

The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings.

BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE.

IV.—THE LUCK OF PITSEY HALL.—TOLD BY NORMAN HEAD.



AS the days and weeks went on Mme. Koluchy became more than ever the talk of London. The medical world agitated itself about her to an extraordinary degree. It was useless to gainsay the fact that she performed marvellous cures. Under her influence and treatment weak people became strong again. Those who stood at the door of the Shadow of Death returned to their intercourse with the busy world. Beneath her spell pain vanished. What she did and how she did it remained more than ever a secret. She dispensed her own prescriptions, but although some of her medicines were analyzed by experts, nothing in the least extraordinary could be discovered in their composition. The cure did not therefore lie in drugs. In what did it consist? Doctors asked this question one of another, and could find no satisfactory answer. The rage to consult Madame became stronger and stronger. Her patients adored her. Her magnetic influence was felt by each person with whom she came in contact.

Meanwhile Dufroyer and I watched and waited. The detective officers, in Scotland Yard knew of some of our views with regard to this woman. Led by Dufroyer they were ceaselessly on the alert; but, try as the most able of their staff did, they could learn nothing of Mme. Koluchy which was not to her credit. She was spoken of as a universal benefactress, taking, it is true, large fees from those who could afford to pay, but, on the other hand, giving her services freely to the people to whom money was scarce. This woman could scarcely walk down the street without heads being turned to look after her, and this not only on account of her remarkable beauty, but still more because of her genius and her goodness. As she passed

by, blessings were showered upon her, and if the person who called down these benedictions was rewarded by even one glance from those lovely and brilliant eyes, he counted himself happy.

About the middle of January the attention of London was diverted from Mme. Koluchy to a murder of a particularly mysterious character. A member of the Cabinet of the name of Delacour was found dead in St. James's Park. His body was discovered in the early morning, in the neighbourhood of Marlborough House, with a wound straight through the heart. Death must have been instantaneous. He was stabbed from behind, which showed the cowardly nature of the attack. I knew Delacour, and for many reasons was appalled when the tidings



"FOUND DEAD IN ST. JAMES'S PARK."

reached me. As far as anyone could tell, he had no enemies. He was a man in the prime of life, of singular power of mind and strength of character, and the only possible motive for the murder seemed to be to wrest some important State secrets from his possession. He had been attending a Cabinet meeting in Downing Street, and was on his way home when the dastardly deed was committed. Certain memoranda respecting a loan to a foreign Government were abstracted from his person, but his watch, a valuable ring, and some money were left intact. The police immediately put measures in active train to secure the murderer, but no clue could be obtained. Delacour's wife and only daughter were broken-hearted. His position as a Cabinet Minister was so well known, that not only his family but the whole country rang with horror at the dastardly crime, and it was fervently hoped that before long the murderer would be arrested, and receive the punishment which he so justly merited.

On a certain evening, about a fortnight after this event, as I was walking slowly down Welbeck Street, and was just about to pass the door of Mme. Koluchy's splendid mansion, I saw a young girl come down the steps. She was dressed in deep mourning, and glanced around from right to left, evidently searching for a passing hansom. Her face arrested me; her eyes met mine, and, with a slight cry, she took a step forward.

"You are Mr. Head?" she exclaimed.

"And you are Vivien Delacour," I replied.

"I am glad to meet you again. Don't you remember the Hotel Bellevue at Brussels?"

When I spoke her name she coloured perceptibly and began to tremble. Suddenly putting out one of her hands, she laid it on my arm.

"I am glad to see you again," she said, in a whisper. "You know of our—our most terrible tragedy?"

"I do," I replied.

"Mother is completely prostrated from the shock. The murder was so sudden and mysterious. If it were not for Mme.—"

"Mme. Koluchy?" I queried.

"Yes, Mr. Head; Mme. Koluchy, the best and dearest friend we have in the world. She was attending mother professionally at the time of the murder, and since then has been with her daily. On that first terrible day she scarcely left us. I don't know what we should have done were it not for her great tact and kindness. She is full of suggestions, too, for the capture of the wretch who took my dear father's life."

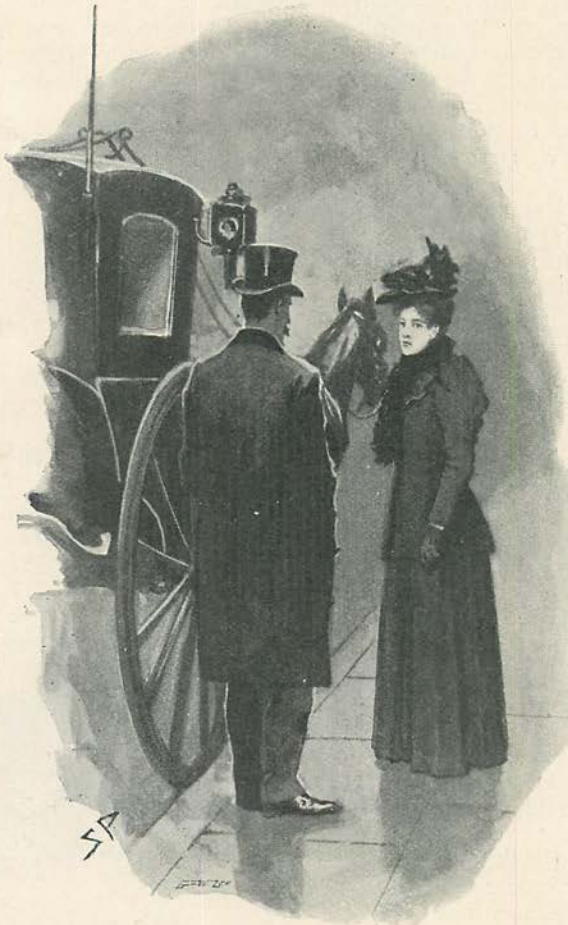
"You look shaken yourself," I said; "ought you to be out alone at this hour?"

"I have just been to see Madame with a message from mother, and am waiting here for a hansom. If you would be so kind as to call on me, I should be much indebted to you."

"Can I do anything else to help you, Vivien?" I said; "you know you have only to ask me."

A hansom drew up at the pavement as I spoke. Vivien's sad grey eyes were fixed on my face.

"Find the man



"'FIND THE MAN WHO KILLED MY FATHER,' SHE SAID."

who killed my father," she said; "we shall never rest until we know who took his life."

"May I call at your house to-morrow morning?" I inquired.

"If you will be satisfied with seeing me. Mother will admit no one to her presence but Mme. Koluchy."

"I will come to see you then; expect me at eleven."

I helped Miss Delacour into her hansom, gave directions to the driver, and she was quickly bowled out of sight.

On my way home many thoughts coursed through my brain. A year ago the Delacours, a family of the name of Pitsey, and I had made friends when travelling through Belgium. The Pitseys, of old Italian origin, owned a magnificent place not far from Tunbridge Wells—the Pitseys and the Delacours were distant cousins. Vivien at that time was only sixteen, and she and I became special chums. She used to tell me all about her ambitions and hopes, and in particular descanted on the museum of rare curios which her cousins, the Pitseys, possessed at their splendid place, Pitsey Hall. I had a standing invitation to visit the Hall at any time when I happened to have leisure, but up to the present had not availed myself of it. Memories of that gay time thronged upon me as I hurried to my own house, but mixed with the old reminiscences was an inconceivable sensation of horror. Why was Mme. Koluchy a friend of the Delacours? My mind had got into such a disordered state that I, more or less, associated her with any crime which was committed. Hating myself for what I considered pure morbidity, I arrived at my own house. There I was told that Dufrayer was waiting to see me. I hurried into my study to greet him; he came eagerly forward.

"Have you any news?" I cried.

"If you allude to Delacour's murder, I have," he answered.

"Then, pray speak quickly," I said.

"Well," he continued, "a curious development, and one which may have the most profoundly important bearing on the murder, has just taken place—it is in connection with it that I have come to see you." Dufrayer never liked to be interrupted, and I listened attentively without uttering a syllable. "Yesterday," he continued, "a man was arrested on suspicion. He was examined this morning before the magistrate at Bow Street. His name is Walter Hunt—he is the keeper of a small marine store at Houndsditch. For several

nights he has been found hovering in a suspicious manner round the Delacours' house. On being questioned he could give no straightforward account of himself, and the police thought it best to arrest him. On his person was discovered an envelope, addressed to himself, bearing the City post-mark and the date of the day the murder was committed. Inside the envelope was an absolutely blank sheet of paper. Thinking this might be a communication of importance it was submitted to George Lambert, the Government expert at Scotland Yard, for examination—he subjected it to every known test in order to see if it contained any writing on sympathetic ink, or some other secret cipher principles. The result is absolutely negative, and Lambert firmly declares that it is a blank sheet of paper and of no value. I heard all these particulars from Ford, the superintendent in charge of the case; and knowing of your knowledge of chemistry, and the quantity of odds and ends of curious information you possess on these matters, I obtained leave that you should come with me to Scotland Yard and submit the paper to any further tests you know of. I felt sure you would be willing to do this."

"Certainly," I replied; "shall I come with you now?"

"I wish you would. If the paper contains any hidden cipher, the sooner it is known the better."

"One moment first," I said. "I have just met Vivien Delacour. She was coming out of Mme. Koluchy's house. It is strange how that woman gets to know all one's friends and acquaintances."

"I forgot that you knew the Delacours," said Dufrayer.

"A year ago," I replied, "I seemed to know them well. When we were in Brussels we were great friends. Vivien looked ill to-night and in great trouble—I would give the world to help her; but I earnestly wish she did not know Madame. It may be morbidity on my part, but lately I never hear of any crime being committed in London without instantly associating Mme. Koluchy with it. She has got that girl more or less under her spell, and Vivien herself informed me that she visits her mother daily. Be assured of this, Dufrayer, the woman is after no good."

As I spoke I saw the lawyer's face darken, and the cold, hard expression I knew so well came into it, but he did not speak a word.

"I am at your service now," I said. "Just

let me go to my laboratory first. I have some valuable notes on these ciphers which I will take with me."

A moment later Dufroyer and I found ourselves in a hansom on our way to Scotland Yard. There we were met by Superintendent Ford, and also by George Lambert, a particularly intelligent-looking man, who favoured me with a keen glance from under shaggy brows.

"I have heard of you, Mr. Head," he said, courteously, "and shall be only too pleased if you can discover what I have failed to do. The sheet of paper in question is the sort on which ciphers are often written, but all my reagents have failed to produce the slightest effect. My fear is that they may possibly have destroyed the cipher should such a thing exist."

"That is certainly possible," I said; "but if you will take me to your laboratory I will submit the paper to some rather delicate tests of my own."

The expert at once led the way, and Dufroyer, Superintendent Ford, and I followed him. When we reached the laboratory, Lambert put all possible tests at my disposal. A glance at the stain on the paper before me showed that cobalt, copper, etc., had been already applied. These tests had, in all probability, nullified any further chemical tests I might try, and had destroyed the result, even if there were some secret writing on the paper.

I spent some time trying the more delicate and less-known tests, with no success. Presently I rose to my feet.

"It is useless," I said; "I can do nothing with this paper. It is rather presumption on my part to attempt the task after you, Mr. Lambert, have given your ultimatum. I am inclined to agree with you that the paper is valueless."

Lambert bowed, and a look of satisfaction crept over his face. Dufroyer and I soon afterwards took our leave. As we did so, I heard my friend utter a quick sigh.

"We are only beating the air as yet," he said. "We must trust that justice and right will win the day at last."

He parted from me at the corner of the street, and I returned to my own house.

On the following day, at the appointed hour, I went to see Vivien Delacour. She received me in her mother's boudoir. Here the blinds were partly down, and the whole room had a desolate aspect. The young girl herself looked pale and sad, years older



"I WENT TO SEE VIVIEN DELACOUR."

than she had done in the happy days at Brussels.

"Mother was pleased when I told her that I met you yesterday," she exclaimed. "Sit down, won't you, Mr. Head? You and my father were great friends during that happy time at the Bellevue. Yes, I feel certain of your sympathy."

"You may be assured of it," I said, "and I earnestly wish I could give you more than sympathy. Would it be too painful to give me some particulars of the murder?"

She shuddered quite perceptibly.

"You must have read all there is to know in the newspapers," she said; "I can tell you

nothing more. My father left us on that dreadful day to attend a Cabinet meeting at Downing Street. He never returned home. The police look in vain for the murderer. There seems no motive for the horrible crime—father had no enemies.”

Here the poor girl sobbed without restraint. I allowed her grief to have its way for a few moments, then I spoke.

“Listen, Vivien,” I said; “I promise you that I will not leave a stone unturned to discover the man or woman who killed your father, but you must help me by being calm and self-collected. Grief like this is quite natural, but it does no good to anyone. Try, my dear girl, to compose yourself. You say there was no motive for the crime, but surely some important memoranda were stolen from your father?”

“His pocket-book in which he often made notes was removed, but nothing more, neither his watch nor his money. Surely, no one would murder him for the sake of securing that pocket-book, Mr. Head?”

“It is possible,” I answered, gloomily. “Remember that the memoranda contained in the book may have held clues to Government secrets.”

Vivien looked as if she scarcely understood. Once more my thoughts travelled to Mme. Koluchy. She was a strange woman—she dealt in colossal crimes. Her influence permeated society through and through. With her a life more or less was not of the slightest consequence. And this terrible woman, whom, up to the present, the laws of England could not touch, was the intimate friend of the young girl by my side!

Vivien moved uneasily, and presently rose.

“I am glad you are going to help us,” she said, looking at me earnestly. “Madame does all she can, but we cannot have too many friends on our side, and we are all aware of your wisdom, Mr. Head. Why do you not consult Madame?”

I shook my head.

“But you are friends, are you not? I told her only this morning how I had met you.”

“We are acquaintances, but not friends,” I replied.

“You astonish me. You cannot imagine how useful she is, and how many suggestions she throws out. By the way, mother and I leave London to-day.”

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“Away from here. It is quite too painful to remain any longer in this house. The shock has completely shattered mother’s nerves, and she is now under Mme. Koluchy’s

care. Madame has just taken a house in the country called Frome Manor—it is not far from our cousins, the Pitseys—you remember them? You met them in Brussels.”

I nodded.

“We are going to Frome Manor to-day,” continued Vivien. “Of course we shall see no one, but mother will be under the same roof with Madame, and thus will have the benefit of her treatment day and night.”

Soon afterwards I took my leave. All was suspicion and uncertainty, and no definite clue had been obtained.

About this time I began to be haunted by an air which had sprung like a mushroom into popularity. It was called the “Queen Waltz,” and it was scarcely possible to pick up a dance programme without seeing it. There was something fascinating about its swinging measure, its almost dreamy refrain, and its graceful alternations of harmony and unison. No one knew who had really composed it, and still less did anyone for a moment dream that its pleasant chords contained a dark or subtle meaning. As I listened to it on more than one occasion, at more than one concert, I little guessed all that the “Queen Waltz” would bring forth. I was waiting for a clue. How could I tell that all too late, and by such unlikely means, it would be put into my hands?

A month and even six weeks went by, and although the police were unceasing in their endeavours to gain a trace of the murderer, they were absolutely unsuccessful. Once or twice during this interval I received letters from Vivien Delacour. She wrote with the passion and impetuosity of a very young girl. She was anxious about her mother, who was growing steadily weaker, and was losing her self-restraint more and more as the long weeks glided by. Mme. Koluchy was anxious about her. Madame’s medicines, her treatment, her soothing powers, were on this occasion destitute of results.

“Nothing will rest her,” said Vivien, in conclusion, “until the murderer is discovered. She dreams of him night after night. During the daytime she is absolutely silent, or she paces the room in violent agitation, crying out to God to help her to discover him. Oh, Mr. Head, what is to be done?”

The child’s letters appealed to me strongly. I was obliged to answer her with extreme care, as I knew that Madame would see what I wrote; but none the less were all my faculties at work on her behalf. From time to time I thought of the mysterious blank sheet of paper. Was it possible that it

contained a cipher? Was one of those old, incomparable, magnificent, undiscovered ciphers which belonged to the ancient Brotherhood really concealed beneath its blank surface? That blank sheet of paper mingled with my dreams and worried me during my wakeful hours. I became nearly as restless as Vivien herself, and when a letter of a more despairing nature than usual arrived on a certain morning towards the end of February, I felt that I could no longer remain inactive. I would answer Vivien's letter in person. To do so I had but to accept my standing invitation to Pitsey Hall. I wrote, therefore, to my friend, Leonardo Pitsey, suggesting that if it were convenient to him and his wife I should like to visit them on the following Saturday.

The next afternoon Pitsey himself called to see me.

"I received your letter this morning, and having to come to town to-day, thought I would look you up," he cried. "I have to catch a train at 5.30, so cannot stay a minute. We shall be delighted to welcome you at the Hall. My wife and I have never forgotten you, Head. You will be, I assure you, a most welcome guest. By the way, have you heard of our burglary?"

"No," I answered.

"You do not read your papers, then. It is an extraordinary affair—crime seems to be in the very air just now. The Hall was attacked by burglars last week—a most daring and cunningly planned affair. Some plate was stolen, but the plate-chest, built on the newest principles, was untampered with. There was a desperate attempt made, however, to get into the large drawing-room, where all our valuable curios are kept. Druco, the mastiff, who is loose about the house at night, was found poisoned outside the drawing-room door. Luckily the butler awoke in time, gave the alarm, and the rascals bolted. The country police have been after them, and in despair I have come up to Scotland Yard and engaged a couple of their best detectives.

They come down with me to-night, and I trust we shall soon get the necessary clue to the capture of the burglars. My fear is that if they are not arrested they will try again, for, I assure you, the old place is worth robbing. But, there, I ought not to worry you about my domestic concerns. We shall have a gay party on Saturday, for my eldest boy Ottavio comes of age next week, and the event is to be celebrated by a big dance in his honour."

"How are the Delacours?" I interrupted.

"Vivien keeps fairly well, but her mother is a source of great anxiety. Mme. Koluchy



"HAVE YOU HEARD OF OUR BURGLARY?"

and Vivien are constant guests at the Hall. The Delacours return to town before the dance, but Madame will attend it. It will be an honour and a great attraction to have such a lioness for the occasion. Do you know her, Head? She is quite charming."

"I have met her," I replied.

"Ah! that is capital; you and she are just

the sort to hit it off. It is all right, then, and we shall expect you. A good train leaves Charing Cross at 4.30. I will send the trap to meet you."

"Thank you," I answered. "I shall be glad to come to Pitsey Hall, but I do not know that I can stay as long as the night of the dance."

"Once we get you into our clutches, Head, we won't let you go; my young people are all anxious to renew their acquaintance with you. Don't you remember little Antonia—my pretty songstress, as I call her? Vivien, too, talks of you as one of her greatest friends. Poor child! I pity her from my heart. She is a sweet, gentle girl; but such a shock as she has sustained may leave its mark for life. Poor Delacour—the very best of men. The fact is this: I should like to postpone the dance on account of the Delacours, although they are very distant cousins; but Ottavio only comes of age once in his life, and, under the circumstances, we feel that we must go through with it. 'Pon my word, Head, when I think of that poor child and her mother, I have little heart for festivities. However, that is neither here nor there—we shall expect you on Saturday."

As Pitsey spoke, he took up his hat.

"I must be off now," he said, "for I have to meet the two detectives at Charing Cross by appointment."

On the following Saturday, the 27th, I arrived at Pitsey Hall, where a warm welcome awaited me. The dance was to be on the following Tuesday, the 2nd of March. There was a large house party, and the late burglary was still the topic of conversation.

After dinner, when the ladies had left the dining-room, Pitsey and I drew our chairs together, and presently the conversation drifted to Mrs. Delacour, the mysterious murder, and Mme. Koluchy.

"The police are completely nonplussed," said Pitsey. "I doubt if the man who committed that rascally crime will ever be brought to justice. I was speaking to Madame on the subject to-day, and although she was very hopeful when she first arrived at Frome Manor, she is now almost inclined to agree with me. By the way, Mrs. Delacour's state is most alarming—she loses strength hour by hour."

"I can quite understand that," I replied. "If the murderer were discovered it would be an immense relief to her."

"So Madame says. I know she is terribly anxious about her patient. By the way, knowing that she was an acquaintance of

yours, I asked her here to-night, but unfortunately she had another engagement which she could not postpone. What a wonderfully well-informed woman she is! She spent hours at the Hall this morning examining my curios; she gave me information about some of them which was news to me, but she has been many times now round my collection. It is a positive treat to talk with anyone so intelligent, and if she were not so keen about my Venetian goblet—"

"What!" I interrupted, "the goblet you spoke to me about in Brussels, the one which has been in your family since 1500?"

"The same," he answered, nodding his head, and lowering his voice a trifle. "It has been in the family, as you say, since 1500. Madame has shown bad taste in the matter, and I am surprised at her."

"Pray explain yourself," I said.

"She first saw it last November, when she came here with the Delacours. I shall never forget her start of astonishment. She stood perfectly still for at least two minutes, gazing at it without speaking. When she turned round at last she was as white as a ghost, and asked me where I got it from. I told her, and she offered me £10,000 for it on the spot."

"A large figure," I remarked.

"I was much annoyed," continued Pitsey, "and told her I would not sell it at any price."

"Did she give any reason for wishing to obtain it?"

"Yes, she said she had a goblet very like it in her own collection, and wished to purchase this one in order to complete one of the most unique collections of old Venetian glass in England. The woman must be fabulously rich, or even her passion for curios would not induce her to offer so preposterous a sum. Since her residence at Frome Manor she has been constantly here, and still takes, I can see, the deepest interest in the goblet, often remarking about it. She says it has got a remarkably pure musical note, very clear and distinct. But come, Head, you would like to see it. We will go into the drawing-room, and I will show it to you."

As Pitsey spoke he rose and led me through the great central hall into the inner drawing-room, a colossal apartment supported by Corinthian pillars and magnificently decorated.

"As you know, the goblet has been in our family for many centuries," he went on, "and we call it, from Uhland's ballad of the old

Cumberland tradition, 'The Luck of Pitsey Hall.' You know Longfellow's translation, of course? Here it is, Head. Is it not a wonderful piece of work? Have a close look at it, it is worth examining."

The goblet in question stood about 6ft. from the ground on a pedestal of solid malachite, which was placed in a niche in the wall. One glance was sufficient to show me that it

work were chipped off the letters would be plainly visible. The cup itself was supported on an open-work stem richly gilt and enamelled with coloured filigree work, the whole supported again on a base set with opal, agate, lapis lazuli, turquoise, and pearl. From the centre of the cup, and in reality supporting it, was a central column of pale green glass which bore what was apparently some heraldic



"HERE IT IS, HEAD."

was a gem of art. The cup, which was 8in. in diameter, was made of thin glass of a pale ruby colour. Some mystical letters were etched on the outside of the glass, small portions of which could only be seen, for screening them from any closer interpretation was some twisted fancy work, often to be observed on old Venetian goblets. If by any chance this fancy

design. Stepping up close I tapped the cup gently with my finger. It gave out, as Pitsey had described, a note of music singularly sweet and clear. I then proceeded to examine the stem, and saw at once that the design formed a row of separate crowns. Scarcely knowing why, I counted them. *There were seven!* A queer suspicion crept over me.

The sequence of late events passed rapidly through my mind, and a strange relationship between circumstances apparently having no connection began to appear. I turned to Pitsey.

"Can you tell me how this goblet came into your possession?" I asked.

"Certainly," he replied; "the legend which is attached to the goblet is this. We are, as you know, descended from an old Italian family, the Pizzis, our present name being merely an Anglicized corruption of the Italian. My children and I still bear Italian Christian names, as you know, and our love for the old country amounts almost to a passion. The Pizzis were great people in Venice in the sixteenth century; at that time the city had an immense fame for its beautiful glass, the manufacturers forming a guild, and the secret being jealously kept. It was during this time that Catherine de Medici by her arbitrary and tyrannical administration roused the opposition of a Catholic party, at whose head was the Duke of Alençon, her own fourth son. Among the Duke's followers was my ancestor, Giovanni Pizzi. It was discovered that an order had been sent by Catherine de Medici to one of the manufacturers at Venice to construct that very goblet which you see there. After its construction it was for some secret purpose sent to the laboratory of an alchemist in Venice, where it was seized by Giovanni Pizzi, and has been handed down in our family ever since."

"But what is the meaning of the seven crowns on the stem?" I asked.

"That I cannot tell. They have probably no special significance."

I thought otherwise, but kept my ideas to myself.

We turned away. A beautiful young voice was filling the old drawing-room with sweetness. I went up to the piano to listen to Antonia Pitsey, while she sang an Italian song as only one who had Italian blood in her veins could.

Antonia was a beautiful girl, dark, with luminous eyes and an air of distinction about her.

"I wish you would tell me something about your friend Vivien," I said, as she rose from the piano.

"Oh, Mr. Head, I am so unhappy about her," was the low reply. "I see her very often—she is altogether changed; and as to Mrs. Delacour, the shock has been so sudden, so terrible, that I doubt if she will ever recover. Mr. Head, I am so glad you have

come. Vivien constantly speaks of you. She wants to see you to-morrow."

"Is she coming here?"

"No, but you can meet her in the park. She has sent you a message. To-morrow is Sunday. Vivien is not going to church. May I take you to the *rendezvous*?"

I promised, and soon afterwards the evening came to an end.

That night I was haunted by three main thoughts: The old Italian legend of the goblet; the seven crowns, symbolic of the Brotherhood of the Seven Kings; and, finally, Madame's emotion when she first saw it, and her strong desire to obtain it. I wondered had the burglary been committed at her instigation. Sleep I could not, my brain was too active and busy. I was certain there was mischief ahead, but try as I would I could only lose myself in strange conjectures.

The following day I met Miss Delacour, as arranged, in the park. Antonia brought me to her, and then left us together. The young girl's worn face, the pathetic expression in her large grey eyes, her evident nervousness and want of self-control all appealed to me to a terrible degree. She asked me eagerly if any fresh clue had been obtained with regard to the murderer. I shook my head.

"If something is not done soon, mother will lose her senses," she remarked. "Even Mme. Koluchy is in despair about her. All her ordinary modes of treatment fail in mother's case, and the strangest thing is that mother has begun to take a most queer and unaccountable dislike to Madame herself. She says that Madame's presence in the room gives her an uncontrollable feeling of nervousness. This has become so bad that mother and I return to town to-morrow; my cousin's house is too gay for us at present, and mother refuses to stay any longer under Mme. Koluchy's roof."

"But why?" I asked.

"That I cannot explain to you. For my part, I think Madame one of the best women on earth. She has been kindness itself to us, and I do not know what we should have done without her."

I did not speak, and Vivien continued, after a pause:—

"Mother's conduct makes Madame strangely unhappy. She told me so, and I pity her from my heart. We had a long talk on the subject yesterday. That was just before she began to speak of the goblet, and before Mr. Lewisham arrived."

"Mr. Lewisham—who is he?" I asked.

"A great friend of Madame's. He comes

to see her almost daily. He is very handsome, and I like him, but I did not know she was expecting him yesterday. She and I were in the drawing-room. She spoke of mother, and then alluded to the goblet, the one at the Hall. You have seen it, of course, Mr. Head?"

I nodded—I was too much interested to interrupt the girl by words.

"My cousins call it 'The Luck of Pitsey Hall.' Well, Madame has set her heart on obtaining it, and she has gone to the length of offering Cousin Leonardo ten thousand pounds for it."

"Mr. Pitsey told me last night that Madame had offered an enormous sum for the vase," I said; "but it is useless, as he has no intention of selling."

"I told Madame so," replied Vivien. "I know well what value my cousins place upon the old glass. I believe they think that their luck would really go if anything happened to it."

"Heaven forbid!" I replied, involuntarily; "it is a perfect gem of its kind."

"I know! I know! I never saw Madame so excited and unreasonable about anything. She begged of me to use my influence to try and get my cousin to let her have it. When I assured her that it was useless, she looked more annoyed than I had ever seen her. She took up a book, and pretended to read. I went and sat behind one of the curtains, near a window. The next moment Mr. Lewisham was announced. He came eagerly up to Madame—I don't think he saw me.

"Well!" he cried; 'any success? Have you secured it yet? If you have, we are absolutely safe. Has that child helped you?'

"I guessed that they were talking about me, and started up and disclosed myself. Madame did not take the slightest notice, but she motioned to Mr. Lewisham to come into another room. What can it all mean, Mr. Head?"

"That I cannot tell you, Vivien; but may I ask you one thing?"

"Certainly you may."

"Will you promise me to keep what you have just told me a secret from everybody

else? I allude to Madame's anxiety to obtain the old goblet. There may be nothing in what I ask, or there may be much. Will you do this?"

"Of course I will. How queer you look!"

I made no remark, and soon afterwards took my leave of her.

Late that same evening, Antonia Pitsey received a note from Vivien, in which she said that Mme. Koluchy, her mother, and herself were returning to town by an early train the following morning. The Delacours did not intend to come back to Frome Manor, but Madame would do so on Tuesday in order to be in time for the dance. She was going to town now in order to be present



"I STARTED UP AND DISCLOSED MYSELF."

at an early performance of "For the Crown," at the Lyceum, having secured a box on the grand tier for the occasion.

This note was commented on without any special interest being attached to it, but restless already, I now quickly made up my mind. I also would go up to town on the following day; I also would return to Pitsey Hall in time for the dance.

Accordingly, at an early hour on the following day I found myself in Dufroyer's office.

"I tell you what it is," I said, "there is some plot deeper than we think brewing. Madame took Frome Manor after the murder of Delacour. She would not do so without a purpose. She is willing to spend ten thousand pounds in order to secure a goblet of old Venetian glass, which is one of the curios at Pitsey Hall. A man called Lewisham, who doubtless bears another alias, is in her confidence. Madame returns to town to-night with a definite motive, I have not the slightest doubt."

"This is all very well, Norman," replied Dufrayer, "but what we want are facts. You will lose your senses if you go on building up fantastic ideas. Madame comes up to town and is going to the Lyceum; at least, so you tell me?"

"Yes."

"And you mean to follow her to see if she has any designs on Forbes Robertson or Mrs. Patrick Campbell?"

"I mean to follow her," I replied, gravely. "I mean to see what sort of man Lewisham is. It is possible that I may have seen him before."

Dufrayer shrugged his shoulders and turned away somewhat impatiently. As he did so a wild thought suddenly struck me.

"What would you say," I cried, "if I suggested an idea to force Madame to divulge some clue to us?"

"My dear Norman, I should say that your fancies are getting the better of your reason, that is all."

"Now listen," I said. I sat down beside Dufrayer. "I have an idea which may serve us well. It is, of course, a bare chance, and if you like you may call it the conception of a madman. Madame goes to the Lyceum to-night. She occupies a box on the grand tier. In all probability Lewisham will accompany her. Dufrayer, you and I will also be at the theatre, and, if possible, we will take a box on the second tier exactly opposite to hers. I will bring Robertson, the Principal of the new deaf and dumb college, with me. I happen to know him well."

Dufrayer stared at me with some alarm in his face.

"Don't you see?" I went on, excitedly. "Robertson is a master of the art of lip language. We will keep him in the back of the box. About the middle of the play, and in one of the intervals when the electric light is full on, we will send a note to Madame's box saying that the cipher on the blank sheet of paper has been read. The note will pre-

tend to be an anonymous warning to her. We shall watch her, and by means of Robertson hear—yes, *hear*—what she says. Robertson will watch her through opera-glasses, and he will be able to understand every word she speaks, just as you or I could if we were in her box beside her. The whole thing is a bare chance, I know, but we may learn something by taking her unsuspecting and unawares."

Dufrayer thought for a minute, then he sprang to his feet.

"Magnificent!" he cried. "Head, you are an extraordinary man! It is a unique idea. I will go off to the box-office at once and take a box if possible opposite Madame, or, failing that, the best seats we can get. I only hope you can secure Robertson. Go to his house at once and offer him any fee he wants. This is detection carried to a fine art with a vengeance. If successful, I shall class you as the smartest criminal agent of the day. We both meet at the Lyceum at a quarter to eight. Now, there is not a moment to lose."

I drove down to Robertson's house in Brompton, found him at home, and told him my wish. I strongly impressed upon him that if he would help he would be aiding in the cause of justice. He became keenly interested, entered fully into the situation, and refused to accept any fee.

At the appointed hour we met Dufrayer at the theatre door, and learned that he had secured a box on the second tier directly opposite Mme. Koluchy's box on the grand tier. I had arranged to have my letter sent by a messenger at ten o'clock.

We took our seats, and a few moments later Mme. Koluchy, in rose-coloured velvet and blazing with diamonds, accompanied by a tall, dark, clean-shaven man, entered her box. I drew back into the shadow of my own box and watched her. She bowed to one or two acquaintances in the stalls, then sat down, leaning her arm on the plush-covered edge of her box.

Robertson never took his eyes off her, and I felt reassured as he repeated to us the chance bits of conversation that he could catch between her and her companion.

The play began, and a few minutes past ten, in one of the intervals, I saw Madame turn and receive my note, with a slight gesture of surprise. She tore it open, and her face paled perceptibly. Robertson, as I had instructed him, sat in front of me—his opera-glasses were fixed on the faces of Madame and her companion. I watched

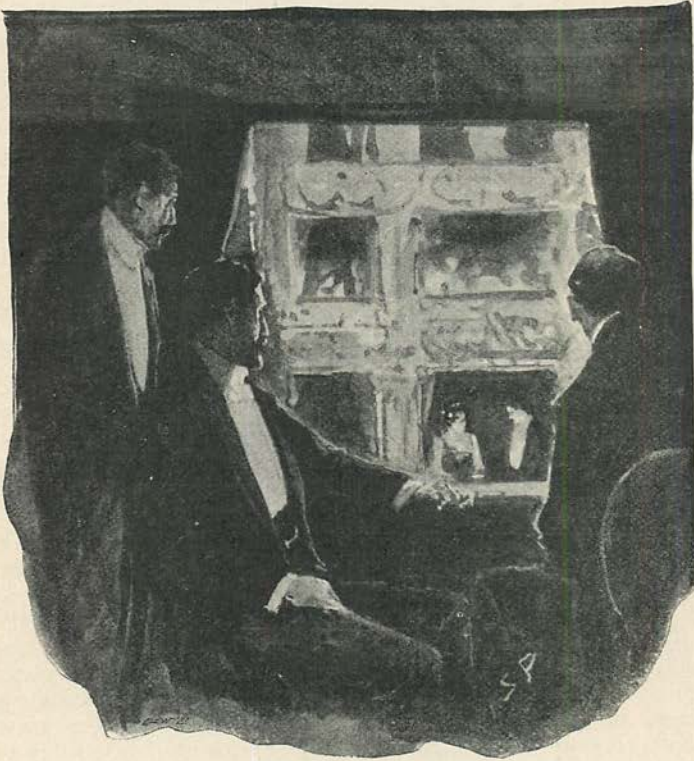
Madame as she read the note; she then handed it to Lewisham, who read it also. They looked at each other, and I saw Madame's lips moving. Simultaneously, Robertson began to make the following report verbatim:—

"Impossible . . . some trick . . . quite safe . . . goblet . . . key to cipher . . . to-morrow night." Then followed a pause. *"Life and death to us . . . Signed. . . . My name."*

There was another long pause, and I saw Madame twist the paper nervously in her fingers. I looked at Dufrayer, our eyes met.

But to-morrow night! To-morrow night was the night of the great dance at Pitsey Hall, and Madame was to be there. The reasoning was so obvious that the chain of evidence struck Dufrayer and me simultaneously.

We immediately left the theatre. There was one thing to be done, and that without delay. I must catch the first train in the morning to Pitsey Hall, examine the goblet afresh, tell Pitsey everything, and thus secure and protect the goblet from harm. If possible, I would myself discover the



‘ I SAW MADAME’S LIPS MOVING.’

My heart was beating. His face had become drawn and grey. The ghastly truth and its explanation were slowly sealing their impress on our brains. The darkness of doubt had lifted, the stunning truth was clear. The paper which had defied us was a cipher written by Madame in her own name, and doubtless implicated her with Delacour's murder. Her anxiety to secure the goblet was very obvious. In some subtle way, handed down, doubtless, through generations, the goblet once in the possession of the ancient Brotherhood held the key of the secret cipher.

key to the cipher, which, in the event of our discovering a method of rendering it visible, would place Madame in a felon's dock and see the end of the Brotherhood.

At ten o'clock the following morning I reached Pitsey Hall. When I arrived I found, as I expected, the house in more or less confusion. Pitsey was busily engaged superintending arrangements and directing the servants in their work. It was some little time before I could see him alone.

“What is the matter, my dear fellow?” he said. “I am very busy now.”

"Come into the library and I will tell you," I replied.

As soon as ever we were alone I unfolded my story. Hardened by years of contact with the world, it was difficult to startle or shake the composure of Leonardo Pitsey, and before I had finished my strange tale I could see from his expression the difficulty I should have in convincing him of the truth.

"I have had my suspicions for a long time," I said, in conclusion. "These are not the first dealings I have had with Mme. Koluchy. Hitherto she has eluded all my efforts to get her within the arm of the law, but I believe her time is near. Pitsey, your goblet is in danger. You will remove it to some place of safety?"

"Remove the luck of Pitsey Hall on the night when my boy comes of age!" replied Pitsey, frowning as he spoke. "It is good of you to be interested, Head; but really—well, I never knew you were such an imaginative man! As to any accident taking place to-night, that is quite outside the realms of probability. The band will be placed in front of the goblet, and it is impossible for anything to happen to it, as none of the dancers can come near it. Now, have you anything more to say?"

"I beg of you to be guided by me and to put the goblet into a place of safety," I repeated. "You don't suppose I would try to scare you with a cock-and-bull story. There is reason in what I say. I know that woman; my uneasiness is far more than due to mere imagination."

"To please you, Head, I will place two of my footmen beside the goblet during the dance, in order to prevent the slightest chance of anyone approaching it. There, will that satisfy you?"

I was obliged to bow my acquiescence, and Pitsey soon left me in order to attend to his multifarious duties.

I spent nearly an hour that morning examining the goblet afresh. The mystical writing on the cup, concealed by the open-work design, engrossed my most careful attention, but so well were the principal letters concealed by the outside ornaments, that I could make nothing of them. Was I, after all, entirely mistaken, or did this beautiful work of art contain hidden within itself the power for which I longed, the strange key to the mysterious paper which would convict Mme. Koluchy of a capital charge?

The evening came at last, and about nine o'clock the guests began to arrive. The first

dance had hardly come to an end before Mme. Koluchy appeared on the scene. She wore a dress of cloth of silver, and her appearance caused an almost imperceptible lull in the dancing and conversation. As she walked slowly up the great drawing-room, on the arm of a county magnate, all eyes turned to look at her. She passed me with a hardening about the corners of her mouth, as she acknowledged my bow, and I fancied I saw her eyes wander in the direction of the goblet at the other end of the room. Soon afterwards Antonia Pitsey came to my side.

"How beautiful everything is," she said. "Did you ever see anyone look quite so lovely as Madame? Her dress to-night gives her a regal appearance. Have you seen our dance programme? The 'Queen Waltz' will be played just after supper."

"So you have fallen a victim to the popular taste?" I answered. "I hear that waltz everywhere."

"But you don't know who has composed it?" said the girl, with an arch look. "Now, I don't mind confiding in you—it is Mme. Koluchy."

I could not help starting.

"I was unaware that she was a musician," I remarked.

"She is, and a most accomplished one. We have included the waltz in our programme by her special request. I am so glad; it is the most lively and inspiring air I ever danced to."

Antonia was called away, and I leant against the wall, too ill at ease to dance or take any active part in the revels of the hour. The moments flew by, and at last the festive and brilliant notes of the "Queen Waltz" sounded on my ears. Couples came thronging into the ballroom as soon as this most fascinating melody was heard. To listen to its seductive measures was enough to make the feet tingle and the heart beat. Once again I watched Mme. Koluchy as she moved through the throng. Ottavio Pitsey, the hero of the evening, was now her partner. There was a slight colour in her usually pale cheeks, and I had never seen her look more beautiful. I was standing not far from the band, and could not help noticing how the dominant note, repeated in two bars when all the instruments played together in unison, rang out with a peculiar and almost passionate insistence. Suddenly, without a moment's warning, and with a clap that struck the dancers motionless, a loud crash rang through the room. The music instantly ceased,

and the priceless heirloom of the Pitseys' lay in a thousand silvered splinters on the polished floor. There was a pause of absolute silence, followed by a sharp cry from our host, and then a hum of voices as the dancers hurried towards the scene of the disaster. The consternation and dismay were indescribable. Pitsey, with a face like death, was gazing horror-struck at the ruins of this old family treasure. The two footmen, who had been standing under the pedestal, looked as if they had been struck by an unseen hand. Pushing my way almost roughly through the crowded throng I reached the spot. Nothing remained but the stem and jewelled base of the goblet, which still kept their place on the malachite stand.

Silent and gazing at the throng as one in a dream stood Mme. Koluchy. Antonia had crept up close to her father; her face was as white as her white dress.

"The Luck of Pitsey Hall," she murmured, "and on this night of all nights!"

As for me, I felt my brain almost reeling with excitement. For the moment the thoughts which surged through it numbed

my capacity for speech. I saw a servant gathering up the fragments. The evening was ended, and the party gradually broke up. To go on dancing would have been impossible.

It was not till some hours afterwards that the whole Satanic scheme burst upon me. The catastrophe admitted of but one explanation. The dominant note, repeated in two bars when all the instruments played together in unison, must have been the note accordant with that of the cup of the goblet, and by the well-known laws of acoustics, when so played it shattered the goblet.

Next day there was an effort made to piece together the shattered fragments, but some were missing—how removed, by whom taken, no one could ever tell. Beyond doubt the characters cunningly concealed by the open-

work pattern contained the key to the cipher. But once again Madame had escaped. The ingenuity, the genius, of the woman placed her beyond the ordinary consequences of crime.

Delacour's murder still remains un-avenged. Will the truth ever come to light?



"'THE LUCK OF PITSEY HALL,' SHE MURMURED."