THE MYSTERY CLEARED UP;

OR, THE HERITAGE OF MADAME YALTA.

CHAPTER V.—(Cont'd)

He leaned toward the colonel who, on hearing the word, said:

"It is useless, my dear Ivan; but tell me, you are sent, then, on an extraordinary mission?"

"So extraordinary that the general allowed me only two hours to make my arrangements."

"And what is its purport?"

"Yourself, my dear Alexis Stepanovitch."

"Me! of what am I accused?"

"Of negligence, or rather imprudence. It seems you placed all your important papers in a casket and had the singular idea of depositing it with your banker."

"I could not but believe it a safer place than my own house. I was known to the Nihilists who have agents everywhere, and was uncertain of some of my people."

"It is not the less true that the box has been stolen, and doubtless by those whose measures you apprehend."

"True; and I was wrong not to render an account of the affair to those who have a right to know. I had reasons for acting thus, which I will explain presently. May I ask by whom the chiefs have been so well instructed?"

"You do not suspect? There is, however, a French proverb which asserts that one is never betrayed but by his own."

"Betrayed by my own! I have here neither friends nor relatives."

"You have an intendant, my dear Alexis Stepanowitch," said the envoye, laughing.

"Vacili! what; this knave has been acting the spy on me and corresponding with the department!"

"He was authorized to do so, that I can inform you. You must be aware that, in foreign parts especially, each one is watched,—sometimes by a comrade whom he is himself charged with overlooking. It is a system of mutual observation, against which it is useless to recriminate. And I enjoin you very earnestly not to let fail your anger upon this subaltern who was, after all, simply exercising his functions."

"I will beware of doing so. He would be capable of inventing calumnies on me to avenge himself. Perhaps he has already done so, for I suppose he was not satisfied to narrate the story of the casket?"

"He wrote that instead of opening an intelligent inquest you had set to work very clumsily."

"Then he has stated that I have laid hold upon a young man who was suspected of being the accomplice of the thieves?"

"He has told all. He has exposed the means to which you had recourse to obtain possession of his person and the embarrassment in which you now find yourself how to dispose of him. He even declared that you were on the point of despatching him by the secret means that are made use of on great occasions. And I will not conceal from you that he animadverted warmly upon your course."

"Criticism is easy, but I should like to know what the rascal would have done in my place. It is true that, despairing of extracting anything from this Carnoel, I had thought of sending him to Siberia, but I have abandoned the idea. If you could indicate to me a method of disposing of him without compromising anything, you would oblige me infinitely."

"Well, we will talk over all this at dinner. And after dinner, if you will, we will go to the opera."

"I see with pleasure, my dear Ivan Ivanovitch," said the colonel, laughing, "that business does not hinder you from thinking of pleasure while in Paris."

"All goes together perfectly. You shall see. I have reason to believe we shall not lose our evening. But let us begin by preparing ourselves. My appetite is voracious, and I mean to do justice to the cuisine and wines of France."

Whilst talking they had reached the fashionable cabaret recently opened on the Avenue de l'Opera.

Borisoff desired nothing better than to enter, for he was greatly annoyed by this bombshell that had fallen into his life, and this desultory conversation unnerved him. Wine unties the most discreet tongues, and he hoped that at table this representative of the great chief would unmask his real purpose.

Ivan Ivanovitch spoke French as fluently as his own tongue, and ordered his repast with an ease which gained him the esteem of the waiters.

No one supposed him to be a Russian until the end of the first course, when the colonel, who had hitherto confined himself to current trivialities, in endeavoring to lead the conversation back to the interesting topic took the precaution to return to his native tongue. He first questioned Mouriatine adroitly with regard to the chief and certain employes of the Third Section, and if there had still lingered any doubts as to the authenticity of the mission with which said Mouriatine declared himself charged, they must have been dispelled by the first replies of that personage. The envoye was thoroughly acquainted with the most secret machinery of the administration which he represented. Evidently he played an important role in the political police.

It was the new-comer who took up the thread of conversation where it had been dropped on the boulevard.

"My dear sir," he said, pouring the colonel out the dozenth glass of eliquot, "I must protest in advance against an intention which you might attribute to me. I did not come to Paris for the purpose of sustaining your steward against you. I do not even wish to see him, and you may count on his remaining ignorant of the nature of my mission. He need not suppose his denunciations have been listened to at St. Petersburg. But we will consult together whether something better may not be done. Important papers have been stolen from you, that is unfortunate, but it is not an irreparable disaster; and instead of concentrating ourselves on the discovery of the thieves, we must extend our operations. It is the chiefs we must reach and not the miserable subalterns who do not even know the real end of the execrable sect with which they are affiliated."

"These chiefs I hoped to arrive at by pursuing the simple soldiers, and I persist in the belief that if this Carnoel has been concerned in the theft of my papers, it was a woman who instigated him, and a woman occupying a high place in the association."

"Perfectly reasoned; but you have not the slightest conception who this woman is. Between ourselves, my dear Alexis, since you have been in France you might have used more sagacity. Thus, we have known at home that you have been occupied with a number of Russians who reside in or pass through Paris, who are not worth observing. It is wellnigh certain that these Nihilist rascals are directed in this country by a French woman, and that this woman is—but what is the matter, my dear friend? You are not listening."

"Excuse me," said Borisoff, "a gentleman who entered just now distracted my attention for a moment."

"That tall young man at the other end of the hall?"

"Yes. He is the nephew of my banker, and took into his head yesterday to question me as to what I had done with M. de Carnoel. I asked him out of my house. He announced that he would send me his seconds. I have not seen them, but am not without anxiety with regard to that madcap."

"He seems little inclined to pick a quarrel with you. See, he has taken a seat at a distance, and does not appear to notice you."

It was true. Maxime Dorgeres, whom chance had led there, true to his promise to the countess, was not thinking of resuming with the colonel the stormy conversation of the day previous. He did not look toward Borisoff, nor the latter toward him.

But the companion of the colonel had attracted his attention from the first, and whilst affecting to be absorbed in the menu, he cast stolen glances at Mouriatine.

"It is strange," he said to himself, "surely I have seen that face somewhere—and that not long ago either. I have a memory for faces, and this one is not commonplace. He certainly has not a French head. Probably he is Russian, since he is dining with that scoundrel Borisoff."

On their part, the two foreigners had resumed their drinking, and talking in Russian as before the arrival of Maxime.

"Let us forget this gentleman and return to the woman of whom we were speaking. We have reason to suppose that it is she who conducts everything in Paris, and I am firmly convinced that she organized the theft of your casket."

"You say she is French?"

"French by birth, but of Polish origin, and intimately connected with all the enemies of Russia."

"It is very extraordinary, if she lives in Paris, that she has not been marked out."

"She has only recently been denounced to the Third Section; but you might have met with her, for she must have been revolving round you, so to speak."

"In the world in which I move?"

"No, my dear Alexis; you move only in the true, and it is a mistake. Our chief said so to me the evening before my departure."

"What world should I frequent to satisfy him?"

"All of them, including the half which you have entirely neglected."

"Because there was nothing to be learned there. You know as well as I do that in this country the femmes galantes are not engaged in politics, especially foreign politics. They make the most of us willingly, we Russians, but they do not conspire against our government."

"There are exceptions, and the person whom I have mentioned is one."

"Then this person is a demoiselle—a cocotte, to speak more precisely."

"She is an irregular, but not one of the creatures whom one meets everywhere. She is very little known. It might be said, moreover, that she is intermittent, for she does not always reside in Paris. She is to be seen at Nice, at Monaco, at Geneva, and her journeyings have always one end. It was at Geneva that she was pointed out to me last summer."

"Ah! you know her then by sight?"

"Better than that. I got presented by one of my compatriots, whom she had bewitched and must have ruined. I had some suspicion that she was enrolled among the Nihilists, but there were no proofs, and I did not concern myself about her seriously. This winter we have received detailed reports of her proceedings. Thanks to her character of pleasure-seeker, no one suspects her, and she has every facility for connecting herself with these Russians from whom she hopes to extract valuable information. It was thus that two months ago she was here openly, under the protection of one of our generals, who was here on furlough."

"I must at least know her name," murmured Borisoff.

"She changes it frequently. When I met her it was Madame de Gauches. Here she has assumed, I am told, some vulgar name. But had you been better informed of what transpires in the camp of adventuresses, this one could not have failed to attract your attention, to say nothing of her beauty, which is marvellous."

"I confess I had not even a suspicion of her existence," said the colonel, somewhat piqued; "and until the contrary is proved you will permit me to doubt the fact of her having stolen my papers."

"She has not taken them with her own hand, but they were stolen by her orders and under her instructions."

"Then she knows me?"

"She has possibly never seen you, but she must have been aware of the nature of your casket, and of the deposit of this casket with your banker. Around her swarm agents obscure but well informed and always ready to do her bidding. She had but to make a sign and the casket was brought to her."

"You admit, then, that this Carnoel was of the band, and that I was not wrong to secure him?"

"On that point I am not yet settled. It is possible that he gave indications, and may even have given them undesignedly. This lady is very skilful in making persons speak. The thing is to ascertain whether she had relations with the young man, and of that I can easily satisfy myself."

"I am curious to know how."

"Dear Alexis Stepanowitch, you shall see, and that shortly. I came to Paris to clear up this matter. If you wish, we will begin this evening."

"Where?"

"At the opera. The lady will probably be there. She has returned to Paris without a cavalier, to spread her nets in the hope of capturing a Russian sufficiently high in place to serve without suspecting her. Why should you not be this Russian?"

"I! you are mad! You have just said that she knows what my occupation is in Paris."

"The more reason for her seeking to connect herself with you. If she has not already tried it, it is because the occasion has not presented itself. Remember, she is persuaded you will take her simply for a femme galante. She will not suspect that you know anything about her. She supposes herself to have all the advantage, and asks nothing better than to attract the man most formidable to her sect. This is, as you must know, their method. These ladies ingratiate themselves by every means with the enemies of their sect, that they may surprise their secrets and hinder their action. They have always one foot in the enemy's camp, and thus it is that they accomplish so much harm. Now is the time to pay them back in their own coin."

(To be continued.)

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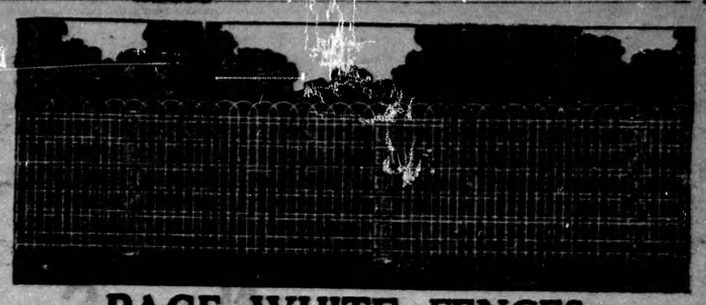

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Anuual Statement of the British America Assurance Company.

Attention is directed to the annual financial statement of the British America Assurance Company given in another place in to-day's issue. The profits on the year's trading amounting to $213,111.50 give evidence of the satisfactory condition of the company's affairs. The surplus to policyholders stands at $915,863.55. The premium income was $1,658,239.65 and out of this were paid fire losses of $839,004.26, and other expenses of $660,847.04. Interest and other receipts are given as $54,723.15 and this brings the profits up to the very satisfactory amount mentioned above. The British America Assurance Company was incorporated in 1833, and since the organization the fire losses paid have reached the enormous sum of $33,620,764.61.

THE BUSINESS SPIRIT.

"I say," cried the business man to the detective, "some fellow has been representing himself as a collector of ours. He has been getting in more money than any two of the men we have, and I want him caught as quickly as you can."

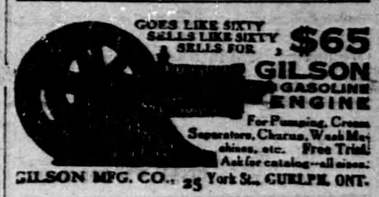
"All right; I'll have him in gaol in less than a week."

"Great Scott, man! I don't want to put him in gaol, I want to engage him!"

THE MONEY QUESTION.

"Wot do they mean, Jimmy, when they say money talks?"

"I dunno unless it's the wonderful way it says good-bye to yer."



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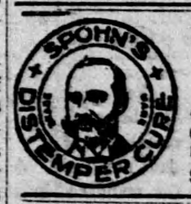

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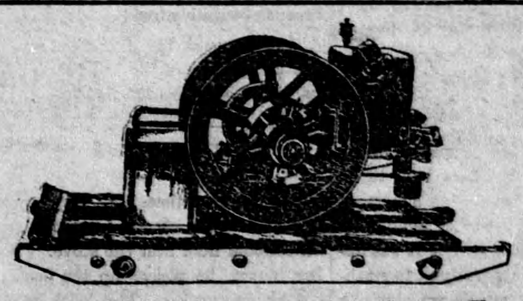

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Fast friends are sometimes loose companions.

British America Assurance Company

INCORPORATED A.D. 1833.

HEAD OFFICE, - - TORONTO

STATEMENT FOR YEAR ENDING DEC. 31, 1909.

ASSETS		$2,022,170 18
Unearned Premiums and other Liabilities		1,106,306 63
Surplus to Policy-holders		$ 915,863 55
Lossses paid since incorporation in 1833		$33,620,764 61
Fire Premiums		$1,658,239 65
Fire Losses	$839,004 26	
Expenses	660,847 04	
		1,499,851 30
		$ 158,388 35
Interest and other Receipts		54,723 15
Profit on Year's Trading		$ 213,111 50

W. B. MEIKLE, General Manager. P. H. SIMS, Secretary.

Applications for Agencies at unrepresented points to be addressed to the Secretary.