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CLOSE QUARTERS;

OR, THE HOUSE IN THE RUE BARBETTE

CHAPTER XXII.—(Cont'd)

"But where did the knife come from?" pursued Brett. "It was not in their possession when they entered, nor when they left."

"No; of course not. Hessein brought it himself, to be used in case of necessity. He also brought the pliers which cut the wire blinds, and the material used for concealing the broken strands subsequently. Hussein was really an excellent confederate, and I was furious when I heard that he was dead. You know how the diamonds were abstracted from the house?"

"Yes," said Brett. "They were made up into a parcel and flung through the window into the Park. The knife and pliers accompanied

them, I suppose?"

"The third Turk-the gentleman who pulled you down on to the bed so unceremoniously, Mr. Talbot-was waiting there for the packet. But he had to hide in the Park all the night, until the gates were opened in the morning. It was a ticklish business right through. I did not know at what hours the police might discover the extent of the crime. The diamonds did not reach me until seven o'clock. And then I had some difficulty in persuading the Turks to give them up to me. You see, I had my own little plan, too, which these excellent gentlemen never suspected, as they already had paid me £5,000 for my help. But the real heads of the party were in Paris-Hessein-ul-Mulk and that gang, you know-and by representing the danger to their cause which would result from any attempt on the part of the Turks in London to reach France, they were at last persuaded. By nine Beucaire?" o'clock that morning I got them safely off to the docks, where they boarded a vessel bound for Smyrna. Their passages were already Brett, I cannot help liking you, booked in Armenian names. Gros Jean, who had no connection with the affair personally, stayed at a little hotel in Soho in order to report all clear during the next few days. He happened by chance to

travel with you and the other man. It was a clever scheme, I assure you, from beginning to end. By the way, may I trouble you for another cigarette?"

"These are not equal to Hussein-ul-Mulk's," said Brett, producing his case.

"No; he has an exquisite taste in tobacco. But I nearly fooled him with the dummy diamonds. I would have done so if it had not been for you. Do you know, Mr. Brett, I have always underrated Englishmen's brains. You are really stupid as a nation"-here Talbot almost blushed-"but you are an exception. You ought to be a Frenchman."

Brett was silent for a few moments. He had fully discussed Dubois' connexion with the British authorities.

"How much of the five thousand pounds given you by the Turks remains in your possession?" he demanded.

The Frenchman hesitated before replying-

"There is no use lving to you. I have not yet expended the first STOPS COUCHS HEALS THE LUNGS thousand, although T had to pay dearly for a good many things."

Again there was silence. "Why did you come here?" ask-

ed the barrister. "Because I would be safe for some months with a few hospitable gentlemen whom I know up in the hills there." He nodded towards

them.

"And then?" "Then Marguerite and I were going to the Argentine, to dwell in rural felicity, and teach our children to bless the name of Mahomet and Obdul Hamid."

"Marguerite is Mademoiselle

"Yes, poor girl! I hear she is ill and in prison, together with her excellent father. Really, Mr. but I ought to feel anxious to cut your throat."

"In that case you would certainly be hanged. Are you married to Mademoiselle Beaucaire?" The Frenchman darted a quick

look at his inquisitor. "What has that to do with you?"

he snarled. Dubois' future had already been

determined. The rascal was more fortunate than he deserved to be. Owing to the lucky chance that his crime had a political significance he would escape punishment. By no known form of European law could he be brought to trial on any charge and at the same time gagged in his defence.

When the Ottoman Empire is next torn asunder by civil war other thrones will rock to their foundation. Half unconsciously, though he had a glimmering perception of the truth, Henri Dubois was saved by the magnitude of the interests involved.

Brett knew exactly how to deal with him. But a fantastic project

had arisen in his mind, and he determined to graft it upon the drastic expedition adopted by the authorities. He abruptly broke off the conversation and told the Frenchman that he would call again during the afternoon.

True to his promise, Talbot and he visited the injured man somehours later. This time they were accompanied by a stout individual and a closely veiled lady-Gros Jean and his daughter.

The meeting between Henri and Marguerite was pathetic. It was at the same time exceedingly French, and somewhat trying to the nerves of the Englishmen.

At last the couple calmed their transports, and Brett promptly recalled them to a sense of their surroundings by reminding them that there was a serious business to be discussed.

"I am commissioned to inform you," he said, addressing Dubois, "that if you proceed direct to the Argentine, never attempt to revisit France, and keep your mouth closed as to your attempt to purloin the Sultan's jewels, you will be set at liberty here and no effort will be made by the French or English police to arrest you. The infringement of any of these conditions will lead to your extradition and a sentence of penal servitude for life."

"Ma foi!" cried the Frenchman, looking intently into the barrister's inscrutable face. "Why such tenderness?"

for prolonged reflection.

"I have not yet finished," he said drily. "I imagine that Mlle. Beaucaire cannot produce a marriage certificate. She will be supplied with one, to permit her to travel with you as your wife."

The pair were startled. They somewhat relaxed the close embrace in which they sat. The man's handsome face flushed with anger. The woman became a shade paler and looked from the barrister to her lover.

"Good," growled Gros Jean. "Quite right!"

"We can manage our own affairs," began Dubois savagely; but Brett again took up the parable.

"You owe this lady a deep debt of gratitude for her unswerving devotion to you. She has helped you to lead an evil life; let her now assist you in a better career. You have your chance. Will you take

La Belle Chasseuse sat mute and downcast. This personal development came as a complete surprise to her. Pride would not permit her to plead her own cause. Dubois glanced at her covertly.

The barrister deemed the moment ripe for his final smashing argument. He came somewhat nearer to

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ing coolness-

examined by the police. It is in me, that is all." their charge. may press their investigation to a and saidpoint when it will be impossible to | "Let us get married, ma p'tite. permit your contemplated voyage It is essential."

000? Yes. But a wife!

further to say."

Suddenly all eyes were attracted ed Brett to one side. to Gros Jean, who emitted a gasping groan. His fat cheeks were liv-Brett would not give him time id, and huge drops of perspiration stood on his brow. Feeling that the burned every week in London, Engothers were regarding him intent- land.

the bed, and said with exasperat- ly, he made a desperate effort to recover his composure.

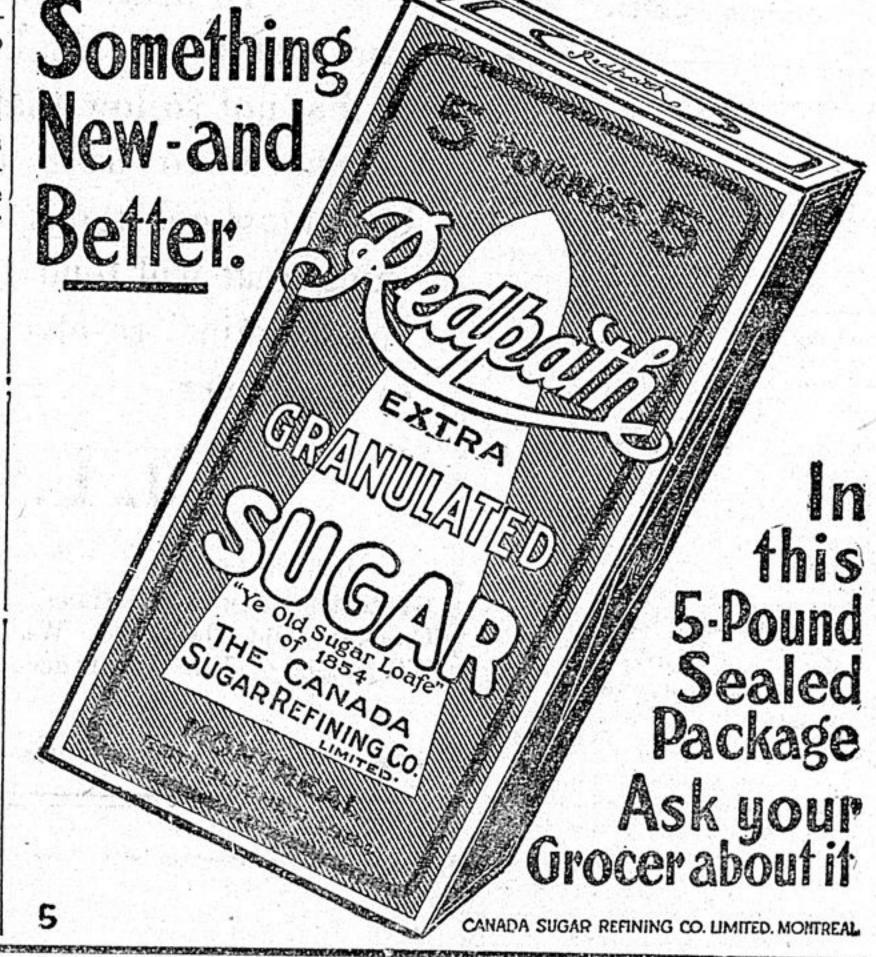
"There is a secret room in the "It is nothing!" he gurgled. "The Cabaret Noir, the contents of English gentleman's proposal with which have not yet been too closely regard to my daughter interested

At my request, Dubois and the innkeeper gazed backed up by the British Foreign intently into each other's eyes for Office, they have thus far deferred a few trying seconds. Then the a detailed scrutiny. Perhaps if the Frenchman drew Marguerite closexternal influence is removed they er to him, with his uninjured arm,

to the Argentine. I have nothing | And married they were forthwith, a priest and an official from the Dubois looked at him in moody Mayor's office being in waiting at silence. The Argentine-with £4,- the hotel. Whilst they were signing the register Gros Jean motion-

(To be continued.)

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