

THE EMPEROR'S DETECTIVE.

BY PERCY ANDRÆ.

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VI.—THE INCIDENT OF THE MAGIC CARD, AND THE STORY OF AN IMPERIAL DETECTIVE.



DID not close my eyes that night. Since the commencement of the strange series of adventures which I have been relating, nothing had so completely confounded me as this last, to me, most puzzling experience. I had been prepared for treachery on the part of Herr von Retzow; I had even conceived the possibility that

the betrayal of his fellow-conspirators he had boldly schemed to rid himself of me at the same stroke; but his own presence at the meeting, which he must have known was destined to end so dramatically, was a mystery that baffled me utterly.

Had it been a part of his whole treacherous plan, and was his own arrest merely a blind to safeguard him against the vengeance of those he was betraying? The more I revolved the question the more obvious the answer to it seemed. But, think as I might, I could find no plausible explanation of the startling fact that the man with the missing forefinger, the desperado to whose murderous onslaught I had nearly fallen a victim when I sprang to the assistance of the stranger in the Thiergarten four months before, was apparently none other than Herr von Retzow himself.

That I should have unwittingly gone home with the very man who had sought my life, thinking that it was he whom I had befriended, was a mistake almost too absurd to appear possible. Moreover, what could have been his object in suddenly patronising the very individual upon whom a few moments before he had been so eager to wreak summary vengeance?

I recalled all the incidents of that fateful night from which my recent strange adventures dated. All I could remember was that I had been stunned by a blow while wrestling with my assailants, and had lain—for how long I knew not—unconscious in the snow.

When I recovered my senses I had found no one beside me save the man whom I had since known as Herr von Retzow, and I could have sworn that he was the person to whose defence I had sprung.

Could the forefinger in the snow, which I had seen him pick up and afterwards preserve in so ghastly a fashion, have been his own? I tried to recollect, but in vain, whether I had ever seen Herr von Retzow's left hand. I had noticed the peculiar trick he had of burying one hand between the flaps of his coat, but the habit had never aroused my suspicions. And, indeed, how could it? Even now, with the evidence of my own eyes before me, the supposition that I had all these months associated with my deadly enemy was so monstrous that my understanding revolted against it.

While I was struggling to reconcile all these strange contradictions, the thought of my own immediate fate almost faded from my mind, and it was not until long after daybreak that I began to consider all the possible consequences of my present awkward situation. From what I had learned of the system of secret trial and punishment of political offenders in Arminia, I knew enough to convince me that my position was one of extreme danger. If, then, my conclusions were correct, and Herr von Retzow had purposely contrived to have me present with the conspirators at the moment of their seizure in order to compromise me in the eyes of the authorities, there was little doubt that he would bring forth such false testimony at my trial as would suffice to convict me of participation in the very scheme I had really been the means of thwarting.

I groaned aloud at the thought of my utter helplessness to clear myself of such a charge. There was but one person who knew of my innocence, the Emperor, whom I had myself warned of the plot that was threatening him. But even if I succeeded in procuring the testimony of so august a

witness, was it not more than likely that I should thereby expose myself to a new danger? I had crossed swords with a member of the Imperial family and had killed an innocent girl—the latter by accident, no doubt, but under circumstances which would scarcely palliate my crime in the eyes of the iron-minded young autocrat, whose jealous notions of the divine prerogatives of royalty no one had yet been known to offend against with impunity.

In short, the longer I dwelt upon all the puzzling aspects of my case, the more desperate it appeared to grow; and when, at last, towards the noon hour—as I supposed, for my watch and all other effects upon my person had been taken from me the night before—my cell door was unlocked, and I was told that I was to appear before the judge to undergo the preliminary examination, which is in Arminia the equivalent of our proceedings in the magistrate's court, I followed my guards with a feeling of reckless indifference born of despair.

The room to which I was now conducted was not an ordinary court room, but a chamber of comparatively small dimensions, furnished with a long table covered with green baize, behind which sat three clean-shaven personages, with a formidable array of papers piled up in front of them. There were a few common wooden chairs placed in a row against the wall facing these men, on one of which I was ordered to seat myself, whilst my two conductors sat down beside me. Otherwise the room was bare of all furniture, and, with the exception of a dried-up old clerk, who passed backwards and forwards between this and the adjoining chamber, carrying bundles of papers and documents, there was no one present but the three judicial individuals

behind the table and I and my two guards.

As soon as I had seated myself, the middle personage behind the table raised his head and regarded me for about thirty seconds with a cold, scrutinising glance. Then he ordered me to stand up, and proceeded to question me rapidly as follows:—

"Your name is Walter Raleigh?"

I replied in the affirmative.

"You are a foreigner?"

"I am of English birth," I said.

"You arrived in this city four months ago, on the 25th of last January?"

"I do not remember the exact date," I replied, "but I presume it is correct."

"For what purpose did you come here?"

"To seek employment," I answered.

"What kind of employment?"

"I am a soldier by profession," I said; "I hoped to enter the service of the Emperor."

"And failing in this purpose, you entered the service of his enemies?"

"If I did so," I said earnestly, "I did it unwittingly and with no evil intent. His Majesty him-

self can testify to my loyal intentions towards his person."

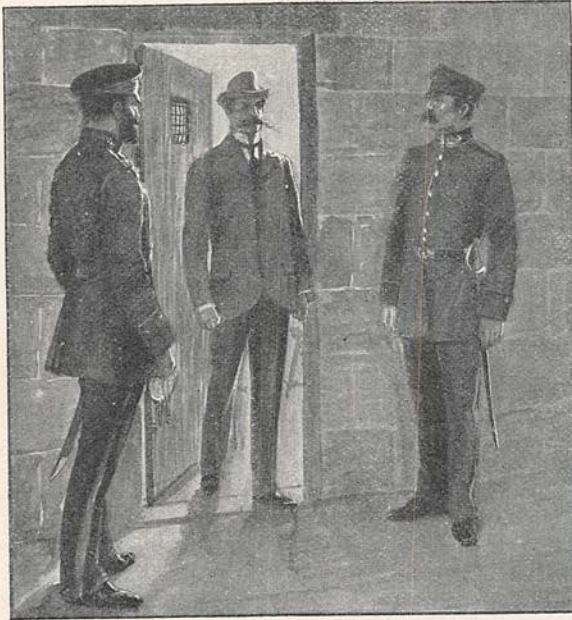
The judge waved his hand to check my speech.

"Silence," he said sternly. "You are here to be questioned, not to offer suggestions."

"I am here to defend myself," I said boldly.

"We shall see," he answered. "Let the indictment be read to the prisoner."

The reading of the document which now followed occupied about ten minutes. It was a tissue of barefaced lies from beginning to end, and under ordinary circumstances I should have found no difficulty in refuting



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every one of the charges contained in it. But, hemmed in as I was by dangers and difficulties on all sides, I had no means of defence save a flat denial of every count in the indictment.

Needless to say, my chief accuser, upon whose evidence the case against me mainly rested, was, as I had anticipated, Herr von Retzow himself, and, judging by the cruel ingenuity of his statement, and the completeness of detail which characterised it, I could only conclude that it must have been prepared for some time. To my surprise it contained no allusion to my presence at the hotel the previous night, nor did it make any mention of my supposed complicity in the plot against the Emperor Willibald. I was accused of being the leading spirit among a gang of foreign anarchists, whose aim was the assassination of the heads of the reigning dynasties in Arminia; and in support of this accusation numerous compromising letters and documents were cited, all of which purported to have been discovered and seized in my lodgings by the henchmen of Herr von Retzow.

I had no doubt that these papers were impudent forgeries, concocted for the express purpose of ruining me. But how was I to prove it? My capture the night before, in the very midst of a bevy of Arminian sovereigns, afforded seemingly the strongest confirmation of my guilt. Even my brief term of office as Oberstallmeister to the Duchess of Bieberstein was construed as evidence of my sinister designs. The position, it was declared, had been procured by fraudulent documents, and my assertion that it had been Herr von Retzow himself who had placed me there was received with derision. I demanded in vain to be confronted with this man. I was told that at the proper time and place I would be brought face to face with the witnesses in the case, and hear from their own lips the evidence they adduced against me.

"It would be better for you, however, young man," the judge added, eyeing me coldly, "if you made a free confession of your guilt, and divulged the names of your vile accomplices. We have means of extorting these which better men than you have been unable to resist."

"I cannot betray accomplices who do not exist," I replied. "But I am ready to tell my story, if I may do so in my own way and without interruption. Perhaps," I added, "it may throw some light on matters of greater import than the guilt or innocence

of the humble individual who stands before you."

"Proceed," said the judge; and I entered into a detailed description of my adventures since that fatal night on which my acquaintance with Herr von Retzow commenced, laying particular stress upon my discovery of the conspiracy against the person of the Emperor, and the detailed knowledge I had obtained of its ramifications and the names of those concerned in it.

The three persons behind the table listened with immovable countenances, only now and then exchanging some remark in a whisper, or taking written notes of what I said.

When I had concluded, the middle one of the three spoke again.

"Your story is a very foolish one," he said, "for it is manifestly impossible, and bristles with palpable lies. Do not imagine," he continued, with a touch of anger, "that you can succeed in confusing the minds of your judges on the subject of your own guiltiness by the introduction of matters pertaining to the crimes of others. The knowledge you pretend to have obtained regarding these things will avail you little, for it is less complete than that which is already in the possession of the authorities. The examination is over. Remove the prisoner."

The last words were addressed to the constables in charge of me, and my heart sank within me as they fell upon my ear. I heard the judge direct an order to be made out for my solitary confinement in the prison of Moab—a place associated in my memory with many a grim story of political persecution; then a sharp tap on my shoulder from one of my gaolers signified to me that I was to withdraw. The prospect of weeks, perhaps months, of solitary imprisonment, with little chance before me of ultimately regaining my freedom, made my blood run cold, and with a violent effort I shook off my two custodians, who had now gripped me each by an arm.

"Stay!" I cried; "you will surely permit me to produce proof of the truth of what I have said. I have such proof, or, rather," I corrected myself, "you have it, for my pockets have been rifled of their contents."

"To what do you refer?" the judge said.

"Give me my pocket-book and my papers," I replied, "and I will prove to you that this man who accuses me of crimes I have never committed was himself my patron and self-constituted protector. I have it in his own writing."

I spoke excitedly, for the thought of the card given me by Herr von Retzow, which once before had stood me in such good stead, had suddenly flashed across my mind. I felt but little hope that it would do so again under these altered circumstances; but it would at least, I thought, go some way towards proving my veracity.

The judge hesitated an instant, then touched a bell, and ordered the clerk to bring in the articles taken from my person. The pocket-book was handed to me, and I

let the most dangerous of his Majesty's enemies escape the punishment he richly deserves, you will leave no stone unturned to discover the card."

"It is enough," the judge said, after searching the papers. "Here is no card. Let this farce end."

He waved his hand to the constables, and the sweat stood out on my brow. As a last resource, more in despair than from any hope of finding the precious piece of writing, which would perhaps not only disclose the



"The pocket-book was handed to me, and I turned over its contents with nervous hands."

turned over its contents with nervous hands. But all my fumbling was of no avail. The card was nowhere to be found.

I stammered some incoherent excuse, and begged that the other effects taken from me should be searched through.

"I swear," I exclaimed, "that the card was in my possession last night."

"We are wasting time," the judge said, with an impatient gesture.

"Gentlemen," I cried in desperation, "as I hope for salvation, I repeat that it was in my possession last night. If you would not

true nature of my relations with Herr von Retzow, but also implicate Colonel von Stauffenberg, the Emperor's secretary, in the treasonable designs I still attributed to him, I plunged my hand into my breast-pocket, where I had always kept the card. To my intense satisfaction I found it there, caught probably in the lining of the pocket, where it must have escaped the attention of those who searched me.

With a gesture of triumph I held it aloft, and at a sign from the judge one of the constables took it from me and handed it to him.

I can hardly say what immediate effect I had expected from its perusal by those upon whose decision my present fate turned. That it would delay my removal to the prison of Moab, and perhaps cause me to be confronted at once with my villainous accuser, was certainly what I hoped for. I may even have been sanguine of better results still, such as a greater inclination on the part of my judges to give ear to, if not exactly to credit, my protestations of innocence. But in my most wildly imaginative mood I could never have conceived the possibility that this crumpled slip of paper would produce the effect it actually did upon the men who a moment ago had sat there stern and inflexible, recking but little whether they condemned an innocent man to a long term of slow and torturous suspense, or not.

I can still see the middle one of the three deliberately adjust his glasses the better to examine the paper, and then, after casting a cursory glance at its contents, start up with every sign of excessive surprise and consternation, and pass it on to his two coadjutors, who in their turn exhibited the same signs of confusion at sight of it. Had a bolt from the blue fallen suddenly into their midst, it could scarcely have created a greater sensation.

"How did this paper come into your hands?" the judge asked me at last, regarding me with a look of undisguised interest.

I repeated the story I had already told, saying that the card had been given me by Herr von Retzow with injunctions not to use it except in a case of dire extremity.

"It was this man," I added, "who, for purposes of his own, procured me the office of Stallmeister to the Duchess of Bieberstein, and at whose instance I was present at the meeting of the conspirators last night. What part Colonel von Stauffenberg played in his nefarious doings is beyond my knowledge. But if you value the Emperor's safety it will not long be beyond yours."

There was a hurried consultation between the gentlemen behind the table, the purport of which I was of course unable to gather. Then he who had questioned me before spoke again.

"This matter shall have our immediate consideration," he said; "let the prisoner be removed to the cells."

Before I could reply, all three rose hastily and retired from the room, whilst I was led back to my cell and left there to ruminate

alone on the strange scene I had just witnessed.

Once before, as I well remembered, I had seen a similar effect produced by this seemingly insignificant piece of writing. It was on the night of my adventure in the house on the Waldstrasse. The recollection was like that of some dream-like vision, blurred and indistinct, but still definite enough for comparison with what I had just now experienced. Was it a mere coincidence? Was Herr von Retzow still in possession of his old power? Had I mistaken his intentions, after all? And if so, how could I explain this cruel and libellous indictment, and, worse than all, the bewildering fact that he himself was the man with the missing forefinger?

These, and innumerable other puzzling questions, tortured my brain as I paced my cell waiting for some ray of light that would pierce the darkness around me. At last, after two hours of suspense, my cell door was once more unlocked, and a lieutenant of police stood on the threshold. Notifying me curtly that I was to follow him, he conducted me, not back to the court room, as I had expected, but through a series of passages to a back outlet of the building leading to the courtyard. Here stood a droschky, which he bade me enter, and, having given the driver some direction in a low voice, he jumped in after me, and we drove away at a rapid pace.

Was I to be confronted with my accuser? I wondered. Or was I on my way to the prison of Moab? I glanced once or twice inquiringly at my companion, who sat beside me cold and taciturn; but I knew the genus too well to suppose that it would be of any use to question him as to our destination, and, not feeling in the humour to brook an insolent answer tamely, I contented myself with noting the direction taken by the vehicle and speculating on its ultimate goal.

So far as I could make out, we were driving due east; and for a time I imagined, with a sense of growing satisfaction, that I was on my way to the house of Herr von Retzow, near the Thiergarten. But just before we reached the Avenue of Limes, which is the dividing line between the eastern and western portions of the city, we turned sharply to the left in the opposite direction, and sped up the quiet street that leads in the rear of the Imperial palace to the Place of the Opera. Here we drew up suddenly at the entrance of a big, almost

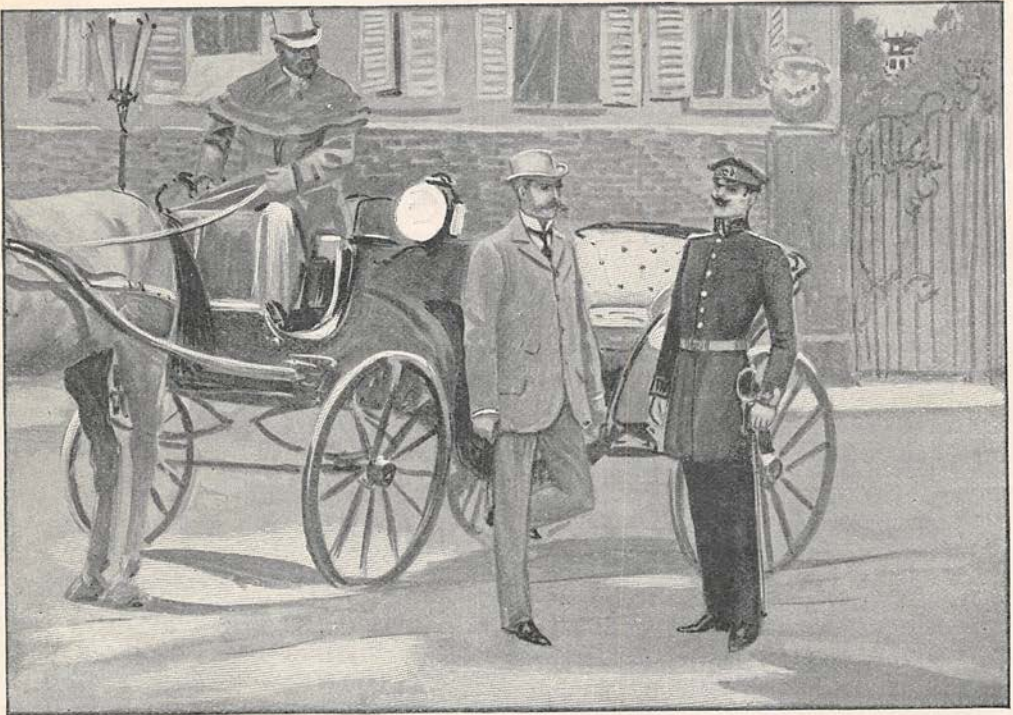
windowless, building, and the officer motioned to me to descend.

"You had better pull yourself together, my friend," he said, not unkindly, as I alighted and looked up with a sinking heart at the bare wall fronting the street. It had an ominous resemblance to a prison. "You are to have an audience with the Emperor, and will want all the wits you possess."

Before I could realise the meaning of it all I was inside the building, which was apparently a rear portion of the Imperial residence, and a few minutes later found

I obeyed almost mechanically, for, truth to say, my wits were totally scattered, and I felt as timid and helpless as a frightened child. I heard the swishing sound of the big double door as it swung back into position after I had entered, and looking up, knew at a glance that I was in the Imperial cabinet.

At a huge table near the window, littered with countless papers, stood the Emperor. He was perusing a lengthy document, which bore a strong resemblance to the copy of the indictment I had seen the judge read from a few hours ago, and it was



“You had better pull yourself together.”

myself in a big square chamber occupied by a number of military big-wigs, who eyed me and my conductor with looks of supercilious contempt. The worthy police officer, as I noted, was scarcely less ill at ease than I myself, and, having brought me so far, appeared now at a loss what to do next. Presently, however, an adjutant approached us, and, after exchanging a few whispered words with the lieutenant, disappeared through a curtained door to the right. In a few moments he reappeared, and dismissing my companion, signed to me to pass through the curtained entrance.

some time before he deigned to notice my presence.

Then, after scanning me for a moment from the distance with a slight frown on his brow, he beckoned to me to approach.

"You are the late Stallmeister to the Duchess of Bieberstein, I understand?" he said, addressing me in his strong guttural Arminian.

I replied in the affirmative, taking care to speak in the same tongue.

"Your adventures in my capital appear to have been of a somewhat varied character," he continued.

"I can assure your Majesty," I said, "that they were not of my own seeking."

"Pshaw!" he answered, with a touch of impatience, "that is a child's excuse. You are charged with being the ringleader of a gang of anarchists. What have you to say in your defence?"

"That the charge is preposterously false!" I cried determinedly. "If your Majesty will but permit me to be brought face to face with the dastardly villain who has concocted it——"

"Let that rest," the Emperor broke in sternly. "The day of retribution has already overtaken this man Von Retzow, and he will suffer for his crimes as he deserves. As for you, it would be well if you looked elsewhere for evidence to clear yourself of the grave suspicions that rest upon you."

"If you will deign to listen to my story, sire," I said, with difficulty repressing an exclamation of delight on hearing that the arch traitor Von Retzow had, after all, met with his deserts, "it will at least prove that I have been innocent of any evil intentions towards your Majesty."

"Maybe, sir," he said, shooting one of his piercing glances at me, "I already know more of your story than you bargain for. My police have watchful eyes, and it would be strange if you had escaped them. But proceed," he concluded curtly, "and be brief."

Thus admonished, I plunged once more into a hurried account of my life in Berolingen, from the memorable night of my encounter with the three ruffians and the stranger in the Thiergarten until my arrest the night before, and my simultaneous discovery that the man with the missing forefinger was none other than Herr von Retzow himself. There was only one incident which, for obvious reasons, I passed over in silence—that of my duel with the Duke of Friedrichsburg and its tragical issue on the evening of the Imperial masked ball.

The Emperor listened with a grim expression on his countenance, which never altered. Once or twice he threw in a quick, impatient question, but otherwise gave no sign that the recital of my strange experiences aroused more than ordinary interest in him.

When I came to the story of my adventure in the hostelry Zum Alten Fritz at Wittichau, not thinking in my eager haste that I had already recounted its main features to him on the occasion of the masked ball at the palace, he interposed with a gesture to prevent me from repeating it, and I faltered on,

in some confusion, to an account of the events that followed my escape from the inn, the attempts made upon my life in the streets of Berolingen, and my last interview with Herr von Retzow, with its strange and, to me, unaccountable consequences.

When I had concluded, his Majesty fixed me with a penetrating look.

"Save for certain omissions, which mar its completeness," he remarked coldly, "your story is entertaining enough. But perhaps those incidents of your career which you have thought fit to conceal are in your opinion of too trifling a nature to be remembered."

"I have told your Majesty everything," I stammered, with a sense of guilty fear, "which bears upon my present unfortunate position."

"On the contrary, sir," he answered, "you have told me everything which does not bear upon what you are pleased to call your present unfortunate position. Or are you foolish enough to suppose that an attempt to assassinate a member of the Imperial house, and the ruthless slaughter of an innocent woman, are crimes that go unpunished in this country?"

I believe he expected to see me stand covered with confusion at this sudden revelation of his knowledge of the events in the palace garden. But I had anticipated it and had steeled myself accordingly.

"Sire," I said earnestly, "if the sacrifice of my own life could restore that of the unhappy lady who died, as your Majesty must know, by my hand, but not by my will, I would make it willingly. As for my encounter with his Highness the Duke of Friedrichsburg, it was a fair and honourable combat, as the Duke himself will testify, and one for which I offer no excuse, unless it be," I added boldly, "for having dared to teach his Highness a lesson in fencing which cannot but have proved to his advantage."

I expected to see his Majesty fly into a passion at this last cut, and, truth to say, I cared at that moment naught if he did. But nothing of the kind occurred. Whether the humour of the thing tickled him, or whether he liked the boldness of my speech, it is certain that he received it without show of anger.

He turned away with a brusque movement, and strode across the room. Then, returning again, he confronted me at a distance of a few paces.

"It is well for you," he said, "that his Highness the Duke has generously pleaded

for you, or the lesson, as you call it, would have cost the giver more dearly than him who received it. Nay," he continued, advancing a step nearer to me, as if to give greater emphasis to his words, "but for the fact that you have rendered me some service in aiding to bring this wretched villain Von Retzow to justice, you should still suffer the full penalty of your crime."

I made a movement expressive of gratitude for this unexpected show of clemency, but he checked me with a frown.

"You owe no thanks to me," he said. "It is upon the intercession of one whom you have scarcely served as loyally as he had a right to expect that the Emperor deals thus leniently with you. He owes you a debt. I have repaid it."

He paused an instant, as if he awaited some reply, and then continued in a slow, deliberate tone—

"It appears that you have succeeded in making for yourself the reputation of being a good swordsman, but a very sorry diplomat. *And, in truth, from what I know of you, my dear Sir Walter, I would rather entrust my safety to your sword than to your wit.*"

The last words, which were spoken in the purest English—a language I had never heard from the Emperor's lips—fell upon my ear like a thunderclap. The tone, the accent, the very voice itself, so different from the stern, abrupt voice of the Arminian Emperor, staggered me as if I had suddenly received a message from the grave. I had heard these identical words once before, only, as I thought, from very different lips, and certainly in very different surroundings. Gradually, as I stood staring at the man before me as if he were a ghost, every feature in his face grew strangely familiar to me. Only the boldly upturned moustaches left me an instant in doubt whether it could be possible that he was one and the same with the Herr von Retzow I had known and associated with all these months.

But the doubt was dispelled at once. As he stood there, with his left arm partly concealed beneath his military coat, in the characteristic attitude the remembrance of which had puzzled me so much these last twenty-four hours, I understood for the first time why I had never seen the supposed Herr von Retzow's left hand. For does not all the world know that his Arminian Majesty's one arm is partially crippled from birth, and that it is always carefully hidden from the sight of men?

There is a certain class of puzzle the

solution of which is at first sight even more bewildering than the puzzle itself. The mystery which had surrounded me so long was revealed at last as in a flash, but the revelation almost surpassed in its strangeness the mystery itself, and left me floundering in a sea of seemingly irreconcilable facts. One thing alone stood out at that moment with painful clearness in my mind—that the Emperor, who had already astonished the world by playing pretty well every rôle known in human society, from judge to parson, had now deigned to act the part of his own detective, and had done it, as he did everything, with a tolerable measure of success. The hot blood rushed to my head as I thought with shame of the incredible blunders I had been guilty of. What a grand opportunity I had blindly wasted! To have associated all this time unknowingly on terms of practical intimacy with the Arminian Emperor himself, and this to be the outcome of it all. The thought was maddening.

The Emperor stood regarding me for a considerable while in silence, evidently enjoying my discomfiture. Then he took a soiled and crumpled slip of paper from his table and tore it into fragments. It was the card I had handed to the judge a few hours before.

"Now that your eyes are opened," he said at last, resuming his usual curt and decisive manner of speaking, "you will comprehend what has impelled me to adopt so lenient a course with you. Let the suspense you have endured serve as a warning to you to respect in the future the sanctity of those whom Heaven has placed as far above you as the stars are above the earth. If you go hence a free man, it is upon the condition that you leave Arminia within four-and-twenty hours. Mark that. If you overstep this time of grace by the space of but one hour, nothing shall save you from suffering the full penalty of the law."

He dismissed me with a wave of his hand, and I went without a word. I had a thousand questions upon my lips which I would have gladly asked him had I only dared. But the difference between the genial and fascinating individual with whom I had passed so many pleasant hours and the stern and imperious personage I was now confronting was too overwhelming and cowed me completely.

I returned to the humble quarters I had left nearly four-and-twenty hours ago with my mind in a state of complete revolution.



“‘Nothing shall save you from suffering the full penalty of the law.’”

I was free again, it is true, and the world stood open to me once more much in the same way that it had stood open to me four months before. And yet, curiously enough, now that my adventures in Berolingen were at an end, and nothing was left for me to do but shake the dust from my feet and betake myself to some other quarter of the globe, I felt a strong reluctance to quit the scene of so many strange and thrilling experiences. Such, I suppose, is the changeable nature of human desires. A few hours before, I would have purchased my escape from that very scene with almost any sacrifice that might have been demanded of me. Now, the thought of my forced departure filled me with a feeling of fiery resentment.

Perhaps, had I then recalled to my mind certain incidents that had passed between me and the man whom I had all along believed to be the famous police agent, I must have admitted to myself that they were not exactly calculated to ingratiate me with his self-opinionated Majesty. But, after all, was I to blame for the many errors I had committed? Even now, as I sat ruminating over the details of my life during these few months, it was only very gradually that the whole solution of the complicated mystery dawned upon me, and I realised how strangely I had been deceived. It was clear to me, of course, that the stranger to whose defence I had sprung that night in the Thiergarten was the Emperor Willibald, and that the attack upon him, which I had so opportunely foiled, was committed by the real Herr von Retzow, probably for the purpose of finding out the identity of the person who was penetrating his dangerous secrets by appearing disguised as the famous agent himself.

Had not the night been so dark, and other circumstances so disadvantageous, I should have seen the face of my principal assailant, and possibly solved that part of the riddle from the start. All my subsequent mistakes originated there. Hence I could not guess that the face I saw some weeks afterwards at the window of the house in the Waldstrasse was that of the real Von Retzow, who, having schemed in vain to possess himself of the marriage certificate of the Duke of Friedrichsburg, had contrived to induce the Princess of Bieberstein to proceed in person to Wittichau in order to convince herself of the fact of the Duke's marriage. That he was the man who intercepted her Highness during her memorable ride in the Thiergarten and placed the mysterious slip of

paper in her hands was fairly certain. For had I not noticed that the forefinger of the fellow's left hand was missing, and even reported the fact to the Emperor himself? It was doubtless he, too, who had received the packet of papers that evening at the house in the Waldstrasse, and from whom they had been forcibly recovered again by the Duke of Friedrichsburg.

What infamous blackmailing design had been at the bottom of all this curious business I could only guess at. Possibly it was connected with some secret Court intrigue, and Herr von Retzow had been merely the paid instrument of those concerned in it. Only one thing was certain—that the Emperor had discovered his agent's plans and had employed me to foil them. I could not but marvel at the skill with which this Imperial detective must have tracked his man step for step and brought his nefarious doings to light. And I, after all, had been but a mere tool in his hands, and a somewhat troublesome tool at that. I understood now the full extent of the blunder I had committed at Wittichau. Here again, needless to say, it was the real Herr von Retzow whom I had met and so recklessly threatened, nor could I doubt that the murderous attacks which were subsequently made upon my life in the streets of Berolingen had been instigated by him.

How extraordinarily simple it all seemed, now the one solitary clue to the riddle had been revealed to me. Clearly, his Majesty had never contemplated such a thing as my discovery of the conspiracy against his person, nor, perhaps, had he any reason to be grateful to me for the part I had taken in exposing it. He had merely intended to utilise me as a kind of spy upon the Princess of Bieberstein and her surroundings, probably regarding the question of the Duke of Friedrichsburg's betrothal to that sweet Princess purely as a side issue between himself and his opponents.

And here was a point which, in the light of this conviction, remained for some time a source of much perplexity to me. For what purpose had the Emperor insisted upon my presence in the closet during the meeting of the conspirators? It is true he had enjoined me to note carefully what was said and done by those assembled, and I had certainly heard enough on that occasion to convict half the notables at the Imperial Court, and a few crowned heads besides, of complicity in the plot to depose his Arminian Majesty. But then, if I had really been employed as an

eavesdropper that night, why was I never called upon to adduce the damning evidence I had gathered ?

To those who are familiar with the details of the remarkable trial that followed the arrest of Herr von Retzow the answer may be obvious. But it must be remembered that many months elapsed before the particulars of that trial reached the public knowledge, and I learned that the documentary evidence seized that night at the hotel was far more complete than any testimony I could have given, a fact which doubtless rendered my appearance at the trial unnecessary. In short, the Emperor had laid his plans only too skilfully, and had not only caught all the ringleaders in the plot at one fell stroke, but had captured the written proofs of their treasonable purposes at the same time.

All the world knows now what an infamous career of crime was brought to a close by the arrest of the man whose very name had become a terror to Arminian society, even including some of the highest in the land. But what hand the young Emperor himself had in bringing this villain Von Retzow to justice, and at the same time foiling one of the most gigantic political conspiracies known to history, has never been disclosed. There was but one single man arraigned before the tribunal whose proceedings excited the attention of all Europe for the space of many weeks, and although the number of those, far higher in rank and station than he, whom his trial compromised, was such as to completely dumbfound the public mind, there are, even to this day, but few initiated persons who know the true history of their connection with his criminal career, and perhaps fewer still who have any conception of the imminent danger in which his Arminian Majesty stood in those days.

Does not ancient history tell us of some great leader of armies who ended by having altars erected to himself ? There has always been something vastly tragical to my mind in this pathetic record of history—the collapse of self-achieved greatness. Whether history will repeat itself in the case of the present Arminian Emperor—who can say ? If it does, it will require on the latter's part something more than the mere building of altars to render the comparison quite perfect.

But I have run ahead of my story, or rather of its conclusion, for I have but little left to say. In story books that I have read, adventures far inferior to mine, though possibly

better told, have conducted men to fame and fortune. My harvest was disgrace and banishment. Not that I cared much for the disgrace, which I felt to be undeserved, nor perhaps had I any reason to grumble at being banished from a country where my experiences had been so bitter and unpleasant. Indeed, though I left it unwillingly, I did so with but one regret—that I was not permitted to see the fair Princess again who had once been my mistress. Since those days she has become Duchess of Friedrichsburg and sister-in-law to the Arminian Emperor. But I have never ceased to think of her as the sweet, winsome girl she then appeared to me, pure and innocent, untrammelled by the restraints of her illustrious station, spirited, natural, and impetuous—to my notion the very ideal of sweet girlhood.

To be quite frank, it was the sense of failure that rendered my departure from Berolingen so bitter, for I had undoubtedly failed, let the cause have been what it may : and so I went, with my pride humbled and my hopes crushed. I was saved the humiliation of having to claim my baggage from the police, for it was brought to my lodgings within an hour of my return from my audience with the Emperor.

With it came a packet of bulky appearance, stamped with the seal of his Majesty's privy chancery, which on opening I found to contain five hundred pounds in Bank of England notes. Accompanying this not unhandsome gift was a short note, which I may transcribe here as the most fitting conclusion to my strange narrative. It bore a signature that had become only too familiar to me, and ran thus—

“Depart in peace, my dear Sir Walter, and remember that a hot head and a foolish tongue are apt to cause more mischief than a good sword can cure. Keep silent on what you have seen and heard, and you shall not regret it. “H. v. R.”

I leave the reader to judge whether the last passage of this note does not convey a tacit promise of reward to come. If it does, all I can say is that this promise, during the years that I have maintained silence on the subject of my extraordinary adventures, has remained unredeemed. I need offer no excuse, therefore, for the publication of the facts I have now related ; for, indeed, when kings and princes forget, why should ordinary folks remember ?