

Stories of the Sanctuary Club.

BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE. TOLD BY PAUL CATO.

VI.—THE SECRET OF THE PRISON HOUSE.



S Chetwynd and I were leaving Ray Park on the night which followed poor Sutherland's death, Kort accompanied us.

"I will come with you if you have no objection," he said. "As far as I can tell there is nothing more for me to do here, but if necessary I can return to-morrow."

Neither Chetwynd nor I found ourselves able to utter a word. Kort seemed to take our silence for consent, and we three went back to the Club. We did not reach our destination until between nine and ten o'clock. Dinner was over, and many of the members were scattered in different quarters of the large central hall. Cards and games of all sorts were the order of the hour; everything looked peaceful and quite as usual. Not one of our guests suspected through what a time of tragedy and strain we three medical men had just passed.

Chetwynd and I said a few words to our different guests, and presently found ourselves in the corridor which led to our consulting-rooms. These happened to be close together.

"I am coming with you, Cato," said Chetwynd, "there is much to talk over."

There was a ring in his voice which I recognised. My friend was roused at last, roused with a vengeance. The moment we entered my consulting-room he turned the key in the lock, and then came and stood near me.

"Pray sit down," I said.

"I cannot sit," was his answer. "You know what I think of this."

"How can I guess your thoughts?"

"Good God! Cato, you can, and you do. This is no time for subterfuge. We have both the same thought, we both know that the man Kort is guilty."

"Guilty of many things, doubtless," I answered; "but scarcely of the crime which we thought he had participated in early in the day."

"I do not believe in Sutherland's confession," was Chetwynd's answer. "I have seen Sutherland's writing several times, and my impression is that what we read to-day is nothing more or less than a clever forgery.

Kort was desperate and would stick at nothing. Cato, he must resign his partnership immediately. If he refuses we must close the Club."

"Ah," I said, "you are coming to my conclusion; it is a relief to hear you. You agree with me fully?"

"I agree with you. This is the third shady affair in which Kort has been implicated during the last few months. For the reputation of the Club, to say nothing of your reputation and mine, we must put things straight without the possibility of further mistake, and our only way, so far as I can see, is through Mrs. Kort. There is not the slightest doubt that she is cognisant of her husband's character. The few words she has dropped to you are sufficient to prove this. There was a time when I believed her insane, led to my belief by Kort's specious words. I no longer hold that theory. There is something wrong with the woman—what, God only knows—but, at least in the Davos rooms, she is in full possession of her faculties. We have got to discover what awful hold her husband has over her. Our next interview must be under official authority. I propose that we have it early to-morrow morning. It is too late to-night to do anything, but I shall telephone as soon as ever I can to-morrow to Inspector Clarkson, put the whole thing before him, and beg him to take up the matter privately and at our expense. Each individual occurrence may be insufficient for our purpose, but linked together they make a formidable chain to break."

"I echo your words, Chetwynd," I replied; "matters cannot go on as they are doing. If for no other reason, for the sake of that wretched woman upstairs, we must take the bull by the horns."

We talked a little longer and afterwards retired to our rooms, but I for one could not sleep. The catastrophe which hung over our heads was all too imminent. It needed but a breath of the truth to get abroad for each member of the Club to resign. In any case now, I greatly feared that we were scarcely likely to save ourselves.

At an early hour on the following morning Chetwynd telephoned to Clarkson.

The reply came back that the inspector would be with us in an hour.

I had many patients to see that morning, and, after attending them, passed through the laboratory on my way to Chetwynd's room. As I entered the large outer laboratory I found Kort engaged in conversation with an elderly, Jewish-looking man, evidently a foreigner. The moment Kort saw me he came forward in his usual deliberate and perfectly calm manner, and introduced the stranger as Mr. Myerstein.

"My lawyer," he added.

I rather wondered why Kort was seeing

quietly: "I may as well inform you that for a long time the house has been under observation on account of Mr. Kort, but we could take no action until you called one of us in to investigate. From what you have told me I am now quite justified in demanding one thing."

"What is that?" I asked.

"An interview with Mrs. Kort. I wish to interview the lady without a moment's delay. You, Dr. Cato, are practically certain that Mrs. Kort is in possession of information as to her husband's character which she is anxious to divulge?"

"Yes," I replied. "From the occasional short interviews I have had with her, I am certain on this point."

"Then matters are simplified at once," said Clarkson. "If both you gentlemen are prepared to certify to the lady's sanity while in her own apartments any evidence obtained there will be valid. Now, from what you have told me I shall insist on such an interview. We will, therefore, hold it at once. If the result should occasion it I can soon get the necessary warrant to arrest Mr. Kort. Is he in the house at present?"

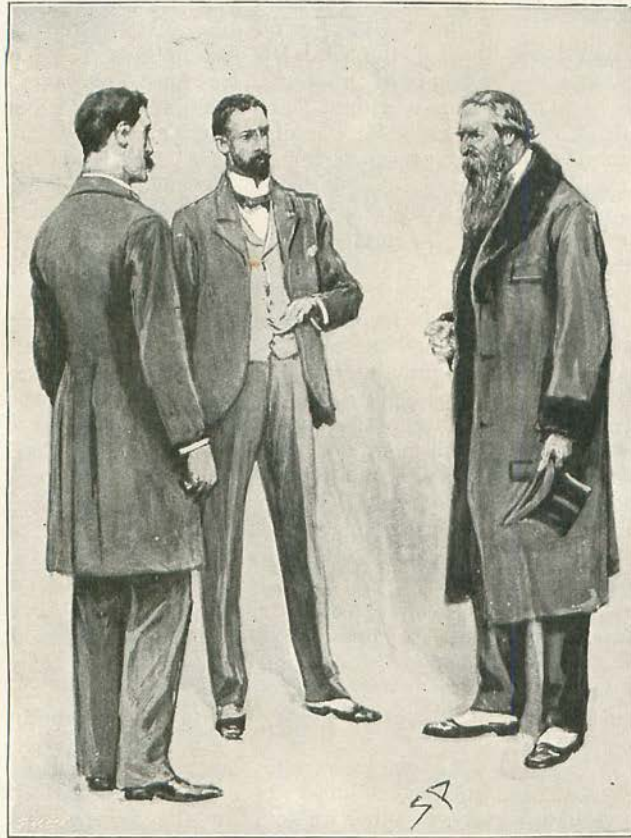
"He is," I answered. "I saw him just before you arrived. Shall I send for him to come here?"

"I should be glad to see him," replied the inspector.

I pressed the bell.

"Tell Mr. Kort that his presence is required here at once," I said to the servant, who bowed and withdrew.

"He will do what he can to prevent our interviewing his wife," I said. "That goes without saying. He will make



"MY LAWYER," HE ADDED.

his lawyer that morning, but had not time to give serious thought to the matter. The sound of wheels on the gravel sweep arrested my attention, and I recognised Clarkson as he dismounted from the dog-cart which we had sent to the station to meet him. I myself conducted the inspector to Chetwynd's room, and we there began to discuss the whole case.

After listening to our story, Clarkson said,

his usual excuse that she cannot stand excitement."

The inspector smiled drily but said nothing. We waited in silence. It was clear to all of us that we were at last on the verge of the great crisis to which events had been gradually leading up. There was no possible loophole for the truth to escape. I felt sure that we could bring the authority of the law into requisition and demand a

full explanation from Mrs. Kort. Once this was given the rest would be easy. Only one misgiving had I now, and that was caused by Kort's own extraordinary self-possession, and also by his presence in the Club.

"He must have returned to guard his wife," I said to myself; "he has come back to keep her in check. It is impossible that he should not be aware of his own danger. But what hold can he possibly have over her which would prevent her telling us the truth when we interview her alone?"

Suddenly the handle of the door clicked, and I involuntarily started in my seat. Kort quietly entered the room. He was holding himself erect as usual, his face looked quite calm, and his dark, somewhat melancholy eyes glanced from one of us to the other with an expression of well-assumed surprise. When his gaze fell upon Inspector Clarkson I saw him lift his heavy eyebrows just for a moment, and the dawn of a smile flitted round his lips.

Meanwhile the officer's keen grey eyes fixed themselves on his face with an impatient and penetrating look.

"You wished to see me?" asked Kort, in a low voice. He glanced at each of us in turn.

"We do," I answered, "pray sit down."

He sank into an easy chair and folded his arms.

"You are of course aware, Mr. Kort," I began, and as I spoke I rose to my feet, "that the position in which we in this Club are placed, owing to the continued occurrence of events of a suspicious nature, admits of only one line of action. Waiving for the moment the fact that nothing has been actually proved against you, Dr. Chetwynd and I have decided to request you to resign your partnership with us, on account of the strong circumstantial evidence against you. Further, since it is directly due to your instrumentality that the reputation of the Club and our own reputations are seriously involved, we desire to arrive at some explanation of this mysterious business. We have, therefore, decided to invoke the aid of the authorities."

"I fully comprehend you," answered Kort, quietly, "and I also entirely sympathize with your intentions."

"There is one point it is necessary to deal with without further delay," I continued. "From short and interrupted interviews with your wife"—as I uttered the latter words I noticed the slightest contraction of the man's folded arms and the faintest hardening of

the lines round his mouth. I went on quickly—"I am driven to believe that she can explain a good deal to us of what is still dark as regards these matters, and we, in the company of Inspector Clarkson, have decided to see her this morning in her own apartments. On more than one occasion she has been on the point of making some disclosure to me, but was prevented from doing so owing to her extraordinary attacks of lapses of memory, attacks which I fail to understand."

"I am not surprised that you cannot understand them," was Kort's answer. "I, who have watched her so closely, have utterly failed to come to any explanation myself. But with regard to your previous remarks. I am glad to have the opportunity of saying that I intend to resign my partnership and to leave England. But as to this interview which you propose holding with my wife, before you do so I must give you a word of warning." His eyes brightened with a deadly glitter as he looked full at me. "My wife's condition is a very precarious one. She is, as I have told you before, insane"—here he glanced at Chetwynd. "This wholesale invasion of her private rooms will be fraught with the utmost danger to her, and I refuse to let you see her." And he abruptly left the room.

The inspector shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing can be done," he said, "unless Mr. Kort will leave his wife free for us to see her."

"There is little hope of that, I fear," I said. "But we will watch for every chance, and let you know at once should any opportunity occur. Do not rest over this matter," I continued, to the inspector, "employ your keenest wits upon it, your most able detectives, make every inquiry in your power."

"I will, sir, and if you want me ring me up and I'll be here as soon as ever I can. At present I am afraid there is nothing further that I can do."

The man left the room. When we found ourselves alone I turned to Chetwynd.

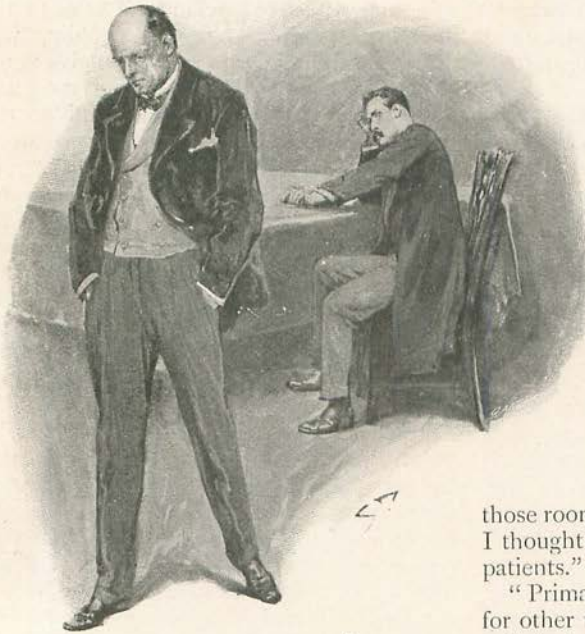
"This is maddening," I cried. "The face of that unhappy woman upstairs haunts me. Have you not noticed her yourself, Chetwynd? While her lips refuse to betray that fiend, her eyes speak volumes, and whenever we have seen her, her misery has been apparent. If she is not already insane she soon will be, driven to it by that man's villainies. He is a monster in human shape."

"Like the Evil One, he has brains and knows

how to use them," said Chetwynd, gloomily. "Yes, I sympathize with every word you say, Cato, but how to solve the mystery, how to get at the truth is the puzzle. If Mrs. Kort cannot help us, to whom are we to apply?"

"Have you nothing to suggest?" I asked. "You don't mean to say you will let him go, you will let him take his miserable wife away without settling his heavy account with us and with her, and with the law of the land? Chetwynd, I have often heard you boast that you never yet were beaten by a problem. Turn your mind on this. Break through this horrible suspicion and anxiety."

He made no answer. To and fro he paced the room in silence. His hands were thrust deep into his pockets, his head bent down.



"HE FACED THE ROOM IN SILENCE."

"Has Kort said when he is leaving?" he suddenly asked.

"Not a word."

"Very well, I have an idea. It is this. I will go immediately and try to find out something of his past and of his wife's past. It is possible, through channels now at the disposal of everyone, to get information about her prior to her marriage. I am certain that it is only by going back and taking up the threads of his earlier days and then following them carefully that we shall get a solution of the present mystery. Will you, Cato, stay quietly here and watch events while I go and

make inquiries? If I am not back to-night, you will hear from me."

"Very well," I answered, "anything you think best. Up to the present the members suspect nothing. There is no one specially ill; you can be spared without exciting suspicion."

The rest of the day passed without anything fresh occurring. At dinner Kort and I sat, one at the head, the other at the foot of the long dining-table. Conversation of the usual kind went on. Outwardly, all was sunshine, for the day happened to have been particularly fine, and some of the members of the Club were in specially high spirits. One lady in especial told me that she herself was deriving so much benefit by our treatment

that she intended to bring her daughter to the Club the following week. As she said the latter words, she slightly dropped her voice.

"Why does not Mrs. Kort take her rightful position in this establishment?" she asked. "I met her for the first time last night. What a very beautiful young woman she is, but she looked ill. Is she ill?"

"I am sorry to tell you that Mrs. Kort is a chronic invalid," was my reply.

"She told me last night that she occupied the Davos suite. Is she consumptive?"

"Not that I know of," I said.

"But why does she stay in those rooms? She scarcely ever leaves them. I thought they were intended for consumptive patients."

"Primarily so, but they are also suitable for other maladies."

"And what is hers? May I know?"

"I wish I could tell you," I answered. "Her illness puzzles us all not a little." As I spoke I raised my voice, and just at that moment encountered the keen, cold glance of Kort. We rose from the table without anything further being said with regard to Mrs. Kort.

Between nine and ten that evening Kort entered my sitting-room.

"I shall not keep you a moment," he said. "This is Wednesday; my wife and I intend leaving here on Friday morning."

"You make a hasty exit," was my answer.

"I could not stay an hour longer than absolutely necessary under this roof," was his

reply. "I shall be glad to go. With regard to money matters and the terms of my partnership, I have placed all my affairs in the hands of my lawyer, Mr. Myerstein; he will correspond with you on these subjects."

I made no answer and merely bowed as he left me. He closed the door, and I sat on by the fire. What was the mystery? Beyond doubt Mrs. Kort held the key of the situation which for some inexplicable reason she refused to render up. Would those two go out of our lives, and the tragedy which concerned them remain for ever unsolved?

At eleven o'clock that night a messenger brought me a short note from Chetwynd.

"Getting nearer. Not home to-night. Stay in to-morrow."

I burned the note in case it should fall into other hands, and then went to bed.

In spite of my depression Chetwynd's words had cheered me. I had every faith in his sagacity, and I knew that his note was pregnant with meaning. The following day passed quietly. Chetwynd did not return nor did I get any tidings of him.

Kort was busy as usual, just as though he intended to remain at the Sanctuary Club for ever. I heard nothing with regard to Mrs. Kort, and a wild desire to enter her presence and force the truth from her was abandoned as soon as it occurred to me.

In the afternoon I met Kort in the hall. I now observed with a certain degree of pleasure a strange restlessness in his manner; his face, too, was pale. He inquired at once where Chetwynd was. I replied briefly that he had left the Club on special business.

At a quarter past four that afternoon, as the usual custom was, the servant entered my sitting-room with the post-bag to ask for the country letters. I noticed as he spoke that he had several letters in his hand, and,

as I put mine into the bag, he added the pile which he held. When he did this I happened to notice one in Kort's handwriting. It was addressed to his lawyer, Myerstein, at some place in the south-west district. I



"I PUT MINE INTO THE BAG."

gave it a passing thought, and then forgot it. The man left the room, and I sat on by the fire. Hours passed, I felt more and more depressed, and less and less inclined to move. Suddenly I started to my feet. How the time had gone by! It was nearly seven o'clock. I was about to leave the room to dress for dinner when the door was quickly opened and Chetwynd walked in.

"My dear fellow," I cried, grasping his hand, "what news?"

He closed the door; locked it, and returned to the middle of the room. His face was calm, but I knew him well enough to be sure that beneath his apparent coolness a terrible furnace of excitement was consuming him.

"I have discovered information of the utmost importance with regard to Mrs. Kort," he said, quietly.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I will tell you," he continued. "It may explain a good deal. Her maiden name was Elkington. She was the only daughter of a certain Captain Elkington, who died when she was quite a girl, leaving her, however, sufficient money to maintain her in comfort. She was fond of science, and elected to take a medical course. She went to Vienna to study medicine in the schools there, and took her degree. While there she became engaged to our poor young friend, Philip Sherwin. Ah, you start!"

"I have reason to," I replied; "I cannot forget poor Sherwin's dying words: '*Ask him (Kort) about Isobel when I am gone.*'"

Chetwynd was silent for a moment.

"Pray listen," he said then; "there is more to follow. Miss Elkington was engaged to Sherwin. Kort appeared upon the scene. He was also studying medicine, and, doubtless, met his wife at the medical schools. The next event in the chain of circumstances was this. Miss Elkington broke off her engagement to Sherwin and married Kort. A few months afterwards the husband and wife left Vienna under extraordinary circumstances. These circumstances are not divulged. It is certain that Kort had done something in the highest degree discreditable if not felonious. There were, it appears, three people who knew his secret—his own wife, Philip Sherwin, and poor Ridley. As we know, Ridley died under, to say the least of it, suspicious circumstances. Sherwin has also died; there is now only the wife whose lips Kort by some fiendish means has sealed."

"But," I interrupted, "if any such danger were to be apprehended from his wife's speaking, and he is the black villain we have every reason to believe him to be, why has he not made an attempt on her life?"

"That I cannot tell you. There is no doubt a reason why he does not dare to kill her. From our interviews it is evident that she is under the influence of some terrible fear. Our only chance is to see her when her husband and maid are out of the house, and the cause of terror, whatever it may be, withdrawn."

"But that will be impossible," I replied. "If things are as you suggest, he will take very good care not to leave her."

Chetwynd put his hand to his brow with a restless gesture.

"That is so," he answered, slowly. "We

are indeed beset with difficulties. I wish I could learn what special business Kort is now transacting with that rascally lawyer Myerstein. I have inquired about him, and he bears a character, to say the least, shady. If we knew that we might get a clue. Well, I have done my best, and yet, now that I review all, we seem to have got no further. If we could only get the slightest idea of what this business is between Myerstein and Kort our way might be clear."

"Kort told me," I replied, "that he was leaving here on Friday, that is to-morrow morning. He further said that his affairs in connection with the Club were being wound up by Myerstein, and that Myerstein would communicate with us on the matter."

"There is more behind," said Chetwynd. "I wish I knew; I earnestly wish I knew."

"Kort wrote to Myerstein by the post which left here soon after four o'clock," I said, suddenly.

"He did? I would give my hand to see that communication. How do you know he has written?"

"I saw the letter when the servant brought me the post-bag."

Chetwynd lay back in his chair and clasped one of his hands across his eyes. The silence lasted a long time, so long that at first I thought my friend had fallen asleep; but a glance at him and the taut tendons of his hand clasped across his eyes told me that he was thinking long and deeply.

"Cato," he said, at last.

"Well?" I replied.

"Are you prepared in the cause of that unhappy woman to play a daring, underhand game, as well as to commit an indictable offence?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"There is no help for it," said my friend. He sprang suddenly to his feet. His face was all alive, his eyes shone with intense excitement. "We have got but two hours," he added; "if we do not succeed now all is lost."

"Explain yourself," I said.

"We must get possession of the letter which has been posted to Myerstein this afternoon."

"My dear fellow," I exclaimed, "that really is impossible."

"It is not impossible, but it is of course improbable, and we shall be running a great risk; but in view of the tremendous issues at stake, and the almost certainty that the letter contains a clue which would put the position into our hands, it is worth the

attempt. My conscience allows me to make it. Will you come with me, and will you join me?"

"I dislike the thought of it," I said. "Hitherto, we at least have been——"

"Oh, pooh!" interrupted Chetwynd, "there are times when a man must sacrifice his so-called honour. The woman upstairs demands that of us. She is Kort's dupe, his victim; she must be rescued. I am not ashamed of what I mean to do. Will you join me or not?"

"I will join you," I said, slowly.

"Then stay here till I come back. Time is short. It is a quarter to eight now. I will return as soon as ever I can."

He hurried out of the room, leaving me alone. I rang the bell and told the servant who appeared that neither Dr. Chetwynd nor I would be able to be present at dinner.

"Ask Mr. Kort from me to take the head of the table," I continued.

The man received my message, bowed, and withdrew. I spent the time of Chetwynd's absence pacing up and down the room. At half past eight he returned with a small, black bag.

"Come now, quickly," he said; "we must have a hansom. I have got the address. It is number thirty-eight, Gledham Gardens, South Kensington."

"Tell me, what is your scheme?" I asked.

"A bold and risky one. You shall soon know."

Outside we hailed the nearest hansom.

"South Kensington Museum," whispered Chetwynd to the driver, "and a sovereign to yourself if you do it in three-quarters of an hour."

The man nodded and away we sped at a spanking trot.

"We will get out at the Museum and walk the rest of the way," said Chetwynd. "I find the letter will be delivered at half-past nine. We shall be just in time."

He made no further remark till we alighted close to the Oratory. He then paid the man and we hurried off in the direction of Gledham Gardens.

"Are you going to bribe the postman?" I asked.

"No, hush! we are here." As he spoke we turned the corner of a

large square, in the centre of which stood the usual garden.

"That is the house," he said, pointing in a certain direction. He glanced at his watch. "Twenty minutes past nine. Stand here and wait for me in the shade of this tree," he continued. He crossed the road and went up the steps of number thirty-eight to the hall door, where he stood for a minute or two. Then he again crossed the road and waited in the shade of the garden. Several people passed, and a policeman on his beat went slowly by. Chetwynd never stirred, and I watched him wondering. A double knock at a door close by caused me to start and turn round. The postman delivering the last post at the various houses was coming down the road. Outside number thirty-eight he stopped for a moment or two, drew some letters from his bag, glanced at them, ran up the steps, put them in the letter-box, and came down again. The moment he did so



"ROUND HERE, QUICK!"

Chetwynd glided softly across the road and ran up the steps of the house. In less than a minute he was hurrying towards me.

"Round here, quick!" he said, catching my arm, and drawing me down a turning.

"What in the name of Heaven have you been doing?" I said.

"I have got it," he answered, as he raised his hand to a crawling four-wheeler. Directly we were inside he drew forth, to my utter amazement, the same letter which I had seen go into the post a few hours back.

"One moment before we read it, Cato," he said. He opened his little bag and took out a strange-looking sort of black silk pouch—the orifice oblong, and held in that shape by a band of copper wire.

"My post-bag," he whispered, "my own little patent post-bag, very simple. I passed this through the flap of Mr. Myerstein's letter-box, leaving these two little black silk threads hanging out and quite invisible. The postman put in his letters, four altogether, this one and three others. I then drew out my bag by the silk threads—it of course contained the letters. I removed the one and returned the others. Cato, we are thieves, but upon my word it is a lucky *coup*. There was just the chance of course of a servant happening to be in the hall. This I had to risk, but we are safe, I have succeeded. Now for the contents."

I had scarcely time to recognise the subtle ingenuity of his plot before he had torn open the envelope and glanced at the contents.

"By Jove!" he cried, "see here!"

I bent forward and in breathless excitement glanced over the page. It contained the following words:—

"Just a line to say all well. She did not dare to speak. Don't forget 11.45 to-night. Burn this. H. K."

"You see it is to-night, whatever it is," I said. "My theory is right: there is a double game playing. We must get back with all possible speed. We must be in time to prevent the catastrophe, whatever it may be. There is no stopping now. We must act on this letter."

We left the four-wheeler, got into a hansom, and, offering the driver anything he wished to ask, told him to take us with all possible speed to the Sanctuary Club. The horse was a good one, and it was scarcely half-past ten when we dashed in through the gates.

"Straight up; we will take the bull by the horns," exclaimed Chetwynd, and we both raced up the stairs. In the corridor which

led to the Davos suite we met Kort, evidently coming from his wife's rooms. Chetwynd immediately stepped up to him.

"Cato and I wish to see your wife at once," he said. "We will take no denial; we must see her now without an instant's delay."

"You cannot," replied Kort. He quickly retreated and stood before the door. His face was livid with suppressed fear.

"Stand aside, Mr. Kort," I said, briefly; "your game is up."

"You are both mad," he almost shouted, quivering with fury. "I tell you if you enter that room her death will be on your hands."

Chetwynd pushed him aside and laid his hand on the hasp of the outer door.

"All right, go!" cried Kort. He sprang suddenly aside and shot down the corridor.

We opened the door and entered the ante-room, but before we reached the inner door a rush of air through the valves fell on our ears. We dashed into Mrs. Kort's room. She was standing in the middle of the floor, her eyes were fixed on the door by which we entered, but I do not think she saw either of us. She was breathing quickly and clutching her head with both hands. Suddenly, with a hoarse cry she fell to the floor, struggling and writhing as if in a death agony, her features twitched and her left hand clutched convulsively at her head. In an instant we were both kneeling beside her. With her hand she pulled aside a mass of her thick black hair, and a loud cry burst from Chetwynd's lips. What he had seen I did not know. He cried out:—

"The lever! the lever! Go and exhaust, man. She is dying, quick!"

I sprang to the door, closed it, and rushed downstairs into the room where stood the great lever that worked the exhaust apparatus. In five minutes the sweat was pouring from every pore in my body. I knew nothing save that a life hung on my efforts, nor did I cease working the great lever till the mercury in the barometer stood at fifteen inches. Then I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"Well done! You have saved her."

I looked into Chetwynd's eyes, and their expression froze the blood at my heart.

"I said before that Kort was a fiend," he continued, "but my wildest dreams never guessed the depths of his iniquity. Come."

"What is wrong? Can you not explain?" I cried.

"There is no time yet, I will tell you presently. Watch this lever," he continued,

turning to two men-servants who had followed him. "If anyone approaches it or attempts to tamper with it, keep him off and send for us."

We both returned to the Davos suite. We entered Mrs. Kort's sitting-room. She was there and alone. Someone had raised her from the floor. She was lying on a sofa. Her face was utterly white and exhausted. When she saw us she stretched out both her hands.

"I am better; I can breathe again," she said.

"The danger is past now," said Chetwynd; "but stay quiet, do not attempt to speak."

"But am I safe? Has he gone?"

"You are quite safe," answered Chetwynd.

She gave a deep sigh.

"I can live," she said, in a low voice, "the agony is over, but I nearly died."

"It was touch and go," said Chetwynd, briefly, "but never mind, do not say anything just yet."

She closed her eyes. In a moment or two she opened them.

"He tried it once before," she said, in a dreamy voice, "once when I would not do what he wished. It was soon after my marriage, when Philip Sherwin threatened to expose him."

Again she closed her eyes, she seemed too weak for further conversation.

"We will not disturb her for a few moments," said Chetwynd to me; "she has gone through agony which only she can fathom."

"But what about Kort?" I inquired. "Is he likely to come back? Is he likely to do her a further injury?"

"He must have seen that his game was up and has probably left the Club," was Chetwynd's answer; "but if you will stay here with Mrs. Kort I will go and inquire." He went out of the room. In a few moments he returned with a strong restorative in his hand.

"I guessed aright, the man has already left the Club," he said, looking at me, then kneeling beside Mrs. Kort he slightly raised her head. "Drink this off," he said, "you will be better afterwards." He held the glass

to her lips. She drained the contents to the last drop and then sat up on her sofa.

"Oh, I am much better," she said, with a deep sigh, "much stronger."

"You need not fear your husband's return," said Chetwynd then, "we have taken measures to secure you against the



"HE HELD THE GLASS TO HER LIPS."

recurrence of the horrible torture to which he has just subjected you. Why he did this horrible deed we have yet to learn, but you need fear no repetition of it."

"Has he left the house?" she asked.

"Yes, he will never come near you again, Mrs. Kort. Dr. Cato and I are both determined men, and we would give our lives to help you. Now pray tell us all you can of your most miserable story."

She looked full at us, the pupils of her eyes began to darken, she breathed more quietly, then she sat up once more on her sofa.

"I will tell you," she said. "Something seems to assure me that the danger is over; it will be a relief to speak."

Neither Chetwynd nor I said a word. She began the recital of her terrible wrongs in a low voice.

"Five years ago I married Mr. Kort in

Vienna. I was studying medicine there at the time. I had always a great love for science, and for medical science in particular. I was thought clever, I had brains, and I longed to use them. I was particularly interested in everything which related to psychological research. The relation of mind to matter was a problem to which I hoped to devote my life. When I first met Mr. Kort I was engaged to a man whom I then sincerely loved, and who most passionately loved me. His name was Philip Sherwin."

Neither Chetwynd nor I spoke a word. She looked up at us with a half questioning glance, and then continued:—

"I was engaged to him—would that I had married him! Since then he has died."

"He died in this house," I said, slowly.

"Ah! you know about him," she exclaimed. "Of course, I heard that he died here. You will tell me of his last hours presently."

"We will," said Chetwynd, "but pray proceed now with your own story, it is of paramount importance for the time being."

She went on quietly.

"Mr. Kort had a wonderful manner, a strange and overpowering fascination. He soon exercised an extraordinary influence over me. He often talked to me on the subject which interested us both. How each pearly cell in the brain, to the sight the merest protoplasm, is really the agent through which the lives, thoughts, and emotions of all humanity are manifested, and in which the greatest sacrifices, renunciations, vices, and virtues have their origin. One day he asked me if I would be his wife. I told him that I was engaged to Philip Sherwin. That fact seemed not to affect him in the least. He pursued his attentions, and one night in the presence of several friends he mesmerized me. After that my will seemed weakened, he put me into the mesmeric trance from time to time, and at last I was completely in his power. I gave up the man to whom I was engaged for the other man who had completely won what I supposed was my heart. I thought of no one but him. He had so transformed my nature that Mr. Sherwin's most passionate appeals had not the slightest effect upon me. It did not seem to me a sin to break his heart. I little knew to what all this was leading up. Mr. Kort and I were married, and a month or two later my husband gave me a glimpse into his true mind. I had always thought that his love of science was one of the strongest motives of his nature. I now saw that

there was something else even stronger. He was intensely, cruelly ambitious. He wanted to be a great discoverer; he wished his name to be handed down to the race as the man who had proved one of the most abstruse and, to my thinking, appalling theories that ever dawned upon the human mind. He told me on one special awful night that it was his belief that every thought or motion arises, not from a spiritual source, but merely from a physical change in certain cells in the brain. He said it would be possible to prove this by stimulating these cells, so that character, moral sense, even conscience itself, and all that had hitherto been accepted as belonging to the spiritual part of our nature, would be really at the mercy of the physiologist. He said this could only be proved by experiment; that such an experiment could not be tried on the animal world, but only on a human subject. I listened to him with horror at his words, but still without following their main drift.

"Then thank God you can never prove your theory," was my remark.

"Do you say so?" he answered, and he fixed his eyes on my face. "I can by experiment on a human subject."

"I turned from him when he said this, with a sense of sudden and sick fear. We were both in his laboratory. I rose and attempted to leave the room. He called me back in that voice which I was powerless to resist.

"You can be that subject," he said, and he put his hands on my shoulders and looked into my eyes.

"I! Never! Never! Are you mad?" was my reply.

"I am not mad, I am sane. I repeat my words. You can be my subject."

"There was an expression in his eyes which drove me to my knees.

"What do you mean?" I cried. "You terrify me, you frighten me. You would not hurt me, your wife? Oh, Horace! give this ghastly thing up! Leave it in the secret rooms of God's treasure house. We are better off with the old beliefs."

"He laughed a cruel laugh.

"Come, Isobel," he said, "I have not mesmerized you for a long time, I mean to do so now."

"I cried aloud in my terror. He held both my hands and stooping looked into my eyes. I struggled against his influence. I think I screamed, then memory and sensation faded and I remembered nothing more. When I came to myself all was changed. I felt sick and bewildered, and with great difficulty could

recall what had happened before I had sunk to sleep. My husband was in the room with me. He was holding both my hands and telling me to keep calm. After a time I found to my horror that I was wearing a small metal cap on a part of my head. I asked him what it meant and he told me.

"I have made the experiment on you, Isobel," he said. "To you is given the honour of being the means of proving the most marvellous theory in all the world. For the purpose of my experiment I was obliged to trephine a certain portion of your skull. I was not able to bring you back to consciousness after the operation, and only succeeded in doing so by preventing the normal atmospheric pressure of fifteen pounds to the square inch from pressing upon your brain. The exhaust cup which you are wearing relieves that pressure, and as long as you wear it your life is safe."

"But am I never to be well again?" I asked.

"That depends," he answered, and he gave a cruel smile.

"Time went on, but there was no improvement in my condition. Once I tried myself to remove the exhausted metallic cup. I immediately fainted, and should have died had my husband not rapidly replaced it. But even when wearing it my memory often failed me. About a month after my husband's awful experiment we made the acquaintance of a certain Mr. Charles Ridley. He often came to see us, and my husband and he became great friends. On the occasion of one of his visits I suddenly fainted in his presence. He was alone with me, and I never could tell what he discovered or what he did not. My husband rushed into the room and soon put me right, but after that I knew that Mr. Ridley suspected my husband.

"A few weeks went by, when one day Philip Sherwin, the man whom I had once loved and so cruelly deserted, burst into my presence. He told me that Mr. Ridley had spoken to him; that he had put two and two together and knew all. He said that my husband was in reality a murderer. He uttered words which really opened my eyes. He declared that he meant to proclaim my husband's infamy to all the world. Into

the midst of this scene Horace himself entered. He spoke quietly, kept his temper, and presently got Mr. Sherwin to leave me. What followed that night I find almost impossible to describe. My husband had me completely in his power both soul and body.

"'Sherwin must hold his tongue,' he said. 'As to Ridley, he does not know all. He has not got Sherwin's scientific knowledge, and can never absolutely guess at the truth; but with Sherwin to aid him the thing will be common talk. I shall be ruined; I shall never be able to complete my discovery. I am desperate and would stop at nothing. You, Isobel, must wring a promise from him. If he does not swear to you that he will never reveal what he knows I will remove the metallic cup.'

"As he spoke I looked into his eyes and read my fate.

"'What is your life?' he said. 'What is the life of any woman, any man, compared to the knowledge which through you I am gradually obtaining? I shall be the greatest



"I LOOKED INTO HIS EYES AND READ MY FATE."

psychological discoverer of my day. You must do what I wish and at once.'

"I yielded to his demands, for terror made me. I saw Philip and begged of him, because of our old love, to remain silent. I do not know how I spoke or how I argued; but, at last, driven to despair by my entreaties, he made the promise. Until I gave him leave he would not betray my husband.

"A week afterwards Horace and I left Vienna. We went at once to Davos. When there, to my great astonishment, I became perfectly well, strong, and vigorous. I was not even obliged to wear the cup, and I much rejoiced at being able to do without it. My husband was more kind than he had been. I began to feel almost my usual health, but as soon as I went down into the valleys the oppression, loss of memory, and faintness returned. One day my husband told me that he had heard of your Club. He said that by special mechanical arrangements an artificial suite of rooms had been made here in which the atmospheric pressure could be kept the same as that of the mountain air at Davos. My husband was extremely anxious to become one of your partners. I had a few thousand pounds which my father left me. He asked me if I would give it to him in order that he might buy a share in the Sanctuary Club. This I was willing to do, as I wanted to return to England. He then brought me to England, and eventually I came here; but although I could live in comparative comfort in the Davos suite, the horror of my mind can never be described. More and more, day after day, my eyes were opened to the brutal character of the man to whom I had been united. He never minded what he said to me, and always explained his plans and intentions, assuring me as he watched my face that nothing was better for the success of his experiments than the manner in which I received them. Thus I knew all about him and all about his victims. It was he who incited Mr. Banpfyld to break the Prince Rupert's Drop, thus causing his death, while my husband rushed into the room in the dark and removed the jewel. Then most unexpectedly Mr. Charles Ridley appeared upon the scene. He knew enough about my husband's secret to make things unpleasant for him. My husband therefore devised his ruin and then his death. He put atropine into the bottle which contained the soda-water. Some of the contents got into the jockey's eyes with the usual result, a temporary paralysis of the pupils of the eyes. The jockey could not guide his horse, and

thus the race was lost and Mr. Ridley ruined. But this was not enough. The next day the unfortunate man was supposed to have died by suicide. This was not the case. My husband shot him and proved an *alibi* in a most cunning way. On the previous day he himself took the photograph which, as you remember, saved him, and he put the plate into Mr. Ridley's camera in order that it should appear that Mr. Ridley had taken the photograph at a certain hour. It had in reality been taken twenty-four hours earlier, and Mr. Ridley had not taken any photograph that morning.

"Once again, it was my miserable husband who was in league with Mr. Sutherland to get the insurance money on the life of Harold Beauchamp. It was he who administered the poison to Mr. Beauchamp, and Mr. Sutherland and he were to divide the spoils between them. This scheme, as you know, failed owing to Dr. Chetwynd's genius. Mr. Sutherland, getting news of the removal of the ashes from Woking, committed suicide in terror, and my husband afterwards forged his confession, thus exonerating himself from all blame. Yes, few men have been so wicked, and the extraordinary thing is that he should have confided in me in the way he did; but he felt certain of my silence, knowing what the consequences would be to myself if I ever revealed the truth. There were moments, however, when I was so mad with misery and anguish, that I determined to risk all in order to let you know; but he invariably prevented me, and at last, seeing that I would creep away from my prison whenever I got the chance, he removed the cup. After this, my position became too awful. I was confined a close prisoner in my own rooms. My maid, Susan, was, of course, in his pay, and was in some ways a worse tyrant than even my husband himself. You have wondered, I dare say, why I did not send for you, why I did not speak. I dared not; I was in the utmost danger. My maid would have been listening by means of a tube which my husband had himself inserted into the wall between this room and my bedroom. She was ready the moment she heard me utter a word of our ghastly secret to communicate with him. He was then to release the valve and I should fall dead in this room. Now you know all. When you two forced your way in here an hour ago my husband saw that all was up, but at any cost he would seal my lips. He released the valve. But for Dr. Cato's quickness I should have been a dead woman."

She paused. For a time Chetwynd and I were silent, rooted to the spot by this horrible tale. Chetwynd was the first to speak; he turned to me.

"Stay with her, Cato, I must not waste a moment in loosing the hounds on Kort; he cannot have got far yet. He did not count on my inspiration when I sent you to the lever just in time."

"No, he thought the grave would cover the most ghastly part of his secret," was my answer; "but all is up with him now. Don't lose a moment, Chetwynd. That man must suffer the full penalty of his crimes."

Chetwynd went away. Two or three hours afterwards he came back. I was still in Mrs. Kort's room. She was lying on the sofa, her eyes closed. What her thoughts were I could not say. He handed me a telegram which he had just received. It was from

he said; "your husband has left the Club and your wicked maid has also vanished. You need never fear seeing either of them again."

We went into the anteroom, as we did not like to leave Mrs. Kort too long alone.

"Can anything be done for her?" I asked.

"I hope so," he answered, briefly, "but do you know what has occurred?"

"I can partly guess, but I have not examined the skull."

"I have," he answered. "A portion of the right parietal bone has been depressed, which, as of course you know, would in ordinary circumstances cause all the symptoms of compression of the brain, stupor, lethargy, passing into coma, which unless relieved passes into death. To relieve this at the time was simple enough. Kort had



"CHETWYND EXPLAINED EVERYTHING TO HER."

Inspector Clarkson: "Have arrested Horace Kort at Southampton."

"Thank God!" was my exclamation.

"The law will punish him," said my friend. "We will leave him for the present to his God and to the law of the land. I want to talk to you about someone else." As he spoke he looked at Mrs. Kort.

"I am sending a nurse to look after you,"

merely to raise the bone and keep it raised till it had united with the surrounding bone. This he did not do, for it would have foiled his purpose and made experiments impossible, and so long as this state of things persisted, the ordinary atmospheric pressure would cause the natural train of symptoms of compression. But under a minus pressure, such as in our Davos suite, or under an

apparatus locally applied, such as the metallic cup, Mrs. Kort would be well, as the portion of the bone would be raised and the pressure relieved."

"But what about the unhappy girl now? Is she to be a prisoner all the rest of her days?" I cried.

"We must do what we can for her," answered Chetwynd; "but the condition of things is formidable. Our only chance is to raise the semi-detached bone, break away the callus that has formed, in order to give a fresh surface for healing, and trust to nature to unite it to the surrounding bone. The Davos rooms are excellently suited for our purpose, and she can remain there during convalescence. Then in a few weeks, if all goes well, we will gradually let in more and more atmospheric pressure and see how the bone stands it. If it has united and she suffers no uncomfortable symptoms, she can step out into the world a free woman."

"Will you undertake it?" I cried. "It will be the crowning triumph of your life."

"If she gives her consent," answered Chetwynd.

That evening we had another interview with Mrs. Kort. Chetwynd explained everything to her with the utmost fulness.

"With your medical knowledge you must understand what we mean," he said. "I will undertake the operation, and Cato will give you chloroform, provided you are willing; but I must frankly tell you that the danger is great, you may never come out of it alive."

"But if I do?" she asked, raising those wonderful sapphire eyes to his.

"If all goes well," he replied, "and I firmly believe and hope that all will go well, you will be a free woman once more."

"Then I consent," she answered. "How soon will you give me back my liberty?"

"To-morrow morning," said Chetwynd.

The operation was performed, and proved a complete success. In three weeks Mrs. Kort was convalescent. We gradually let in the atmospheric pressure. She showed no signs of distress, and came out of her prison well and eternally grateful. Nevertheless, a curious thing had happened. As she went into that awful prison house she did not return. She was a changed woman—strong and blooming, no doubt, but without any memory of the awful thing which had happened to her. Never from the day of her recovery has she been heard to inquire for her husband or to mention his name. All the memory of that fearful time in her life was blotted out as if it had never existed.

This was indeed well, for Kort was brought to trial and received the extreme penalty of the law for his awful crimes.

As to the maid, the police failed to find her, and she has doubtless long since left England.

Kort is dead. He lies in his dishonoured grave, and the world is all the better for his removal. But the Sanctuary Club lives and flourishes. Mrs. Kort is still a member, and the most invaluable help to Chetwynd and myself. Her lost memory she will never get again, but her wit, her brightness, and her beauty are the delight and surprise of all who come to the Club.

CONCLUSION.