CLOSE QUARTERS;

OR, THE HOUSE IN THE RUE BARBETTE

CHAPTER XII.--(Cont'd)

Beaucaire came a step nearer. Clearly he did not recall the barrister's face. He knew well that his daughter's attainments were not such as to command the eager search of London theatrical managers, yet he was assured that the individual who now addressed him was not an ordinary music-hall agent, hunting up fees.

"I regret," he said, "that mademoiselle is not professionally engaged at this moment. Indeed, she has not appeared in public for some months. May I ask how monsieur came to hear of her name?"

"It is the easiest matter in the world," said Brett with his ready smile, producing his note-book and rapidly turning over the leaves. "I have here the names and addresses of a large number of artists whom I was recommended to visit. Mademoiselle's name was given to me among others at the Cirque d'Hiver, where I heard most encouraging accounts of her skill. You see, monsieur," he went on, "that in England the public are not acquainted with any other language than their own and when Continental artistes are engaged we prefer those whose performance consists chiefly of acrobatic or other feats in which dialogue is unnecessary."

The barrister's ready explanation was sufficient. Nevertheless Beaucaire was puzzled. But even the most vulgar or brutal Frenchman is endowed with a certain amount of politeness, and in this instance Gros Jean felt that his visitor should be treated deferentially.

"I am most sorry," he cried, "to be unable to assist monsieur any further. If, however, you leave me your address I will communicate with you after I have heard from my daughter. I have no doubt that she will readily come to terms."

"I think you said that mademoiselle was in the South of France?" observed Brett casually.

Instantly Beaucaire became suspicious again.

"No," he replied shortly; "I do not think I said so."

"Of course not," laughed Brett. "How foolish of me! It was I who mentioned the South of France, was it not? You see that French is a foreign language to me, and I do not express myself very easily."

Beaucaire grinned politely again:

"Permit me to congratulate monsieur upon both his pronunciation and facility. Not many Englishmen speak French as he does."

The barrister was determined not to allow the conversation to end too rapidly. He wished to note more carefully the details of this interesting household. Pulling out his cigar-case, he offered it to Gros Jean with the remark. "Your small French tables seem curious to my eyes after long acquaintance with English billiards. Are any of these gentlemen here skilled players in your fashion?"

"Oh, yes," said the innkeeper. "Andre there, for instance, can make big breaks. I have seen him make forty consecutive coups. Will you not take a seat for a little while and observe the play?"

"With pleasure." And Brett confirmed the favorable opinion formed of him by ordering refreshments for Beaucaire and himself. He apparently took a keen interest in the game, and applauded the manner in which the Frenchman scored a series of difficult cannons.

Meanwhile he noted that between the private passage from the bar and the public one that led from the cafe was a room into which the light of day could not possibly penetrate. He was certain that no door communicated with it from the public passage, and he could not remember having passed one that first afternoon when La Belle Chasseuse brought him and Fairholme into the billiard-room to display her prowess as a marks-woman.

Probably the Cafe Noir had no cellars. The place might serve as a store room. This natural hypothesis was upset by the appearance of the waiter, who passed through the billiard-room and opened another door at the further end, through which he soon emerged carrying a fresh supply of bottles.

"It is obvious," said Brett to himself, "that if there is no door communicating with the private passage, then the only way in which that room can be reached is by a ladder from the top. Now I wonder why that should be necessary?"

He remained in the billiard-room some twenty minutes. When Gros Jean was called on some momentary errand to the front of the house he took his departure, purposely making the mistake of quitting the room by the wrong exit. At the same instant he struck a match to relight his cigar, and while the expert billiard player, Andre, ran after him to direct him as to the right way he rapidly surveyed the passage. The plaster walls were smooth and unbroken on their inner side, affording no doorway exit.

Apologizing to Andre with a laugh, he then sauntered towards the front cafe, where he purchased another drink at the counter. He assured himself that he had not been mistaken. The only private door out of the bar led into the passage, so that the room beyond could only be reached by a staircase or through a trap-door.

"I have learned something, at any rate," he murmured as he passed out into the Boulevard, "and I imagine that my knowledge is not shared by the Paris police. Mademoiselle would have acted more wisely had she not yielded to impulse, and reserved her shooting display for a more dramatic occasion."

Brett kept his appointment with the commissary next morning. That worthy official set himself to the congenial task of examining a prisoner with the air of one who said: "Now you will see what manner of man I am. Here I am on my native heath."

He consulted bulky volumes, made notes, fussily called up various subordinates, both in person and by speaking-tube, and generally conducted himself with a business-like air that much amused the barrister, who, however, for his own purposes took care to appear greatly impressed.

At last all was ready, and the captive of the Rue Barbette was introduced.

This precocious personage had recovered his self-possession and natural impudence during the night. By the commissary's instructions, he had been well supplied with eatables, and the restrictions as to persons under detention were relaxed, to permit him to enjoy a supply of his much-loved cigarettes. Consequently, the little thief was restored to his usual state of jaunty cheekiness.

The first part of the interrogation, which promptly ensued, was not strange to him.

"Your name?" said the commissary.

"Charles Petit."

"Abode?"

"Changeable. Of late I have dwelt in the Cabaret Noir Boulevard de Montmartre."

"You are generally known as 'The Worm?'"

"That is so."

"You have served periods of imprisonment, and have paid over 400 francs in fines?"

"I have not kept count, but I suppose it is all written down there." And he jerked his thumb towards the conviction book on the commissary's desk.

"You are a noted thief, and you obtained your nickname by reason of your dexterity in picking locks and climbing through scullery windows?"

"If you say so, monsieur, your words cannot be disputed."

"Very well." The commissary scratched a few lines on a memorandum tablet. Then he suddenly raised his quick eyes and fastened them on the prisoner with the direct question—

"How came you to be detained in such an extraordinary manner in the house, No. 11, Rue Barbette, yesterday?"

A vacant and stolid expression intended to convey an idea of utter innocence came over "The Worm's" face.

"Believe me, monsieur," he said, "I cannot give you the slightest explanation of that extraordinary incident."

"Indeed! You surprise me. I suppose you wish me to understand that you casually strolled in out of the street and were set upon by three Turks, who gagged you and bound you with leather thongs, leaving you to starve quietly to death if you had not been rescued by reason of a chance visit paid to the place by myself and others?"

"I assure you, monsieur, that, strange as it may seem, you have almost related the facts. I went to the place in question with a very ordinary message from a Turkish gentleman with whom I have a slight acquaintance. The other Turks listened to me with the gravity peculiar to their nation, and then, before I could offer a word of remonstrance, treated me exactly as you saw."

"And what time did you go there?"

"It must have been nearly three o'clock, the day before yesterday," was the answer.

"And what message did you bring?"

"I was told to ask the Turkish gentlemen to be good enough to cross the Pont Neuf exactly at half-past six, when they would meet a friend who desired to give some information to them."

"Oh! come now," said the commissary, with a knowing smile, "that will not do, Petit. You are far too old a hand to convey such a childish message as that. What reason can you have for seeking to shield these men who treated you in a barbarous way and left you to die a cruel death?"

"On my honor——" began the thief melodramatically, but Brett here interrupted the conversation.

"Will you allow me," he said to the commissary, "to put a few questions to this man?" "Certainly," was the answer.

"Now listen," said Brett, sternly gazing at the truculent little rascal with those searching eyes of his which seemed to reach to the very spine. "It is useless for you to attempt any further prevarication. We know exactly who are your confederates. You are acquainted with a large number of the gang that frequents the Cafe Noir. Do not forget that I was present when you tried to palm off on Hussein-ul-Mulk the false diamonds, which your confederates hoped he would accept. For you to attempt now to escape from the law is hopeless. The sole chance you have of remitting a punishment which may even lead you beneath the gullotine is to confess fully and freely all that you know concerning the outrage which has been committed.

"No, don't interrupt me," he continued with even greater emphasis, when "Le Ver" tried to break in. "You will tell me that you merely acted as the agent of others, and that you yourself are not conscious of the nature of any crime that has been committed. I know that to be so. You have been made a mere tool. You are the cat, simply employed by the monkey to pull the chestnuts out of the fire, and you have only succeeded in getting your own paws burnt. Your sole chance of safety now is to inform the commissary and me exectly how you came to be mixed up with this affair."

"I assure you, gentlemen," he cried, "that with respect to the Turks I have no knowledge whatever of their pursuits or motives. I was present when this English gentleman here was debating with them, and I understood that they even went so far as to use threats against him. My mission was to give to the leaders of the Turks a package which I did not even know contained diamonds, either genuine or false. No one could be more surprised than myself when the Turkish gentleman produced them."

"Who sent you there with the diamonds?" said Brett.

"Even that I cannot tell you," said Petit. "It was a mere chance affair. I was seated in a cafe sipping some absinthe when a man asked me if I would execute a small commission for him. He explained that it was to deliver a parcel at a house not five minutes distant, and——"

"I see," interrupted Brett, with the cynical smile which so often disconcerted glib liars like Petit. "It is hopeless to expect you to tell the truth. However, I think I know a way to clear your wits. You must be brought face to face with La Belle Chasseuse. Perhaps when you are confronted with that lady in the room between the cafe and billiard saloon of the Carbaret Noir——"

"The Worm" gasped out brokenly—

"Pardon, monsieur! I will tell you everything!"

The man's face had absolutely become livid as he listened to the barrister's words.

The commissary was vastly surprised at the turn taken by the conversation. He could not guess what deep significance lay behind the Englishman's threat, and, to tell the truth, Brett himself was considerably astonished at the effect of his vague insinuations, but he lost not a moment in following up the advantage thus gained.

"Well," he said, "tell us now who it was that sent you to the Turks with the diamonds?"

"It was Le Jongleur, Henri Dubois."

"What?" cried the commissary, staring violently. "Henri Dubois! the most expert thief in France! A scoundrel against whom the police have vainly tried for years to secure evidence."

(To be continued.)

SLEEPY TOWN.

A former resident of Marshall, Mo., was asking about the old town.

"I understand they have a curfew law out there now," he said.

"No," his informant answered, "they did have one, but they've abandoned it."

"What was the matter?"

"Well, the bell rang at 9 o'clock, and almost everybody complained that it woke them up."

HABITS OF GIRLS.

"When should a girl change her name?"

"Well, she usually changes her first name when she goes to high school, and her last name whenever she can."

The fire of genius is often unable to make the pot boil.

On the Farm

HOW TO USE A DRAG.

The successful operation of a road drag involves two principles, which, when thoroughly understood and intelligently applied, make road working with this implement very simple. The first concerns the length and position of the drag, while the second deals with the position of the driver on the drag. Each influences the other to a large extent, and successful manipulation of the drag is dependent upon an understanding of both of them, writes Mr. D. W. King.

For ordinary purposes the scratch link or clevis should be fastened far enough toward the blade end of the chain to force the unloaded drag to follow the team at an angle of 45 degrees. This will cause the earth to move along the face of the drag smoothly and will give comparatively light draft to the team, provided the driver rides in the line of draft. Sometimes, however, conditions are met which require special treatment, and in a rolling country such conditions are not infrequent. Often a flat place several rods in length or a seepy spot needs special attention.

The distance from the drag at which the team is hitched affects the depth of the cutting. Shortening the chain tends to lift the front slab from the ground; a longer hitch causes the blade to cut more deeply. The length of hitch may be regulated by lengthening and shortening the chain at the end which runs through the hole in the blade end of the drag. If small weeds are to be cut the double tree should be attached rather closer to the ditch end of the drag. The drag will now move nearly ditch end foremost, and the driver should stand with one foot on the extreme end of the front slab. This will swing the drag back to the proper angle and will cause the blade to plow.

The drag does the best work when the soil is moist, but not sticky. The earth then moves freely along the faces of the slabs. If the roadway is very badly rutted and full of holes, it may be well to use the drag once when the ground is slushy. This treatment is particularly applicable before cold spell in winter when it is possible to have a roadway freeze smooth.

A smooth road surface is secured by this method. Clay, when mixed with water and thoroughly worked, becomes remarkably tough and impervious to water. If compacted in this condition it becomes extremely hard.

Another valuable result of dragging is the reduction of dust, for the particles of clay cohere so tenaciously that there is but little wear when the surface is smooth. Dust on an earth road is due to the breaking up under traffic of the frayed and upturned edges of ruts and hoof prints. If the surface is smoothed after each rain and the road dries hard and even, so edges are exposed to crushing and the only dust which forms is that due to actual wear of the road surface.

Certain sections of the roadway will require more attention than others because of steep grades, seepages, exposure to hillside wash, etc. The best guide in meeting these conditions is the knowledge and experience gained while dragging the roadway.

There is one condition, however, in which special treatment should be given to a road. Clay hills under persistent dragging frequently become too high in the center. To correct this it is best to drag the earth toward the center of the road twice and away from it once.

NOTES OF THE SHEEPFOLD.

All pure bred sires are not good. We would rather have a large, well formed, vigorous, verile scrub ram than a puny, ill-formed, pure-blood. In buying rams it is just as necessary to study individuality as it is to have pure blood

We have seen some mighty poor specimens of men who boasted of their high lineage, and we have seen some extremely poor specimens of sheep that had pedigrees as long as your arm

A flock will go through a winter in good shape in an open shed provided it has a dry roof, but no flock will ever thrive on wet footing.

Sheep are nervous animals and of rather delicate constitutions and suffer more from bad ventilation and overcrowding than any other animal on the farm; it is a mistake, therefore, to confine sheep during the winter in close quarters. If kept dry their fleeces will keep them warm. Who ever heard of sheep freezing to death?

The rams should never be fed fattening food, but should be given the kind of food that will add strength and stamina. They must never be allowed to run with the ewes at will, but should be separated from them.

IN AND AROUND THE DAIRY.

Every dairyman must, if he will succeed, employ a detective in his dairy barn—a Babcock tester. This detective is absolutely honest, shows favors to nobody and always records facts from all the facts. The poor cows stand no chance against it.

If we allow buyers to come into our herds and pick out the best cows how can we ever expect to build up a profitable dairy?

We knew a farmer who always cured his calves of scours by breaking raw eggs into their mouths. A better way, however, is dried blood fed in moderate quantities at the start.

No matter at what price you sell the poor cows it is generally safe to say you get all they are worth and a little more, particularly if she is to be classed as a dairy animal.

Never milk the cow with wet hands. No more filthy habit is indulged in than that of milking on the hand in order to strip the teat. Milking should always be done with a full, dry hand.

IN ANCIENT BABYLON.

How and By Whom the Banking Business Was Carried on.

Recent discoveries of the wonders of Babylonian civilization, reenforced by the fruits of earlier explorations, show that "Business is business" as a rule of life is as old as history, says the Accountant.

As far back as 2000 years before Christ the Babylonians had made such progress in commercial aptitude that special laws had to be framed to deal with those gentlemen who tried shortcuts to wealth. The young man with expectations realized in those days with less regard to the sacredness of the person and the right to live, borrowed, as his modern prototype not infrequently does to-day, from the professional money lender.

The Babylonian merchant banked regularly and issued his brick "cheques" and bills of exchange, and the law stepped in, even as it does to-day, to preserve inviolate the rights of property. So keen were the business instincts of the people that even the priests were not above a deal in offerings and in real estate. Indeed a great part of the commerce of Babylonia was concentrated in the temples.

The vast quantities of metals, cereals and other commodities which either as gifts to the temples or offerings to the gods poured in daily were sold by the priests, who did not neglect to get their full margin of profit. Business ability indeed seems to have been an important qualification for admission to the priesthood.

Careful accounts of revenue and expenditure were kept, and these show that investments in loans and the purchase of land and other profitable dealings were a regular part of the fiscal activities of the priestly establishments.

Perhaps the most interesting of all the buried record which have come to light are the contract tablets kept by a firm of bankers and money lenders known as "the sons of Egibi," established at Babylon before the time of Sennacherib, probably as early as 1000 B.C., and which existed for several centuries. These "brick books," as they have been called, constitute the chief source of our acknowledge of life in ancient Babylon.

The firm of Egibi possessed enormous wealth and influence and have been designated the "Rothschilds of the ancient world." They carried on every sort of financial transaction. They made loans to the State, as well as to private persons, and the finances of the court were entrusted to them for several generations. They collected the land taxes, tithes and dues for the use of public roads and paid them into the royal treasury.

They also undertook what we should now describe as "agencies" for private individuals, and in addition to their vast money lending transactions must also have engaged in what we now term "banker's" business, for we know that documents existed in those early days corresponding to modern checks and bills of exchange. The various transactions of the firm were noted down on clay tablets, which were stored in great earthenware jars for safety, and earthenware jars for safety, and there they remained until they few years ago.

All bear the names of the contracting parties and witnesses, and most of them are dated. The Egibi firm were not the only great trading firm in ancient Babylonia, as during the excavations at Niffer there were discovered the records of another firm, known as Murasu, which rose to a position of great wealth and importance during the fifth century B.C.

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