

oldier's pay... time of peace... of his choice... emblems of conquest... annually by the... of the Chin... Irrawaddy, th... aded mines... with these much... annually by the... of the Chin... Irrawaddy, th... aded mines... with these much... annually by the... of the Chin... Irrawaddy, th... aded mines... with these much...

# BY ORDER OF THE LEAGUE

BY FRED. M. WHITE.

## CHAPTER XII.

Coolly, as it is the whole transaction had been a little light recreation, and untroubled in conscience, as if the fatal card had fallen to Maxwell by pure chance, instead of base trickery. Le Gautier turned his face in the direction of Fitzroy Square. It steps in the direction of supreme indifference to him as a matter of supreme indifference to him as to whether Maxwell obeyed the dictum of the League or not; indeed, flat rebellion would have suited his purpose better, for in that case he would be all the sooner rid of him. There was just a chance that the affair with Visci might end favourably; whereas, on the other hand, a refusal would end fatally for the rash man who defied the League. Men can face open danger; it is the uncertainty, the blind groping in the dark, that makes the body and mind out, unstrung, the nerves, and sometimes unseats reason. Better fight with fearful odds, than walk with the shadow of the sword hanging over one night and day. The inestimable Frenchman had seen what defiance to the League generally came to; and as he reviewed his rosy prospects, his bright thoughts lent additional flavour to his cigarette. Nevertheless, his heart beat faster as he pulled the bell at the quiet house in Ventnor Street. Adventures of this sort were nothing novel to him; but he had something more at stake here than the fortunes of the little blind boy and the light intrigue he looked for. Miss St Jean was in, he found; and she was shown up to her room, where he sat waiting the apartment—the open piano, and the shaded waxlights, shining softly—just the proper amount of light to note charms and just dim enough to unite confidences. He noted these things, he smiled, for Le Gautier was a connoisseur in the graceful art of love-making, and boasted that he could read women as scholars can expound the passages of the earlier classics, or think they can, which pleases them equally. In such like case, the Frenchman was about to fall into a similar error, never dreaming that the artistically arranged room with its shaded lights was a trap to catch his soul. He waited impatiently for the coming fair one, knowing full well that she wished to create an impression. If such was her intention, she succeeded beyond expectation. With her magnificent hair piled up upon her small shapely head, and its glossy blackness relieved only by a single diamond star, shining like a planet on the bosom of the twilight sky, with a radiant smile upon her face, she came towards him. She was dressed in some light shimmering material, low upon the shoulders; and around the neck was a wreath of deep red roses, a ribbon round the neck, from which depended a diamond cross. She came forward murmuring a few well-chosen words, and sank into a chair, waiting for Le Gautier to recover. He had need of time to recover his scattered senses, for man of the world as he was, and acquainted with beauty as he was, had never seen anything like this before. He was not the sort to be long taken back; he raised his eyes to hers with a homage which was more eloquent than words. He began to feel at home; the dazzling loveliness threw a spell upon him, and the delicious mystery was to his liking; and he was tete-a-tete. "I began to think I had failed to interest you sufficiently last night," Isodore commenced, waving her fan slowly before her. "I began to imagine you were not coming to take pity on my loneliness." "How could you dream such a thing?" Le Gautier replied in his most languishing voice. His pulses began to beat at these words. "Did I not promise to come? I should have been here long since, but some claims of business detained me from your room." "I must have been pressing business," Isodore laughed archly. "And pray, what come are you going to rock to its foundations now?" "Had Le Gautier been a trifle less vain, he would have been in his guard when the conversation took so personal a turn; but he was flattered; the question betokened an interest in himself. "How would it interest you?" he asked. "How do you know that it would not interest me, that though I am bound by no obligations, I am one of you. Anything connected with the League, anything connected with myself, cannot fail to interest me." The words ran through Le Gautier's frame like quicksilver. He was impulsive and passionate; these few minutes had almost sufficed to seal his thralldom. He began to lose his head. "You flatter me," he said joyfully. "Our business-to-night was short; I only had to choose an avenging angel." "For Visci, I suppose?" Isodore observed with some faint show of interest. "Poor fellow! and upon whom did the choice fall?" "A new member, curiously enough. I do not know if you are acquainted with him; his name is Maxwell." "May he prove as true to the cause as— I have never had the fortune to be present on one of these occasions. How do you manage it? Do you draw lots, or do you settle it with dice?" "On this occasion, no. We have a much better plan than that. We take a pack of cards; they are counted, to see if they are equal; then each man present shuffles them; a particular one represents the fatal number, and the president of the assembly deals the cards out. Whoever the chosen one falls to, he has to do the task in hand." "That, I suppose, must be fair, unless there is a conjurer presiding," Isodore observed reflectively. "Who was the president to-night?" "Myself. I took my chance with the cards, you must understand." Isodore did not reply, as she sat there watching her fan backwards and forwards before her face. Le Gautier fancied that for a moment a smile of bitter contempt flashed from her eyes; but he dismissed the thought, for when she dropped the fan again, her face was clear and smiling. "I am wearying you," she said, "by my questions. A woman who asks questions should not be allowed in society; saccharine as a thing to be avoided. I am no exception myself, at least not in the sense men mean. Shall I play to you?" Le Gautier would have asked nothing better than to sit there feasting his eyes upon the matchless beauty; but now he assented eagerly to the suggestion. Music is an

the silent street. The mask fell from her face as she clenched her hands, and her countenance was crossed with a hundred angry passions. Valerie entering at that moment, looked at her with something like fear. "Sit down, Valerie," Isodore whispered hoarsely, in a voice like the tones of one in great pain, as she walked impatiently about the room, her hands twisted together convulsively. "Do not be afraid; I shall be better presently. I feel as if I want to scream, or do some desperate thing to-night. He has been here, Valerie; how I sustained myself, I cannot tell." "Did he recognise you?" Valerie asked timidly. "Recognize me? No, indeed! He spoke about the old days by the Mattio woods, the old times when we were together, and laughed at me for a romantic schoolgirl. I nearly stabbed him then. There is treachery about; his plan is prospering. As I told you it would be, Maxwell is chosen for the Roman mission; but he shall never do the deed, for I shall warn Visci myself. And he was my brother—Visci's friend!" "But what are you going to do now?" Valerie asked. "He is a traitor. He is going to betray the League, and I am going to be his confidant. I saw it in his face. I wonder how I bear it—I wonder I do not die! What would they say if they saw Isodore now! Come, Valerie, come and hold me tightly in your arms—tighter still. If you do not have a little pity, my poor heart will break!" Long and earnestly did Salvarini and Maxwell sit in the latter's studio discussing the events of the evening, till the fire had burnt down to ashes and the clock in the neighboring steeple struck three. It was settled that Maxwell should go to Rome, though with what ulterior object they did not decide. Time was in his favor, the lapse of a month or so in the commission being a matter of little object to the League. They preferred that vengeance should be deferred for a time, and that the blow might be struck when it was least expected, when the victim was just beginning to imagine himself safe and the matter forgotten. "I suppose I had better lose no time in going," Maxwell observed, when they had discussed the matter thoroughly. "Time and distance are no objects to me, or money either." "As to your time of departure, I should say as soon as possible," Salvarini replied; "and as to money, the League finds that." "I would not touch a penny of it, Luigi—no, not if I was starving. I could not soil my fingers with their blood-money.—What do you say to my starting on Monday night? I could get to Rome by Thursday at the latest.—And yet, to what good? I almost feel inclined to refuse, and bid them do their worst." "For heaven's sake, do not!" Salvarini implored. "Such a thing is worse than folly. If you assume a readiness to fulfill your undertaking, something may turn up in your favour." Maxwell gazed moodily in the dead ashes, and cursed the hot-headed haste which had placed him in that awful position. Like every right-minded man, he shrunk with horror from such a cowardly crime. "You will never attain your ends," he said. "Your cause is a noble one; but true liberty, perfect freedom, turns against cold-blooded murder; for call it what you will, it is nothing else." "You are right, my friend," Salvarini mournfully replied. "No good can come of it; and when reprisals come, as they must, they shall be swift and terrible.—But Frederick," he continued, laying his hand on the other's shoulder, "do not blame me too deeply, for I will lay down my own life cheerfully before harm shall come to you." Maxwell was not aware that Sir Geoffrey Charteris was a member of the League, as Le Gautier had taken care to keep them apart, so far as business matters were concerned, only allowing the baronet to attend such meetings as were perfectly harmless in their general admiration of the philanthropic schemes and self-denying usefulness of the Brotherhood; nor was it the Frenchman's intention to admit him any deeper into its secrets; indeed, his admission only formed part of the scheme by which the baronet, and through him his daughter, should be entirely in the Frenchman's power. The cards were sorted, and once Maxwell was out of the way, the game was ready to be played. All this the artist did not know. With a heavy heart and a foreboding of coming evil, he made the simple preparations for his journey. He had delayed to the last the task of informing Enid of his departure, partly from a distaste of alarming her, and partly out of fear. It would look more natural, he thought, to break it suddenly, merely saying he had been called to Rome on pressing business, and that his absence would not be a prolonged one. Till Saturday, he put this off, and then, bracing up his nerves, he got into his cab, and was driven off rapidly in the direction of Grosvenor Square. He was roused from his meditations by a shock and a crash, the sound of two plunging horses on the ground—roused by being shot forward violently, by the shouts of the crowd, and above all, by the piercing scream of a woman's voice. Scrambling out as best he could, he rose to his feet and looked around. His cab had come violently in collision with another in the centre of Piccadilly. A woman had attempted to cross hurriedly; and the two cabs had swerved suddenly, coming together sharply, but not too late to save the woman, who was lying there, in the centre of an eager, excited crowd, perfectly unconscious, the blood streaming down her white face, and staining her light summer dress. A doctor had raised her a little, and was trying to force some brandy between the clenched teeth, as Maxwell pushed his way through the crowd. "Nothing very serious," he said, in answer to Maxwell's question. "She is simply stunned by the blow, and has sustained, I should say, a simple fracture of the right arm.—She must be moved from here at once.—If you will call a cab, I will take her to a hospital."

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