CLOSE QUARTERS;

OR, THE HOUSE IN THE RUE BARBETTE

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Cont'd)

"They set off, and, being sure of their destination, I did not quit the cafe myself until they were well out of sight. Then I walked away in the same direction, inquired of a policeman the quickest way to reach the post-office, and stepped out rapidly.

"I had not gone far when I overtook them. They reached the building. The Turks remained in the street and Gros Jean went inside, so I followed him, and found him inquiring for letters at the Poste Restante department. Whereupon I sent a telegram to London."

"Who on earth did you telegraph to, Jack?" broke in Edith.

"To my shirt-maker, telling him to put a couple of dozens in hand at once."

This unexpected answer provoked a general titter.

"The funny thing to me," said Talbot, "was the effect of the message on the telegraph clerk. He could evidently read English, and he surveyed me curiously, for in my present appearance I looked a most unlikely person to order shirts by telegram from a well-known London house. However, I achieved my purpose, which was to overhear Gros Jean's request. He asked if there were any letters for M. Isidor de Rion."

"Good gracious," cried Edith, "what an aristocratic name for that fat man."

"Anyhow, it was effective. There was a letter for him, and he evidently only expected one, for, before the clerk who handed it to him was able to examine the remainder of the packet, he tore it open, glanced briefly at its contents and then hurried out to join his friends in the street. After a short conclave they entered a cafe and procured a railway guide. I tried hard to find out what section of the book Gros Jean was looking at, but failed, for the double reason that he did not consult the Turks, nor did he seem to make up his mind, for he looked through the book, sighed impatiently and suggested to the others that they should go out again. I followed them into the Cannebiere, and thence down towards the harbor. When we reached the quay a small pleasure steamer was whistling for passengers, and a placard announced a fifty-centimes return trip to the Chateau d'If.

"Seemingly on the spur of the moment, Gros Jean invited the others to accompany him. So, of course, I followed them. When we reached the island, I quickly perceived that the castle filled the whole of it. Therefore, in place of keeping behind them I went in front. We all passed on with the stream of sightseers until we reached the courtyard. I had never been in the place before, but Gros Jean seemed to know it well. Owing to my policy of preceding them I found myself halted for a moment at the foot of the stairs leading to the tower. It struck me that the Frenchman was making in this direction, so I took the chance and ran up. I reached the top and looked over before the party had entered the doorway at the bottom. They came in. Thus far I was right. I looked around, and found, as you know, the square roof surrounded by bare battlements with a turret in one corner. I decided instantly that it would be hopeless to try to get close to them if they halted at any other point save in the vicinity of the turret. Elsewhere I must remain too far away to catch any portion of their conversation. So I darted across and entered the turret, noting on my way up the stairs the existence of the loopholed window where you finally saw me. It would never do to be caught there, so I went to the top and peeped over. You can guess how delighted I was when they came straight across and settled themselves in the angle beneath. Then I crept half-way down the stairs and leaned as far as I dared through the loophole, being just in time to hear Gros Jean read a letter from his daughter. Fortunately the innkeeper had to speak plainly, as his companions were foreigners, and for the same reason I had no difficulty in catching the drift of what the Turks said.

"The letter was quite short. It told him that H. had decided to leave France, and had made arrangements to proceed at once to Palmero, whither the writer would accompany him.

"One sentence I remember exactly: 'H.' she wrote, 'has friends in Sicily, and he feels assured of a kind reception at their hands.'"

"Friends!" interrupted Brett. "That means brigands!"

"The information seemed to annoy the Turks very much. They were very angry at what they described as the enforced delay, and discussed with Gros Jean the quickest means of reaching Palmero forthwith. Then he told them that he had endeavored to find out the trains running through Italy to Messina, but they could not leave Marseilles until to-night, and he thought it best that they should have a quiet talk on the situation before deciding too hurriedly upon any line of action.

"The rest of their conversation was inconsequent and desultory, alluding evidently to some project which they had fully discussed before."

Brett smiled grimly. "The commissary in Paris always follows up the wrong person," he said. "Had he only used his wits yesterday morning he would have discovered that the agent of the Embassy was in touch with Hussein-ul-Mulk. Hence the presence of the quartette in Marseilles to-day."

Talbot was naturally mystified by this remark until Brett explained to him the circumstances already known to the reader.

"Was there anything else?" inquired the barrister, reverting to the chief topic before them.

"Only this. I gathered that Gros Jean did not know his daughter's whereabouts in Marseilles, but she had arranged that if circumstances necessitated her departure from the town she would leave a letter for him in the Poste Restante, giving him full details. Nevertheless, this presupposes the knowledge on her part that he would come to Marseilles, so I assume therefore that telegrams must have passed between them yesterday afternoon."

"Obviously!" said Brett. "Anything else?"

"Yes," and now Talbot's voice took a note of passion that momentarily surprised his hearers. "It seems to me that this under-handed arrangement, if it goes through, condones the murder of poor Mehemet Ali and his assistants, and places on me the everlasting disgrace of having permitted this thing to happen whilst an important and special mission was entrusted to my sole charge by the Foreign Office. Dubois has been able to commit his crime, get away with the diamonds, hoodwink all of us most effectually, and, in the result, obtain a huge reward from the Turkish Government for his services. I tell you, Mr. Brett, I won't put up with it. I will follow him to the other end of the world, and, at any rate, take personal vengeance on the man who has ruined my career. For, no matter what you say, the only effective way in which I can rehibilitate myself with my superiors is to hand back those diamonds to the custody of the Foreign Office. No matter how the panic-stricken sovereign in Yildiz Kiosk may sacrifice his servants to gain his own ends, I, at least, have a higher motive. It rests with me to prove that the British Government is not to be humbugged by Paris thieves or Turkish agitators. If I fail in that duty there remains to me the personal motive of revenge!

"No, Edith; it is useless to argue with me," for his sister had risen and placed her arms lovingly round his neck in the effort to calm him. "My mind is made up. I suppose Mr. Brett feels that his inquiry is ended. For me it has just commenced."

The young man's justifiable rage created a sensation.

"May I ask," he said, "what reason you have to suppose that I should so readily throw up the sponge and leave Monsieur Henri Dubois the victor in this contest?"

"Do you mean," cried Talbot, starting to his feet, "that you will stand by me?"

"Stand by you!" echoed the barrister, himself yielding for an instant to the electrical condition of things. "Of course I will. We will recover those diamonds and bring them back with us to London if we have to take them out of the Sultan's palace itself!"

"And now, Lord Fairholme," he added, before Talbot could do other than grasp his hand and shake it impulsively, "we want your friend's yacht. We will set out for Palmero at the first possible moment. We must reach there many hours, perhaps a whole day, before Dubois, who is on a sailing vessel, and even with the start he has obtained cannot hope to equal the performance of a fast steamer. Let Gros Jean and his Turks travel overland. We will beat them, too. Come, now, no more talk, but action. You, Fairholme, go ahead and prepare Daubeney. I will see to your luggage being packed. Talbot and I will join in half an hour."

"Eh! what is that?" broke in Sir Hubert. "Fairholme, Talbot, you—what are Edith and I going to do?"

"Mr. Brett, of course," said Edith, in her steady, even tones, "did not trouble to include us, uncle, because we shall be on the yacht first. A woman can always pack up much better than a man, you know, and I will look after you, dear."

Brett gave one glance at her flushed and smiling face, and forthwith abandoned argument as useless.

An hour later the Blue Bell was skimming past the outer lighthouse in Marseilles bay.

CHAPTER XIX.

Next morning they reached the Straits of Bonifacio, and here they had to slacken speed somewhat, for the navigation of the rocky channel was difficult and dangerous. Far behind them they could see a huge steamer approaching. As the morning wore, this vessel came nearer, and Daubeney, important now in his capacity of commander, announced that she was the P. and O. steamship Ganges, bound for Brindisi and the East, via the Straits of Messina.

"She left Marseilles at a late hour last night," he said, "and will call at Brindisi for the Indian mails."

An idea suddenly struck Brett. "Do you know how fast she is steaming?" he inquired.

"Oh, about thirteen and a half knots an hour. That is her best rate. The P. and O. boats are not flyers, you know."

"And does she stop at Messina?"

Daubeney now caught the drift of the barrister's questions.

"I don't think so."

Another hour passed, and the Ganges was now almost alongside. Although both ships were well through the Straits of Bonifacio, and the Ganges should have followed a course a point or two north of that pursued by the Blue Bell, she appeared to be desirous to come close to them.

Suddenly the reason became apparent. A line of little flags fluttered up to her masthead.

"She is signalling us," cried Daubeney excitedly. "Here you," he shouted to a sailor, "bring Jones here at aonce."

Jones was the yacht's expert signaller. He approached with a telescope and a code under his arm. After a prolonged gaze and a careful scrutiny of the code, he announced—

"This is how the message reads: 'Turks on board Stopping Messina. —Winter.'"

For once the barrister was startled out of his usual quiet self-possession.

"Winter!" he almost screamed. "Is he there?"

A hundred mad questions coursed through his brain, but he realized that to attempt a long explanation by signals was not only out of the question, but could not fail to attract the attention of passengers on board the Ganges. This he did not desire to do. Quick as lightning, he decided that by some inexplicable means the Scotland Yard detective had reached Marseilles full of the knowledge that Dubois and the diamonds were en route to Sicily, and had also learnt that he, Brett, and the others were on board the Blue Bell.

He had evidently taken the speediest means of reaching the island, and found himself on board the same ship as Gros Jean and the Turks. Hence he had approached the captain with the request that the Blue Bell should be signalled.

(To be continued.)

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It will benefit your children or your invalid.

E-2-12

HOW TO BECOME TALL.

Undergo a Course of Electrification —That's All.

Interesting experiments are being made in Stockholm, Sweden, as to the effect of electricity on the physical growth of children.

The walls and ceilings of a school room were lined with a coil of wires through which a high frequency current was passed. The children in the room were thus in a position of an iron core in the centre of a magnetizing coil. Fifty children were kept in this room, while 50 others of the average age, size and mental development were kept in an adjoining room without electrical treatment.

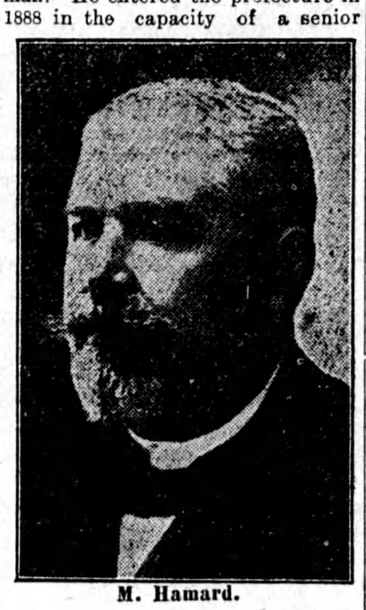
At the end of six months the children under electrical treatment showed a growth of two inches, while those without electricity grew only one and a half inches. The electrified children showed an increase in weight and other forms of development in proportion to their height.

A GREAT SLEUTH.

If Octave Henri Aeodat Hamard, the Paris detective chief, who has been promoted to be director of the Criminal Investigation Department, were to reveal his secrets, they would make the most blood-curdling record of crime of modern times; for Paris is the most wicked city in the world.

Hamard is provincial by birth, having been born at Chatillon-sur-Loing in the Loiret, fifty years ago. Though only in his prime, his hair is quite white, not by heredity, but by reason of the intense strain consequent upon the chase of crime.

Unlike M. Lepine, chief of police, Hamard is tall. Unlike the little magician he has never known any other calling than that of policeman. He entered the prefecture in 1888 in the capacity of a senior



M. Hamard.

clerk at a salary scarcely sufficient to keep body and soul together. Six years later he was made a police magistrate.

Soon he became Assistant-Chief of Detectives, his immediate superior being Cochefert, the terror of evil-doers. Hamard succeeded Cochefert in 1902, and from then till now has held the office of Chief of Detectives in the capital where the criminals of all nations congregate. But criminals, like kings, are closely watched, and, unlike the latter, are rarely disturbed in Paris provided they keep quiet.

Of the many celebrated cases with which he has had to deal, none attracted more widespread attention than that of Madame Steinhall, the "tragic widow," who was accused of having killed her husband, and her mother, and whom some hold responsible for the death of President Felix Faure. The distracted woman, in her frantic efforts to free herself from the disgrace of murder and parricide, blamed people indiscriminately. Finally, to cast the blame upon a servant, she put a pearl in his pocket book. Hamard had her arrested. She was acquitted, but the terrible ordeal she was put through during a long trial has forced a change in the form of French criminal procedure.

Hamard says his most amusing experience concerned the bank clerk named Galley, who stole a large sum of money from the Comtoir National Escompte, chartered a yacht, and eloped with a music-hall artist named Merelli. For a time the clerk played the part of a grand seigneur, but finally he and Merelli, whom he called "a sister soul," were arrested at Bahia. The most revolting case of M. Hamard's experience was that of Soleilland, who killed the ten-year-old daughter of his friend, put her little body in a sack and deposited it in a luggage office of the Western Station. Hamard stuck to the prosecution till the scoundrel was condemned to the guillotine; but President Fallieres, who does not believe in capital punishment, commuted his sentence to imprisonment for life.

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The student, on finishing her course, can pick and choose her position, that of lady-cook being so far the most popular. Some of the pupils, however, are prospective brides, who wish to gain sufficient practical knowledge to control the work of their own servants when they set up housekeeping.

Lady nurses are already established on the pay roll of many a wealthy Britisher, and the employment of lady cooks and lady parlormaids is following in natural sequence. Those who have tried the high-grade helps vote them a great improvement on the ordinary types, who now yearn for the factory and store as affording more evening liberty.

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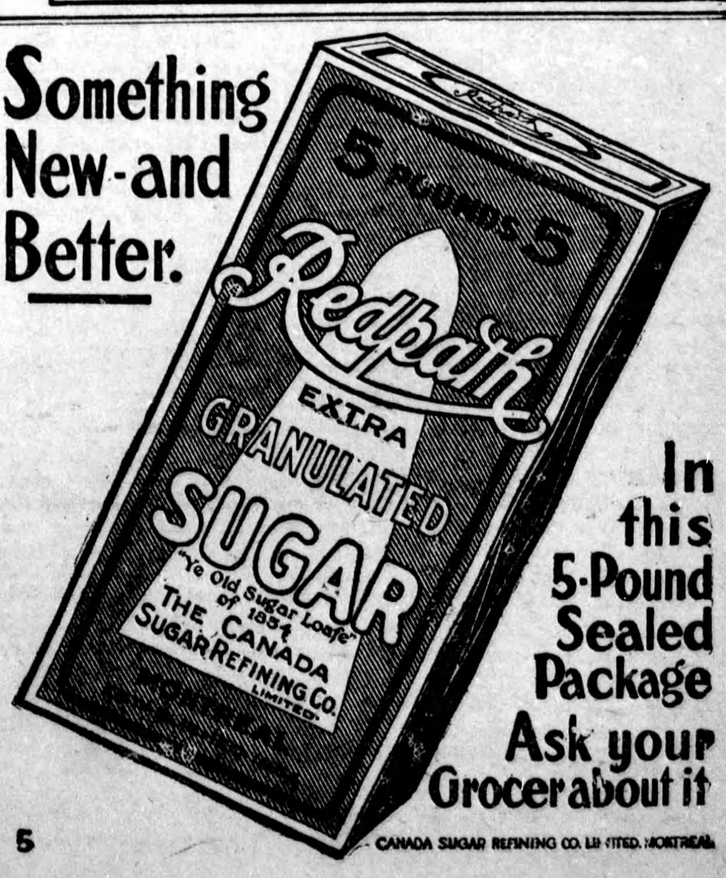

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