as you did, for you sadly needed a lesson in discretion."

I laughed aloud. This attempt, as I thought it, to gloss over the shooting affair at Wittichau seemed to me too palpably lame.

"You mean to imply," I said, "that you missed your aim on purpose. A rather sorry excuse for poor marksmanship."

A flash as of angry scorn lighted up his eyes.

"You shall judge for yourself," he answered abruptly. "Come." He touched

a hand-bell that stood upon his writing-desk, and the servant who had ushered me in entered.

"To the shooting gallery," he said; and before I knew what he meant, he had passed out of the door.

I followed him wonderingly, and a moment or two later found myself in a kind of outbuilding about forty feet in length, which evidently extended into the garden at the back of the house, and was fitted out as a miniature shooting range. As we entered, the servant who had preceded us touched an electric button, and the place was instantly



"There was but one mark in the target."

lighted up with the brightness of day. Upon a sign from my strange host, the man then placed a new target in position at the lower end. It was about two feet in diameter, and black, with a white bull's-eye. Pointing to a row of pistols arrayed ready for use on the shooting stand, Herr von Retzow said—

"The first shot shall be yours. Take your choice."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"At twenty-five paces?" I said contemptuously, for the length of the range scarcely exceeded that distance. "Is it worth the trouble?"

"If you dot the centre of the bull's-eye, my friend," he replied, "it shall stand to your credit."

I chose a pistol, and, taking a careless aim, fired. The bullet struck the white bull's-eye about a quarter of an inch from the centre.

My companion, who had meanwhile likewise made his choice of a weapon, now stepped into my place to take his turn. His aim was quick but careful. I heard the bullet strike the target, but no second dot appeared beside mine in the bull's-eye.

"A pretty clean miss," I said, with a feeling of satisfaction which I could not repress.

He gave me an amused glance.

"Over hasty, as usual, my dear Sir Walter," he said. "Unless you claim to have fired two bullets, I must take credit for the one that covers yours in the target."

I strode incredulously to the spot in order to investigate the thing with my own eyes. What he said was true. There was but one mark in the target, but, after dislodging the visible bullet with my penknife, I found a second one, my own, buried beneath it.

"By George!" I muttered under my breath; "what a stunning shot!"

"At least, not a likely one for a man who requires to invent lame excuses for poor marksmanship," said Herr von Retzow, who had meanwhile come up behind me.

I said nothing; but, though I could not but acknowledge that the feat I had witnessed was one to command respect, it left me unconvinced on the one point on which it had apparently been his desire to convince me—namely, that his firing at me through the window of the inn at Wittichau had been a mere feint, executed for some purpose best known to himself.

"May I ask," I said, when we had returned to the room we had left a few moments before, "for what object you have summoned me here?"

"To require one more service of you," he replied simply. "It shall be your last."

"You may spare your time and breath, then," I said roughly, "for I shall not be likely to undertake it."

"It would be well, at least," he answered, quite unmoved by my determined manner, "to listen to what I have to propose before you refuse."

He motioned me with a careless gesture to a seat at the further end of the table, and, leaning back in an easy attitude in the chair he occupied, he sat regarding me for a

moment with an almost whimsical expression of countenance.

"I may tell you frankly, my dear Sir Walter," he went on, "that it did not enter into my plans that you should learn what you did at Wittichau. But since chance has afforded you an insight into these things, it is perhaps meet that you should have an opportunity of using the knowledge you have acquired. I have, therefore, decided that you shall attend in person the next conference of those of whose secrets you have become possessed."

I hardly knew whether he was mocking me or speaking in earnest.

"Your intentions are extremely kind," I said, with studied irony. "But my interest in the proceedings of these friends of yours is of the slightest, and I have no desire to learn more of them."

"What!" he exclaimed, with feigned astonishment. "Not even for the sake of the Emperor whose cause you champion?"

"Not even for the sake of the Emperor whom you pretend to serve," I replied sternly.

"And can serve no better," he said impressively, "than by the very means I am now proposing. Listen," he went on, falling suddenly into the short, peremptory tone he was sometimes wont to adopt. "The conference I speak of will be held two nights hence, in a room of a certain hotel which I shall name to you. You will attend it unseen, concealed in a closet to which you will gain access from the adjoining chamber. The partition between this closet and the conference chamber is a panel that slides back at the pressure of a button, the position of which will be shown to you by the person to whom you will deliver this letter." He took up a sealed envelope from the table as he spoke. "Neither the panel nor the existence of the closet behind it is discoverable from the other side, but means are provided that will enable you to hear, if not to see, what passes at the conference. Do you follow me?"

"I follow you perfectly," I rejoined, speaking, as before, with ironical politeness; "and pray what is to be the outcome of all this comedy?"

"A pertinent question," he replied. "I will answer it. At a given signal, which will consist in a loud knocking at the door of the room, you will press the button in the closet removing the panel, and pass quickly to the door, which you will unlock, letting in those who demand admittance."

"A likely story, indeed," I said scornfully. "But you will have to select another to assume that part in it which you have assigned to me."

A flush of anger mounted to his brow.

"You refuse to do my bidding?" he asked.

"Your bidding?" I said. "I have yet to learn that there is one who can bid Walter Raleigh do what he would not do. Do you imagine," I added angrily, "that I am to be deceived by so palpable a trap as this?"

"Is that the only difficulty?" he said, pausing an instant, as one who is carefully weighing his words. "You are strangely inconsistent, my dear Sir Walter. Or has it not occurred to you, since you suspect me of these evil designs, that you are at this very moment in a trap from which escape is impossible?"

"How so?" I said, slightly startled, and glancing involuntarily around me; for, truth to say, though I had come here with the full knowledge of the danger I was incurring, the sense of that danger had gradually yielded to the curious influence of this man's presence, and I had thought no more of it.

"It is for you to draw your own conclusions," he answered. "But rest assured you shall do my bidding, or abide the consequences of a refusal."

"And what may these consequences be?" I asked in a tone of defiance.

He paused again before he replied, regarding me the while with an air of supreme indifference, which sent a flush of anger to my temples.

"Simply these, my friend," he then said quietly, "that you will leave this house in the custody of the police to answer a charge of murder and high treason."

I sprang to my feet, enraged at the boldness of the thing, and I fear I lost my head.

"Not before I have settled scores with you, double-dyed traitor and would-be assassin!" I cried, hoarse with passion. "If I am to suffer for the crime of murder, I will at least merit my punishment."

I had slipped my hand into my hip pocket as I spoke and whipped out my revolver. But I was too late. Before I could raise and point it, Herr von Retzow, without rising from the table at which he had seated himself when we re-entered the room, had quickly covered me with a similar weapon. At the same moment, apparently in response to some electric signal, the doors

in the two side walls opened noiselessly, and a stalwart lacquey appeared on each threshold.

"Disarm that man," Herr von Retzow said in a quiet, even voice. "Nay, if you raise your arm another inch, my friend," he continued, addressing me, "it will be at the cost of your life."

I stood for an instant in doubt. But I saw it was useless to persist. I had to own myself fairly worsted, and I threw down my revolver with as good a grace as I could. Herr von Retzow calmly possessed himself of the weapon, and, having placed it beside his own at his elbow, made a sign to the two servants, who then withdrew again like two automata.

The whole thing had not occupied more than sixty seconds, and certainly, for perfection in its every detail, the incident might have passed for a scene in a well-rehearsed play. In spite of myself, I could not stifle a feeling of respect, nay, even of liking for this man and his strong, dauntless spirit, struggle against it as I might.

He rose from his seat now and advanced towards me until he stood within a couple of feet of me.

"You are stubborn as well as blind," he said, eyeing me sternly. (I could have struck him to the ground, then, and killed him where he stood, for I towered half a head above him, and he had no arms now. Yet I desisted, for what reason I do not know.) "Now, listen to me," he went on. "In your ignorant folly you think it is I who am persecuting you and seeking your life. You are mistaken in this as in many other things, but it is not for me to open your eyes when you refuse the opportunity of self-enlightenment which I have offered you. The mystery that surrounds you has confused your judgment, my dear Sir Walter. Yet there is a clue to it so simple that a child could grasp it. Indeed," he concluded, pointing with startling abruptness to the mantelshelf behind me, where the vial with its ghastly contents, the human forefinger which I had seen him pick up from the snow three months ago, still stood in the same position it had occupied on the night when I first met him, "it is there, within three feet of where you stand."

He noticed the look of perplexity with which I gazed in the direction indicated, and continued—

"Events, it seems, have been crowding in upon you so fast that they have affected your memory, or you would not have for-

gotten that the man who lacks that finger is still at large. Did I not pledge you my promise that the task of tracking that scoundrel to his lair should fall to you? I am now redeeming my pledge, for you shall meet him face to face two nights hence, and with his capture your troubles will be at an end."

"Do you mean," I said, catching at the bait, though I was loth to believe him, "that I shall find this fellow among those present at the conference?"

"Precisely," he replied. "We begin at last to understand each other."

"But his capture," I said. "There may be half a dozen or more present at this meeting. I cannot deal single-handed with so many."

"My dear Sir Walter," he rejoined, "I would not entrust this man's seizure to even so doughty an arm as yours. Think of nothing but the accomplishment of the task I have set you, which is to throw open the door to those who will demand admittance. The rest will follow."

"It is they, then, who will seize him?"

"Him, and those with him."

"Then why not place them where you would place me?" I objected. "Since access to the chamber where the conference will be held can be gained through the closet, it seems to me unnecessary—"

"My friend," he broke in quietly, "I am not accustomed to argue my plans with such as you. I have given you your choice. Take it. The hour is growing late."

I had already half succumbed to the strange fascination of the man, and if I wavered still, it was rather from the desire to learn more than from any indecision I felt.

"Do you really believe," I asked, "that a promise of services obtained under these circumstances of compulsion is likely to be fulfilled?"

His eye rested upon me with an expression that seemed to search my inmost thoughts.

"Walter Raleigh," he said, with a peculiar emphasis which I cannot describe, "I would not give the value of a silver piece for all the sense you possess. But there are fools who are rich in that most priceless of heaven's gifts—honour, and I believe you to be one of them. I demand your word, no more."

I think I would have struck any other man who had dared to say this to me. All I replied to him was—

"You shall have my word, then, if nothing

else will content you. But mark, if you play me false——”

“Enough,” he interrupted me with an impatient gesture. “Are you so witless as to suppose that, if I meditated your destruction, I would suffer you to go forth free from here, when with a motion of my finger I could at this very instant forfeit your liberty for ever—nay, perhaps your life itself? Go, my dear Sir Walter, and remember your pledge. Present yourself, the night after next, at nine o'clock precisely at the address on this envelope.” He handed me the sealed letter as he spoke. “The person to whom it is directed will conduct you to the room I have described. Lock the outer door before you enter the closet, and ask no questions; but obey my instructions to the letter. Within three days we shall meet again—for the last time. Good night.”

It was his usual form of curt dismissal, and I left him without further demur. There was some truth in what he had said, and I knew it. Yet it seemed to me that there had been a faint tinge of mockery in his reference to our meeting again for the last time, and the memory of it set me a-thinking as I made my way homewards.

During the two days that intervened I scarcely left my lodgings at all, deeming it safest not to expose myself again to the attacks of the murderous villains from whose vengeance I had twice so narrowly escaped. I also took another precaution, which I thought desirable in case of emergency. That is to say, I packed up all my belongings and sent them by the hand of a street porter to the railway station, it being my intention, if I passed safely through the adventure that awaited me, to board the first train that left Berolingen for foreign parts, and betake myself to some country where I should be quit for ever of all the harassing circumstances that surrounded me in the Arminian capital.

Imagine my discomfiture, however, when the worthy porter returned with an air of extreme consternation and placed, instead of the expected luggage receipt, a strip of paper, containing the following words, in my hands—

“Mr. Walter Raleigh can claim his baggage by presenting this paper at the Central Bureau of the Imperial Detective Police. By Order.”

There was no signature to the document, and all the explanation I received from the affrighted porter was, that the paper in

question had been handed to him by the official in charge of the baggage room of the station at the Friedrichstrasse, with strict injunctions to deliver it to the owner of the deposited baggage.

I dismissed the man, after handing him his fee, and paced my room in a state of considerable perplexity. Evidently my intentions of flight had been forestalled, a circumstance which filled me rather with impotent anger than with alarm, and caused me to take a step which, to say the truth, I had been too dull, or perhaps too scrupulous, to think of before. It was this. While I had pledged my word to carry out Herr von Retzow's instructions, I had made no promise to refrain from making use of the knowledge he had imparted to me as I thought fit, and I now resolved upon the bold plan of communicating the fact of the meeting of the conspirators to the Emperor Willibald himself.

My only difficulty was the devising of a means to ensure the safe delivery of my communication into the Emperor's own hands, for I was shrewd enough to conjecture that if it passed, as I knew it must in the ordinary course, through the hands of Colonel von Stauffenberg, it would not be likely ever to reach his Majesty. There was no time to be lost, for it was the morning of the day on which the conference was to take place, and after a hasty deliberation I hit upon the following method. I addressed my warning, in which I stated the precise hour and place of the contemplated meeting, to his Majesty the Emperor Willibald under cover to the general in command of the garrison of Berolingen, and added a short note to the latter, begging his Excellency to deliver the enclosure with his own hands to the Emperor, whose personal safety it concerned.

Having despatched this important document, in which, for reasons of prudence, I gave no clue to my identity, I felt more at ease. All I now had to fear was the possibility that it might reach its destination too late to effect its purpose, for the Emperor, as I saw by the newspapers, was not in Berolingen, but in Potshof, which lies at a distance of about thirty miles from the capital. But I could not influence the course of events. I had done my best and must await the result.

Punctually at nine o'clock that night I presented myself at the address designated in the letter given me by Herr von Retzow. This was a small hotel in a busy street in



the northern part of the town. I delivered my letter at the hotel office, whereupon a personage whom it was not difficult to recognise as the landlord came towards me, and after scrutinising me with a good deal of curiosity, invited me to enter his private room. Thence, without addressing another word to me, he conducted me straightway by a back staircase to the first floor of the building, where we proceeded along a sparsely-lighted passage towards what appeared to be a kind of annex recently added to the original structure. He stopped at a door near the end of the passage, and, unlocking it, bade me enter.

I found myself in a small, bare room, littered with rubbish and lumber of every kind, evidently left by carpenters and mechanics who had just finished some piece of work there. A glance around sufficed to show me the nature of this work. A portion of the thick wall dividing the room from the adjoining apartment had been removed, and a kind of closet constructed in the aperture. I was still gazing curiously at this gap in the wall, and wondering at its unfinished appearance, when my companion stepped into the closet and touched a button in the left-hand corner. The back panel slid aside instantly, disclosing a large, well-lighted chamber beyond, furnished with a long table and about twelve chairs. On this side, as I satisfied myself by ocular inspection, the mechanics had put so complete a finish to their work that the most experienced eye could have discovered no trace of their labour. The reverse side of the panel in the closet, as I noted with some amusement, was a life-size painting of his Majesty the Arminian Emperor, of the common, ponderous kind which one usually meets with in the hotels and public places all over the country. The frame was fitted so close to the wall as to give the impression of being let into the masonry, and, indeed, the whole arrangement was so cleverly contrived that I doubt if the most careful inspection would have resulted in a discovery of its real nature.

I returned to the first room, whereupon my taciturn companion closed the panel, showed me once more the mechanism and manipulation of the button, then turned down the light, and left me without uttering a syllable. I heard him lock the door as he went out, and a feeling crept over me similar to what I imagine a rat must experience when it suddenly finds itself imprisoned in a trap.

But I was there, and had to make the

best of it. The floor of the closet, which I now proceeded to examine more closely by the meagre light left in the room, was bestrewn with thick carpet rugs, presumably to deaden all sound from my side of the partition. On the other hand, as I stood with my ear close to the panel, I could distinctly hear the occasional creaking of the furniture in the adjoining room. A long and weary wait now followed, and the minutes dragged as if they were hours. Once I heard the door of the next room open and someone move on the other side. But it could only have been some hotel servant, come, possibly, to put the finishing touch to the place prior to the arrival of the guests. At any rate, whoever it was, he passed out again after a while, carefully locking the door behind him, whereupon another long, long pause of silence ensued, to be broken at last by the shuffling of several pairs of feet along the passage.

The door was unlocked once more, and by the whispering that followed I gathered that some, if not all, of the members of the conference had entered the room. Presently the same thing was repeated, and twice more, at intervals of three or four minutes, the newcomers in each case being strictly cross-questioned before they were given admittance.

In all I estimated that about eight or nine persons must be assembled, but it was some time before I could distinguish more than a confused murmur of voices, accompanied every now and then by a peculiar rustling noise, as if papers were passing from hand to hand. Gradually one peremptory voice rose above the rest and thenceforward dominated, seemingly, the whole assembly. I knew the voice well, for it was that of the distinguished stranger whose conversation with the "Doctor" I had overheard in the garden of the hostelry at Wittichau.

I strained my ears now to catch the purport of the proceedings, and though my efforts were not rewarded with complete success, I heard enough to convince me, firstly, that the plot against the Emperor Willibald, of which I had learned the bare details at Wittichau, was far more widespread than I had dared suspect, and, secondly, that it was on the very eve of its consummation.

I wondered, as I listened to the details of this vast political intrigue, the success of which would alter the entire complexion of European affairs, whether it were possible that the Emperor could have realised the full extent of the danger threatening him. Here, within a few feet of me, sat but nine

men, but they were the influential leaders of a conspiracy whose ramifications extended throughout the length and breadth of the great Arminian Confederation, and which comprised sovereigns, ministers, diplomats, journalists, physicians, and even two important foreign potentates. Such was the pitch of bitter animosity existing against the impetuous, self-willed young ruler, whose autocratic spirit had more than once come within an ace of setting the world by the ears.

I waited breathlessly to hear some reference by those present to the man who I had every reason to believe had acted throughout as the medium between the parties to the great plot. But, strangely enough, neither the name of Herr von Retzow nor any allusion to him passed the lips of those assembled, though his absence from the meeting should, I thought, have excited some comment. Was the trust these men placed in him so implicit that they harboured no suspicion of the motives which had actuated him in apparently casting in his lot with theirs?

As the time passed, and I listened in vain for the promised signal that would release me from the tension of feeling I was undergoing in the stuffy closet, fresh doubts as to the true object of my presence there began to assail me. What if I were in a trap, after all, and the scheme merely one to expose me at a given moment to the vengeance of the powerful men of whose secrets I had possessed myself? I thought of the taciturn landlord, and remembered, with some misgivings, that he had locked me in the room himself, instead of leaving me to secure the door from within, as arranged with Herr von Retzow. Then, again, I wondered if my despatch had reached the Emperor, and if he would act upon it as I hoped. Whatever might happen, I argued with set teeth, I would at least make my life an expensive purchase, and I instinctively hugged my revolver at the thought.

During these reflections I paid little attention to what was passing in the adjoining room, and it was only when a sudden dead silence fell there that I awoke with a start from my unpleasant reverie. At first I thought that the assembly had dispersed, and that I was left alone, boxed up within these four bare walls. Presently, however, I heard a sound which sent a thrill of excited expectation through me. It was the soft but regular tread of many feet in the passage outside. Had they heard it in the next room, I wondered, and was this the cause of

the sudden silence that had fallen upon them? Even as the thought flashed across my mind the sound outside, in the passage, came to an abrupt end, and a moment later two heavy blows were struck upon the door of the adjoining apartment.

My heart leapt within me. The moment for action had come.

"Open, in the Emperor's name!" said a sharp, commanding voice, and during the momentary pause that followed while I searched for the electric button in the closet I fancied that I could hear the deep, nervous breathing of those assembled on the other side of the partition.

It needed but the gentlest pressure, and the heavy panel slid back swiftly, letting a flood of dazzling light into the semi-darkness in which I had been confined. I stepped quickly through the opening, and, looking neither to the right nor the left, passed with two or three bounds to the door, which I unbolted and opened.

I think my sudden apparition must have paralysed the occupants of the room, for no one stirred as I passed through. Now, however, with a movement of actual horror which I shall never forget, everyone present sprang to his feet. In the open door stood, sword in hand, a captain of the Imperial infantry, and behind him two lieutenants, while the passage beyond was occupied by a company of soldiers drawn up in double file.

It was a moment of extreme tension, during which I glanced curiously around at the faces of those assembled. There were in all eleven men present, all standing, with the exception of one who sat at the head of the table on the right hand of the illustrious stranger whom I had first seen in the garden of the inn at Wittichau. As my eye alighted upon this man a feeling of such utter amazement overcame me that I fell back in a helpless kind of fashion upon the very toes of one of the lieutenants who was entering behind me. Almost at the same moment I heard the voice of the captain, who had advanced alone into the room, ring out these words—

"I arrest you, Heinrich von Retzow, in the Emperor's name."

With one frantic movement the person so addressed swept up the pile of papers lying before him and rushed towards the window. But it was too late. Before he reached the window the two lieutenants had seized him and secured the compromising documents.

The captain now turned to the others.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you are my

prisoners, and will please answer to your names as I call them."

He drew a list from his pocket and read from it as follows—

"Herbert Leopold, Prince Regent of Wittelsbach."

The illustrious stranger from Wittichau

captain answered blandly. "I am a soldier, and my duty is merely to obey my orders. Frederick Augustus, Grand Duke of Mecklenburg," he continued, reading from the list in a dry, matter-of-fact voice.

The distinguished personage named advanced from the group.

"I join in the protest of his Royal Highness the Prince Regent of Wittelsbach against this gross violation of our sovereign rights," he said.

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"Charles Frederick of Hohenwerthern, Prince of Brandenburg," he went on unheeding.

The person so addressed stepped forward as the others had done before him. But I heard neither his reply nor the replies of the remaining seven whose names followed. My attention had suddenly become riveted once more upon the man whose presence in that chamber was a source of so much perplexity to me. He was conversing now in a low voice with one of the lieutenants who stood on guard beside him, and from the glances which he every now and then shot in my direction I gathered that I was the subject of his discourse. There was the same look of cold malevolence in his eyes that I had seen in them once before in the room of the inn at Wittichau. But it was



"I arrest you, Heinrich von Retzow, in the Emperor's name."

stepped forward with compressed lips and eyes blazing with anger.

"I demand to know," he said haughtily, "by what right or law you dare to commit this outrage upon the person of a federal sovereign?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, sir," the

not this which exercised so powerful a fascination over me. In his vehemence he had suddenly removed his left hand from between the flaps of his coat, where it had been buried—a peculiar attitude of his which I had often noticed—and as he pointed with it towards the spot where I stood, I observed

with an indescribable thrill *that the forefinger of the hand was missing.*

The sight fairly rooted me to the ground, and it was not until I felt a heavy hand laid on my shoulder, and, turning, saw the captain behind me, that I regained my power of speech and action.

"Great God!" I exclaimed, addressing that officer and pointing towards Herr von Retzow, "who is that man?"

"One in whose company it is dangerous to be caught, as you see, my friend," he replied simply. "Vorwärts, we have no time to dawdle."

He gripped me roughly by the arm and I fell back thunderstruck.

"What!" I exclaimed, freeing my arm with a quick wrench. "Am I to understand that you arrest me, too? On what grounds? I am innocent of any complicity in this vile conspiracy. The Emperor knows it, and none better than he."

But my expostulations fell upon deaf ears. In a twinkling half-a-dozen soldiers were around me, and I was overpowered and made a prisoner like the rest.

What it all meant I was utterly at a loss to conceive. For an instant, as I glanced instinctively across at Herr von Retzow, who stood between his guards eyeing me with a look of villainous triumph, the horrible suspicion flashed across me that, after all, my warning had not reached the Emperor, and that my seizure as an accomplice of the men whose treasonable schemes I had been instrumental in thwarting was but a prearranged part of the deeply laid plans of the astute police agent himself. And yet, if this were so, how could I account for the fact that he, too, had been taken prisoner? Was his arrest merely an act in the farce in which I had so foolishly assisted? or was it the result of extraordinary miscalculation on his part?

The captain now gave the word of command, and the soldiers falling into double line, with their prisoners in their midst, the curious procession filed out of the room in military order. To all appearances every other occupant of the place had taken flight. In the street, also, every vestige of the busy traffic I had encountered there on my arrival that night had disappeared. But drawn up in front of the hotel stood a row of some dozen carriages, with a soldier seated motionless on the box of each. Into the three first of these the captain and his two lieutenants entered with the three princely personages whose names I had heard

called, and the three conveyances were whirled rapidly away—to what destination I knew not. The rest of us followed into the remaining carriages, and were driven away in an opposite direction. Within ten minutes the conveyance I was in drove through a dark archway and drew up before the door of a large square building. I alighted and was conducted up a short flight of steps into a capacious office, which I recognised at a glance as a police bureau. Here the formality of my transfer from the military to the civil authorities was effected, and I found myself



"I was left in the darkness and solitude of my narrow police cell."

entered upon the records of the station as "One Walter Raleigh, foreigner. Political suspect."

As I was being led away to the cells I made one more endeavour to remonstrate against the treatment I was receiving. But the police official paid as little heed to my energetic protests as the captain had done before him. I was left in the darkness and solitude of my narrow police cell to ruminate upon the extraordinary events of the last few hours and the probable fate that awaited me.