

The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings.

BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE.

II.—THE WINGED ASSASSIN.—TOLD BY NORMAN HEAD.



MY scientific pursuits no longer interested me. I returned to my house in Regent's Park, but only to ponder recent events. With the sanction of conscience I fully intended to be a traitor to the infamous Brotherhood which, in a moment of mad folly, I had joined. From henceforth my object would be to expose Mme. Koluchy. By so doing, my own life would be in danger; nevertheless, my firm determination was not to leave a stone unturned to place this woman and her

lawyers in London. I went therefore one day to his office. I was fortunate in finding him in, and he listened to the story, which I told him in confidence, with the keenest attention.

"If this is true, Head," he said, "you yourself are in considerable danger."

"Yes," I answered; "nevertheless, my mind is made up. I will enter the lists against Mme. Koluchy."

His face grew grave, furrows lined his high and bald forehead, and knitted themselves together over his watchful, grey eyes.



"HE LISTENED TO THE STORY WITH THE KEENEST ATTENTION."

confederates in the felon's dock of an English criminal court. To effect this end one thing was obvious: single-handed I could not work. I knew little of the law, and to expose a secret society like Mme. Koluchy's, I must invoke the aid of the keenest and most able legal advisers.

Colin Dufrayer, the man I had just met before my hurried visit to Naples, was assuredly the person of all others for my purpose. He was one of the smartest

"If anyone but yourself had brought me such an incredible story, Head, I should have thought him mad," he said, at last. "Of course, one knows that from time to time a great master in crime arises and sets justice at defiance; but that this woman should be the leader of a deliberately organized crusade against the laws of England is almost past my belief. Granted it is so, however, what do you wish me to do?"

"Give me your help," I answered; "use

your ingenuity, employ your keenest agents, the most trusted and experienced officers of the law, to watch this woman day and night, and bring her and her accomplices to justice. I am a rich man, and I am prepared to devote both my life and my money to this great cause. When we have obtained sufficient evidence, let us lay our information before the authorities."

He looked at me thoughtfully; after a moment he spoke.

"What occurred in Naples has doubtless given the Brotherhood a considerable shock," he said, "and if Mme. Koluchy is as clever as you suppose her to be, she will remain quiet for the present. Your best plan, therefore, is to do nothing, and allow me to watch. She suspects you, she does not suspect me."

"That is certainly the case," I answered.

"Take a sea voyage, or do something to restore your equilibrium, Head; you look over-excited."

"So would you be if you knew the woman, and if you had just gone through my terrible experiences."

"Granted, but do not let this get on your nerves. Rest assured that I won't leave a stone unturned to convict the woman, and that when the right moment comes I will apply to you."

I had to be satisfied with this reply, and soon afterwards I left Dufrayer. I spent a winter of anxiety, during which time I heard nothing of Mme. Koluchy. Once again my suspicions were slumbering, and my attention was turned to that science which was at once the delight and solace of my life, when, in the May of the following year, I received a note from Dufrayer. It ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR HEAD,—I have received an invitation both for you and myself to dine and sleep next Friday at Sir John Winton's place at Epsom. You are, of course, aware that his horse, Ajax, is the favourite for the Derby. Don't on any account refuse this invitation—throw over all other engagements for the sake of it. There is more in this than meets the eye.

"Yours sincerely,

"COLIN DUFRAYER."

I wired back to Dufrayer to accept the invitation, and on the following Friday went down to Epsom in time for dinner. Dufrayer had arrived earlier in the day, and I had not yet had an opportunity of seeing him alone. When I entered the drawing-room before dinner I found myself one of a large party. My host came forward to receive me. I happened to have met Sir John several times

at his club in town, and he now signified his pleasure at seeing me in his house. A moment afterwards he introduced me to a bright-eyed girl of about nineteen years of age. Her name was Alison Carr. She had very dark eyes and hair, a transparent complexion, and a manner full of vivacity and intelligence. I noticed, however, an anxious expression about her lips, and also that now and then, when engaged in the most animated conversation, she lost herself in a reverie of a somewhat painful nature. She would wake from these fits of inattention with an obvious start and a heightened colour. I found she was to be my companion at dinner, and soon discovered that hers was an interesting, indeed, delightful, personality. She knew the world and could talk well. Our conversation presently drifted to the great subject of the hour, Sir John Winton's colt, Ajax.

"He is a beauty," cried the girl. "I love him for himself, as who would not who had ever seen him?—but if he wins the Derby, why, then, my gratitude——" she paused and clasped her hands, then drew herself up, colouring.

"Are you very much interested in the result of the race?" I could not help asking.

"All my future turns on it," she said, dropping her voice to a low whisper. "I think," she continued, "Mr. Dufrayer intends to confide in you. I know something about you, Mr. Head, for Mr. Dufrayer has told me. I am so glad to meet you. I cannot say any more now, but my position is one of great anxiety."

Her words somewhat surprised me, but I could not question her further at that moment. Later on, however, when we returned to the drawing-room, I approached her side. She looked up eagerly when she saw me.

"I have been all over Europe this summer," she said, gaily; "don't you want to see some of my photographs?"

She motioned me to a seat near her side, and taking up a book opened it. We bent over the photographs; she turned the pages, talking eagerly. Suddenly she put her hand to her brow, and her face turned deadly pale.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

She did not speak for a moment, but I noticed that the moisture stood on her forehead. Presently she gave a sigh of relief.

"It has passed," she said. "Yes, I suffer an indescribable agony in my head, but it does not last now more than a moment or two. At one time the pain used to stay for nearly an hour, and I was almost crazy at the end. I have had these sharp sort of neuralgic



"OF COURSE YOU HAVE HEARD OF HER."

pains from a child, but since I have consulted Mme. Koluchy——"

I started. She looked up at me and nodded.

"Of course you have heard of her," she said; "who has not? She is quite the most wonderful, delightful woman in existence. She, indeed, is a doctor to have confidence in. I understand that the men of the profession are mad with jealousy, and small wonder, her cures are so marvellous. Yes, Mr. Head, I went to quite half-a-dozen of our greatest doctors, and they could do nothing for me; but since I have been to Mme. Koluchy the pain comes but seldom, and when it does arise from any cause it quickly subsides. I have much to thank her for. Have you ever seen her?"

"Yes," I replied.

"And don't you like her?" continued the girl, eagerly. "Is she not beautiful, the most beautiful woman in the world? Perhaps you have consulted her for your health; she has

a great many men patients."

I made no reply; Miss Carr continued to speak with great animation.

"It is not only her beauty which impresses one," she said, "it is also her power—she draws you out of yourself completely. When I am away from her I must confess I am restless—it is as though she hypnotized me, and yet she has never done so. I long to go back to her even when——" she hesitated and trembled. Someone came up, and commonplace subjects of conversation resumed their sway.

That evening late I joined Dufrazer in the smoking-room. We found ourselves

alone, and I began to speak at once.

"You asked me to come here for a purpose," I said. "Miss Carr, the girl whom I took in to dinner, further told me that you had something to communicate. What is the matter?"

"Sit down, Head, I have much to tell you."

"By the way," I continued, as I sank into the nearest chair, "do you know that Miss Carr is under the influence of Mme. Koluchy?"

"I know it, and before I go any further, tell me what you think of her."

"She is a handsome girl," I replied, "and I should say a good one, but she seems to have trouble. She hinted at such, and in any case I observed it in her face and manner."

"You are right, she is suffering from a very considerable anxiety. I will explain all that to you presently. Now, please, give your best attention to the following details. It is about a month ago that I first received a visit from Frank Calthorpe, Sir John

Winton's nephew, and the junior partner of Bruce, Nicholson, and Calthorpe, the great stockjobbers in Garrick Gardens. I did some legal business for his firm some years ago, but the matter on which Calthorpe came to see me was not one connected with his business, but of a purely private character."

"Am I to hear what it is?"

"You are, and the first piece of information I mean to impart to you is the following. Frank Calthorpe is engaged to Miss Carr."

"Indeed!"

"The engagement is of three months' date."

"When are they to be married?"

"That altogether depends on whether Sir John Winton's favourite, Ajax, wins the Derby or not."

"What do you mean?"

"To explain, I must tell you something of Miss Carr's early history."

I sat back in my chair and prepared to listen. Dufrayer spoke slowly.

"About a year ago," he began, "Alison Carr lost her father. She was then eighteen years of age, and still at school. Her mother died when she was five years old. The father was a West Indian merchant, and had made his money slowly and with care. When he died he left a hundred thousand pounds behind him and an extraordinary will. The girl whom you met to-night was his only child. Henry Carr, Alison's father, had a brother, Felix Carr, a clergyman. In his will Henry made his brother Alison's sole guardian, and also his own residuary legatee. The interest of the hundred thousand pounds was to be devoted altogether to the girl's benefit, but the capital was only to come into her possession on certain conditions. She was to live with her uncle, and receive the interest of the money as long as she remained single. After the death of the uncle she was still, provided she was unmarried, to receive the interest during her lifetime. At her death the property was to go to Felix Carr's eldest son, or, in case he was dead, to his children. Provided, however, Alison married according to the conditions of the will, the whole of the hundred thousand pounds was to be settled on her and her children. The conditions were as follows:—

"The man who married Alison was to settle a similar sum of one hundred thousand upon her and her children, and he was also to add the name of Carr to his own. Failing the fulfilment of these two conditions, Alison, if she married, was to lose the interest and

capital of her father's fortune, the whole going to Felix Carr for his life, and after him to his eldest son. On this point, the girl's father seems to have had a crank—he was often heard to say that he did not intend to amass gold in order to provide luxuries for a stranger.

"'Let the man who marries Alison put pound to pound,' he would cry; 'that's fair enough, otherwise the money goes to my brother.'

"Since her father's death, Alison has had one or two proposals from elderly men of great wealth, but she naturally would not consider them. When she became engaged, however, to Calthorpe, he had every hope that he would be able to fulfil the strange conditions of the will and meet her fortune with an equal sum on his own account. The engagement is now of three months' date, and here comes the extraordinary part of the story. Calthorpe, like most of his kind, is a speculator, and has large dealings both in stocks and shares and on the turf. He is a keen sportsman.

"Now, pray, listen. Hitherto he has always been remarkable for his luck, which has been, of course, as much due to his own common sense as anything else; but since his engagement to Miss Carr his financial ventures have been so persistently disastrous, and his losses so heavy, that he is practically now on the verge of ruin. Several most remarkable and unaccountable things have happened recently, and it is now almost certain that someone with great resources has been using his influence against him. You will naturally say that the person whose object it would be to do so is Felix Carr, but beyond the vaguest suspicion there is not the slightest evidence against him. He has been interested in the engagement from the first, and preparations have even been made for the wedding. It is true that Alison does not like him, and resents very much the clause in the will which compels her to live with him; but as far as we can tell, he has always been systematically kind to her, and takes the deepest interest in Calthorpe's affairs. Day by day, however, these affairs grow worse.

"About a fortnight ago, Calthorpe actually discovered that shares were being held against him on which he was paying enormous differences, and had finally to buy them back at tremendous loss. The business was done through a broker, but the identity of his client is a mystery. We now come to his present position, which is a most crucial one.

Next Wednesday is the Derby Day, and Calthorpe hopes to retrieve his losses by a big coup, as he has backed Ajax at an average price of five to two in order to win one hundred thousand on the horse alone. He has been quietly getting his money on during the last two months through a lot of different commission agents. If he secures this big price he will be in a position to marry Alison, and his difficulties will be at an end. If, on the other hand, the horse is beaten, Calthorpe is ruined."

"What are the chances for the horse?" I asked.

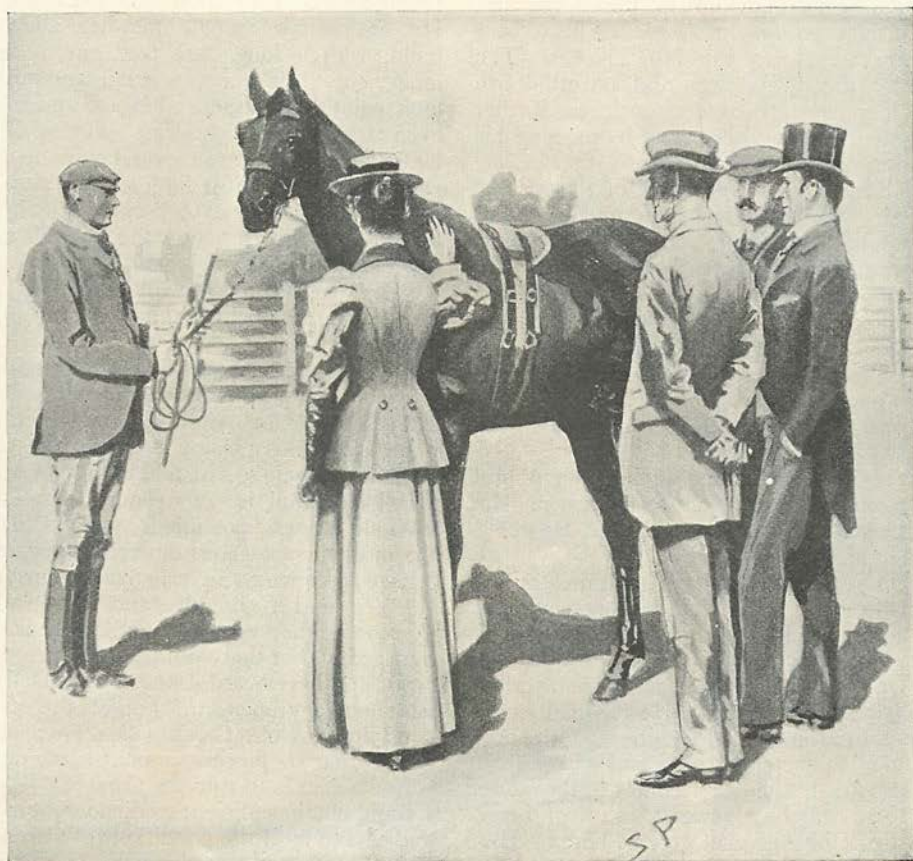
"As far as I can tell, they are splendid. He is a magnificent creature, a bay colt with black points, and comes of a splendid stock. His grandsire was Colonel Gillingham's Trumpeter, who was the champion of his year, winning the Derby, the Two Thousand Guineas, and St. Leger. There is not a three-year-old with such a fashionable ancestry as Ajax, and Sir John Winton is confident that he will follow their glorious record."

"Have you any reason to suspect Mme. Koluchy in this matter?" I asked.

"None. Without doubt Calthorpe possesses an enemy, but who that enemy is remains to be discovered. His natural enemy would be Felix Carr, but to all appearance the man has not moved a finger against him. Felix is well off, too, on his own account, and it is scarcely fair to suspect him of the wish to deliberately ruin his niece's prospects and her happiness. On the other hand, such a series of disasters could not happen to Calthorpe without a cause, and we have got to face that fact. Mme. Koluchy would, of course, be capable of doing the business, but we cannot find that Felix Carr even knows her."

"His niece does," I cried. "She consults her—she is under her care."

"I know that, and have followed up the clue very carefully," said Dufrayer. "Of course, the fact that Alison visits her two or three times a week, and in all probability confides in her fully, makes it all-important



"THE CREATURE TURNED HIS LARGE AND BEAUTIFUL EYE UPON HER."

to watch her carefully. That fact, with the history which you have unfolded of Mme. Koluchy, makes it essential that we should take her into our calculations, but up to the present there is not a breath of suspicion against her. All turns on the Derby. If Ajax wins, whoever the person is who is Calthorpe's secret enemy, will have his foul purpose defeated."

Early the following morning, Sir John Winton took Dufrayer and myself to the training stables. Miss Carr accompanied us. The colt was brought out for inspection, and I had seldom seen a more magnificent animal. He was, as Dufrayer had described him, a bright bay with black points. His broad forehead, brilliant eyes, black muzzle, and expanded nostrils proclaimed the Arab in his blood, while the long, light body, with the elongated limbs, were essentially adapted for the maximum development of speed. As the spirited creature curveted and pranced before us, our admiration could scarcely be kept in bounds. Miss Carr in particular was almost feverishly excited. She went up to the horse and patted him on his forehead. I heard her murmur something low into his ear. The creature turned his large and beautiful eye upon her as if he understood; he further responded to the girl's caress by pushing his nose forward for her to stroke.

"I have no doubt whatever of the result," said Sir John Winton, as he walked round and round the animal, examining his points and emphasizing his perfections. "If Ajax does not win the Derby, I shall never believe in a horse again." He then spoke in a low tone to the trainer, who nodded; the horse was led back to his stables, and we returned to the house.

As we crossed the Downs I found myself by Miss Carr's side.

"Yes," she exclaimed, looking up at me, her eyes sparkling, "Ajax is safe to win. Has Mr. Dufrayer confided in you, Mr. Head?"

"He has," I answered.

"Do you understand my great anxiety?"

"I do, but I think you may rest assured. If I am any judge of a horse, the favourite is sure to win the race."

"I wish Frank could hear you," she cried; "he is terribly nervous. He has had such a queer succession of misfortunes. Of course, I would marry him gladly, and will, without any fortune, if the worst comes to the worst; but there will be no worst," she continued, brightly, "for Ajax will save us both." Here she paused, and pulled out her watch.

"I did not know it was so late," she

exclaimed. "I have an appointment with Mme. Koluchy this morning. I must ask Sir John to send me to the station at once."

She hurried forward to speak to the old gentleman, and Dufrayer and I fell behind.

Soon afterwards we all returned to London, and on the following Monday I received a telegram from Dufrayer.

"Come to dinner—seven o'clock. Important," was his brief message.

I responded in the affirmative, and at the right hour drove off to Dufrayer's flat in Shaftesbury Avenue, arriving punctual to the moment.

"I have asked Calthorpe to meet you," exclaimed Dufrayer, coming forward when I appeared; "his ill-luck dogs him closely. If the horse loses he is absolutely ruined. His concealed enemy becomes more active as the crucial hour approaches. Ah, here he comes to speak for himself."

The door was thrown open, and Calthorpe was announced. Dufrayer introduced him to me, and the next moment we went into the dining-room. I watched him with interest. He was a fair man, somewhat slight in build, with a long, thin face and a heavy moustache. He wore a worried and anxious look painful to witness; his age must have been about twenty-eight years. During dinner he looked across at me several times with an expression of the most intense curiosity, and as soon as the meal had come to an end, turned the conversation to the topic that was uppermost in all our minds.

"Dufrayer has told me all about you, Mr. Head; you are in his confidence, and therefore in mine."

"Be assured of my keen interest," I answered. "I know how much you have staked on the favourite. I saw the colt on Saturday. He is a magnificent creature, and I should say is safe to win, that is——" I paused, and looked full into the young man's face. "Would it not be possible for you to hedge on the most advantageous terms?" I suggested. "I see the price to-night is five to four on."

"Yes, and I should stand to win about £30,000 either way, if I could negotiate the transaction, but that would not effect my purpose. You have heard, I know, from Dufrayer, all about my engagement, and the strange conditions of old Carr's will. There is no doubt that I possess a concealed enemy, whose object is to ruin me; but if Ajax wins I could obtain sufficient credit to right myself, and also to fulfil the conditions of Carr's will. Yes, I will stand to it now, every penny. The horse can win, and by Heaven he shall!"

As he spoke Calthorpe brought down his fist with a blow on the table that set the glasses dancing. A glance was sufficient to show that his nerves were strung up to the highest pitch, and that a little more excitement would make him scarcely answerable for his actions.

"I have already given you my advice in this matter," said Dufrayer, in a grave tone.

wait for you. If, on the other hand, you lose, all is lost. It is the ancient adage, 'A bird in the hand.'

"It would be a dead crow," he interrupted, excitedly, "and I want a golden eagle." Two hectic spots burned on his pale cheeks, and the glitter in his eyes showed how keen was the excitement which consumed him.

"I saw my uncle this morning," he went on.



"CALTHORPE BROUGHT DOWN HIS FIST ON THE TABLE."

He turned and faced the young man as he spoke. "I would say emphatically, choose the certain game now, and get out of it. You have plunged far too heavily in this matter. As to your present run of ill-luck, it will turn, depend upon it, and is only a question of time. If you hedge now you will have to put off your marriage, that is all. In the long run you will be able to fulfil the strange conditions which Carr has enjoined on his daughter's future husband, and if I know Alison aright, she will be willing to

"Of course, Sir John knows my position well, and there is no expense spared to guard and watch the horse. He is never left day or night by old and trusted grooms in the training stables. Whoever my enemy may be, I defy him to tamper with the horse. By the way, you must come down to see the race, Dufrayer; I insist upon it, and you too, Mr. Head. Yes, I should like you both to be there in the hour of my great success. I saw Rushton, the trainer, to-day, and he says the race is all over, bar shouting."

This was Monday night, and the following Wednesday was Derby Day. On the next evening, impelled by an uncontrollable desire to see Calthorpe, I called a hansom and gave the driver the name of his club. I felt certain that I should find him there. When I arrived the porter told me that he was in the house, and sending up my card, I went across to the tape machine, which was ticking away under its glass case in the hall. Two or three men were standing beside it, chatting. The Derby prices had just come through, and a page-boy was tearing the tape into lengths, and pinning them on to a green baize board in the hall. I glanced hurriedly through them. Evens Ajax, four to one Bright Star, eleven to two The Midge, eight to one Day Dawn. I felt a hand on my shoulder, and Calthorpe stood beside me. I was startled at his appearance. There was a haggard, wild look in his eyes.

"It seems to be all right," I said, cheerfully. "I see Ajax has gone off a point since this morning, but I suppose that means nothing?"

"Oh, nothing," he replied; "there has been a pot of money going on Bright Star all day, but the favourite can hold the field from start to finish. I saw him this morning, and he is as fit as possible. Rushton, the trainer, says he absolutely can't lose."

A small, dark man in evening dress approached us and overheard Calthorpe's last remark.

"I'll have a level monkey about that, if you like, Mr. Calthorpe," he said, in a low, nasal voice.

"It's a wager," retorted Calthorpe, drawing out his pocket-book with silver-bound edges, and entering the bet. "I'll make it a thousand, if you like?" he added, looking up.

"With pleasure," cried the little man. "Does your friend fancy anything?"

"No, thank you," I replied.

The man turned away, and went back to his companions.

"Who is that fellow?" I asked of Calthorpe.

"Oh, a very decent little chap. He's on the Stock Exchange, and makes a pretty big book on his own account."

"So I should think," I replied. "Why do you suppose he wants to lay against Ajax?"

"Hedging, I should imagine," answered Calthorpe, carelessly. "One thousand one way or the other cannot make any difference now."

He had scarcely said the words before Dufroyer entered the hall.

"I have been looking for you, Head," he said, just nodding to Calthorpe as he spoke, and coming up to my side. "I went to your house and heard you were here, and hoped I should run you to earth. I want to speak to you. Can you come with me?"

"Anything wrong?" asked Calthorpe, uneasily.

"I hope not," replied Dufroyer, "but I want to have a word with Head. I will see you presently, Calthorpe."

He linked his hand through my arm, and we left the club.

"What is it?" I asked, the moment we got into the street.

"I want you to come to my flat. Miss Carr is there, and she wishes to see you."

"Miss Carr at your flat, and she wishes to see me?"

"She does. You will soon know all about it, Head. Here, let us get into this hansom."

He hailed one which was passing; we got into it and drove quickly to Shaftesbury Avenue. Dufroyer let himself into his rooms with a latchkey, and the next moment I found myself in Alison's presence. She started up when she saw the lawyer and myself.

"Now, Miss Carr," said Dufroyer, shutting the door hastily, "we have not a moment to lose. Will you kindly repeat the story to Mr. Head which you have just told me?"

"But is there anything to be really frightened about?" she asked.

"I do not know of anyone who can judge of that better than Mr. Head. Tell him everything, please, and at once."

Thus adjured, the girl began to speak.

"I went as usual to Mme. Koluchy this afternoon," she began; "her treatment does me a great deal of good. She was even kinder than usual. I believe her to be possessed of a sort of second sight. When she assured me that Ajax would win the Derby, I felt so happy that I laughed in my glee. She knows, no one better, how much this means to me. I was just about to leave her when the door of the consulting-room was opened, and who should appear standing on the threshold but my uncle, the Rev. Felix Carr! There is no love lost between my uncle and myself, and I could not help uttering a cry, half of fear and half of astonishment. I could see that he was equally startled at seeing me.

"What in the name of fortune has brought you to Mme. Koluchy?" he cried.

"Madame rose in her usual stately way and went forward to meet him.

"Your niece, Alison, is quite an old

patient of mine,' she said; 'but did you not receive my telegram?'

"'No; I left home before it arrived,' he answered. 'The pains grew worse, and I felt I must see you. I have taken a horrible cold on the journey.' As he spoke he took his handkerchief out of his pocket, and sneezed several times. He continued to stand on the threshold of the room.

"'Well, good-bye, Alison, keep up your courage,' cried Mme. Koluchy. She kissed me on my forehead and I left. Uncle Felix did not take any further notice of me. The

moment I went out, the door of the consulting-room was closed, and the first thing I saw in the corridor was a torn piece of letter. It lay on the floor, and must have dropped out of Uncle Felix's pocket. I recognised the handwriting to be that of Mme. Koluchy's. I picked it up, and these words met my eyes: '*Innocuous to man, but fatal to the horse.*' I could not read any further, as the letter was torn across and the other half not in my possession, but the words frightened me, although I did not understand them. I became possessed with a dreadful sense of depression. I hurried out of the house. I was so much at home with Mme. Koluchy that

I could go in and out much as I pleased. I drove straight to see you, Mr. Dufrayer. I hoped you would set my terrors at rest, for surely Ajax cannot be the horse alluded to. The words haunt me, but there is nothing in them, is there? Please tell me so, Mr. Head—please allay my fears."

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"May I see the torn piece of paper?" I asked, gravely.

The girl took it out of her pocket and handed it to me.

"You don't mind if I keep this?" I said.

"No, certainly; but is there any cause for alarm?"

"I hope none, but you did well to consult Dufrayer. Now, I have something to ask you."

"What is that?"

"Do not repeat what you were good enough to tell Dufrayer and me, to Calthorpe."

"Why so?"

"Because it would give him needless anxiety. I am going to take the matter up, and I trust all will be well. Keep your own counsel; do not tell what you have just told us to another living soul, and now I must ask you to leave us."

Her face grew whiter than ever; her anxious eyes travelled from my face to Dufrayer's.

"I will see you to a hansom," I said. I took her downstairs, put her into one, and returned to the lawyer's presence.

"I am glad you sent for me, Dufrayer," I answered. "Don't you see how grave all this is? If Ajax wins the Derby, the Rev. Felix Carr—I know nothing about his character, remember—will lose the interest

on one hundred thousand pounds, and the further chance of the capital being secured to his son. You see that it would be very much to the interest of the Rev. Felix if Ajax loses the Derby. Then why does he consult Mme. Koluchy? The question of health is surely a mere blind. I confess I do



"I PICKED IT UP."

not like the aspect of affairs at all. That woman has science at her fingers' ends. I shall go down immediately to Epsom and insist on Sir John Winton allowing me to spend the night in the training stables."

"I believe you are doing the right thing," answered Dufrayer. "You, who know Mme. Koluchy well, are armed at a thousand points."

"I shall start at once," I said.

I bade Dufrayer good-bye, hailed a hansom, desired the man to drive me to Victoria Station, and took the next train to Epsom.

I arrived at Sir John's house about ten o'clock. He was astonished to see me, and when I begged his permission to share the company of the groom in the training stables that night, he seemed inclined to resent my intrusion. I did not wish to betray Alison, but I repeated my request with great firmness.

"I have a grave reason for making it," I said, "but one which at the present moment it is best for me not to disclose. Much depends on this race. From the events which have recently transpired, there is little doubt that Calthorpe has a secret enemy. Forewarned is forearmed. Will you share my watch to-night in the training stables, Sir John?"

"Certainly," he answered. "I do not see that you have any cause for alarm, but under the circumstances, and in the face of the mad way that nephew of mine has plunged, I cannot but accede to your request. We will go together."

We started to walk across the Downs. As we did so, Sir John became somewhat garrulous.

"I thought Alison would have come by your train," he said, "but have just had a telegram asking me not to expect her. She is probably spending to-night with Mme. Koluchy. By the way, Head, what a charming woman that is."

"Do you know her?" I asked.

"She was down here on Sunday. Alison begged me to invite her. We all enjoyed her company immensely. She has a wonderful knowledge of horses; in fact, she seems to know all about everything."

"Has she seen Ajax?" I asked. My heart sank, I could not tell why.

"Yes, I took her to the stables. She was interested in all the horses, and above all in Ajax. She is certain he will win the Derby."

I said nothing further. We arrived at the stables. Sir John and I spent a wakeful night. Early in the morning I asked to be

allowed to examine the colt. He appeared in excellent condition, and the groom stood by him, admiring him, praising his points, and speaking about the certain result of the day's race.

"Here's the Derby winner," he said, clapping Ajax on his glossy side. "He'll win the race by a good three lengths. By the way, I hope he won't be off his feed this morning."

"Off his feed!" exclaimed Sir John. "What do you mean?"

"What I say, sir. We couldn't get the colt to touch his food last night, although we tempted him with all kinds of things. There ain't nothing in it, I know, and he seems all right now, don't he?"

"Try him with a carrot," said Sir John.

The man brought a carrot and offered it to the creature. He turned away from it, and fixed his large, bright eyes on Sir John's face. I fancied there was suffering in them. Sir John seemed to share my fears. He went up to the horse and examined it critically, feeling the nose and ears.

"Tell Saunders to step across," he said, turning to the groom. He mentioned a veterinary surgeon who lived close by. "And look you here, Dan, keep your own counsel. If so much as a word of this gets out, you may do untold mischief."

"No fear of me, sir," said the man. He rushed off to fetch Saunders, who soon appeared.

The veterinary surgeon was a thickly built man, with an intelligent face. He examined the horse carefully, taking his temperature, feeling him all over, and finally stepping back with a satisfied smile.

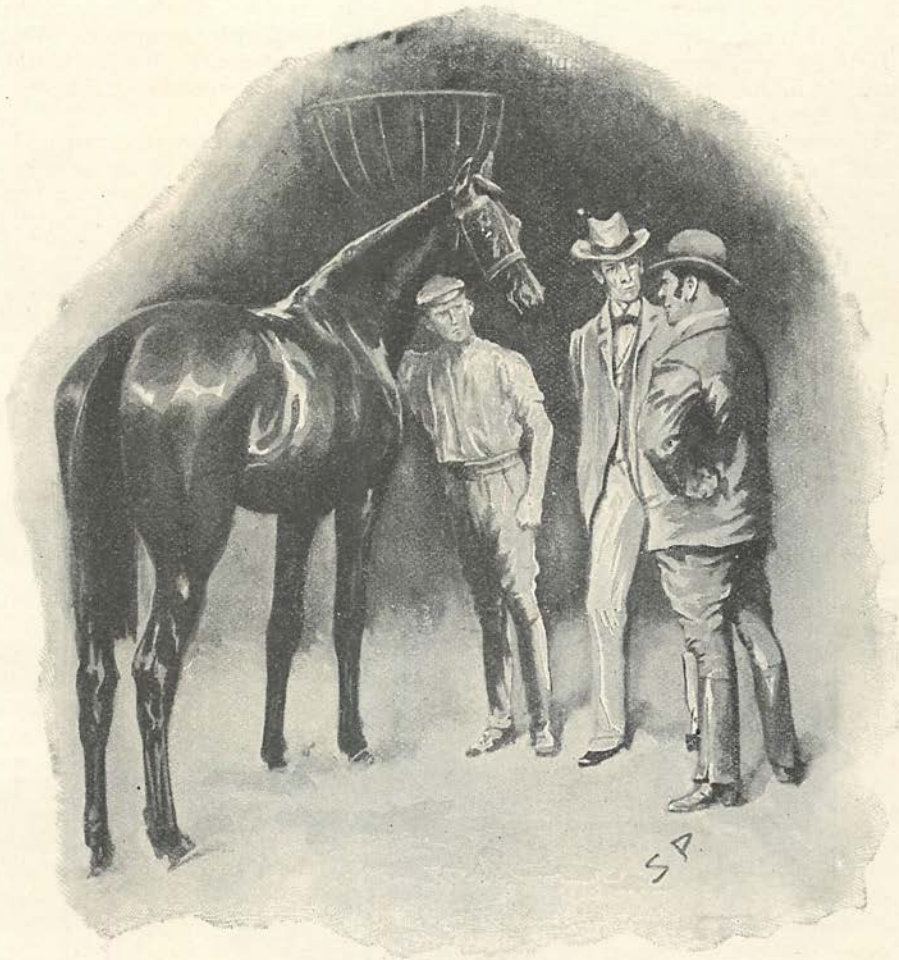
"There's nothing to be alarmed about, Sir John," he said. "The colt is in perfect health. Let him have a mash presently with some crushed corn in it. I'll look in in a couple of hours, but there's nothing wrong. He is as fit as possible."

As the man left the stables, Sir John uttered a profound yawn.

"I confess I had a moment's fright," he said; "but I believe it was more from your manner than anything else, Mr. Head. Well, I am sleepy. Won't you come back to the house, and let me offer you a shake-down?"

"No," I replied, "I want to return to town. I can catch an early train if I start at once."

He shook hands with me, and I went to the railway station. The oppression and apprehension at my heart got worse moment by moment. For what object had Mme. Koluchy visited the stables? What was the meaning of that mysterious writing which I had in my



“‘THERE'S NOTHING TO BE ALARMED ABOUT, SIR JOHN,' HE SAID.”

pocket? “Innocuous to man, but fatal to the horse.” What did the woman, with her devilish ingenuity, mean to do? Something bad, I had not the slightest doubt.

I called at Dufrayer's flat and gave him an account of the night's proceedings.

“I don't like the aspect of affairs, but God grant my fears are groundless,” I cried. “The horse is off his feed, but Sir John and the vet. are both assured there is nothing whatever the matter with him. Mme. Koluchy was in the stables on Sunday; but, after all, what could she do? We must keep the thing dark from Calthorpe, and trust for the best.”

At a quarter to twelve that day I found myself at Victoria. When I arrived on the platform I saw Calthorpe and Miss Carr coming to meet me. Dufrayer also a moment afterwards made his appearance. Miss Carr's

eyes were full of question, and I avoided her as much as possible. Calthorpe, on the contrary, seemed to have recovered a good bit of nerve, and to be in a sanguine mood. We took our seats, and the train started for Epsom. As we alighted at the Downs station, a man in livery hurried up to Calthorpe.

“Sir John Winton is in the paddock, sir,” he said, touching his hat. “He sent me to you, and says he wishes to see you at once, sir, and also Mr. Head.”

The man spoke breathlessly, and seemed very much excited.

“Very well; tell him we'll both come,” replied Calthorpe. He turned to Dufrayer. “Will you take charge of Alison?” he said.

Calthorpe and I moved off at once.

“What can be the matter?” cried the young man. “Nothing wrong, I hope. What is that?” he cried the next instant.

The enormous crowd was increasing moment by moment, and the din that rose from Tattersall's ring seemed to me unusually loud so early in the day's proceedings. As Calthorpe uttered the last words he started and his face turned white.

"Good heavens! Did you hear that?" he cried, dashing forward. I followed him quickly, the ring was buzzing like an

deafening clamour of the crowd, the air seemed to swell with the uproar. Were my worst fears confirmed? I felt stunned and sick. I turned round; Calthorpe had vanished.

Several smart drags were drawn up beside the railings. I glanced up at the occupants of the one beside me. Upon the box-seat, looking down at me with the amused smile



"I LOOKED HER FULL IN THE FACE."

infuriated beehive, and the men in it were hurrying to and fro as if possessed by the very madness of excitement. It was an absolute pandemonium. The stentorian tones of a brass-voiced bookmaker close beside us fell on my ears:—

"Here, I'll bet five to one Ajax—five to one Ajax!"

The voice was suddenly drowned in the

of a spectator, sat Mme. Koluchy. As I caught her eyes I thought I detected a flash of triumph, but the next moment she smiled and bowed gracefully.

"You are a true Englishman, Mr. Head," she said. "Even your infatuated devotion to your scientific pursuits cannot restrain you from attending your characteristic national fête. Can you tell me what has happened?"

Those men seem to have suddenly gone mad—is that a part of the programme?"

"Innocuous to man, but fatal to the horse," was my strange reply. I looked her full in the face. The long lashes covered her brilliant eyes for one flashing moment, then she smiled at me more serenely than ever.

"I will guess your enigma when the Derby is won," she said.

I raised my hat and hurried away. I had seen enough: suspicion was changed into certainty. The next moment I reached the paddock. I saw Calthorpe engaged in earnest conversation with his uncle.

"It's all up, Head," he said, when he saw me.

"Don't be an idiot, Frank," cried Sir John Winton, angrily. "I tell you the thing is impossible. I don't believe there is anything the matter with the horse. Let the ring play their own game, it is nothing to us. Curse the market! I tell you what it is, Frank. When you plunged as you did, you would deserve it if the horse fell dead on the course; but he won't—he'll win by three lengths. There's not another horse in the race."

Calthorpe muttered some inaudible reply and turned away. I accompanied him.

"What is the matter?" I asked, as we left the paddock.

"Saunders is not satisfied with the state of the horse. His temperature has gone up; but, there, my uncle will see nothing wrong. Well, it will be all over soon. For Heaven's sake, don't let us say anything to Alison."

"Not a word," I replied.

We reached the grand stand. Alison's earnest and apprehensive eyes travelled from her lover's face to mine. Calthorpe went up to her and endeavoured to speak cheerfully.

"I believe it's all right," he said. "Sir John says so, and he ought to know. It will be all decided one way or another soon. Look, the first race is starting."

We watched it, and the

one that followed, hardly caring to know the name of the winner. The Derby was timed for three o'clock—it only wanted three minutes to the hour. The ring below was seething with excitement. Calthorpe was silent now, gazing over the course with the vacant expression of a man in a day-dream.

Bright Star was a hot favourite at even money.

"Against Ajax, five to one," rang out with a monotonous insistence.

There was a sudden lull, the flag had fallen. The moments that followed seemed like years of pain—there was much senseless cheering and shouting, a flash of bright colours, and the race was over. Bright Star had won. Ajax had been pulled up at Tattenham Corner, and was being led by his jockey.

Twenty minutes later Dufroyer and I were in the horse's stable.

"Will you allow me to examine the horse for a moment?" I said, to the veterinary surgeon.

"It will want some experience to make out what is the matter," replied Saunders; "it's beyond me."

I entered the box and examined the colt



"'STAND STILL,' I CRIED."

carefully. As I did so the meaning of Mme. Koluchy's words became plain. Too late now to do anything—the race was lost and the horse was doomed. I looked around me.

"Has anyone been bitten in this stable?" I asked.

"Bitten!" cried one of the grooms. "Why, I said to Sam last night"—he apostrophized the stable-boy—"that there must be gnats about. See my arm, it's all inflamed."

"Hold!" I cried, "what is that on your sleeve?"

"A house-fly, I suppose, sir," he answered.

"Stand still," I cried. I put out my hand and captured the fly. "Give me a glass," I said. "I must examine this."

One was brought and the fly put under it. I looked at it carefully. It resembled the ordinary house-fly, except that the wings were longer. Its colour was like that of an ordinary humming-bee.

"I killed a fly like that this morning," said Sam, the stable-boy, pushing his head forward.

"When did you say you were first bitten?" I asked, turning to the groom.

"A day or two ago," he replied. "I was bitten by a gnat, I don't rightly know the time. Sam, you was bitten too. We couldn't catch it, and we wondered that gnats should be about so early in the year. It has nothing to do with the horse, has it, sir?"

I motioned to the veterinary surgeon to come forward, and once more we examined Ajax. He now showed serious and unmistakable signs of malaise.

"Can you make anything out?" asked Saunders.

"With this fly before me, there is little doubt," I replied; "the horse will be dead in ten days—nothing can save him. He has been bitten by the tsetse fly of South Africa—I know it only too well."

My news fell on the bystanders like a thunderbolt.

"Innocuous to man, but fatal to the horse," I found myself repeating. The knowledge of this fact had been taken advantage of—the devilish ingenuity of the plot was revealed. In all probability Mme. Koluchy had herself let the winged assassin loose when she had entered the stables on Sunday. The plot was worthy of her brain, and hers alone.

"You had better look after the other horses," I said, turning to the grooms. "If they have not been bitten already they had better be removed from the stables immediately. As for Ajax, he is doomed."

Late that evening Dufrayer dined with me alone. Pity for Calthorpe was only exceeded by our indignation and almost fear of Mme. Koluchy.

"What is to happen?" asked Dufrayer.

"Calthorpe is a brave man and will recover," I said. "He will win Miss Carr yet. I am rich, and I mean to help him, if for no other reason in order to defeat that woman."

"By the way," said Dufrayer, "that scrap of paper which you hold in your possession, coupled with the fact that Mr. Carr called upon Mme. Koluchy, might induce a magistrate to commit them both for conspiracy."

"I doubt it," I replied; "the risk is not worth running. If we failed, the woman would leave the country, to return again in more dangerous guise. No, Dufrayer, we must bide our time until we get such a case against her as will secure conviction without the least doubt."

"At least," cried Dufrayer, "what happened to-day has shown me the truth of your words—it has also brought me to a decision. For the future I shall work with you, not as your employed legal adviser, but hand in hand against the horrible power and machinations of that woman. We will meet wit with wit, until we bring her to the justice she deserves."