THE FOUR JUST MEN

By EDGAR WALLACE

£500 REWARD A Remarkable Offer is made in connection with this Novel. Apart from its interest as a most brilliant piece of story writing, Mr. Edgar Wallace has heightened its charm by leaving at the end one mystery unsolved. The Publishers invite the reader to solve this mystery and offer Prizes to the value of £500 (First Prize, £250), to the readers who will furnish on the form provided the explanation of Sir Philip Ramon's death.

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THE FOUR JUST MEN

By EDGAR WALLACE

Author of

"The Melody of Death," "The Girl from Scotland Yard," "Angel Esquire," "The Traitors' Gate," "The Black Abbot," "The Clue of the New Pin," "The Green Archer," "The Hairy Arm," "Blue Hand," "The Sinister Man," "Terror Keep," "The Ringer," "The Door with Seven Locks," "Jack O' Judgment," etc.

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TO
I. M. W.

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PART I
THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

CHAPTER I
THERY'S TRADE

Four men sat about a table on the sidewalk in front of the Café of the Nations in the High Street of Cadiz and talked business.

Leon Gonsalez was one, Poiccart was another, George Manfred was a notable third, and one Thery, or Saimont, was the fourth. Of this quartet, only Thery requires no introduction to the student of contemporary history. In the Bureau of Public Affairs you will find his record. As Thery, alias Saimont, he is registered and to all students of Criminology and Physiognomy, he must need no introduction.

He sat at the little table, this man, obviously ill at ease, pinching his fat cheeks, smoothing his shaggy eyebrows, fingering the white scar on his unshaven chin, doing all the things that the lower classes do when they suddenly find themselves placed on terms of equality with their betters.

For although Gonsalez, with the light blue eyes and the restless hands, and Poiccart, heavy, saturnine, and suspicious, and George Manfred, with his grey shot beard and single eyeglass, were less famous in the criminal world, each was a great man, as you shall learn.

Manfred laid down the *Heraldo di Madrid*, removed his eyeglass, rubbed it with a spotless handkerchief, and laughed quietly.

"These Russians are droll," he commented.

Poiccart frowned and reached for the newspaper. "Who is it—this time?"

"A Governor of one of the Southern Provinces."

"Killed?"

Manfred's moustache curled in scornful derision.

"Bah! Who ever killed a man with a bomb! Yes, yes; I know it has been done—but so clumsy, so primitive, so very much like undermining a city wall that it may fall and slay—amongst others—your enemy."

Poiccart was reading the telegram deliberately and without haste, after his fashion.

"The Prince was severely injured and the would-be assassin lost an arm," he read, and pursed his lips disapprovingly. The hands of Gonsalez, never still, opened and shut nervously, which was Leon's sign of perturbation.

"Our friend here"—Manfred jerked his head in the direction of Gonsalez and laughed—"our friend has a conscience and——"

"Only once," interrupted Leon quickly, "and not by my wish; you remember, Manfred; you remember, Poiccart"—he did not address Thery—"I advised against it. You remember?" He seemed anxious to exculpate himself from the unspoken charge. "It was a miserable little thing, and I was in Madrid," he went on breathlessly, "and they came to me, some men from a factory at Barcelona. They said what they were going to do, and I was horror-stricken at their ignorance of the elements of the laws of chemistry. I wrote down the ingredients and the proportions, and begged them, yes, almost on my knees, to use some other method. 'My children,' I said, 'you are playing with something that even chemists are afraid to handle. If the owner of the factory is a bad man, by all means exterminate him, shoot him, wait on him after he has dined and is slow and dull, and present a petition with the right hand and—with the left hand—so'!"

Leon twisted his knuckles down and struck forward and upward at an imaginary oppressor. “But they would listen to nothing I had to say.”

Manfred stirred the glass of creamy liquid that stood at his elbow, and nodded his head with an amused twinkle in his grey eyes.

“I remember—several people died, and the principal witness at the trial of the expert in explosives was the man for whom the bomb was intended.”

Thery cleared his throat as if to speak, and the three looked at him curiously. There was some resentment in Thery’s voice.

“I do not profess to be a great man like you, señors. Half the time I don’t understand what you are talking about—you speak of governments and kings and constitutions and causes. If a man does *me* an injury I smash his head”—he hesitated, “I do not know how to say it . . . but I mean . . . well, you kill people without hating them, men who have not hurt you. Now, that is not my way. . . .” He hesitated again, tried to collect his thoughts, looked intently at the middle of the roadway, shook his head and relapsed into silence.

The others looked at him, then at one another, and each man smiled. Manfred took a bulky case from his pocket, extracted an untidy cigarette, rerolled it deftly and struck a government match on the sole of his boot.

“Your—way—my—dear—Thery”—he puffed—“is a fool’s way. You kill for benefit; we kill for justice, which lifts us out of the ruck of professional slayers. When we see an unjust man oppressing his fellows; when we see an evil thing done against the good God”—Thery crossed himself, “and against man—and know that by the laws of man this evil-doer may escape punishment—we punish.”

“Listen,” interrupted the taciturn Poiccart; “once there was a girl, young and beautiful, up there”—he waved his hand northward with unerring instinct—“and a priest—a priest, you understand—and the parents winked at it because it is often done . . . but the girl was filled with loathing and shame, and would not go a second time, so he trapped her and kept her in a house, and then when the bloom was off turned her out, and I found her. She was nothing to me, but I said, ‘Here is a wrong that the law cannot adequately right.’ So one night I called on the priest with my hat over my eyes and said that I wanted him to come to a dying traveller. He would not have come then, but I told him that the dying man was rich and was a great person. He mounted the horse I had brought, and we rode to a little house on the mountain. . . . I locked the door and he turned round—so! Trapped, and he knew it. ‘What are you going to do?’ he said with a gasping noise. ‘I am going to kill you, señor,’ I said, and he believed me. I told him the story of the girl. . . . He screamed when I moved towards him, but he might as well have saved his breath. ‘Let me see a priest,’ he begged; and I handed him—a mirror.”

Poiccart stopped to sip his coffee.

“They found him on the road next day without a mark to show how he died,” he said simply.

“How?” Thery bent forward eagerly, but Poiccart permitted himself to smile grimly, and made no response.

Thery bent his brows and looked suspiciously from one to the other.

“If you can kill as you say you can, why have you sent for me? I was happy in Jerez working at the wine factory . . . there is a girl there . . . they call her Juan Samarez.” He mopped his forehead and looked quickly from one to the other. “When I received your message I thought I should like to kill you—whoever you were—you understand I am happy . . . and there is the girl—and the old life I have forgotten——”

Manfred arrested the incoherent protests.

"Listen," said he imperiously; "it is not for you to inquire the wherefore and the why; we know who you are and what you are; we know more of you even than the police know, for we could send you to the garotte."

Poiccart nodded his head in affirmation, and Gonsalez looked at Thery curiously, like the student of human nature that he was.

"We want a fourth man," went on Manfred, "for something we wish to do; we would have wished to have had one animated by no other desire than to see justice done. Failing that, we must have a criminal, a murderer if you like."

Thery opened and shut his mouth as if about to speak.

"One whom we can at a word send to his death if he fails us; you are the man; you will run no risk; you will be well rewarded; you may not be asked to slay. Listen," went on Manfred, seeing that Thery had opened his mouth to speak. "Do you know England? I see that you do not. You know Gibraltar? Well, this is the same people. It is a country up there"—Manfred's expressive hands waved north,—"a curious, dull country, with curious, dull people. There is a man, a member of the Government, and there are men whom the Government have never heard of. You remember one: Garcia, Manuel Garcia, leader in the Carlist movement; he is in England; it is the only country where he is safe; from England he directs the movement here, the great movement. You know of what I speak?"

Thery nodded.

"This year as well as last there has been a famine, men have been dying about the church doors, starving in the public squares; they have watched corrupt Government succeed corrupt Government; they have seen millions flow from the public treasury into the pockets of politicians. This year something will happen; the old régime must go. The Government know this; they know where the danger lies, they know their salvation can only come if Garcia is delivered into their hands before the organization for revolt is complete. But Garcia is safe for the present, and would be safe for all time were it not for a member of the English Government, who is about to introduce and pass into law a bill. When that is passed, Garcia is as good as dead. You must help us to prevent that from ever becoming law; that is why we have sent for you."

Thery looked bewildered. "But how?" he stammered.

Manfred drew a paper from his pocket and handed it to Thery. "This, I think," he said, speaking deliberately, "is an exact copy of the police description of yourself." Thery nodded. Manfred leant over and, pointing to a word that occurred half-way down the sheet, "Is that your trade?" he said.

Thery looked puzzled. "Yes," he replied.

"Do you really know anything about that trade?" asked Manfred earnestly; and the other two men leant forward to catch the reply.

"I know," said Thery slowly, "everything there is to be known: had it not been for a—mistake I might have earned great money."

Manfred heaved a sigh of relief and nodded to his two companions.

"Then," he said briskly, "the English minister is a dead man."

CHAPTER II
A NEWSPAPER STORY

On the fourteenth day of August 190- a tiny paragraph appeared at the foot of an unimportant page in London's most sober journal to the effect that the secretary of state for foreign affairs had been much annoyed by the receipt of a number of threatening letters, and was prepared to pay a reward of fifty pounds to any person who would give such information as would lead to the apprehension and conviction of the person or persons, etc. The few people who read London's most sober journal thought, in their ponderous Athenæum Club way, that it was a remarkable thing that a minister of state should be annoyed at anything; more remarkable that he should advertise his annoyance, and most remarkable of all that he could imagine for one minute that the offer of a reward would put a stop to the annoyance.

News editors of less sober but larger circulated newspapers, wearily scanning the dull columns of *Old Sobriety*, read the paragraph with a newly acquired interest.

"Hullo, what's this?" asked Smiles of the *Comet*, and cut out the paragraph with huge shears, pasted it upon a sheet of copy-paper and headed it:

"Who is Sir Philip's Correspondent?" As an afterthought—the *Comet* being in Opposition—he prefixed an introductory paragraph, humorously suggesting that the letters were from an intelligent electorate, grown tired of the shilly-shallying methods of the Government.

The news editor of the *Evening World*—a white-haired gentleman of deliberate movement—read the paragraph twice, cut it out carefully, read it again and, placing it under a paper-weight, very soon forgot all about it.

The news editor of the *Megaphone*, which is a very bright newspaper indeed, cut the paragraph as he read it, rang a bell, called a reporter, all in a breath so to speak, and issued a few terse instructions.

"Go down to Portland Place, try to see Sir Philip Ramon, secure the story of that paragraph—why he is threatened, what he is threatened with; get a copy of one of the letters if you can. If you cannot see Ramon, get hold of a secretary."

And the obedient reporter went forth.

He returned in an hour in that state of mysterious agitation peculiar to the reporter who has got a "beat." The news editor duly reported to the editor-in-chief, and that great man said, "That's very good, that's, very good indeed"—which was praise of the highest order.

What was "very good indeed" about the reporter's story may be gathered from the half-column that appeared in the *Megaphone* on the following day:

CABINET MINISTER IN DANGER
THREATS TO MURDER THE FOREIGN SECRETARY
"THE FOUR JUST MEN"
PLOT TO ARREST THE PASSAGE OF THE ALIENS
EXTRADITION BILL
EXTRAORDINARY REVELATIONS

Considerable comment was excited by the appearance in the news columns of yesterday's *National Journal* of the following paragraph:

> The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Sir Philip Ramon) has during the past few weeks been the recipient of threatening letters, all apparently emanating from

one source and written by one person. These letters are of such a character that they cannot be ignored by his Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who hereby offers a reward of Fifty Pounds (£50) to any person or persons, other than the actual writer, who will lay such information as will lead to the apprehension and conviction of the author of these anonymous letters.

So unusual was such an announcement, remembering that anonymous and threatening letters are usually to be found daily in the letter-bags of every statesman and diplomat, that the *Daily Megaphone* immediately instituted inquiries as to the cause for this unusual departure.

A representative of this newspaper called at the residence of Sir Philip Ramon, who very courteously consented to be seen.

"It is quite an unusual step to take," said the great Foreign Secretary, in answer to our representative's question, "but it has been taken with the full concurrence of my colleagues of the Cabinet. We have reasons to believe there is something behind the threats, and I might say that the matter has been in the hands of the police for some weeks past.

"Here is one of the letters," and Sir Philip produced a sheet of foreign notepaper from a portfolio, and was good enough to allow our representative to make a copy.

It was undated, and beyond the fact that the handwriting was of the flourishing, effeminate variety that is characteristic of the Latin races, it was written in good English.

It ran:

YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

The Bill that you are about to pass into law is an unjust one. It is calculated to hand over to a corrupt and vengeful Government men who now in England find an asylum from the persecutions of despots and tyrants. We know that in England opinion is divided upon the merits of your Bill, and that upon your strength, and your strength alone, depends the passing into law of the Aliens Political Offences Bill.

Therefore it grieves us to warn you that unless your Government withdraws this Bill, it will be necessary to remove you, and not alone you, but any other person who undertakes to carry into law this unjust measure.

(*Signed*)

FOUR JUST MEN

"The Bill referred to," Sir Philip resumed, "is of course the Aliens Extradition (Political Offences) Bill, which, had it not been for the tactics of the Opposition, might have passed quietly into law last session."

Sir Philip went on to explain that the Bill was called into being by the insecurity of the succession in Spain.

"It is imperative that neither England nor any other country should harbour propagandists who, from the security of these, or other shores, should set Europe ablaze. Coincident with the passage of this measure similar Acts or proclamations have been made in every country in Europe. In fact, they are all in existence, having been arranged to come into law simultaneously with ours, last session."

"Why do you attach importance to these letters?" asked the *Daily Megaphone* representative.

"Because we are assured, both by our own police and the continental police, that the writers are men who are in deadly earnest. The 'FOUR JUST MEN,' as they sign themselves, are known collectively in almost every country under the sun. Who they are individually we should all very much like to know. Rightly or wrongly, they consider that justice as meted out here on earth is inadequate, and have set themselves about correcting the law. They were the people who assassinated General Trelovitch, the leader of the Servian Regicides; they hanged the French Army Contractor Conrad in the Place de la Concorde—with a hundred policemen within call. They shot Hermann le Blois, the poet-philosopher, in his study for corrupting the youth of the world with his reasoning."

The Foreign Secretary then handed to our representative a list of the crimes committed by this extraordinary quartet.

Our readers will recollect the circumstance of each murder, and it will be remembered that until to-day—so closely have the police of the various nationalities kept the secret of the Four Men—no one crime has been connected with the other; and certainly none of the circumstances which, had they been published, would have assuredly revealed the existence of this band, have been given to the public before to-day.

The *Daily Megaphone* is able to publish a full list of sixteen murders committed by the four men.

"Two years ago, after the shooting of le Blois, by some hitch in their almost perfect arrangements, one of the four was recognized by a detective as having been seen leaving le Blois's house on the Avenue Kléber, and he was shadowed for three days, in the hope that the four might be captured together. In the end he discovered he was being watched, and made a bolt for liberty. He was driven to bay in a café in Bordeaux—they had followed him from Paris; and before he was killed he shot a sergeant de ville and two other policemen. He was photographed, and the print was circulated throughout Europe, but who he was or what he was, even what nationality he was, is a mystery to this day."

"But the four are still in existence?"

Sir Philip shrugged his shoulders. "They have either recruited another, or they are working short-handed," he said.

In conclusion the Foreign Secretary said:

"I am making this public through the press, in order that the danger which threatens, not necessarily myself, but any public man who runs counter to the wishes of this sinister force, should be recognized. My second reason is that the public may in its knowledge assist those responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the execution of their office, and by their vigilance prevent the committal of further unlawful acts."

Inquiries subsequently made at Scotland Yard elicited no further information on the subject beyond the fact that the Criminal Investigation Department was in communication with the chiefs of the continental police.

The following is a complete list of the murders committed by the "Four Just Men," together with such particulars as the police have been able to secure regarding the cause for the crimes. We are indebted to the Foreign Office for permission to reproduce the list.

> *London*, October 7, 1899.—Thomas Cutler, master tailor, found dead under suspicious circumstances. Coroner's jury returned verdict of "Willful murder against some person or persons unknown."

(Cause of murder ascertained by police: Cutler, who was a man of some substance, and whose real name was Bentvitch, was a sweater of a particularly offensive type. Three convictions under the Factory Act. Believed by the police there was a further and more intimate cause for the murder not unconnected with Cutler's treatment of women employees.)

Liège, February 28, 1900.—Jacques Ellerman, prefect: shot dead returning from the Opera House. Ellerman was a notorious evil liver, and upon investigating his affairs after his death it was found that he had embezzled nearly a quarter of a million francs of the public funds.

Sattle (Kentucky), October 1900.—Judge Anderson. Found dead in his room, strangled. Anderson had thrice been tried for his life on charges of murder. He was the leader of the Anderson faction in the Anderson-Hara feud. Had killed in all seven of the Hara clan, was three times indicted and three times released on a verdict of "Not guilty." It will be remembered that on the last occasion, when charged with the treacherous murder of the Editor of the *Sattle Star*, he shook hands with the packed jury and congratulated them.

New York, October 30, 1900.—Patrick Welch, a notorious grafter and stealer of public moneys. Sometime City Treasurer; moving spirit in the infamous Street Paving Syndicate; exposed by the *New York Journal*. Welch was found hanging in a little wood on Long Island. Believed at the time to have been suicide.

Paris, March 4, 1901.—Madame Despard.—Asphyxiated. This also was regarded as suicide till certain information came to hands of French police. Of Madame Despard nothing good can be said. She was a notorious "dealer in souls."

Paris, March 4, 1902 (exactly a year later).—Monsieur Gabriel Lanfin, Minister of Communication. Found shot in his brougham in the Bois de Boulogne. His coachman was arrested, but eventually discharged. The man swore he heard no shot or cry from his master. It was raining at the time, and there were few pedestrians in the Bois.

(Here followed ten other cases, all on a par with those quoted above, including the cases of Trelovitch and le Blois.)

It was undoubtedly a great story.

The editor-in-chief, seated in his office, read it over again and said, "Very good indeed."

The reporter—whose name was Smith—read it over and grew pleasantly warm at the consequences of his achievement.

The foreign secretary read it in bed as he sipped his morning tea, and frowningly wondered if he had said too much.

The chief of the French police read it—translated and telegraphed—in *Le Temps*, and furiously cursed the talkative Englishman who was upsetting his plans.

In Madrid, at the Café de la Paix, in the Place of the Sun, Manfred, cynical, smiling, and sarcastic, read extracts to three men—two pleasantly amused, the other heavy-jowled and pasty of face, with the fear of death in his eyes.

CHAPTER III
THE FAITHFUL COMMONS

Somebody—was it Mr. Gladstone?—placed it on record that there is nothing quite so dangerous, quite so ferocious, quite so terrifying, as a mad sheep. Similarly, as we know, there is no person quite so indiscreet, quite so foolishly talkative, quite so amazingly *gauche*, as the diplomat who for some reason or other has run off the rails.

There comes a moment to the man who has trained himself to guard his tongue in the councils of nations, who has been schooled to walk warily amongst pitfalls digged cunningly by friendly powers, when the practice and precept of many years are forgotten, and he behaves humanly. Why this should be has never been discovered by ordinary people, although the psychological minority who can generally explain the mental processes of their fellows have doubtless very adequate and convincing reasons for these acts of dis-balancement.

Sir Philip Ramon was a man of peculiar temperament. I doubt whether anything in the wide world would have arrested his purpose once his mind had been made up. He was a man of strong character, a firm, square-jawed, big-mouthed man, with that shade of blue in his eyes that one looks for in peculiarly heartless criminals and particularly famous generals. And yet Sir Philip Ramon feared, as few men imagined he feared, the consequence of the task he had set himself.

There are thousands of men who are physically heroes and morally poltroons, men who would laugh at death—and live in terror of personal embarrassment. Coroners' courts listen daily to the tale of such men's lives—and deaths.

The foreign secretary reversed these qualities. Good animal men would unhesitatingly describe the minister as a coward, for he feared pain and he feared death.

"If this thing is worrying you so much," the premier said kindly—it was at the cabinet council two days following the publication of the *Megaphone's* story—"why don't you drop the bill? After all, there are matters of greater importance to occupy the time of the House, and we are getting near the end of the session."

An approving murmur went round the table.

"We have every excuse for dropping it. There must be a horrible slaughtering of innocents—Braithwaite's Unemployed Bill must go; and what the country will say to that, Heaven only knows."

"No, no!" The foreign secretary brought his fist down on the table with a crash. "It shall go through; of that I am determined. We are breaking faith with the Cortes, we are breaking faith with France, we are breaking faith with every country in the Union. I have promised the passage of this measure—and we must go through with it, even though there are a thousand 'Just Men,' and a thousand threats."

The premier shrugged his shoulders.

"Forgive me for saying so, Ramon," said Bolton, the solicitor general; "but I can't help feeling you were rather indiscreet to give particulars to the press as you did. Yes, I know we were agreed that you should have a free hand to deal with the matter as you wished, but somehow I did not think you would have been quite so—what shall I say?—candid."

"My discretion in the matter, Sir George, is not a subject that I care to discuss," replied Ramon stiffly.

Later, as he walked across Palace Yard with the youthful-looking chancellor, Mr. Solicitor-General, smarting under the rebuff, said, à propos of nothing, "Silly old ass." And the youthful guardian of Britain's finances smiled.

"If the truth be told," he said, "Ramon is in a most awful funk. The story of the Four Just Men is in all the clubs, and a man I met at the Carlton at lunch has rather convinced me that there is really something to be feared. He was quite serious about it—he's just returned from South America and has seen some of the work done by these men."

"What was that?"

"A president or something of one of these rotten little republics . . . about eight months ago—you'll see it in the list. . . . They hanged him . . . most extraordinary thing in the world. They took him out of bed in the middle of the night, gagged him, blindfolded him, carried him to the public jail, gained admission, and hanged him on the public gallows—and escaped!"

Mr. Solicitor-General saw the difficulties of such proceedings, and was about to ask for further information when an under-secretary buttonholed the chancellor and bore him off. "Absurd," muttered Mr. Solicitor crossly.

There were cheers for the secretary for foreign affairs as his brougham swept through the crowd that lined the approaches to the House. He was in no wise exalted, for popularity was not a possession he craved. He knew instinctively that the cheers were called forth by the public's appreciation of his peril; and the knowledge chilled and irritated him. He would have liked to think that the people scoffed at the existence of this mysterious four—it would have given him some peace of mind had he been able to think "the people have rejected the idea."

For although popularity or unpopularity was outside his scheme of essentials, yet he had an unswerving faith in the brute instincts of the mob. He was surrounded in the lobby of the House with a crowd of eager men of his party, some quizzical, some anxious, all clamouring for the latest information—all slightly in fear of the acid-tongued minister.

"Look here, Sir Philip"—it was the stout, tactless member for West Brondesbury—"what is all this we hear about threatenin' letters? Surely you're not goin' to take notice of things of that sort—why, I get two or three every day of my life."

The minister strode impatiently away from the group, but Tester—the member—caught his arm.

"Look here——" he began.

"Go to the devil," said the foreign secretary plainly, and walked quickly to his room.

"Beastly temper that man's got, to be sure," said the honorable member despairingly. "Fact is, old Ramon's in a blue funk. The idea of making a song about threatenin' letters! Why, I get ——"

A group of men in the members' smoke-room discussed the question of the Just Four in a perfectly unoriginal way.

"It's too ridiculous for words," said one oracularly. "Here are four men, a mythical four, arrayed against all the forces and established agencies of the most civilized nation on earth."

"Do you think Ramon will withdraw the Bill?" asked the senior member for Aldgate East.

"Ramon? Not he—he'd sooner die."

"It's a most unusual circumstance," said Aldgate East; and three boroughs, a London suburb, and a midland town nodded and "thought it was."

"In the old days, when old Bascoe was a young member"—Aldgate East indicated an aged senator bent and white of beard and hair, who was walking painfully toward a seat—"in the old days——"

“Thought old Bascoe had paired?” remarked a listener irrelevantly.

“If I were Ramon,” resumed Aldgate East profoundly, “I know exactly what I should do. I should go to the police and say ‘Look here——’ ”

A bell rang furiously and continuously, and the members went scampering along the corridor. “Division—’vision.”

Clause Nine of the Medway Improvement Bill having been satisfactorily settled and the words “Or as may hereafter be determined” added by a triumphant majority of twenty-four, the faithful Commons returned to the interrupted discussion.

“What I say, and what I’ve always said about a man in the cabinet,” maintained an important individual, “is that he must, if he is a true statesman, drop all consideration for his own personal feelings.”

“Hear!” applauded somebody.

“His own personal feelings,” repeated the orator. “He must put his duty to the state before all other—er—considerations. You remember what I said to Barrington the other night when we were talking out the Estimates? I said, ‘The right honourable gentleman has not, cannot have, allowed for the strong and almost unanimous desires of the great body of the electorate. The action of a minister of the crown must primarily be governed by the intelligent judgment of the great body of the electorate, whose fine feelings’—no—‘whose higher instincts’—no—that wasn’t it—at any rate I made it very clear what the duty of a minister was,” concluded the oracle lamely.

“Now I——” commenced Aldgate East, when an attendant approached with a tray on which lay a greenish-grey envelope.

“Has any gentleman dropped this?” he inquired, and, picking up the letter, the member fumbled for his eyeglasses.

“To the Members of the House of Commons,” he read, and looked over his pince-nez at the circle of men about him.

“Company prospectus,” said the stout member for West Brondesbury, who had joined the party; “I get hundreds. Only the other day——”

“Too thin for a prospectus,” said Aldgate East, weighing the letter in his hand.

“Patent medicine, then,” persisted the light of Brondesbury. “I get one every morning—‘Don’t burn the candle at both ends,’ and all that sort of rot. Last week a feller sent me ——”

“Open it,” some one suggested, and the member obeyed. He read a few lines and turned red.

“Well, I’m damned!” he gasped, and read aloud:

> Citizens,
>
> The Government is about to pass into law a measure which will place in the hands of the most evil Government of modern times men who are patriots and who are destined to be the saviours of their countries. We have informed the minister in charge of this measure, the title of which appears in the margin, that unless he withdraws this Bill we will surely slay him.
>
> We are loath to take this extreme step, knowing that otherwise he is an honest and brave gentleman, and it is with a desire to avoid fulfilling our promise that we ask the members of the Mother of Parliaments to use their every influence to force the withdrawal of this Bill.

Were we common murderers or clumsy anarchists we could with ease wreak a blind and indiscriminate vengeance on the members of this assembly, and in proof thereof, and as an earnest that our threat is no idle one, we beg you to search beneath the table near the recess in this room. There you will find a machine sufficiently charged to destroy the greater portion of this building.

(*Signed*)

FOUR JUST MEN

Postscript.—We have not placed either detonator or fuse in the machine, which may therefore be handled with impunity.

As the reading of the letter proceeded the faces of the listeners grew pallid.

There was something very convincing about the tone of the letter, and instinctively all eyes sought the table near the recess.

Yes, there was something, a square black something, and the crowd of legislators shrank back. For a moment they stood spellbound—and then there was a mad rush for the door.

"Was it a hoax?" asked the prime minister anxiously, but the hastily summoned expert from Scotland Yard shook his head.

"Just as the letter described it," he said gravely, "even to the absence of fuses."

"Was it really——"

"Enough to wreck the House, sir," was the reply.

The premier, with a troubled face, paced the floor of his private room.

He stopped once to look moodily through the window that gave a view of a crowded terrace and a mass of excited politicians gesticulating and evidently all speaking at once.

"Very, very serious—very, very serious," he muttered. Then aloud, "We've said so much we might as well continue. Give the newspapers as full an account of this afternoon's happenings as you think necessary—give them the text of the letter." He pushed a button, and his secretary entered noiselessly.

"Write to the commissioner telling him to offer a reward of a thousand pounds for the arrest of the man who left this thing, and a free pardon and the reward to any accomplice."

The secretary withdrew and the Scotland Yard expert waited.

"Have your people found how the machine was introduced?"

"No, sir; the police have all been relieved and been subjected to separate interrogation. They remember seeing no stranger either entering or leaving the House."

The premier pursed his lips in thought.

"Thank you," he said simply, and the expert withdrew.

On the terrace Aldgate East and the oratorical member divided honours.

"I must have been standing quite close to it," said the latter impressively; " 'pon my word it makes me go cold all over to think about it. You remember, Mellin? I was saying about the duty of the ministry——"

"I asked the waiter," said the member for Aldgate to an interested circle, "when he brought the letter: 'Where did you find it?' 'On the floor, sir,' he said. I thought it was a medicine advertisement; I wasn't going to open it, only somebody——"

"It was me," claimed the stout gentleman from Brondesbury proudly; "you remember I was saying——"

“I knew it was somebody,” continued Aldgate East graciously. “I opened it and read the first few lines. ‘Bless my soul,’ I said——”

“You said, ‘Well, I’m damned,’ ” corrected Brondesbury.

“Well, I know it was something very much to the point,” admitted Aldgate East. “I read it—and, you’ll quite understand, I couldn’t grasp its significance, so to speak. Well——”

The three stalls reserved at the Star Music Hall in Oxford Street were occupied one by one. At half-past seven prompt came Manfred, dressed quietly; at eight came Poiccart, a fairly prosperous middle-aged gentleman; at half-past eight came Gonsalez, asking in perfect English for a program. He seated himself between the two others.

When pit and gallery were roaring themselves hoarse over a patriotic song, Manfred smilingly turned to Leon and said:

“I saw it in the evening papers.”

Leon nodded quickly.

“There was nearly trouble,” he said quietly. “As I went in somebody said, ‘I thought Bascoe had paired,’ and one of them almost came up to me and spoke.”

CHAPTER IV
ONE THOUSAND POUNDS REWARD

To say that England was stirred to its depths—to quote more than one leading article on the subject—by the extraordinary occurrence in the House of Commons, would be stating the matter exactly.

The first intimation of the existence of the Four Just Men had been received with pardonable derision, particularly by those newspapers that were behindhand with the first news. Only the *Daily Megaphone* had truly and earnestly recognized how real was the danger which threatened the minister in charge of the obnoxious act. Now, however, even the most scornful could not ignore the significance of the communication that had so mysteriously found its way into the very heart of Britain's most jealously guarded institution. The story of the "Bomb Outrage" filled the pages of every newspaper throughout the country, and the latest daring venture of the Four was placarded the length and breadth of the Isles.

Stories, mostly aprocryphal, of the men who were responsible for the newest sensation made their appearance from day to day, and there was no other topic in the mouths of men wherever they met but the strange quartet who seemed to hold the lives of the mighty in the hollows of their hands.

Never since the days of the Fenian outrages had the mind of the public been so filled with apprehension as it was during the two days following the appearance in the Commons of the "blank bomb," as one journal felicitously described it. Perhaps there was not exactly the same kind of apprehension, since there was a general belief, which grew out of the trend of the letters, that the Four menaced none other than one man.

The first intimation of their intentions had excited widespread interest. But the fact that the threat had been launched from a small French town, and that in consequence the danger was very remote, had somehow robbed the threat of some of its force. Such was the vague reasoning of an ungeographical people that did not realize that Dax is no farther from London than Aberdeen.

But here was the hidden terror in the metropolis itself. Why, argued London, with suspicious sidelong glances, every man we rub elbows with may be one of the Four, and we none the wiser.

Heavy, black-looking posters stared down from blank walls, and filled the breadth of every police notice-board.

£1,000 REWARD

WHEREAS, on August 18, at about 4.30 o'clock in the afternoon, an infernal machine was deposited in the Members' Smoke-Room by some person or persons unknown.

AND WHEREAS there is reason to believe that the person or persons implicated in the disposal of the aforesaid machine are members of an organized body of criminals known as "The Four Just Men," against whom warrants have been issued on charges of wilful murder in London, Paris, New York, New Orleans, Sattle (U.S.A.), Barcelona, Tomsk, Belgrade, Christiana, Capetown and Caracas.

NOW, THEREFORE, the above reward will be paid by his Majesty's Government to any person or persons who shall lay such information as shall lead to the

apprehension of any or the whole of the persons styling themselves "The Four Just Men" and identical with the band before mentioned.

And FURTHERMORE, a free pardon and the reward will be paid to any member of the band for such information, providing the person laying such information has neither committed nor has been an accessory before or after the act of any of the following murders.

(*Signed*)

RYDAY MONTGOMERY,
His Majesty's Secretary
of State for Home Affairs
J. B. CALFORT,
Commissioner of Police

[Here followed a list of the sixteen crimes alleged against the four men.]

GOD SAVE THE KING

All day long little knots of people gathered before the broadsheets, digesting the magnificent offer.

It was an unusual hue and cry, differing from those with which Londoners were best acquainted. For there was no appended description of the men wanted; no portraits by which they might be identified, no stereotyped "when last seen was wearing a dark blue serge suit, cloth cap, check tie," on which the searcher might base his scrutiny of the passer-by. It was a search for four men whom no person had ever consciously seen, a hunt for a will-o'-the-wisp, a groping in the dark after indefinite shadows.

Detective Superintendent Falmouth, who was a very plain-spoken man (he once brusquely explained to a Royal Personage that he hadn't got eyes in the back of his head), told the assistant-commissioner exactly what he thought about it.

"You can't catch men when you haven't got the slightest idea who or what you're looking for. For the sake of argument, they might be women for all we know—they might be Chinamen or niggers; they might be tall or short; they might—why, we don't even know their nationality! They've committed crimes in almost every country in the world. They're not French because they killed a man in Paris, or Yankee because they strangled Judge Anderson."

"The writing," said the commissioner, referring to a bunch of letters he held in his hand.

"Latin; but that may be a fake. And suppose it isn't? There's no difference between the handwriting of a Frenchman, Spaniard, Portuguese, Italian, South American, or Creole—and, as I say, it might be a fake, and probably is."

"What have you done?" asked the commissioner.

"We've pulled in all the suspicious characters we know. We cleaned out Little Italy, combed Bloomsbury, been through Soho, and searched all the colonies. We raided a place at Sunhead last night—a lot of Armenians live down there, but——"

The detective's face bore a hopeless look.

"As likely as not," he went on, "we should find them at one of the swagger hotels—that's if they were fools enough to bunch together; but you may be sure they're living apart, and meeting at some unlikely spot once or twice a day."

He paused, and tapped his fingers absently on the big desk at which he and his superior sat.

"We've had de Courville over," he resumed. "He saw the Soho crowd, and what is more important, saw his own man who lives amongst them—and it's none of them, I'll swear—or at least he swears, and I'm prepared to accept his word."

The commissioner shook his head pathetically.

"They're in an awful stew in Downing Street," he said. "They do not know exactly what is going to happen next."

Mr. Falmouth rose to his feet with a sigh and fingered the brim of his hat.

"Nice time ahead of us—I don't think," he remarked paradoxically.

"What are the people thinking about it?" asked the commissioner.

"You've seen the papers?"

Mr. Commissioner's shrug was uncomplimentary to British journalism.

"The papers! Who in Heaven's name is going to take the slightest notice of what is in the papers?" he said petulantly.

"I am, for one," replied the calm detective; "newspapers are more often than not led by the public; and it seems to me the idea of running a newspaper, in a nutshell, is to write so that the public will say, 'That's smart—it's what I've said all along.' "

"But the public themselves—have you had an opportunity of gathering their idea?"

Detective Falmouth nodded.

"I was talking in the Park to a man only this evening—a master-man by the look of him, and presumably intelligent. 'What's your idea of this Four Just Men business?' I asked. 'It's very queer,' he said: 'do you think there's anything in it?'—and that," concluded the disgusted police officer, "is all the public thinks about it."

But if there was sorrow at Scotland Yard, Fleet Street itself was all a-twitter with pleasurable excitement. Here was great news indeed: news that might be heralded across double columns, blared forth in headlines, shouted by placards, illustrated, diagramized and illuminated by statistics.

"Is it the Mafia?" asked the *Comet* noisily, and went on to prove that it was.

The *Evening World*, with its editorial mind lingering lovingly in the sixties, mildly suggested a vendetta, and instanced "The Corsican Brothers."

The *Megaphone* stuck to the story of the Four Just Men, and printed pages of details concerning their nefarious acts. It disinterred from dusty files, Continental and American, the full circumstances of each murder; it gave the portraits and careers of the men who were slain, and, whilst in no way palliating the offence of the Four, yet set forth justly and dispassionately the lives of the victims, showing the sort of men they were.

It accepted warily the reams of contributions that flowed into the office; for a newspaper that has received the stigma "yellow" exercises more caution than its more sober competitors. In newspaperland a dull lie is seldom detected, but an interesting exaggeration drives an unimaginative rival to hysterical denunciations.

And reams of "Four Men" anecdotes did flow in. For suddenly, as if by magic, every outside contributor, every literary gentleman who made a specialty of personal notes, every kind of man who wrote, discovered that he had known the Four intimately all his life.

"When I was in Italy . . ." wrote the author of *Come Again* (Hackworth Press, 6*s.*; "slightly soiled," Farringdon Book Mart, 2*d.*), "I remember I heard a curious story about these Men of Blood . . ."

Or—

"No spot in London is more likely to prove the hiding-place of the Four Villains than Tidal Basin," wrote another gentleman, who stuck "Collins" in the northeast corner of his manuscript. "Tidal Basin in the reign of Charles II was known as . . ."

"Who's Collins?" asked the super-chief of the *Megaphone* of his hard-worked editor.

"A liner," described the editor wearily, thereby revealing that even the newer journalism has not driven the promiscuous contributor from his hard-fought field; "he does police-courts, fires, inquests and things. Lately he's taken to literature and writes Picturesque-Bits-of-Old-London and Famous-Tombstones-of-Hornsey epics. . . ."

Throughout the office of the newspaper the same thing was happening. Every cable that arrived, every piece of information that reached the sub-editor's basket, was coloured with the impending tragedy uppermost in men's minds. Even the police-court reports contained some allusion to the Four. It was the overnight drunk and disorderly's justification for his indiscretion.

"The lad has always been honest," said the peccant errand boy's tearful mother; "it's reading these horrible stories about the Four Foreigners that's made him turn out like this"; and the magistrate took a lenient view of the offence.

To all outward showing, Sir Philip Ramon, the man mostly interested in the development of the plot, was the least concerned.

He refused to be interviewed any further; he declined to discuss the possibilities of assassination, even with the premier, and his answer to letters of appreciation that came to him from all parts of the country was an announcement in the *Morning Post* asking his correspondents to be good enough to refrain from persecuting him with picture postcards, which found no other repository than his waste-paper basket.

He had thought of adding an announcement of his intention of carrying the bill through Parliament at whatever cost, and was only deterred by the fear of theatricality.

To Falmouth, upon whom had naturally devolved the duty of protecting the foreign secretary from harm, Sir Philip was unusually gracious, and incidentally permitted that astute officer to get a glimpse of the terror in which a threatened man lives.

"Do you think there's any danger, Superintendent?" he asked, not once but a score of times; and the officer, stout defender of an infallible police force, was very reassuring.

"For," as he argued to himself, "what is the use of frightening a man who is half scared to death already? If nothing happens, he will see I have spoken the truth, and if—if—well, he won't be able to call me a liar."

Sir Philip was a constant source of interest to the detective, who must have shown his thoughts once or twice. For the foreign secretary, who was a remarkably shrewd man, intercepting a curious glance of the police officer, said sharply, "You wonder why I still go on with the bill, knowing the danger? Well, it will surprise you to learn that I do *not* know the danger, nor can I imagine it! I have never been conscious of physical pain in my life, and in spite of the fact that I have a weak heart, I have never had so much as a single ache. What death will be, what pangs or peace it may bring, I have no conception. I argue, with Epictetus, that the fear of death is by way of being an impertinent assumption of a knowledge of the hereafter, and that we have no reason to believe it is any worse condition than our present. I am not afraid to die—but I am afraid of dying."

"Quite so, sir," murmured the sympathetic but wholly uncomprehending detective, who had no mind for nice distinctions.

"But," resumed the minister—he was sitting in his study in Portland Place—"if I cannot imagine the exact process of dissolution, I can imagine, and have experienced, the result of breaking faith with the chancellories, and I have certainly no intention of laying up a store of future embarrassments for fear of something that may after all be comparatively trifling."

Which piece of reasoning will be sufficient to indicate what the Opposition of the hour was pleased to term "the tortuous mind of the right honourable gentleman."

And Inspector Falmouth, listening with every indication of attention, yawned inwardly and wondered who Epictetus was.

"I have taken all possible precautions, sir," said the detective in the pause that followed the recital of this creed. "I hope you won't mind for a week or two being followed about by some of my men. I want you to allow two or three officers to remain in the house whilst you are here, and of course there will be quite a number on duty at the Foreign Office."

Sir Philip expressed his approval, and later, when he and the detective drove down to the House in a closed brougham, he understood why cyclists rode before and on either side of the carriage, and why two cabs followed the brougham into Palace Yard.

At Notice time, with a house sparsely filled, Sir Philip rose in his place and gave notice that he would move the second reading of the Aliens Extradition (Political Offences) Bill, on Tuesday week, or, to be exact, in ten days.

That evening Manfred met Gonsalez in North Tower Gardens and remarked on the fairy-like splendour of the Crystal Palace grounds by night.

A Guards' band was playing the overture to *Tannhäuser*, and the men talked music.

Then—

"What of Thery?" asked Manfred.

"Poiccart has him to-day; he is showing him the sights." They both laughed.

"And you?" asked Gonsalez.

"I have had an interesting day; I met that delightfully naïve detective in Green Park, who asked me what I thought of ourselves!"

Gonsalez commented on the movement in G minor, and Manfred nodded his head, keeping time with the music.

"Are we prepared?" asked Leon quietly.

Manfred still nodded and softly whistled the number. He stopped with the final crash of the band, and joined in the applause that greeted the musicians.

"I have taken a place," he said, clapping his hands. "We had better come together."

"Is everything there?"

Manfred looked at his companion with a twinkle in his eye.

"Almost everything."

The band broke into the national anthem, and the two men rose and uncovered.

The throng about the bandstand melted away in the gloom, and Manfred and his companion turned to go.

Thousands of fairy lamps gleamed in the grounds, and there was a strong smell of gas in the air.

"Not that way this time?" questioned, rather than asserted, Gonsalez.

"Most certainly not that way," replied Manfred decidedly.

CHAPTER V
PREPARATIONS

When an advertisement appeared in the *Newspaper Proprietor* announcing that there was —

> "For Sale: An old-established zinco-engraver's business with a splendid new plant and a stock of chemicals,"

everybody in the printing world said "That's Etheringtons'."

To the uninitiated a photo-engraver's is a place of buzzing saws, and lead shavings, and noisy lathes, and big bright arc lamps. To the initiated a photo-engraver's is a place where works of art are reproduced by photography on zinc plates, and consequently used for printing purposes. To the very knowing people of the printing world, Etheringtons' was the worst of its kind, producing the least presentable of pictures at a price slightly above the average. Etheringtons' had been in the market (by order of the trustees) for three months, but partly owing to its remoteness from Fleet Street (it was in Carnaby Street), and partly to the dilapidated condition of the machinery (which shows that even an official receiver has no moral sense when he starts advertising), there had been no bids.

Manfred, who interviewed the trustee in Carey Street, learnt that the business could be either leased or purchased; that immediate possession in either circumstance was to be had; that there were premises at the top of the house which had served as a dwelling-place to generations of caretakers, and that a banker's reference was all that was necessary in the way of guarantee.

"Rather a crank," said the trustee at a meeting of creditors; "thinks that he is going to make a fortune turning out photogravures of Murillo at a price within reach of the inartistic. He tells me that he is forming a small company to carry on the business, and that so soon as it is formed he will buy the plant outright."

And sure enough that very day Thomas Brown, merchant; Arthur W. Knight, gentleman; James Selkirk, artist; Andrew Cohen, financial agent; and James Leech, artist, wrote to the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies, asking to be formed into a company, limited by shares, with the object of carrying on business as photo-engravers, with which object they had severally subscribed for the shares set against their names.

(In parenthesis, Manfred was a great artist.)

And five days before the second reading of the Aliens Extradition Act, the company had entered into occupation of their new premises in preparation to starting business.

"Years ago, when I first came to London," said Manfred, "I learned the easiest way to conceal one's identity was to disguise oneself as a public company. There's a wealth of respectability behind the word 'limited,' and the pomp and circumstance of a company directorship diverts suspicion, even as it attracts attention."

Gonsalez printed a neat notice to the effect that the Fine Arts Reproduction Syndicate would commence business on October 1, and a further neat label that "no hands were wanted," and a further terse announcement that travellers and others could only be seen by appointment, and that all letters must be addressed to the manager.

It was a plain-fronted shop, with a deep basement crowded with the dilapidated plant left by the liquidated engraver. The ground floor had been used as offices, and neglected furniture

and grimy files predominated. There were pigeon-holes filled with old plates, pigeon-holes filled with dusty invoices, pigeon-holes in which all the débris that is accumulated in an office by a clerk with salary in arrear was deposited.

The first floor had been a workshop, the second had been a store, and the third and most interesting floor of all was that on which were the huge cameras and the powerful arc lamps that were so necessary an adjunct to the business. In the rear of the house on this floor were the three small rooms that had served the purpose of the bygone caretaker.

In one of these, two days after the occupation, sat the four men of Cadiz.

Autumn had come early in the year, a cold driving rain was falling outside, and the fire that burnt in the Georgian grate gave the chamber an air of comfort. This room alone had been cleared of litter, the best furniture of the establishment had been introduced, and on the ink-stained writing-table that filled the centre of the apartment stood the remains of a fairly luxurious lunch.

Gonsalez was reading a small red book, and it may be remarked that he wore gold-rimmed spectacles; Poiccart was sketching at a corner of the table, and Manfred was smoking a long thin cigar and studying a manufacturing chemists' price list. Thery (or, as some prefer to call him, Saimont), alone did nothing, sitting a brooding heap before the fire, twiddling his fingers, and staring absently at the leaping little flames in the grate.

Conversation was carried on spasmodically, as between men whose minds were occupied by different thoughts. Thery concentrated the attentions of the three by speaking to the point. Turning from his study of the fire with a sudden impulse he asked:

"How much longer am I to be kept here?"

Poiccart looked up from his drawing and remarked:

"That is the third time he has asked to-day."

"Speak Spanish!" cried Thery passionately. "I am tired of this new language. I cannot understand it, any more than I can understand you."

"You will wait till it is finished," said Manfred, in the staccato patois of Andalusia; "we have told you that."

Thery growled and turned his face to the grate.

"I am tired of this life," he said sullenly. "I want to walk about without a guard—I want to go back to Jerez, where I was a free man. I am sorry I came away."

"So am I," said Manfred quietly; "not very sorry, though—I hope for your sake I shall not be."

"Who are you?" burst forth Thery, after a momentary silence. "What are you? Why do you wish to kill? Are you anarchists? What money do you make out of this? I want to know."

Neither Poiccart nor Gonsalez nor Manfred showed any resentment at the peremptory demand of their recruit. Gonsalez's clean-shaven, sharp-pointed face twitched with pleasurable excitement, and his cold blue eyes narrowed.

"Perfect! perfect!" he murmured, watching the other man's face: "pointed nose, small forehead and—*articulorum se ipsos torquentium sonus; gemitus, mugitusque parum explanatis*——"

The physiognomist might have continued Seneca's picture of the Angry Man, but Thery sprang to his feet and glowered at the three.

"Who are you?" he asked slowly. "How do I know that you are not to get money for this? I want to know why you keep me a prisoner, why you will not let me see the newspapers, why you never allow me to walk alone in the streets, or speak to somebody who knows my

language? You are not from Spain, nor you, nor you—your Spanish is, yes—but you are not of the country I know. You want me to kill—but you will not say how——"

Manfred rose and laid his hand on the other's shoulder.

"Señor," he said—and there was nothing but kindness in his eyes—"restrain your impatience, I beg of you. I again assure you that we do not kill for gain. These two gentlemen whom you see have each fortunes exceeding six million pesetas, and I am even richer; we kill and we will kill because we are each sufferers through acts of injustice, for which the law gave us no remedy. If—if——" he hesitated, still keeping his grey eyes fixed unflinchingly on the Spaniard. Then he resumed gently: "If we kill you it will be the first act of the kind——"

Thery was on his feet, white and snarling, with his back to the wall; a wolf at bay, looking from one to the other with fierce suspicion.

"Me—me!" he breathed, "kill me?"

Neither of the three men moved save Manfred, who dropped his outstretched hand to his side.

"Yes, you." He nodded as he spoke. "It would be new work for us, for we have never slain except for justice—and to kill you would be an unjust thing."

Poiccart looked at Thery pityingly.

"That is why we chose you," said Poiccart, "because there was always a fear of betrayal, and we thought—it had better be you."

"Understand," resumed Manfred calmly, "that not a hair of your head will be harmed if you are faithful—that you will receive a reward that will enable you to live—remember the girl at Jerez."

Thery sat down again with a shrug of indifference, but his hands were trembling as he struck a match to light his cigarette.

"We will give you more freedom—you shall go out every day. In a few days we shall all return to Spain. They called you the silent man in the prison at Granada—we shall believe that you will remain so."

After this the conversation became Greek to the Spaniard, for the men spoke in English.

"He gives very little trouble," said Gonsalez; "now that we have dressed him like an Englishman, he does not attract attention. He doesn't like shaving every day; but it is necessary, and luckily he is fair. I do not allow him to speak in the street, and this tries his temper somewhat."

Manfred turned the talk into a more serious channel.

"I shall send two more warnings, and one of those must be delivered in his very stronghold. He is a brave man."

"What of Garcia?" asked Poiccart.

Manfred laughed.

"I saw him on Sunday night—a fine old man, fiery and oratorical. I sat at the back of a little hall whilst he pleaded eloquently in French for the rights of man. He was a Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a Mirabeau, a broad-viewed Bright, and the audience was mostly composed of Cockney youths, who had come that they might boast they had stood in the temple of Anarchism."

Poiccart tapped the table impatiently.

"Why is it, George, that an element of bathos comes into all these things?"

Manfred laughed.

"You remember Anderson? When we had gagged him and bound him to the chair, and had told him why he had to die—when there were only the pleading eyes of the condemned, and the half-dark room with a flickering lamp, and you and Leon and poor Clarice masked and silent, and I had just sentenced him to death—you remember how there crept into the room the scent of frying onions from the kitchen below?"

"I too remember," said Leon, "the case of the regicide."

Poiccart made a motion of agreement.

"You mean the corsets," he said, and the two nodded and laughed.

"There will always be bathos," said Manfred; "poor Garcia with a nation's destinies in his hand, an amusement for shop-girls—tragedy and the scent of onions—a rapier thrust and the whalebone of corsets—it is inseparable."

And all the time Thery smoked cigarettes, looking into the fire with his head on his hands.

"Going back to this matter we have on our hands," said Gonsalez: "I suppose that there is nothing more to be done till—the day?"

"Nothing."

"And after?"

"There are our fine art reproductions."

"And after?" persisted Poiccart.

"There is a case in Holland, Hermannus van der Byl, to wit; but it will be simple, and there will be no necessity to warn."

Poiccart's face was grave.

"I am glad you have suggested van der Byl, he should have been dealt with before—Hook of Holland or Flushing?"

"If we have time, the Hook by all means."

"And Thery?"

"I will see to him," said Gonsalez easily; "we will go overland to Jerez—where the girl is," he added laughingly.

The object of their discussion finished his tenth cigarette and sat up in his chair with a grunt.

"I forgot to tell you," Leon went on, "that to-day, when we were taking our exercise walk, Thery was considerably interested in the posters he saw everywhere, and was particularly curious to know why so many people were reading them. I had to find a lie on the spur of the minute, and I hate lying"—Gonsalez was perfectly sincere. "I invented a story about racing or lotteries or something of the sort, and he was satisfied."

Thery had caught his name in spite of its Anglicized pronunciation, and looked inquiry.

"We will leave you to amuse our friend," said Manfred, rising. "Poiccart and I have a few experiments to make."

The two left the room, traversed the narrow passage, and paused before a small door at the end. A larger door on the right, padlocked and barred, led to the studio. Drawing a small key from his pocket, Manfred opened the door, and stepping into the room switched on a light that shone dimly through a dust-covered bulb. There had been some attempt at restoring order from the chaos. Two shelves had been cleared of rubbish, and on these stood rows of bright little phials, each bearing a number. A rough table had been pushed against the wall beneath the shelves, and on the green baize with which the table was covered was a litter of graduated measures, test-tubes, condensors, delicate scales, and two queer-shaped glass machines, not unlike gas generators.

Poiccart pulled a chair to the table, and gingerly lifted a metal cup that stood in a dish of water. Manfred, looking over his shoulder, remarked on the consistency of the liquid that half-filled the vessel, and Poiccart bent his head, acknowledging the remark as though it were a compliment.

"Yes," he said, satisfied, "it is a complete success; the formula is quite right. Some day we may want to use this."

He replaced the cup in its bath, and, reaching beneath the table, produced from a pail a handful of ice-dust, with which he carefully surrounded the receptacle.

"I regard that as the *multum in parvo* of explosives," he said, and took down a small phial from the shelf, lifted the stopper with the crook of his little finger, and poured a few drops of a whitish liquid into the metal cup.

"That neutralizes the elements," said Poiccart, and gave a sigh of relief. "I am not a nervous man, but the present is the first comfortable moment I have had for two days."

"It makes an abominable smell," said Manfred, with his handkerchief to his nose.

A thin smoke was rising from the cup.

"I never notice those things," Poiccart replied, dipping a thin glass rod into the mess. He lifted the rod, and watched reddish drops dripping from the end.

"That's all right," he said.

"And it is an explosive no more?" asked Manfred.

"It is as harmless as a cup of chocolate."

Poiccart wiped the rod on a rag, replaced the phial and turned to his companion.

"And now?" he asked.

Manfred made no answer, but unlocked an old-fashioned safe that stood in the corner of the room. From this he removed a box of polished wood. He opened the box and disclosed the contents.

"If Thery is the good workman he says he is, here is the bait that shall lure Sir Philip Ramon to his death," he said.

Poiccart looked. "Very ingenious," was his only comment; then,—"Does Thery know, quite know, the stir he has created?"

Manfred closed the lid and replaced the box before he replied.

"Does Thery know that he is the fourth Just Man?" he asked; then slowly,—"I think not—and it is as well that he does not know; a thousand pounds is roughly thirty-three thousand pesetas, and there is the free pardon—and the girl at Jerez," he added, thoughtfully.

A brilliant idea came to Smith, the reporter, and he carried it to the chief.

"Not bad," said the editor, which meant that the idea was really very good,—"not bad at all."

"It occurred to me," said the gratified reporter, "that one or two of the four might be foreigners who don't understand a word of English."

"Quite so," said the chief; "thank you for the suggestion. I'll have it done to-night."

Which dialogue accounts for the fact that the next morning the *Megaphone* appeared with the police notice printed in French, Italian, German—and Spanish.

CHAPTER VI
THE OUTRAGE AT THE "MEGAPHONE"

The editor of the *Megaphone*, returning from dinner, met the super-chief on the stairs. The super-chief, boyish of face, withdrew his mind from the mental contemplation of a new project ("Megaphone House" is the home of new projects) and inquired after the Four Just Men.

"The excitement is keeping up," replied the editor. "People are talking of nothing else but the coming debate on the Extradition Bill, and the Government is taking every precaution against an attack upon Ramon."

"What is the feeling?"

The editor shrugged his shoulders.

"Nobody really believes that anything will happen, in spite of the bomb."

The super-chief thought for a moment, and then asked, quickly,

"What do *you* think?"

The editor laughed.

"I think the threat will never be fulfilled; for once the Four have struck against a snag. If they hadn't warned Ramon they might have done something, but forewarned——"

"We shall see," said the super-chief, and went home.

The editor wondered, as he climbed the stairs, how much longer the Four would fill the contents bill of his newspaper, and rather hoped that they would make their attempt, even though they met with a failure which he regarded as inevitable.

His room was locked and in darkness, and he fumbled in his pocket for the key, found it, turned the lock, opened the door and entered.

"I wonder," he mused, reaching out his hand and pressing down the switch of the light.

There was a blinding flash, a quick splutter of flame, and the room was in darkness again.

Startled, he retreated to the corridor and called for a light.

"Send for the electrician," he roared; "one of these damned fuses has gone!"

A lamp revealed the room to be filled with a pungent smoke; the electrician discovered that every globe had been carefully removed from its socket and placed on the table. From one of the brackets suspended a curly length of thin wire which ended in a small black box, and it was from this that thick fumes were issuing.

"Open the windows," directed the editor; and a bucket of water having been brought, the little box was dropped carefully into it.

Then it was that the editor discovered the letter—the greenish-grey letter that lay upon his desk. He took it up, turned it over, opened it, and noticed that the gum on the flap was still wet.

> Honoured Sir (ran the note), when you turned on your light this evening you probably imagined for an instant that you were a victim of one of those "outrages" to which you are fond of referring. We owe you an apology for any annoyance we may have caused you. The removal of your lamp and the substitution of a "plug" connecting a small charge of magnesium powder is the cause of your discomfiture. We ask you to believe that it would have been as simple to have connected a charge of nitro-glycerine, and thus have made you your own executioner. We have arranged this as evidence of our inflexible intention to carry out our promise in respect to the

Alien Extradition Act. There is no power on earth that can save Sir Philip Ramon from destruction, and we ask you, as the directing force of a great medium, to throw your weight into the scale in the cause of justice, to call upon your Government to withdraw an unjust measure, and save, not only the lives of many inoffensive persons who have found an asylum in your country, but also the life of a Minister of the Crown whose only fault in our eyes is his zealousness in an unrighteous cause.
(*Signed*)

THE FOUR JUST MEN

"Whew!" whistled the editor, wiping his forehead and eyeing the soddened box floating serenely at the top of the bucket.

"Anything wrong, sir?" asked the electrician daringly.

"Nothing," was the sharp reply. "Finish your work, refix these globes, and go."

The electrician, ill-satisfied and curious, looked at the floating box and the broken length of wire.

"Curious-looking thing, sir," he said. "If you ask me——"

"I don't ask you anything; finish your work," the great journalist interrupted.

"Beg pardon, I'm sure," said the apologetic artisan.

Half an hour later the editor of the *Megaphone* sat discussing the situation with Welby. Welby, who is the greatest foreign editor in London, grinned amiably and drawled his astonishment.

"I have always believed that these chaps meant business," he said cheerfully, "and what is more, I feel pretty certain that they will keep their promise. When I was in Genoa"—Welby got much of his information first hand—"when I was in Genoa—or was it Sofia?—I met a man who told me about the Trelovitch affair. He was one of the men who assassinated the King of Servia, you remember. Well, one night he left his quarters to visit a theatre—the same night he was found dead in the public square with a sword thrust through his heart. There were two extraordinary things about it." The foreign editor ticked them off on his fingers. "First, the general was a noted swordsman, and there was every evidence that he had not been killed in cold blood, but had been killed in a duel; the second was that he wore corsets, as many of these Germanized officers do, and one of his assailants had discovered this fact, probably by a sword thrust, and had made him discard them; at any rate when he was found this frippery was discovered close by his body."

"Was it known at the time that it was the work of the Four?" asked the editor.

Welby shook his head.

"Even I had never heard of them before," he said resentfully. Then he asked, "What have you done about your little scare?"

"I've seen the hall porters and the messengers, and every man on duty at the time, but the coming and the going of our mysterious friend—I don't suppose there was more than one—is unexplained. It really is a remarkable thing. Do you know, Welby, it gives me quite an uncanny feeling; the gum on the envelope was still wet; the letter must have been written on the premises and sealed down within a few seconds of my entering the room."

"Were the windows open?"

"No; all three were shut and fastened, and it would have been impossible to enter the room that way."

The detective who came to receive a report of the circumstances endorsed this opinion.

"The man who wrote this letter must have left your room not longer than a minute before you arrived," he concluded, and took charge of the letter.

Being a young and enthusiastic detective, before finishing his investigations he made a most minute search of the room, turning up carpets, tapping walls, inspecting cupboards, and taking laborious and unnecessary measurements with a foot-rule.

"There are a lot of our chaps who sneer at detective stories," he explained to the amused editor, "but I have read almost everything that has been written by Gaboriau and Conan Doyle, and I believe in taking notice of little things. There wasn't any cigar ash or anything of that sort left behind, was there?" he asked, wistfully.

"I'm afraid not," said the editor, gravely.

"Pity," said the detective, and wrapping up the "infernal machine" and its appurtenances, he took his departure.

Afterwards the editor informed Welby that the disciple of Holmes had spent half an hour with a magnifying glass examining the floor.

"He found half a sovereign that I lost weeks ago, so it's really an ill wind——"

All that evening nobody but Welby and the chief knew what had happened in the editor's rooms. There was some rumour in the sub-editor's department that a small accident had occurred in the sanctum.

"Chief busted a fuse in his room and got a devil of a fright," said the man who attended to the shipping list.

"Dear me," said the weather expert, looking up from his chart, "do you know something like that happened to me; the other night——"

The chief had directed a few firm words to the detective before his departure.

"Only you and myself know anything about this occurrence," said the editor, "so if it gets out I shall know it comes from Scotland Yard."

"You may be sure nothing will come from us," was the detective's reply; "we've got into too much hot water already."

"That's good," said the editor, and "that's good" sounded like a threat.

So that Welby and the chief kept the matter a secret till half an hour before the paper went to press. This may seem to the layman an extraordinary circumstance, but experience has shown most men who control newspapers that news has an unlucky knack of leaking out before it appears in type. Wicked compositors—and even compositors can be wicked—have been known to screw up copies of important and exclusive news and to throw them out of a convenient window, where they have fallen close to a patient man standing in the street below and have been immediately hurried off to the office of a rival newspaper and sold for more than their weight in gold. Such cases have been known.

But at half-past eleven the buzzing hive of Megaphone House began to hum, for then it was that the sub-editors learnt for the first time of the "outrage."

It was a great story—still another *Megaphone* scoop, head-lined half down the page with "The 'Just Four' again—Outrage at the office of the *Megaphone*—Devilish Ingenuity—Another Threatening Letter—The Four Will Keep Their Promise—Remarkable Document—Will the Police Save Sir Philip Ramon?"

"A very good story," said the chief complacently, reading the proofs. He was preparing to leave, and was speaking to Welby by the door.

"Not bad," said the discriminating Welby. "What I think—hullo!"

The last was addressed to a messenger who appeared with a stranger.

"Gentleman wants to speak to somebody, sir—bit excited, so I brought him up; he's a foreigner, and I can't understand him, so I brought him to you"—this to Welby.

"What do you want?" asked the chief in French.

The man shook his head, and said a few words in a strange tongue.

"Ah!" said Welby. "Spanish—what do you wish?" he said in that language.

"Is this the office of that paper?" The man produced a grimy copy of the *Megaphone*.

"Yes."

"Can I speak to the editor?"

The chief looked suspicious.

"I am the editor," he said.

The man looked over his shoulder, then leant forward.

"I am one of The Four Just Men," he said hesitatingly.

Welby took a step towards him and scrutinized him *closely*.

"What is your name," he asked quickly.

"Miguel Thery of Jerez," replied the man.

It was half-past ten when, returning from a concert, the cab that bore Poiccart and Manfred westward passed through Hanover Square and turned off to Oxford Street.

"You ask to see the editor," Manfred was explaining; "they take you up to the offices—you explain your business to somebody; they are very sorry, but they cannot help you; they are very polite, but not to the extent of seeing you off the premises, so, wandering about seeking your way out, you come to the editor's room and, knowing that he is out, slip in, make your arrangements, walk out, locking the door after you if nobody is about, addressing a few farewell words to an imaginary occupant, if you are seen, and *voilà*!"

Poiccart bit the end of his cigar.

"Use for your envelope a gum that will not dry under an hour and you heighten the mystery," he said quietly, and Manfred was amused.

"The envelope-just-fastened is an irresistible attraction to an English detective."

The cab speeding along Oxford Street turned into the Edgware Road, when Manfred put up his hand and pushed open the trap in the roof.

"We'll get down here," he called, and the driver pulled up to the sidewalk.

"I thought you said Pembridge Gardens?" he remarked, as Manfred paid him.

"So I did," said Manfred; "good night."

They waited chatting on the edge of the pavement until the cab had disappeared from view, then turned back to the Marble Arch, crossed to Park Lane, walked down that plutocratic thoroughfare and round into Piccadilly. Near the Circus they found a restaurant with a long bar and many small alcoves, where men sat round marble tables, drinking, smoking, and talking. In one of these, alone, sat Gonsalez, smoking a long cigarette and wearing on his clean-shaven mobile face a look of meditative content.

Neither of the men evinced the slightest sign of surprise at meeting him—yet Manfred's heart missed a beat, and into the pallid cheeks of Poiccart crept two bright red spots.

They seated themselves, a waiter came and they gave their orders, and when he had gone Manfred asked in a low tone, "Where is Thery?"

Leon gave the slightest shrug.

"Thery has made his escape," he answered, calmly.

For a minute neither man spoke, and Leon continued:

"This morning, before you left, you gave him a bundle of newspapers?"

Manfred nodded.

"They were English newspapers," he said. "Thery does not know a word of English. There were pictures in them—I gave them to amuse him."

"You gave him, amongst others, the *Megaphone*?"

"Yes—ha!" Manfred remembered.

"The offer of a reward was in it—and the free pardon—printed in Spanish."

Manfred was gazing into vacancy.

"I remember," he said, slowly; "I read it afterwards."

"It was very ingenious," remarked Poiccart, commendingly.

"I noticed he was rather excited, but I accounted for this by the fact that we had told him last night of the method we intended adopting for the removal of Ramon and the part he was to play."

Leon changed the topic to allow the waiter to serve the refreshments that had been ordered.

"It is preposterous," he went on, without changing his key, "that a horse on which so much money has been placed should not have been sent to England at least a month in advance."

"The idea of a bad Channel-crossing leading to the scratching of the favourite of a big race is unheard of," added Manfred, severely.

The waiter left them.

"We went for a walk this afternoon," resumed Leon, "and we were passing along Regent Street, he stopping every few seconds to look in the shops, when suddenly—we had been staring at the window of a photographer's—I missed him. There were hundreds of people in the street—but no Thery. . . . I have been seeking him ever since."

Leon sipped his drink and looked at his watch.

The other two men did nothing, said nothing.

A careful observer might have noticed that both Manfred's and Poiccart's hands strayed to the top button of their coats.

"Perhaps not so bad as that," smiled Gonsalez.

Manfred broke the silence of the two.

"I take all blame," he commenced, but Poiccart stopped him with a gesture.

"If there is any blame, I alone am blameless," he said with a short laugh. "No, George, it is too late to talk of blame. We underrated the cunning of m'sieur, the enterprise of the English newspapers and—and——"

"The girl at Jerez," concluded Leon.

Five minutes passed in silence, each man thinking rapidly.

"I have a motor-car not far from here," said Leon at length. "You had told me you would be at this place by eleven o'clock; we have the naphtha launch at Burnham-on-Crouch—we could be in France by daybreak."

Manfred looked at him. "What do you think yourself?" he asked.

"I say stay and finish the work," said Leon.

"And I," said Poiccart quietly but decisively.

Manfred called the waiter.

"Have you the last editions of the evening papers?"

The waiter thought he could get them, and returned with two.

Manfred scanned the pages carefully, then threw them aside.

“Nothing in these,” he said. “If Thery has gone to the police we must hide and use some other method than that agreed upon, or we could strike now. After all, Thery has told us all we want to know, but——”

“That would be unfair to Ramon.” Poiccart finished the sentence in such a tone as summarily ended that possibility. “He has still two days, and must receive yet another, and last, warning.”

“Then we must find Thery.”

It was Manfred who spoke, and he rose, followed by Poiccart and Gonsalez.

“If Thery has not gone to the police—where would he go?”

The tone of Leon’s question suggested the answer.

“To the office of the newspaper that published the Spanish advertisement,” was Manfred’s reply, and instinctively the three men knew that this was the correct solution.

“Your motor-car will be useful,” said Manfred, and all three left the bar.

In the editor’s room Thery faced the two journalists.

“Thery?” repeated Welby. “I do not know that name. Where do you come from? What is your address?”

“I come from Jerez in Andalusia, from the wine farm of Sienor.”

“Not that,” interrupted Welby; “where do you come from now—what part of London?”

Thery raised his hands despairingly.

“How should I know? There are houses and streets and people—and it is in London, and I was to kill a man, a minister, because he had made a wicked law—they did not tell me——”

“They—who?” asked the editor eagerly.

“The other three.”

“But their names?”

Thery shot a suspicious glance at his questioner.

“There is a reward,” he said sullenly, “and a pardon. I want these before I tell——”

The editor stepped to his desk.

“If you are one of the Four you shall have your reward—you shall have some of it now.” He pressed a button and a messenger came to the door.

“Go to the composing-room and tell the printer not to allow his men to leave until I give orders.”

Below, in the basement, the machines were thundering as they flung out the first numbers of the morning news.

“Now”—the editor turned to Thery, who had stood, uneasily shifting from foot to foot whilst the order was being given—“now, tell me all you know.”

Thery did not answer; his eyes were fixed on the floor.

“There is a reward and a pardon,” he muttered doggedly.

“Hasten!” cried Welby. “You will receive your reward and the pardon also. Tell us, who are the Four Just Men; who are the other three; where are they to be found?”

“Here,” said a clear voice behind him; and he turned as a stranger, closing the door as he entered, stood facing the three men—a stranger in evening dress, masked from brow to chin.

There was a revolver in the hand that hung at his side.

“I am one,” repeated the stranger calmly; “there are two others waiting outside the building.”

“How did you get here—what do you want?” demanded the editor, and stretched his hand to an open drawer in his desk.

“Take your hand away”—and the thin barrel of the revolver rose with a jerk. “How I came here your doorkeeper will explain, when he recovers consciousness. Why I am here is because I wish to save my life—not an unreasonable wish. If Thery speaks I may be a dead man—I am about to prevent his speaking. I have no quarrel with either of you gentlemen, but if you hinder me I shall kill you,” he said, simply. He spoke all the while in English, and Thery, with wide-stretched eyes and distended nostrils, shrank back against the wall, breathing quickly.

“You,” said the masked man, turning to the terror-stricken informer and speaking in Spanish, “would have betrayed your comrades—you would have thwarted a great purpose, therefore it is just that you should die.”

He raised the revolver to the level of Thery’s breast, and Thery fell on his knees, mouthing the prayer he could not articulate.

“By God—no!” cried the editor, and sprang forward.

The revolver turned on him.

“Sir,” said the unknown—and his voice sunk almost to a whisper—“for God’s sake do not force me to kill you.”

“You shall not commit a cold-blooded murder,” cried the editor in a white heat of anger, and moved forward, but Welby held him back.

“What is the use?” said Welby, in an undertone. “He means it—we can do nothing.”

“You can do something,” said the stranger, and his revolver dropped to his side.

Before the editor could answer there was a knock at the door.

“Say you are busy,” and the revolver covered Thery, who was a whimpering, huddled heap by the wall.

“Go away,” shouted the editor, “I am busy.”

“The printers are waiting,” said the voice of the messenger.

“Now,” asked the chief, as the footsteps of the boy died away, “what can we do?”

“You can save this man’s life.”

“How?”

“Give me your word of honour that you will allow us both to depart, and will neither raise an alarm nor leave this room for a quarter of an hour.”

The editor hesitated.

“How do I know that the murder you contemplate will not be committed as soon as you get clear?”

The other laughed under his mask.

“How do I know that as soon as I have left the room you will not raise an alarm?”

“I should have given my word, sir,” said the editor, stiffly.

“And I mine,” was the quiet response, “and my word has never been broken.”

In the editor’s mind a struggle was going on; here in his hand was the greatest story of the century; another minute and he would have extracted from Thery the secret of the Four.

Even now a bold dash might save everything—and the printers were waiting . . . but the hand that held the revolver was the hand of a resolute man, and the chief yielded.

“I agree, but under protest,” he said, “I warn you that your arrest and punishment is inevitable.”

“I regret,” said the masked man with a slight bow, “that I cannot agree with you—nothing is inevitable save death. Come, Thery,” he said, speaking in Spanish. “On my word as a

cabalero, I will not harm you."

Thery hesitated, then slunk forward with his head bowed and his eyes fixed on the floor.

The masked man opened the door an inch, listened, and in the moment came the inspiration of the editor's life.

"Look here," he said quickly, the man giving place to the journalist, "when you get home will you write us an article about yourselves? You needn't give us any embarrassing particulars, you know—something about your aspirations, your *raison d'être*."

"Sir," said the masked man—and there was a note of admiration in his voice—"I recognize in you an artist. The article will be delivered to-morrow," and opening the door the two men stepped into the darkened corridor.

CHAPTER VII
THE CLUES

Blood-red placards, hoarse newsboys, overwhelming headlines, and column after column of leaded type told the world next day how near the Four had been to capture. Men in the train leaned forward, their newspapers on their knees, and explained what they would have done had they been in the editor of the *Megaphone's* position. People stopped talking about wars and famines and droughts and street accidents and parliaments and ordinary every-day murders in order to concentrate their minds upon the topic of the hour. Would the Four Just Men carry out their promise and slay the secretary for foreign affairs on the morrow? Nothing else was spoken about. Here was a murder threatened a month ago, and, unless something unforeseen happened, to be committed to-morrow. No wonder that the London press devoted the greater part of its space to discuss the coming of Thery and his recapture.

". . . It is not so easy to understand," said the *Telegram*, "why, having the miscreants in their hands, certain journalists connected with a sensational and halfpenny contemporary allowed them to go free to work their evil designs upon a great statesman whose unparalleled. . . . We say 'if,' for, unfortunately, in these days of cheap journalism every story emanating from the sanctum sanctorum of sensation-loving sheets is not to be accepted on its pretensions; so if, as it is stated, these desperadoes really did visit the office of a contemporary last night . . ."

At noon-day Scotland Yard circulated broadcast a hastily printed sheet:

£1,000 REWARD

WANTED, on suspicion of being connected with a criminal organization known as the Four Just Men, MIGUEL THERY, *alias* SAIMONT, *alias* LE CHICO, late of Jerez, Spain, a Spaniard speaking no English. Height 5 feet 8 inches. Eyes brown, hair black, slight black moustache, face broad. Scars: white scar on cheek, old knife wound on body. Figure, thick-set.

The above reward will be paid to any person or persons who shall give such information as shall lead to the identification of the said Thery with the band known as the Four Just Men, and his apprehension.

From which may be gathered that, acting on the information furnished by the editor and his assistant at two o'clock in the morning, the direct Spanish cable had been kept busy; important personages had been roused from their beds in Madrid, and the history of Thery as recorded in the Bureau had been reconstructed from pigeon-hole records for the enlightenment of an energetic commissioner of police.

Sir Philip Ramon, sitting writing in his study at Portland Place, found a difficulty in keeping his mind upon the letter that lay before him. It was a letter addressed to his agent at Branfell, the huge estate over which he, in the years when he was out of office, played squire. Neither wife nor chick nor child had Sir Philip. ". . . if by any chance these men succeed in carrying out their purpose I have made ample provision not only for yourself but for all who have rendered me faithful service," he wrote—from which may be gathered the tenor of his letter.

During these past few weeks, Sir Philip's feelings towards the possible outcome of his action had undergone a change.

The irritation of a constant espionage, friendly on the one hand, menacing on the other, had engendered so bitter a feeling of resentment, that in this newer emotion all personal fear had been swallowed up. His mind was filled with one unswerving determination, to carry through the measure he had in hand, to thwart the Four Just Men, and to vindicate the integrity of a Minister of the Crown. "It would be absurd," he wrote in the course of an article entitled "Individuality in its Relation to the Public Service," which was published some months later in the *Quarterly Review*—"it would be monstrous to suppose that incidental criticism from a wholly unauthoritative source should affect or in any way influence a member of the Government in his conception of the legislation necessary for the millions of people entrusted to his care. He is the instrument, duly appointed, to put into tangible form the wishes and desires of those who naturally look to him to furnish, not only means and methods for the betterment of their conditions, or the amelioration of irksome restrictions upon international commercial relations, but to find them protection from risks extraneous of purely commercial liabilities . . . in such a case a Minister of the Crown with a due appreciation of his responsibilities ceases to exist as a man and becomes merely an unhuman automaton."

Sir Philip Ramon was a man with very few friends. He had none of the qualities that go to the making of a popular man. He was an honest man, a conscientious man, a strong man. He was the cold-blooded, cynical creature that a life devoid of love had left him. He had no enthusiasm—and inspired none. Satisfied that a certain procedure was less wrong than any other, he adopted it. Satisfied that a measure was for the immediate or ultimate good of his fellows, he carried that measure through to the bitter end. It may be said of him that he had no ambitions—only aims. He was the dangerous man in the cabinet, which he dominated in his masterful way, for he knew not the meaning of the blessed word "compromise."

If he held views on any subject under the sun, those views were to be the views of his colleagues.

Four times in the short history of the administration had "Rumoured Resignation of a Cabinet Minister" filled the placards of the newspapers, and each time the minister whose resignation was ultimately recorded was the man whose views had clashed with the foreign secretary. In small things, as in great, he had his way.

His official residence he absolutely refused to occupy, and No. 44, Downing Street was converted into half office, half palace. Portland Place was his home, and thence he drove every morning, passing the Horse Guards clock as it finished the last stroke of ten.

A private telephone wire connected his study in Portland Place with the official residence, and with the exception of this Sir Philip had cut himself adrift from the house in Downing Street, to occupy which had been the ambition of the great men of his party. Now, however, with the approach of the day on which their every effort would be taxed, the police insisted upon his taking up his quarters in Downing Street. Here, they said, the task of protecting the minister would be simplified. No. 44, Downing Street they knew. The approaches could be better guarded, and moreover the drive—that dangerous drive!—between Portland Place and the Foreign Office would be obviated.

It took a considerable amount of pressure and pleading to induce Sir Philip to take even this step, and it was only when it was pointed out that the surveillance to which he was being subjected would not be so apparent to himself that he yielded.

"You don't like to find my men outside your door with your shaving-water," said Superintendent Falmouth bluntly. "You objected to one of my men being in your bath-room

when you went in the other morning, and you complained about a plain-clothes officer driving on your box—well, Sir Philip, in Downing Street I promise that you shan't even see them."

This clinched the argument.

It was just before leaving Portland Place to take up his new quarters that he sat writing to his agent whilst the detective waited outside the door. The telephone at Sir Philip's elbow buzzed—he hated bells—and the voice of his private secretary asked with some anxiety how long he would be.

"We have got sixty men on duty at 44," said the secretary, zealous and young, "and to-day and to-morrow we shall—" and Sir Philip listened with growing impatience to the recital.

"I wonder you have not got an iron safe to lock me in," he said petulantly, and closed the conversation.

There was a knock at the door and Falmouth put his head inside.

"I don't want to hurry you, sir," he said, "but——"

So the foreign secretary drove off to Downing Street in something remarkably like a temper. For he was not used to being hurried, or taken charge of, or ordered hither and thither. It irritated him further to see the now familiar cyclists on either side of the carriage, to recognize at every few yards an obvious policeman in plain clothes admiring the view from the sidewalk, and when he came to Downing Street and found it barred to all carriages but his own, and an enormous crowd of morbid sightseers gathered to cheer his ingress, he felt as he had never felt before in his life—humiliated.

He found his secretary waiting in his private office with the rough draft of the speech that was to introduce the second reading of the Extradition Bill.

"We are pretty sure to meet with a great deal of opposition," informed the secretary, "but Mainland has sent out three-line whips, and expects to get a majority of thirty-six—at the very least."

Ramon read over the notes and found them refreshing. They brought back the old feeling of security and importance. After all, he was a great minister of state. Of course the threats were too absurd—the police were to blame for making so much fuss; and of course the press—yes, that was it—a newspaper sensation. There was something buoyant, something almost genial in his air, when he turned with a half smile to his secretary.

"Well, what about my unknown friends—what do the blackguards call themselves?—the Four Just Men?" Even as he spoke he was acting a part; he had not forgotten their title, it was with him day and night.

The secretary hesitated; between his chief and himself the Four Just Men had been a tabooed subject.

"They—oh, we've heard nothing more than you have read," he said lamely; "we know now who Thery is, but we can't place his three companions."

The Minister pursed his lips.

"They give me till to-morrow night to recant," he said.

"You have heard from them again?"

"The briefest of notes," said Sir Philip lightly.

"And otherwise?"

Sir Philip frowned. "They will keep their promise," he said shortly, for the "otherwise" of his secretary had sent a coldness into his heart that he could not quite understand.

In the top room in the workshop at Carnaby Street, Thery, subdued, sullen, fearful, sat facing the three.

"I want you to understand," said Manfred, "that we bear you no ill-will for what you have done. I think, and Señor Poiccart thinks, that Señor Gonsalez did right to spare your life and bring you back to us."

Thery dropped his eyes before the half-quizzical smile of the speaker.

"To-morrow night you will do as you agreed to do—if the necessity still exists. Then you will go——" he paused.

"Where?" demanded Thery in sudden rage. "Where, in the name of Heaven? I have told them my name, they will know who I am—they will find that by writing to the police. Where am I to go?" He sprang to his feet, glowering on the three men, his hands trembling with rage, his great frame shaking with the intensity of his anger.

"You betrayed yourself," said Manfred quietly; "that is your punishment. But we will find a place for you, a new Spain under other skies—and the girl at Jerez shall be there waiting for you."

Thery looked from one to the other suspiciously. Were they laughing at him? There was no smile on their faces; Gonsalez alone looked at him with keen, inquisitive eyes, as though he saw some hidden meaning in the speech.

"Will you swear that?" asked Thery hoarsely, "will you swear that by the——"

"I promise that—if you wish it, I will swear it," said Manfred. "And now," he went on, his voice changing, "you know what is expected of you to-morrow night—what you have to do?"

Thery nodded.

"There must be no hitch—no bungling; you and I and Poiccart and Gonsalez will kill this unjust man in a way that the world will never guess—such an execution as shall appal mankind,—a swift death, a sure death, a death that will creep through cracks, that will pass by the guards unnoticed. Why, there never has been such a thing done—such——" he stopped dead, with flushed cheeks and kindling eyes, and met the gaze of his two companions, Poiccart, impassive, sphinxlike, Leon, interested and analytic. Manfred's face went a duller red. "I am sorry," he said almost humbly; "for the moment I had forgotten the cause, and the end, in the strangeness of the means." He raised his hand deprecatingly.

"It is understandable," said Poiccart gravely, and Leon pressed Manfred's arm.

The three stood in embarrassed silence for a moment, then Manfred laughed.

"To work!" he said, and led the way to the improvised laboratory.

Inside, Thery took off his coat. Here was his province, and from being the cowed dependent he took charge of the party, directing them, instructing, commanding, until he had the men of whom, a few minutes before, he had stood in terror, running from studio to laboratory, from floor to floor. There was much to be done, much testing, much calculating, many little sums to be worked out on paper, for in the killing of Sir Philip Ramon all the resources of modern science were to be pressed into the service of the Four.

"I am going to survey the land," said Manfred suddenly, and disappearing into the studio returned with a pair of stepladders. These he straddled in the dark passage, and mounting quickly pushed up a trap-door that led to the flat roof of the building. He pulled himself up carefully, crawled along the leaden surface, and raising himself cautiously looked over the low parapet. He was in the centre of a half-mile circle of uneven roofs. Beyond the circumference of his horizon London loomed murkily through smoke and mist. Below was the busy street. He took a hasty survey of the roof with its chimney stacks, its unornamental telegraph pole, its

leaden floor and rusty guttering; then, through a pair of field-glasses, he made a long careful survey southward. He crawled slowly back to the trap-door, raised it, and let himself down very gingerly till his feet touched the top of the ladder. Then he descended rapidly, closing the door after him.

"Well?" asked Thery, with something of triumph in his voice.

"I see you have labelled it," said Manfred.

"It is better so—since we shall work in the dark," said Thery.

"Did you see then——?" began Poiccart.

Manfred nodded.

"Very indistinctly—one could just see the Houses of Parliament dimly, and Downing Street is a jumble of roofs."

Thery had turned to the work that was engaging his attention. Whatever was his trade he was a deft workman. Somehow he felt that he must do his best for these men. He had been made forcibly aware of their superiority in the last days, he had now an ambition to assert his own skill, his own individuality, and to earn commendation from these men who had made him feel his littleness.

Manfred and the others stood aside and watched him in silence. Leon, with a perplexed frown, kept his eyes fixed on the workman's face, for Leon Gonsalez, scientist, physiognomist (his translation of the *Theologi Physiognomia Humana* of Lequetius is regarded to-day as the finest), was endeavouring to reconcile the criminal with the artisan.

After a while Thery finished.

"All is now ready," he said, with a grin of satisfaction; "let me find your minister of state, give me a minute's speech with him, and the next minute he dies." His face, repulsive in repose, was now demoniacal. He was like some great bull from his own country made more terrible with the snuffle of blood in his nostrils.

In strange contrast were the faces of his employers. Not a muscle of either face stirred. There was neither exultation nor remorse in their expressions—only a curious something that creeps into the set face of the judge as he pronounces the dread sentence of the law. Thery saw that something, and it froze him to his very marrow.

He threw out his hands as if to ward them off.

"Stop! stop!" he shouted; "don't look like that, in the name of God—don't, don't!" He covered his face with shaking hands.

"Like what, Thery?" asked Leon, softly.

Thery shook his head.

"I cannot say—like the judge at Granada when he says—when he says, 'Let the thing be done'!"

"If we look so," said Manfred harshly, "it is because we are judges—and not alone judges but executioners of our judgment."

"I thought you would have been pleased," whimpered Thery.

"You have done well," said Manfred, gravely.

"Bueno, bueno!" echoed the others.

"Pray God that we are successful," added Manfred solemnly, and Thery stared at this strange man in blank amazement.

Superintendent Falmouth reported to the commissioner that afternoon that all arrangements were now complete for the protection of the threatened minister.

"I've filled up 44, Downing Street," he said; "there's practically a man in every room. I've got four of our best men on the roof, men in the basement, men in the kitchens."

"What about the servants?" asked the commissioner.

"Sir Philip has brought up his own people from the country, and now there isn't a person in the house from the private secretary to the doorkeeper whose name and history I do not know from A to Z."

The commissioner breathed an anxious sigh.

"I shall be very glad when to-morrow is over," he said. "What are the final arrangements?"

"There has been no change, sir, since we fixed things up the morning Sir Philip came over. He remains at 44 all day to-morrow until half-past eight, goes over to the House at nine to move the reading of the bill, returns at eleven."

"I have given orders for the traffic to be diverted along the Embankment between a quarter to nine and a quarter after, and the same at eleven," said the commissioner. "Four closed carriages will drive from Downing Street to the House; Sir Philip will drive down on a motor-car immediately afterwards."

There was a rap at the door—the conversation took place in the commissioner's office—and a police officer entered. He bore a card in his hand, which he laid upon the table.

"Señor Jose di Silva," read the commissioner, "the Spanish Chief of Police," he explained to the superintendent. "Show him in, please."

Señor di Silva, a lithe little man, with a pronounced nose and a beard, greeted the Englishmen with the exaggerated politeness that is peculiar to Spanish official circles.

"I am sorry to bring you over," said Mr. Commissioner, after he had shaken hands with the visitor and had introduced him to Falmouth; "we thought you might be able to help us in our search for Thery."

"Luckily I was in Paris," said the Spaniard; "yes, I know Thery, and I am astounded to find him in such distinguished company. Do I know the Four?"—his shoulders went up to his ears—"who does? I know of them—there was a case at Malaga, you know? . . . Thery is not a good criminal. I was astonished to learn that he had joined the band."

"By the way," said the chief, picking up a copy of the police notice that lay on his desk, and running his eye over it, "your people omitted to say—although it really isn't of very great importance—what is Thery's trade?"

The Spanish policeman knitted his brow.

"Thery's trade! Let me remember"; he thought for a moment. "Thery's trade? I don't think I know; yet I have an idea that it is something to do with rubber. His first crime was stealing rubber; but if you want to know for certain——"

The commissioner laughed.

"It really isn't at all important," he said lightly.

CHAPTER VIII
THE MESSENGER OF THE FOUR

There was yet another missive to be handed to the doomed minister. In the last he had received there had occurred the sentence: “One more warning you shall receive, and, so that we may be assured it shall not go astray, our next and last message shall be delivered into your hands by one of us in person.”

This passage afforded the police more comfort than had any episode since the beginning of the scare. They placed a curious faith in the honesty of the Four Men; they recognized that these were not ordinary criminals and that their pledge was inviolable. Indeed, had they thought otherwise, the elaborate precautions that they were taking to ensure the safety of Sir Philip would not have been made. The honesty of the Four was their most terrible characteristic.

In this instance it served to raise a faint hope that the men who were setting at defiance the establishment of the law would overreach themselves. The letter conveying this message was the one to which Sir Philip had referred so airily in his conversation with his secretary. It had come by post, bearing the date mark, “Balham, 12.15.”

“The question is, shall we keep you absolutely surrounded, so that these men cannot by any possible chance carry out their threat?” asked Superintendent Falmouth, in some perplexity, “or shall we apparently relax our vigilance in order to lure one of the Four to his destruction?”

The question was directed to Sir Philip Ramon as he sat huddled up in the capacious depths of his office chair.

“You want to use me as a bait?” he asked sharply.

The detective expostulated.

“Not exactly that, sir; we want to give these men a chance——”

“I understand perfectly,” said the minister, with some show of irritation.

The detective resumed:

“We know now how the infernal machine was smuggled into the House; on the day on which the outrage was committed an old member, Mr. Bascoe, the member for North Torrington, was seen to enter the House.”

“Well?” asked Sir Philip in surprise.

“Mr. Bascoe was never within a hundred miles of the House of Commons on that date,” said the detective quietly. “We might never have found it out, for his name did not appear in the division list. We’ve been working quietly on that House of Commons affair ever since, and it was only a couple of days ago that we made the discovery.”

Sir Philip sprang from his chair and nervously paced the floor of his room.

“Then they are evidently well acquainted with the conditions of life in England,” he asserted rather than asked.

“Evidently; they’ve got the lay of the land, and that is one of the dangers of the situation.”

“But,” frowned the other, “you have told me there were no dangers, no real dangers.”

“There is this danger, sir,” replied the detective, eyeing the minister steadily, and dropping his voice as he spoke; “men who are capable of making such disguise are really outside the ordinary run of criminals. I don’t know what their game is, but whatever it is, they are playing

it thoroughly. One of them is evidently an artist at that sort of thing, and he's the man I'm afraid of—to-day."

Sir Philip's head tossed impatiently.

"I am tired of all this, tired of it"—he thrashed the edge of his desk with an open palm —"detectives and disguises and masked murderers until the atmosphere is, for all the world, like that of a melodrama."

"You must have patience for a day or two," said the plain-spoken officer. The Four Just Men were on the nerves of more people than the foreign minister. "And we have not decided what is to be our plan for this evening," he added.

"Do as you like," said Sir Philip shortly, and then, "Am I to be allowed to go to the House to-night?"

"No; that is not part of the programme," replied the detective.

Sir Philip stood for a moment in thought.

"These arrangements; they are kept secret, I suppose?"

"Absolutely."

"Who knows of them?"

"Yourself, the Commissioner, your secretary, and myself."

"And no one else?"

"No one; there is no danger likely to arise from that source. If your safety depended upon the secrecy of it, it would be plain sailing."

"Have these arrangements been committed to writing?" asked Sir Philip.

"No, sir; nothing has been written: our plans have been settled upon and communicated verbally; even the prime minister does not know."

Sir Philip breathed a sigh of relief.

"That is all to the good," he said, as the detective rose to go.

"I must see the commissioner. I shall be away for less than half an hour; in the meantime I suggest that you do not leave your room," he said.

Sir Philip followed him to the ante-room, in which sat Hamilton, the secretary.

"I have had an uncomfortable feeling," said Falmouth, as one of his men approached with a long coat, which he proceeded to help the detective into, "a sort of instinctive feeling this last day or two, that I have been watched and followed, so that I am using a motor-car to convey me from place to place; they can't follow that without attracting some notice." He dipped his hand into the pocket and brought out a pair of motor-goggles; he laughed somewhat shamefacedly as he adjusted them. "This is the only disguise I ever adopt, and I might say, Sir Philip," he added with some regret, "that this is the first time during my twenty-five years of service that I have ever played the fool like a stage detective."

After Falmouth's departure the foreign minister returned to his desk. He hated being alone: it frightened him. That there were two-score detectives within call did not dispel the feeling of loneliness. The terror of the Four was ever with him, and this had so worked upon his nerves that the slightest noise irritated him. He played with the penholder that lay on the desk. He scribbled inconsequently on the blotting-pad before him, and was annoyed to find that the scribbling had taken the form of numbers of figure 4.

Was the bill worth it? Was the sacrifice called for? Was the measure of such importance as to justify the risk? These things he asked himself again and again, and then immediately, What sacrifice? What risk?

“I am taking the consequences too much for granted,” he muttered, throwing aside the pen, and half turning from the writing-table. “There is no certainty that they will keep their words; bah! it is impossible that they should——”

There was a knock at the door.

“Hullo! Superintendent,” said the foreign minister as the knocker entered. “Back again already!”

The detective, vigorously brushing the dust from his moustache with a handkerchief, drew an official-looking blue envelope from his pocket.

“I thought I had better leave this in your care,” he said, dropping his voice; “it occurred to me just after I had left; accidents happen, you know.”

The minister took the document.

“What is it?” he asked.

“It is something which would mean absolute disaster for me if by chance it was found in my possession,” said the detective, turning to go.

“What am I to do with it?”

“You would greatly oblige me by putting it in your desk until I return”; and the detective stepped into the ante-room, closed the door behind him and, acknowledging the salute of the plain-clothes officer who guarded the outer door, passed to the motor-car that waited him.

Sir Philip looked at the envelope with a puzzled frown.

It bore the superscription “Confidential” and the address, “Department A. C.I.D., Scotland Yard.”

“Some confidential report,” thought Sir Philip, and an angry doubt as to the possibility of its containing particulars of the police arrangements for his safety filled his mind. He had hit by accident upon the truth had he but known. The envelope contained those particulars.

He placed the letter in a drawer of his desk and drew some papers toward him. They were copies of the Bill for the passage of which he was daring so much. It was not a long document. The clauses were few in number, the objects, briefly described in the preamble, were tersely defined. There was no fear of this bill failing to pass on the morrow. The Government’s majority was assured. Men had been brought back to town, stragglers had been whipped in, prayers and threats alike had assisted in concentrating the rapidly dwindling strength of the administration on this one effort of legislation; and what the frantic entreaties of the whips had failed to secure, curiosity had accomplished, for members of both parties were hurrying to town to be present at a scene which might perhaps be history, and, as many feared, tragedy.

As Sir Philip conned the paper he mechanically formed in his mind the line of attack—for, tragedy or none, the bill struck at too many interests in the House to allow of its passage without a stormy debate. He was a master of dialectics, a brilliant casuist, a coiner of phrases that stuck and stung. There was nothing for him to fear in the debate. If only——. It hurt him to think of the Four Just Men, not so much because they threatened his life—he had gone past that—but the mere thought that there had come a new factor into his calculations, a new and a terrifying force, that could not be argued down or brushed aside with an acid jest, or intrigued against, or adjusted by any parliamentary method. He did not think of compromise. The possibility of making terms with his enemy never once entered his head.

“I’ll go through with it!” he cried, not once but a score of times; “I’ll go through with it!” and now, as the moment grew nearer to hand, his determination to try conclusions with this new world-force grew stronger than ever.

The telephone at his elbow purred—he was sitting at his desk with his head on his hands—and he took the receiver. The voice of his house steward reminded him that he had arranged to give instructions for the closing of the house in Portland Place. For two or three days, or until this terror had subsided, he intended that his house should be empty. He would not risk the lives of his servants. If the Four intended to carry out their plan they would run no risks of failure, and if the method they employed were a bomb, then, to make assurance doubly sure, an explosion at Downing Street might well synchronize with an outrage at Portland Place.

He had finished his talk, and was replacing the receiver when a knock at the door heralded the entry of the detective.

He looked anxiously at the minister.

"Nobody been, sir?" he asked.

Sir Philip smiled.

"If by that you mean have the Four delivered their ultimatum in person, I can comfort your mind—they have not."

The detective's face was evidence of his relief.

"Thank Heaven!" he said fervently. "I had an awful dread that whilst I was away something would happen. But I have news for you, sir."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir, the commissioner has received a long cable from America. Since the two murders in that country one of Pinkerton's men has been engaged in collecting data. For years he has been piecing together the scrappy evidence he has been able to secure, and this is his cablegram." The detective drew a paper from his pocket and, spreading it on the desk, read:

> Pinkerton, Chicago, to Commissioner of Police, Scotland Yard, London.
>
> Warn Ramon that the Four do not go outside their promise. If they have threatened to kill in a certain manner at a certain time they will be punctual. We have proof of this characteristic. After Anderson's death small memorandum book was discovered outside window of room evidently dropped. Book was empty save for three pages, which were filled with neatly written memoranda headed "Six methods of execution." It was initialed "C." (third letter in alphabet). Warn Ramon against following: drinking coffee in any form, opening letters or parcels, using soap that has not been manufactured under eye of trustworthy agent, sitting in any room other than that occupied day and night by police officer. Examine his bedroom; see if there is any method by which heavy gases can be introduced. We are sending two men by *Lucania* to watch.

The detective finished reading. "Watch" was not the last word in the original message, as he knew. There had been an ominous postscript, "Afraid they will arrive too late."

"Then you think?" asked the statesman.

"That your danger lies in doing one of the things that Pinkerton warns us against," replied the detective. "There is no fear that the American police are talking idly. They have based their warning on some sure knowledge, and that is why I regard their cable as important."

There was a sharp rap on the panel of the door, and without waiting for invitation the private secretary walked into the room, excitedly waving a newspaper.

"Look at this!" he cried. "Read this! The Four have admitted their failure."

"What!" shouted the detective, reaching for the journal.

“What does this mean?” asked Sir Philip, sharply.

“Only this, sir: these beggars, it appears, have actually written an article on their ‘mission.’ ”

“In what newspaper?”

“The *Megaphone*. It seems when they recaptured Thery the editor asked the masked man to write him an article about himself, and they’ve done it; and it’s here, and they’ve admitted defeat, and—and——”

The detective had seized the paper and broke in upon the incoherent secretary’s speech.

“ ‘The Creed of the Four Just Men,’ ” he read. “Where is their confession of failure?”

“Half way down the column—I have marked the passage—here,” and the young man pointed with a trembling finger to a paragraph.

“ ‘We leave nothing to chance,’ ” read the detective; “ ‘if the slightest hitch occurs, if the least detail of our plan miscarries, we acknowledge defeat. So assured are we that our presence on earth is necessary for the carrying out of a great plan, so certain are we that we are the indispensable instruments of a Divine Providence, that we dare not, for the sake of our very cause, accept unnecessary risks. It is essential, therefore, that the various preliminaries to every execution should be carried out to the full. As an example, it will be necessary for us to deliver our final warning to Sir Philip Ramon; and to add point to this warning, it is, by our code, essential that that should be handed to the minister by one of us in person. All arrangements have been made to carry this portion of our programme into effect. But such are the extraordinary exigencies of our system that unless this warning can be handed to Sir Philip in accordance with our promise, and before eight o’clock this evening, our arrangements fall to the ground, and the execution we have planned must be foregone.’ ”

The detective stopped reading, with disappointment visible on every line of his face.

“I thought, sir, by the way you were carrying on that you had discovered something new. I’ve read all this; a copy of the article was sent to the Yard as soon as it was received.”

The secretary thumped the desk impatiently.

“But don’t you see!” he cried. “Don’t you understand, that there is no longer any need to guard Sir Philip, that there is no reason to use him as a bait, or, in fact, to do anything if we are to believe these men—look at the time——”

The detective’s hand flew to his pocket; he drew out his watch, looked at the dial and whistled.

“Half-past eight, by God,” he muttered in astonishment, and the three stood in surprised silence.

Sir Philip broke the silence.

“Is it a ruse to take us off our guard?” he said hoarsely.

“I don’t think so,” replied the detective slowly, “I feel sure that it is not; nor shall I relax my watch—but I am a believer in the honesty of these men—I don’t know why I should say this, for I have been dealing with criminals for the past twenty-five years, and never once have I put an ounce of faith in the word of the best of ’em, but somehow I can’t disbelieve these men. If they have failed to deliver their message they will not trouble us again.”

Ramon paced his room with quick, nervous steps.

“I wish I could believe that,” he muttered; “I wish I had your faith.”

A tap on the door panel.

“An urgent telegram for Sir Philip,” said a grey-haired attendant.

The minister stretched out his hand, but the detective was before him.

"Remember Pinkerton's wire, sir," he said, and ripped open the brown envelope.

> "Just received a telegram handed in at Charing Cross 7.52 begins: We have delivered our last message to the Foreign Secretary, signed Four. Ends. Is this true? Editor *Megaphone*."

"What does this mean?" asked Falmouth in bewilderment when he had finished reading.

"It means, my dear Mr. Falmouth," replied Sir Philip testily, "that your noble Four are liars and braggarts as well as murderers; and it means at the same time, I hope, an end to your ridiculous faith in their honesty!"

The detective made no answer, but his face was clouded and he bit his lips in perplexity.

"Nobody came after I left," he asked.

"Nobody."

"You have seen no person besides your secretary and myself?"

"Absolutely nobody has spoken to me, or approached within a dozen yards of me," Ramon answered, shortly.

Falmouth shook his head despairingly.

"Well—I—where are we?" he asked, speaking more to himself than to anybody in the room, and moved towards the door.

Then it was that Sir Philip remembered the package left in his charge.

"You had better take your precious documents," he said, opening his drawer and throwing the package left in his charge on to the table.

The detective looked puzzled.

"What is this?" he asked, picking up the envelope.

"I'm afraid the shock of finding yourself deceived in your estimate of my persecutors has dazed you," said Sir Philip, and added pointedly, "I must ask the commissioner to send an officer who has a better appreciation of the criminal mind, and a less childlike faith in the honour of murderers."

"As to that, sir," said Falmouth, unmoved by the outburst, "you must do as you think best. I have discharged my duty to my own satisfaction; and I have no more critical taskmaster than myself. But what I am more anxious to hear is exactly what you mean by saying that I handed any papers into your care."

The foreign secretary glared across the table at the imperturbable police officer.

"I am referring, sir," he said harshly, "to the packet which you returned to leave in my charge."

The detective stared.

"I—did—not—return," he said in a strained voice. "I have left no papers in your hands." He picked up the package from the table, tore it open and disclosed yet another envelope. As he caught sight of the grey-green cover he gave a sharp cry.

"This is the message of the Four," said Falmouth.

The foreign secretary staggered back a pace, white to the lips.

"And the man who delivered it?" he gasped.

"Was one of the Four Just Men," said the detective grimly. "They have kept their promise."

He took a quick step to the door, passed through into the ante-room and beckoned the plain-clothes officer who stood on guard at the outer door.

"Do you remember my going out?" he asked.

"Yes, sir—both times."

"Both times, eh!" said Falmouth bitterly. "And how did I look the second time?"

His subordinate was bewildered at the form the question took.

"As usual, sir," he stammered.

"How was I dressed?"

The constable considered.

"In your long dust coat."

"I wore my goggles, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"I thought so," muttered Falmouth savagely, and raced down the broad marble stairs that led to the entrance-hall. There were four men on duty, who saluted him as he approached.

"Do you remember my going out?" he asked of the sergeant in charge.

"Yes, sir—both times," the officer replied.

"Damn your 'both times'!" snapped Falmouth. "How long had I been gone the first time before I returned?"

"Five minutes, sir," was the astonished officer's reply.

"They just gave themselves time to do it," muttered Falmouth, and then aloud,—"Did I return in my car?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah!" hope sprang into the detective's breast. "Did you notice the number?" he asked, almost fearful to hear the reply.

"Yes!"

The detective could have hugged the stolid officer.

"Good—what was it?"

"A 17164."

The detective made a rapid note of the number.

"Jackson," he called, and one of the men in plain clothes stepped forward and saluted.

"Go to the Yard; find out the registered owner of this car. When you have found this go to the owner; ask him to explain the movements; if necessary, take him into custody."

Falmouth retraced his steps to Sir Philip's study. He found the statesman still agitatedly walking up and down the room, the secretary nervously drumming his fingers on the table and the letter still unopened.

"As I thought," explained Falmouth; "the man you saw was one of the Four impersonating me. He chose his time admirably; my own men were deceived. They managed to get a car exactly similar in build and colour to mine, and, watching their opportunity, they drove to Downing Street a few minutes after I had left. There is one last chance of our catching him—luckily the sergeant on duty noticed the number of the car, and we might be able to trace him through that—hullo." An attendant stood at the door.

Would the superintendent see Detective Jackson?

Falmouth found him waiting in the hall below.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Jackson, saluting, "but is there not some mistake in this number?"

"Why?" asked the detective, sharply.

"Because," said the man, "A 17164 is the number of your own car."

CHAPTER IX
THE POCKET-BOOK

The final warning was brief and to the point:

> "We allow you until to-morrow evening to reconsider your position in the matter of the Aliens Extradition Bill. If by six o'clock no announcement is made in the afternoon newspapers of your withdrawing this measure we shall have no other course to pursue but to fulfil our promise. You will die at eight in the evening. We append for your enlightenment a concise table of the secret police arrangements made for your safety to-morrow. Farewell.
> (*Signed*)
>
> FOUR JUST MEN."

Sir Philip read this over without a tremor. He read, too, the slip of paper on which was written, in the strange foreign hand, the details that the police had not dared to put into writing.

"There is a leakage somewhere," he said, and the two anxious watchers saw that the face of their charge was grey and drawn.

"These details were known only to four," said the detective quietly, "and I'll stake my life that it was neither the commissioner nor myself."

"Nor I!" said the private secretary emphatically.

Sir Philip shrugged his shoulders with a weary laugh.

"What does it matter?—they know," he exclaimed; "by what uncanny method they have learnt the secret I neither know nor care. The question is, can I be adequately protected to-morrow night at eight o'clock?"

Falmouth shut his teeth.

"Either you'll come out of it alive or, by the Lord, they'll kill two," he said, and there was a gleam in his eye that spoke for his determination.

The news that yet another letter had reached the great statesman was on the streets at ten o'clock that night. It circulated through the clubs and theatres, and between the acts grave-faced men stood in the vestibules discussing Ramon's danger. The House of Commons was seething with excitement. In the hope that the minister would come down, a strong House had gathered, but the members were disappointed, for it was evident soon after the dinner recess that Sir Philip had no intention of showing himself that night.

"Might I ask the right honourable the prime minister whether it is the intention of his Majesty's Government to proceed with the Aliens Extradition (Political Offence) Bill," asked the Radical member for West Deptford, "and whether he has not considered, in view of the extraordinary conditions that this bill has called into life, the advisability of postponing the introduction of this measure?"

The question was greeted with a chorus of "hears," and the prime minister rose slowly and turned an amused glance in the direction of the questioner.

"I know of no circumstance that is likely to prevent my right honourable friend, who is unfortunately not in his place to-night, from moving the second reading of the bill to-morrow," he said, and sat down.

“What the devil was he grinning at?” grumbled West Deptford to a neighbour.

“He’s deuced uncomfortable, is J. K.,” said the other wisely, “deuced uncomfortable; a man in the cabinet was telling me to-day that old J. K. has been feeling deuced uncomfortable. ‘You mark my words,’ he said, ‘this Four Just Men business is making the premier deuced uncomfortable,’ ” and the hon. member subsided to allow West Deptford to digest his neighbour’s profundities.

“I’ve done my best to persuade Ramon to drop the bill,” the premier was saying, “but he is adamant, and the pitiable thing is that he believes in his heart of hearts that these fellows intend keeping faith.”

“It is monstrous,” said the colonial secretary hotly; “it is inconceivable that such a state of affairs can last. Why, it strikes at the root of everything, it unbalances every adjustment of civilization.”

“It is a poetical idea,” said the phlegmatic premier, “and the standpoint of the Four is quite a logical one. Think of the enormous power for good or evil often vested in one man: a capitalist controlling the markets of the world, a speculator cornering cotton or wheat whilst mills stand idle and people starve, tyrants and despots with the destinies of nations between their thumb and finger—and then think of the four men, known to none; vague, shadowy figures stalking tragically through the world, condemning and executing the capitalist, the corner-maker, the tyrant—evil forces all, and all beyond reach of the law. We have said of these people, such of us as are touched with mysticism, that God would judge them. Here are men arrogating to themselves the divine right of superior judgment. If we catch them they will end their lives unpicturesquely, in a matter-of-fact, commonplace manner in a little shed in Pentonville Gaol, and the world will never realize how great the artists who perish.”

“But Ramon?”

The premier smiled.

“Here, I think, these men have just overreached themselves. Had they been content to slay first and explain their mission afterwards I have little doubt that Ramon would have died. But they have warned and warned and exposed their hand a dozen times over. I know nothing of the arrangements that are being made by the police, but I should imagine that by to-morrow night it will be as difficult to get within a dozen yards of Ramon as it would be for a Siberian prisoner to dine with the Czar.”

“Is there no possibility of Ramon withdrawing the bill?” asked the Colonies.

The premier shook his head.

“Absolutely none,” he said.

The rising of a member of the Opposition front bench at that moment to move an amendment to a clause under discussion cut short the conversation.

The House rapidly emptied when it became generally known that Ramon did not intend appearing, and the members gathered in the smoking-room and lobby to speculate upon the matter which was uppermost in their minds.

In the vicinity of Palace Yard a great crowd had gathered, as in London crowds will gather, on the off-chance of catching a glimpse of the man whose name was in every mouth. Street vendors sold his portrait, frowsy men purveying the real life and adventures of the Four Just Men did a roaring trade, and itinerant street singers, introducing extemporized verses into their repertoire, declined the courage of that statesman bold, who dared for to resist the threats of coward alien and deadly anarchist.

There was praise in these poor lyrics for Sir Philip, who was trying to prevent the foreigner from taking the bread out of the mouths of honest workingmen.

The humour of which appealed greatly to Manfred; he and Poiccart had driven to the Westminster end of the Embankment and, having dismissed their cab, were walking to Whitehall.

"I think the verse about the 'deadly foreign anarchist' taking the bread out of the mouth of the home-made variety is distinctly good," chuckled Manfred.

Both men were in evening dress, and Poiccart wore in his button-hole the silken button of a Chevalier of the Legion d'Honneur.

Manfred continued:

"I doubt whether London has had such a sensation since—when?"

Poiccart's grim smile caught the other's eye and he smiled in sympathy.

"Well?"

"I asked the same question of the *maître d'hôtel*," he said slowly, like a man loath to share a joke; "*he* compared the agitation to the atrocious East-End murders."

Manfred stopped dead and looked with horror on his companion.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed in distress, "it never occurred to me that we should be compared with—him!"

They resumed their walk.

"It is part of the eternal bathos," said Poiccart serenely; "even De Quincey taught the English nothing."

They were traversing that portion of Whitehall from which Scotland Yard runs.

A man slouching along with bent head and his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his tattered coat, gave them a swift sidelong glance, stopped when they had passed, and looked after them. Then he turned, and, quickening his shuffle, followed on their trail. A press of people and a seemingly ceaseless string of traffic at the corner of Cockspur Street brought Manfred and Poiccart to a standstill, waiting for an opportunity to cross the road. They were subjected to a little jostling as the knot of waiting people thickened, but eventually they crossed and walked towards St. Martin's Lane.

The comparison which Poiccart had quoted still rankled with Manfred.

"There will be people at His Majesty's to-night," he said, "applauding Brutus as he asks, 'What villain touched his body and not for justice?' You will not find a serious student of history, or any commonplace man of intelligence, for the matter of that, who, if you asked, Would it not have been God's blessing for the world if Buonaparte had been assassinated on his return from Egypt? would not answer without hesitation, Yes. But we—we are murderers!"

"They would not have erected a statue to Napoleon's assassin," said Poiccart easily, "any more than they have enshrined Felton, who slew a profligate and debauched Minister of Charles I. Posterity may do us justice"; he spoke half mockingly; "for myself I am satisfied with the approval of my conscience."

He threw away the cigar he was smoking, and put his hand to the inside pocket of his coat to find another. He withdrew his hand without the cigar and whistled a passing cab.

Manfred looked at him in surprise.

"What is the matter? I thought you said you would walk?"

Nevertheless he entered the hansom and Poiccart followed, giving his direction through the trap, "Baker Street Station."

The cab was rattling through Shaftesbury Avenue before Poiccart gave any explanation.

"I have been robbed," he said, sinking his voice, "my watch has gone, but that does not matter; the pocket-book with the notes I made for the guidance of Thery has gone—and that matters a great deal."

"It may have been a common thief," said Manfred: "he took the watch."

Poiccart was feeling his pockets rapidly.

"Nothing else has gone," he said; "it may have been, as you say, a pickpocket, who will be content with the watch and will drop the notebook down the nearest drain; but it may be a police agent."

"Was there anything in it to identify you?" asked Manfred, in a troubled tone.

"Nothing," was the prompt reply; "but unless the police are blind they would understand the calculations and the plans. It may not come to their hands at all, but if it does, and the thief can recognize us, we are in a fix."

The cab drew up at the down station at Baker Street, and the two men alighted.

"I shall go east," said Poiccart; "we will meet in the morning. By that time I shall have learnt whether the book has reached Scotland Yard. Good-night."

And with no other farewell than this the two men parted.

If Billy Marks had not had a drop of drink he would have been perfectly satisfied with his night's work. Filled, however, with that false liquid confidence that leads so many good men astray, Billy thought it would be a sin to neglect the opportunities that the gods had shown him. The excitement engendered by the threats of the Four Just Men had brought all suburban London to Westminster, and on the Surrey side of the Bridge Billy found hundreds of patient suburbanites waiting for conveyance to Streatham, Camberwell, Clapham, and Greenwich. So, the night being comparatively young, Billy decided to work the trams.

He touched a purse from a stout old lady in black, a Waterbury watch from a gentleman in a top hat, a small hand-mirror from a dainty bag, and decided to conclude his operations with the exploration of a superior young lady's pocket. Billy's search was successful. A purse and a lace handkerchief rewarded him, and he made arrangements for a modest retirement. Then it was that a gentle voice breathed into his ear. "Hullo, Billy!"

He knew the voice, and felt momentarily unwell.

"Hullo, Mister Howard," he exclaimed with feigned Joy; " 'ow are you, sir? Fancy meetin' you!"

"Where are you going, Billy?" asked the welcome Mr. Howard, taking Billy's arm affectionately.

" 'Ome," said the virtuous Billy.

"Home it is," said Mr. Howard, leading the unwilling Billy from the crowd; "home, sweet home, it is, Billy." He called another young man, with whom he seemed to be acquainted: "Go on that car, Porter, and see who has lost anything. If you can find anybody bring them along," and the other young man obeyed.

"And now," said Mr. Howard, still holding Billy's arm affectionately, "tell me how the world has been using you."

"Look 'ere, Mr. Howard," said Billy earnestly, "what's the game? Where are you takin' me?"

"The game is the old game," said Mr. Howard sadly—"the same old game, Bill, and I'm taking you to the same old sweet spot."

“You’ve made a mistake this time, guv’nor,” cried Billy fiercely, and there was a slight clink.

“Permit me, Billy,” said Mr. Howard, stooping quickly and picking up the purse Billy had dropped.

At the police station the sergeant behind the charge desk pretended to be greatly overjoyed at Billy’s arrival, and the jailer who put Billy into a steel-barred dock and passed his hands through cunning pockets greeted him as a friend.

“Gold watch, half a chain, gold, three purses, two handkerchiefs, and a red moroccer pocket-book,” reported the jailer.

The sergeant nodded approvingly.

“Quite a good day’s work, William,” he said.

“What shall I get this time?” inquired the prisoner, and Mr. Howard, a plain-clothes officer engaged in filling in particulars of the charge, opined nine moon.

“Go on!” exclaimed Mr. Billy Marks in consternation.

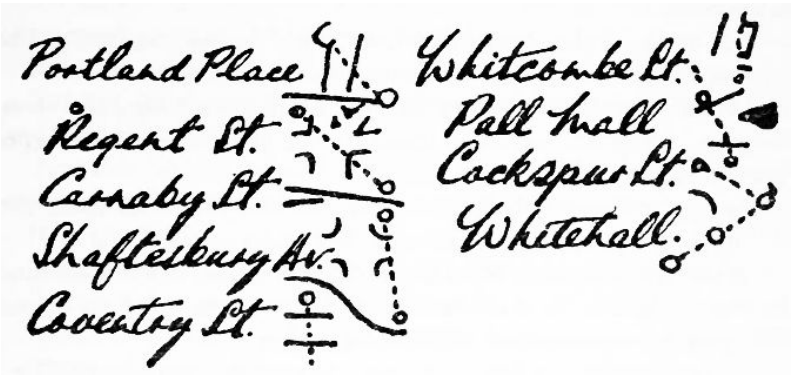
“Fact,” said the sergeant; “you’re a rogue and a vagabond, Billy, you’re a petty larcenist, and you’re for the sessions this time—Number Eight.”

This latter was addressed to the jailer, who bore Billy off to the cells protesting vigorously against a police force that could only tumble to poor blokes, and couldn’t get a touch on sanguinary murderers like the Four Just Men.

“What do we pay rates and taxes for?” indignantly demanded Billy through the grating of his cell.

“Fat lot you’ll ever pay, Billy,” said the jailer, putting the double lock on the door.

In the charge office Mr. Howard and the sergeant were examining the stolen property, and three owners, discovered by P. C. Porter, were laying claim to their own.



“That disposes of all the articles except the gold watch and the pocket-book,” said the sergeant after the claimants had gone, “gold watch, Elgin half-hunter, No. 5029020; pocket-book containing no papers, no card, no address, and only three pages of writing. What this means I don’t know.” The sergeant handed the book to Howard. The page that puzzled the policeman contained simply a list of streets. Against each street was scrawled a cabalistic character.

“Looks like the diary of a paper-chase,” said Mr. Howard. “What is on the other pages?”

They turned the leaf. This was filled with figures.

"H'm," said the disappointed sergeant, and again turned over-leaf. The contents of this page was understandable and readable, although evidently written in a hurry as though it had been taken down at dictation.

"The chap who wrote this must have had a train to catch," said the facetious Mr. Howard, pointing to the abbreviations:

> "Will not leave D.S., except to Hs. Will drive to Hs in M.C. (4 dummy brghms first), 8.30. At 2 600 p arve traf divtd Embank, 80 spls inside D.S. One each rm, three each cor, six basemt, six rf. All drs wide opn allow each off see another, all spls will carry revr. Nobody except F and H to approach R. In Hse strange gal filled with pl, all press vouched for. 200 spl in cor. If nec battalion guards at disposal."

The policemen read this over slowly.

"Now what the devil does that mean?" asked the sergeant helplessly.

It was at that precise moment that Constable Howard earned his promotion.

"Let me have that book for ten minutes," he said excitedly. The sergeant handed the book over with wondering stare.

"I think I can find an owner for this," said Howard, his hand trembling as he took the book, and ramming his hat on his head he ran out into the street.

He did not stop running until he reached the main road, and finding a cab he sprang in with a hurried order to the driver.

"Whitehall, and drive like blazes," he called, and in a few minutes he was explaining his errand to the inspector in charge of the cordon that guarded the entrance of Downing Street.

"Constable Howard, 946 L. reserve," he introduced himself. "I've a very important message for Superintendent Falmouth."

That officer, looking tired and beaten, listened to the policeman's story.

"It looks to me," went on Howard breathlessly, "as though this had something to do with your case, sir. D.S. is Downing Street, and——" He produced the book and Falmouth snatched at it.

He read a few words and then gave a triumphant cry.

"Our secret instructions," he cried, and catching the constable by the arm he drew him to the entrance hall.

"Is my car outside?" he asked, and in response to a whistle a car drew up. "Jump in, Howard," said the detective, and the car slipped into Whitehall.

"Who is the thief?" asked the senior.

"Billy Marks, sir," replied Howard; "you may not know him, but down at Lambeth he is a well-known character."

"Oh, yes," Falmouth hastened to correct, "I know Billy very well indeed—we'll see what he has to say."

The car drew up at the police station and the two men jumped out.

The sergeant rose to his feet as he recognized the famous Falmouth, and saluted.

"I want to see the prisoner Marks," said Falmouth shortly, and Billy, roused from his sleep, came blinking into the charge office.

"Now, Billy," said the detective, "I've got a few words to say to you."

"Why, it's Mr. Falmouth," said the astonished Billy, and something like fear shaded his face. "I wasn't in that 'Oxton affair, s'help me."

“Make your mind easy, Billy; I don’t want you for anything, and if you’ll answer my questions truthfully, you may get off the present charge and get a reward into the bargain.”

Billy was suspicious.

“I’m not going to give anybody away, if that’s what you mean,” he said, sullenly.

“Nor that, either,” said the detective impatiently. “I want to know where you found this pocket-book,” and he held it up.

Billy grinned.

“Found it lyin’ on the pavement,” he lied.

“I want the truth,” thundered Falmouth.

“Well,” said Billy sulkily, “I pinched it.”

“From whom?”

“I didn’t stop to ask him his name,” was the impudent reply.

The detective breathed deeply.

“Now, look here,” he said, lowering his voice, “you’ve heard about the Four Just Men?”

Billy nodded, opening his eyes in amazement at the question.

“Well,” exclaimed Falmouth impressively, “the man to whom this pocket-book belongs is one of them.”

“What!” cried Billy.

“For his capture there is a reward of a thousand pounds offered. If your description leads to his arrest that thousand is yours.”

Marks stood paralyzed at the thought.

“A thousand—a thousand?” he muttered in a dazed fashion. “And I might just as easily have caught him!”

“Come, come!” cried the detective, sharply. “You may catch him yet——tell us what he looked like.”

Billy knitted his brows in thought.

“He looked like a gentleman,” he said, trying to recall from the chaos of his mind a picture of his victim; “he had a white weskit, a white shirt, nice patent shoes——”

“But his face—his face!” demanded the detective.

“His face?” cried Billy, indignantly. “How do I know what it looked like? I don’t look a chap in the face when I’m pinching his watch, do I?”

CHAPTER X
THE CUPIDITY OF MARKS

"You cursed dolt, you infernal fool!" stormed the detective, catching Billy by the collar and shaking him like a rat. "Do you mean to tell me that you had one of the Four Just Men in your hand, and did not even take the trouble to look at him?"

Billy wrenched himself free.

"You leave me alone!" he said defiantly. "How was I to know it was one of the Four Just Men, and how do you know it was?" he added with a cunning twist of his face. Billy's mind was beginning to work rapidly. He saw in this staggering statement of the detective a chance of making capital out of the position which to within a few minutes he had regarded as singularly unfortunate.

"I did get a bit of a glance at 'em," he said, "they——"

"Them—they?" said the detective quickly. "How many were there?"

"Never mind," said Billy sulkily. He felt the strength of his position.

"Billy," said the detective earnestly, "I mean business; if you know anything you've got to tell us."

"Ho!" cried the prisoner in defiance. "Got to, 'ave I? Well, I know the lor as well as you—you can't make a chap speak if he don't want. You can't——"

The detective signalled the other police officers to retire, and when they were out of earshot he dropped his voice and said:

"Harry Moss came out last week."

Billy flushed and lowered his eyes.

"I don't know no Harry Moss," he muttered, doggedly.

"Harry Moss came out last week," continued the detective shortly, "after doing three years for robbery with violence—three years and ten lashes."

"I don't know anything about it," said Marks, in the same tone.

"He got clean away and the police had no clues," the detective went on remorselessly, "and they might not have caught him to this day, only—only 'from information received' they took him one night out of his bed in Leman Street."

Billy licked his dry lips but did not speak.

"Harry Moss would like to know who he owes his three stretch to—and the ten. Men who've had the cat have a long memory, Billy."

"That's not playing the game, Mr. Falmouth," cried Billy thickly. "I—I was a bit hard up, an' Harry Moss wasn't a pal of mine—and the p'lice wanted to find out——"

"And the police want to find out now," said Falmouth.

Billy Marks made no reply for a moment.

"I'll tell you all there is to be told," he said at last, and cleared his throat. The detective stopped him.

"Not here," he said. Then turning to the officer in charge:

"Sergeant, you may release this man on bail—I will stand sponsor." The humorous side of this appealed to Billy at least, for he grinned sheepishly and recovered his former spirits.

"First time I've been bailed out by the p'lice," he remarked, facetiously.

The motor-car bore the detective and his charge to Scotland Yard, and in Superintendent Falmouth's office Billy prepared to unburden himself.

“Before you begin,” said the officer, “I want to warn you that you must be as brief as possible. Every minute is precious.”

So Billy told his story. In spite of the warning there were embellishments, to which the detective was forced to listen impatiently.

At last the pickpocket reached the point.

“There was two of ’em, one a tall chap and one not so tall. I heard one say ‘My dear George’—the little one said that, the one I took the ticker from and the pocketbook. Was there anything in the notebook?” Billy asked suddenly.

“Go on,” said the detective.

“Well,” resumed Billy, “I follered ’em up to the end of the street, and they was waitin’ to cross towards Charing Cross Road when I lifted the clock, you understand?”

“What time was this?”

“ ’Arf-past ten—or it might’ve been eleven.”

“And you did not see their faces?”

The thief shook his head emphatically.

“If I never get up from where I’m sittin’ I didn’t, Mr. Falmouth,” he said earnestly.

The detective rose with a sigh.

“I’m afraid you’re not much use to me, Billy,” he said ruefully. “Did you notice whether they wore beards, or were they clean-shaven, or——”

Billy shook his head mournfully.

“I could easily tell you a lie, Mr. Falmouth,” he said frankly, “and I could easily pitch a tale that would take you in, but I’m playin’ it square with you.”

The detective recognized the sincerity of the man and nodded.

“You’ve done your best, Billy,” he said, and then—“I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. You are the only man in the world who has ever seen one of the Four Just Men—and lived to tell the story. Now, although you cannot remember his face, perhaps if you met him again in the street you would know him—there may be some little trick of walking, some habit of holding the hands that you cannot recall now, but if you saw again you would recognize. I shall therefore take upon myself the responsibility of releasing you from custody until the day after to-morrow. I want you to find this man you robbed. Here is a sovereign; go home, get a little sleep, turn out as early as you can and go west.” The detective went to his desk and wrote a dozen words on a card. “Take this; if you see the man or his companion, follow them, show this card to the first policeman you meet, point out the man, and you’ll go to bed a thousand pounds richer than when you woke.”

Billy took the card.

“If you want me at any time you will find somebody here who will know where I am. Good-night,” and Billy passed into the street, his brain in a whirl, and a warrant written on a visiting-card in his waistcoat pocket.

The morning that was to witness great events broke bright and clear over London. Manfred, who, contrary to his usual custom, had spent the night at the workshop in Carnaby Street, watched the dawn from the flat roof of the building.

He lay face downwards, a rug spread beneath him, his head resting on his hands. Dawn, with its white, pitiless light, showed his strong face, seamed and haggard. The white streaks in his trim beard were accentuated in the light of morning. He looked tired and disheartened, so unlike his usual self that Gonsalez, who crept up through the trap just before the sun rose, was

as near alarmed as it was possible for that phlegmatic man to be. He touched him on the arm and Manfred started.

"What is the matter?" asked Leon softly.

Manfred's smile and shake of head did not reassure the questioner.

"Is it Poiccart and the thief?"

"Yes," nodded Manfred. Then speaking aloud, he asked: "Have you ever felt over any of our cases as you feel in this?"

They spoke in such low tones as almost to approach whispering. Gonsalez stared ahead thoughtfully.

"Yes," he admitted, "once—the woman at Warsaw. You remember how easy it all seemed, and how circumstance after circumstance thwarted us . . . till I began to feel, as I feel now, that we should fail."

"No, no, no!" said Manfred fiercely. "There must be no talk of failure, Leon, no thought of it."

He crawled to the trap-door and lowered himself into the corridor, and Gonsalez followed.

"Thery?" he asked.

"Asleep."

They were entering the studio, and Manfred had his hand on the door-handle when a footstep sounded on the bottom floor.

"Who's there?" cried Manfred, and a soft whistle from below sent him flying downstairs.

"Poiccart!" he cried.

Poiccart it was, unshaven, dusty, weary.

"Well?" Manfred's ejaculation was almost brutal in its bluntness.

"Let us go upstairs," said Poiccart, shortly. The three men ascended the dusty stairway, not a word being spoken until they had reached the small living-room.

Then Poiccart spoke.

"The very stars in their courses are fighting against us," he said, throwing himself into the only comfortable chair in the room, and flinging his hat into a corner. "The man who stole my pocket-book has been arrested by the police. He is a well-known criminal of a sneak-thief order, and unfortunately he had been under observation during the evening. The pocket-book was found in his possession, and all might have been well, but an unusually smart police officer associated the contents with us.

"After I had left you I went home and changed, then made my way to Downing Street. I was one of the curious crowd that stood watching the guarded entrance. I knew that Falmouth was there, and I knew, too, if there was any discovery made it would be communicated immediately to Downing Street. Somehow I felt sure the man was an ordinary thief, and that if we had anything to fear it was from a chance arrest. Whilst I was waiting a cab dashed up, and out an excited man jumped. He was obviously a policeman, and I had just time to engage a hansom when Falmouth and the new arrival came flying out. I followed them in the cab as fast as possible without exciting the suspicion of the driver. Of course, they outdistanced us, but their destination was evident. I dismissed the cab at the corner of the street in which the police station is situated, and walked down and found, as I had expected, the car drawn up at the door.

"I managed to get a fleeting glance at the charge room—I was afraid that any interrogation there might be would have been conducted in the cell, but by the greatest of good luck they had chosen the charge room. I saw Falmouth, and the policeman, and the prisoner. The latter,

a mean-faced, long-jawed man with shifty eyes—no, no, Leon, don't question me about the physiognomy of the man—my view was for photographic purposes—I wanted to remember him.

"In that second I could see the detective's anger, the thief's defiance, and I knew that the man was saying that he could not recognize us."

"Ha!" It was Manfred's sigh of relief that put a period to Poiccart's speech.

"But I wanted to make sure," resumed the latter. "I walked back the way I had come. Suddenly I heard the hum of the car behind me, and it passed me with another passenger. I guessed that they were taking the man back to Scotland Yard.

"I was content to walk back; I was curious to know what the police intended doing with their new recruit. Taking up a station that gave me a view of the entrance of the street, I waited. After a while the man came out alone. His step was light and buoyant. A glimpse I got of his face showed me a strange blending of bewilderment and gratification. He turned on to the Embankment, and I followed close behind."

"There was a danger that he was being shadowed by the police too," said Gonsalez warningly.

"Of that I was well satisfied," Poiccart rejoined. "I took a very careful survey before I acted. Apparently the police were content to let him roam free. When he was abreast of the Temple steps he stopped and looked undecidedly left and right, as though he were not quite certain as to what he should do next. At that moment I came abreast of him, passed him, and then turned back, fumbling in my pockets.

" 'Can you oblige me with a match?' I asked.

"He was most affable; produced a box of matches and invited me to help myself.

"I took a match, struck it, and lit my cigar, holding the match so that he could see my face."

"That was wise," said Manfred gravely.

"It showed his face, too, and out of the corner of my eye I watched him searching every feature. But there was no sign of recognition and I began a conversation. We lingered where we had met for a while and then by mutual consent we walked in the direction of Blackfriars, crossed the bridge, chatting on inconsequent subjects, the poor, the weather, the newspapers. On the other side of the bridge is a coffee-stall. I determined to make my next move. I invited him to take a cup of coffee, and when the cups were placed before us, I put down a sovereign. The stall-keeper shook his head, said he could not change it. 'Hasn't your friend any small change?' he asked.

"It was here that the vanity of the little thief told me what I wanted to know. He drew from his pocket, with a nonchalant air—a sovereign. 'This is all that I have got,' he drawled. I found some coppers—I had to think quickly. He had told the police something, something worth paying for—what was it? It could not have been a description of ourselves, for if he had recognized us then, he would have known me when I struck the match and when I stood there, as I did, in the full glare of the light of the coffee-stall. And then a cold fear came to me. Perhaps he had recognized me, and with a thief's cunning was holding me in conversation until he could get assistance to take me."

Poiccart paused for a moment, and drew a small phial from his pocket; this he placed carefully on the table.

"He was as near to death then as ever he has been in his life," he said quietly; "but somehow the suspicion wore away. In our walk we had passed three policemen—there was an

opportunity if he had wanted it.

"He drank his coffee and said, 'I must be going home.'

" 'Indeed!' I said. 'I suppose I really ought to go home too—I have a lot of work to do to-morrow.' He leered at me. 'So have I,' he said with a grin, 'but whether I can do it or not I don't know.'

"We had left the coffee-stall, and now stopped beneath a lamp that stood at the corner of the street. I knew that I had only a few seconds to secure the information I wanted—so I played boldly and led directly to the subject. 'What of these Four Just Men?' I asked, just as he was about to slouch away. He turned back instantly. 'What about them?' he asked, quickly. I led him on from that by gentle stages to the identity of the Four. He was eager to talk about them, anxious to know what I thought, but most concerned of all about the reward. He was engrossed in the subject, and then suddenly he leaned forward, and, tapping me on the chest with a grimy forefinger, he commenced to state a hypothetical case."

Poiccart stopped to laugh—his laugh ended in a sleepy yawn.

"You know the sort of questions," said he, "and you know how very naïve the illiterate are when they are seeking to disguise their identities by elaborate hypotheses. Well, this is the story. He—Marks is his name—thinks he may be able to recognize one of us by some extraordinary trick of memory. To enable him to do this, he has been granted freedom—to-morrow he would search London, he said."

"A full day's work," laughed Manfred.

"Indeed," agreed Poiccart soberly, "but hear the sequel. We parted, and I walked westward perfectly satisfied of our security. I made for Covent Garden Market, because that is one of the places in London where a man may be seen at four o'clock in the morning without exciting suspicion.

"I had strolled through the market, idly watching the busy scene, when, for some cause that I cannot explain, I turned suddenly on my heel and came face to face with Marks! He grinned sheepishly, and recognized me with a nod of his head.

"He did not wait for me to ask him his business, but started in to explain his presence.

"I accepted his explanation easily, and for the second time that night invited him to coffee. He hesitated at first, then accepted. When the coffee was brought, he pulled it to him as far from my reach as possible, and then I knew that Mr. Marks had placed me at fault, that I had underrated his intelligence, that all the time he had been unburdening himself he had recognized me. He had put me off my guard."

"But why——?" began Manfred.

"That is what I thought," the other answered. "Why did he not have me arrested?" He turned to Leon, who had been a silent listener. "Tell us, Leon, why?"

"The explanation is simple," said Gonsalez quietly; "why did not Thery betray us?——cupidity, the second most potent force of civilization. He has some doubt of the reward. He may fear the honesty of the police—most criminals do so; he may want witnesses." Leon walked to the wall, where his coat hung. He buttoned it thoughtfully, ran his hand over his smooth chin, then pocketed the little phial that stood on the table.

"You have slipped him, I suppose?" he asked.

Poiccart nodded.

"He lives——?"

"At 700, Red Cross Street, in the Borough—it is a common lodging-house."

Leon took a pencil from the table and rapidly sketched a head upon the edge of a newspaper.

"Like this?" he asked.

Poiccart examined the portrait.

"Yes," he said in surprise; "have you seen him?"

"No," said Leon carelessly, "but such a man would have such a head."

He paused on the threshold.

"I think it is necessary." There was a question in his assertion. It was addressed rather to Manfred, who stood with his folded arms and knit brow staring at the floor.

For answer Manfred extended his clenched fist.

Leon saw the down-turned thumb, and left the room.

Billy Marks was in a quandary. By the most innocent device in the world his prey had managed to slip through his fingers. When Poiccart, stopping at the polished doors of the best hotel in London, whither they had strolled, casually remarked that he would not be a moment and disappeared into the hotel, Billy was nonplussed. This was a contingency for which he was not prepared. He had followed the suspect from Blackfriars; he was almost sure that this was the man he had robbed. He might, had he wished, have called upon the first constable he met to take the man into custody; but the suspicion of the thief, the fear that he might be asked to share the reward with the man who assisted him, restrained him. And besides, it might not be the man at all, argued Billy, and yet——

Poiccart was a chemist, a man who found joy in unhealthy precipitates, who mixed evil-smelling drugs and distilled, filtered, carbonated, oxydized, and did all manner of things in glass tubes, to the vegetable, animal, and mineral products of the earth. Billy had left Scotland Yard to look for a man with a discoloured hand. Here again, he might, had he been less fearful of treachery, have placed in the hands of the police a very valuable mark of identification.

It seems a very lame excuse to urge on Billy's behalf that his cupidity alone stayed his hand, when he came face to face with the man he was searching for. And yet it was so. Then again there was a sum in simple proportion to be worked out. If one Just Man was worth a thousand pounds, what was the commercial value of four? Billy was a thief with a business head.

So that when Poiccart disappeared within the magnificent portals of the Royal Hotel in Northumberland Avenue, Billy was hipped. He realized in a flash that his captive had gone whither he could not follow without exposing his hand; that the chances were he had gone for ever. He looked up and down the street; there was no policeman in sight. In the vestibule, a porter in shirt sleeves was polishing brasses. It was still very early; the streets were deserted, and Billy, after a few moments' hesitation, took a course that he would not have dared at a more conventional hour.

He pushed open the swing doors and passed into the vestibule. The porter turned on him as he entered and favoured him with a suspicious frown.

"What do you want?" asked he, eyeing the tattered coat of the visitor in some disfavour.

"Look 'ere, old feller," began Billy, in his most conciliatory tone.

Just then the porter's strong right arm caught him by the coat collar, and Billy found himself stumbling into the street.

"Outside—you," said the porter firmly.

It needed this rebuff to engender in Marks the necessary self-assurance to carry him through.

Straightening his ruffled clothing, he pulled Falmouth's card from his pocket and returned to the charge with dignity.

"I am p'lice officer," he said, adopting the opening that he knew so well, "and if you interfere with me, look out! young feller."

The porter took the card and scrutinized it.

"What do you want?" he asked in more civil tones. He would have added "sir," but somehow it stuck in his throat. If the man is a detective, he argued to himself, he is very well disguised.

"I want that gentleman that came in before me," said Billy.

The porter scratched his head.

"What is the number of his room?" he asked.

"Never mind about the number of his room," said Billy rapidly. "Is there any back way to this hotel—any way a man can get out of it? I mean, besides through the front entrance?"

"Half a dozen," replied the porter.

Billy groaned.

"Take me round to one of them, will you?" he asked. And the porter led the way.

One of the tradesmen's entrances was from a small back street; and here it was that a street scavenger gave the information that Marks had feared. Five minutes before a man answering to the description had walked out, turned towards the Strand and, picking up a cab in the sight of the street cleaner, had driven off.

Baffled, and with the added bitterness that had he played boldly he might have secured at any rate a share of a thousand pounds, Billy walked slowly to the Embankment, cursing the folly that had induced him to throw away the fortune that was in his hands. With hands thrust deep into his pockets, he tramped the weary length of the Embankment, going over again and again the incidents of the night and each time muttering a lurid condemnation of his error. It must have been an hour after he had lost Poiccart, that it occurred to him all was not lost. He had the man's description, he had looked at his face, he knew him feature by feature. That was something, at any rate. Nay, it occurred to him that if the man was arrested through his description he would still be entitled to the reward—or a part of it. He dared not see Falmouth and tell him that he had been in company with the man all night without effecting his arrest. Falmouth would never believe him, and, indeed, it was curious that he should have met him.

This fact struck Billy for the first time. By what strange chance had he met this man? Was it possible—the idea frightened Marks—that the man he had robbed had recognized *him*, and that he had deliberately sought him out with murderous intent?

A cold perspiration broke upon the narrow forehead of the thief. These men were murderers, cruel, relentless murderers: suppose——?

He turned from the contemplation of the unpleasant possibilities to meet a man who was crossing the road toward him. He eyed the stranger doubtingly. The new-comer was a young-looking man, clean-shaven, with sharp features and restless blue eyes. As he came closer, Marks noted that first his appearance had been deceptive; the man was not so young as he looked. He might have been forty, thought Marks. He approached, looked hard at Billy, then beckoned him to stop, for Billy was walking away.

"Is your name Marks?" asked the stranger authoritatively.

"Yes, sir," replied the thief.

"Have you seen Mr. Falmouth?"

"Not since last night," replied Marks in surprise.

"Then you are to come at once to him."

"Where is he?"

"At Kensington Police Station—there has been an arrest, and he wants you to identify the man."

Billy's heart sank.

"Do I get any of the reward?" he demanded, "that is if I recognize 'im?' "

The other nodded and Billy's hopes rose.

"You must follow me," said the newcomer; "Mr. Falmouth does not wish us to be seen together. Take a first-class ticket to Kensington and get into the next carriage to mine—come."

He turned and crossed the road toward Charing Cross, and Billy followed at a distance.

He found the stranger pacing the platform and gave no sign of recognition. A train pulled into the station, and Marks followed his conductor through a crowd of workmen the train had discharged. He entered an empty first-class carriage, and Marks, obeying instructions, took possession of the adjoining compartment, and found himself the solitary occupant.

Between Charing Cross and Westminster Marks had time to review his position. Between the last station and St. James's Park, he invented his excuses to the detective; between the Park and Victoria he had completed his justification for a share of the reward. Then as the train moved into the tunnel for its five minutes' run to Sloane Square, Billy noticed a draught, and turned his head to see the stranger standing on the footboard of the swaying carriage, holding the half-opened door.

Marks was startled.

"Pull up the window on your side," ordered the man, and Billy, hypnotized by the authoritative voice, obeyed. At that moment he heard the tinkle of broken glass.

He turned with an angry snarl.

"What's the game?" he demanded.

For answer the stranger swung himself clear of the door and, closing it softly, disappeared.

"What's his game?" repeated Marks drowsily. Looking down he saw a broken phial at his feet, by the phial lay a shining sovereign. He stared stupidly at it for a moment, then, just before the train ran into Victoria Station, he stopped to pick it up. . . .

CHAPTER XI
THREE WHO DIED

A passenger leisurely selecting his compartment during the wait at Kensington opened a carriage door and staggered back coughing. A solicitous porter and an alarmed station official ran forward and pulled open the door, and the sickly odour of almonds pervaded the station. A little knot of passengers gathered and peered over one another's shoulders, whilst the station inspector investigated. By and by came a doctor, and a stretcher, and a policeman from the street without. Together they lifted the huddled form of a dead man from the carriage and laid it on the platform.

"Did you find anything?" asked the policeman.

"A sovereign and a broken bottle," was the reply.

The policeman fumbled in the dead man's pockets.

"I don't suppose he'll have any papers to show who he is," he said with knowledge. "Here's a first-class ticket—it must be a case of suicide. Here's a card——"

He turned it over and read it, and his face underwent a change.

He gave a few hurried instructions, then made his way to the nearest telegraph office.

Superintendent Falmouth, who had snatched a few hours' sleep at the Downing Street house, rose with a troubled mind and an uneasy feeling that in spite of all his precautions the day would end disastrously. He was hardly dressed before the arrival of the assistant-commissioner was announced.

"I have your report, Falmouth," was the official's greeting; "you did perfectly right to release Marks—have you had news of him this morning?"

"No."

"H'm," said the commissioner thoughtfully. "I wonder whether——" he did not finish his sentence. "Has it occurred to you that the Four may have realized their danger?"

The detective's face showed surprise.

"Why, of course, sir."

"Have you considered what their probable line of action will be?"

"N—no—unless it takes the form of an attempt to get out of the country."

"Has it struck you that whilst this man Marks is looking for them, they are probably seeking him?"

"Bill is smart," said the detective, uneasily.

"So are they," said the commissioner with an emphatic nod. "My advice is, get in touch with Marks and put two of your best men to watch him."

"That shall be done at once," replied Falmouth; "I am afraid that it is a precaution that should have been taken before."

"I am going to see Sir Philip," the commissioner went on, and he added with a dubious smile, "I shall be obliged to frighten him a little."

"What is the idea?"

"We wish him to drop this bill. Have you seen the morning papers?"

"No, sir."

"They are unanimous that the bill should be abandoned—they say because it is not sufficiently important to warrant the risk, that the country itself is divided on its merit; but as a matter of fact they are afraid of the consequence; and upon my soul I'm a little afraid, too."

He mounted the stairs, and was challenged at the landing by one of his subordinates. This was a system introduced after the episode of the disguised "detective." The foreign minister was now in a state of siege. Nobody was to be trusted, a password had been initiated, and every precaution taken to ensure against a repetition of the previous mistake. His hand was raised to knock upon the panel of the study, when he felt his arm gripped. He turned to see Falmouth with white face and startled eyes.

"They've finished Billy," said the detective breathlessly. "He has just been found in a railway carriage at Kensington."

The commissioner whistled.

"How was it done?" he asked.

Falmouth was the picture of haggard despair.

"Prussic acid gas," he said bitterly; "they are scientific. Look you, sir, persuade this man to drop his damned bill." He pointed to the door of Sir Philip's room. "We shall never save him. I have got the feeling in my bones that he is a doomed man."

"Nonsense!" the commissioner answered sharply. "You are growing nervous—you haven't had enough sleep, Falmouth. That isn't spoken like your real self—we *must* save him."

He turned from the study and beckoned one of the officers who guarded the landing.

"Sergeant, tell Inspector Collins to send an emergency call throughout the area, for reserves to gather immediately. I will put such a cordon round Ramon to-day," he went on addressing Falmouth, "so that no man shall reach him without the fear of being crushed to death."

And within an hour there was witnessed in London a scene that has no parallel in the history of the metropolis. From every district there came a small army of policemen. They arrived by train, by tramway car, by motor-bus, by every vehicle and method of traction that could be requisitioned or seized. They streamed from the stations, they poured through the thoroughfares, till London stood aghast at the realization of the strength of her civic defences.

Whitehall was soon packed from end to end; St. James's Park was black with them. Automatically Whitehall, Charles Street, Birdcage Walk, and the eastern end of the Mall, were barred to all traffic by solid phalanxes of mounted constables. St. George's Street was in the hands of the force, the roof of every house was occupied by a uniformed man, not a house or room that overlooked in the slightest degree the foreign secretary's residence but was subjected to a rigorous search. It was as though martial law had been proclaimed, and indeed two regiments of Guards were under arms the whole of the day ready for any emergency. In Sir Philip's room the commissioner, backed by Falmouth, made his last appeal to the stubborn man whose life was threatened.

"I tell you, sir," said the commissioner earnestly, "we can do no more than we have done, and I am still afraid. These men affect me as would something supernatural. I have a horrible dread that for all our precautions we have left something out of our reckoning; that we are leaving unguarded some avenue which by their devilish ingenuity they may utilize. The death of this man Marks has unnerved me—the Four are ubiquitous as well as omnipotent. I beg of you, sir, for God's sake, think well before you finally reject their terms. Is the passage of this bill so absolutely necessary?"—he paused—"is it worth your life?" he asked with blunt directness; and the crudity of the question made Sir Philip wince.

He waited some time before he replied, and when he spoke his voice was low and firm.

"I shall not withdraw," he said slowly, with a dull, dogged evenness of tone. "I shall not withdraw in any circumstance. I have gone too far," he went on, raising his hand to check

Falmouth's appeal. "I have got beyond fear, I have even got beyond resentment; it is now to me a question of justice. Am I right in introducing a law that will remove from this country colonies of dangerously intelligent criminals, who, whilst enjoying immunity from arrest, urge ignorant men forward to commit acts of violence and treason. If I am right, the Four Just Men are wrong. Or are they right; is this measure an unjust thing, an act of tyranny, a piece of barbarism dropped into the very centre of twentieth-century thought, an anachronism? If these men are right, then I am wrong. So it has come to this, that I have to satisfy my mind as to the standard of right and wrong that I must accept—and I accept my own."

He met the wondering gaze of the officers with a calm, unflinching countenance.

"You were wise to take the precautions you have," he resumed quietly. "I have been foolish to chafe under your protective care."

"We must take even further precautions," the commissioner interrupted; "between six and half-past eight o'clock to-night we wish you to remain in your study, and under no circumstance to open the door to a single person—even to myself or Mr. Falmouth. During that time you must keep your door locked." He hesitated. "If you would rather have one of us with you——"

"No, no," was the minister's quick reply; "after the impersonation of yesterday I would rather be alone."

The commissioner nodded. "This room is anarchist proof," he said, waving his hand round the apartment. "During the night we have made a thorough inspection, examined the floors, the wall, the ceiling, and fixed steel shields to the shutters."

He looked round the chamber with the scrutiny of a man to whom every visible object was familiar.

Then he noticed something new had been introduced. On the table stood a blue china bowl full of roses.

"This is new," he said, bending his head to catch the fragrance of the beautiful flowers.

"Yes," was Ramon's careless reply, "they were sent from my house in Hereford this morning."

The Commissioner plucked a leaf from one of the blooms and rolled it between his fingers. "They look so real," he said paradoxically, "that they might even be artificial."

As he spoke he was conscious that he associated the roses in some way with—what?

He passed slowly down the noble marble stairway—a policeman stood on every other step—and gave his views to Falmouth.

"You cannot blame the old man for his decision; in fact I admire him to-day more than I have ever done before. But"—there was a sudden solemnity in his voice—"I am afraid—I am afraid."

Falmouth said nothing.

"The notebook tells nothing," the Commissioner continued, "save the route that Sir Philip might have taken had he been anxious to arrive at 44, Downing Street by back streets. The futility of the plan is almost alarming, for there is so much evidence of a strong subtle mind behind the seeming innocence of this list of streets that I am confident that we have not got hold of the true inwardness of its meaning."

He passed into the streets and threaded his way between crowds of policemen. The extraordinary character of the precautions taken by the police had the natural result of keeping the general public ignorant of all that was happening in Downing Street. Reporters were prohibited within the magic circle, and newspapers, and particularly the evening newspapers,

had to depend upon such information as was grudgingly offered by Scotland Yard. This was scanty, while their clues and theories, which were many, were various and wonderful.

The *Megaphone*, the newspaper that regarded itself as being most directly interested in the doings of the Four Just Men, strained every nerve to obtain news of the latest developments. With the coming of the fatal day, excitement had reached an extraordinary pitch; every fresh edition of the evening newspapers was absorbed as soon as it reached the streets. There was little material to satisfy the appetite of a sensation-loving public, but such as there was, was given. Pictures of 44, Downing Street, portraits of the Minister, plans of the vicinity of the Foreign Office, with diagrams illustrating existing police precautions, stood out from columns of letterpress dealing, not for the first but for the dozenth time, with the careers of the Four as revealed by their crimes.

And with curiosity at its height, and all London, all England, the whole of the civilized world, talking of one thing and one thing only, there came like a bombshell the news of Marks' death.

Variously described as one of the detectives engaged in the case, as a foreign police officer, as Falmouth himself, the death of Marks grew from "Suicide in a Railway Carriage" to its real importance. Within an hour the story of tragedy, inaccurate in detail, true in substance, filled the columns of the Press. Mystery on mystery! Who was this ill-dressed man, what part was he playing in the great game, how came he by his death? asked the world instantly; and little by little, pieced together by ubiquitous newsmen, the story was made known. On top of this news came the great police march on Whitehall. Here was evidence of the serious view the authorities were taking.

"From my vantage place," wrote Smith in the *Megaphone*, "I could see the length of Whitehall. It was the most wonderful spectacle that London has ever witnessed. I saw nothing but a great sea of black helmets reaching from one end of the broad thoroughfare to the other. Police! The whole vicinity was black with police; they thronged side streets, they crowded into the Park, they formed, not a cordon, but a mass through which it was impossible to penetrate."

For the commissioners of police were leaving nothing to chance. If they were satisfied that cunning could be matched by cunning, craft by craft, stealth by counter stealth, they would have been content to defend their charge on conventional lines. But they were outmanœvred. The stake was too high to depend upon strategy—this was a case that demanded brute force. It is difficult, writing so long after the event, to realize how the terror of the Four had so firmly fastened upon the finest police organization in the world, to appreciate the panic that had come upon a body renowned for its clear-headedness.

The crowd that blocked the approaches to Whitehall soon began to grow as the news of Billy's death circulated, and soon after two o'clock that afternoon, by order of the commissioner, Westminster Bridge was closed to all traffic, vehicular or passenger. The section of the Embankment that runs between Westminster and Hungerford Bridge was next swept by the police and cleared of curious pedestrians; Northumberland Avenue was barred, and before three o'clock there was no space within five hundred yards of the official residence of Sir Philip Ramon that was not held by a representative of the law. Members of Parliament on their way to the House were escorted by mounted men, and, taking on a reflected glory, were cheered by the crowd. All that afternoon a hundred thousand people waited patiently, seeing nothing, save, towering above the heads of a host of constabulary, the spires and towers of the Mother of Parliaments, or the blank faces of the buildings. In Trafalgar Square, along

the Mall as far as the police would allow them, at the lower end of Victoria Street, eight deep along the Albert Embankment, growing in volume every hour, London waited, waited in patience, orderly, content to stare steadfastly at nothing, deriving no satisfaction for their weariness but the sense of being as near as it was humanly possible to be to the scene of a tragedy. A stranger arriving in London, bewildered by this gathering, asked for the cause. A man standing on the outskirts of the Embankment throng pointed across the river with the stem of his pipe.

"We're waiting for a man to be murdered," he said simply, as one who describes a familiar function.

About the edge of these throngs newspaper boys drove a steady trade. From hand to hand the pink sheets were passed over the heads of the crowd. Every half-hour brought a new addition, a new theory, a new description of the scene in which they themselves were playing an ineffectual if picturesque part. The clearing of the Thames Embankment produced an edition; the closing of Westminster Bridge brought another; the arrest of a foolish socialist who sought to harangue the crowd in Trafalgar Square was worthy of another. Every incident of the day was faithfully recorded and industriously devoured.

All that afternoon they waited, telling and retelling the story of the Four, theorizing, speculating, judging. And they spoke of the culmination as one speaks of a promised spectacle, watching the slow-moving hands of Big Ben ticking off the laggard minutes. "Only two more hours to wait," they said at six o'clock, and that sentence, or rather the tone of pleasurable anticipation in which it was said, indicated the spirit of the mob. For a mob is a cruel thing, heartless and unpitying.

Seven o'clock boomed forth, and the angry hum of talk ceased. London watched in silence, and with a quicker beating heart, the last hour crawl round the great clock's dial.

There had been a slight alteration in the arrangements at Downing Street, and it was after seven o'clock before Sir Philip, opening the door of his study, in which he had sat alone, beckoned the commissioner and Falmouth to approach. They walked toward him, stopping a few feet from where he stood.

The minister was pale, and there were lines on his face that had not been there before. But the hand that held the printed paper was steady and his face was sphinx-like.

"I am about to lock my door," he said calmly. "I presume that the arrangements we have agreed upon will be carried out?"

"Yes, sir," answered the commissioner, quietly.

Sir Philip was about to speak, but he checked himself.

After a moment he spoke again.

"I have been a just man according to my lights," he said half to himself. "Whatever happens I am satisfied that I am doing the right thing.—What is that?"

Through the corridor there came a faint roar.

"The people—they are cheering you," said Falmouth, who just before had made a tour of inspection.

The minister's lip curled in disdain, and the familiar acid crept into his voice.

"They will be terribly disappointed if nothing happens," he said bitterly. "The people! God save me from the people, their sympathy, their applause, their insufferable pity."

He turned and pushed open the door of his study, slowly closed the heavy portal, and the two men heard the snick of the lock as he turned the key.

Falmouth looked at his watch.

"Forty minutes," was his laconic comment.

In the dark stood the Four Men.

"It is nearly time," said the voice of Manfred, and Thery shuffled forward and groped on the floor for something.

"Let me strike a match," he grumbled in Spanish.

"No!"

It was Poiccart's sharp voice that arrested him; it was Gonsalez who stooped quickly and passed sensitive fingers over the floor. He found one wire and placed it in Thery's hand, then he reached up and found the other, and Thery deftly tied them together.

"Is it not time?" asked Thery, short of breath from his exertions.

"Wait."

Manfred was examining the illuminated dial of his watch. In silence they waited.

"It is time," said Manfred solemnly, and Thery stretched out his hand.

Stretched out his hand—and groaned and collapsed.

The three heard the groan, felt rather than saw the swaying figure of the man, and heard the thud of him as he struck the floor.

"What has happened?" whispered a tremorless voice; it was Gonsalez.

Manfred was at Thery's side fumbling at his shirt.

"Thery had bungled and paid the consequence," he said in a hushed voice.

"But Ramon——"

"We shall see, we shall see," said Manfred, still with his fingers over the heart of the fallen man.

That forty minutes was the longest that Falmouth ever remembered spending. He had tried to pass it pleasantly by recounting some of the famous criminal cases in which he had played a leading rôle. But he found his tongue wandering after his mind. He grew incoherent, almost hysterical. The word had been passed round that there was to be no talking in tones above a whisper, and absolute silence reigned, save an occasional sibilant murmur as a necessary question was asked or answered.

Policemen were established in every room, on the roof, in the basement, in every corridor, and each man was armed. Falmouth looked round. He sat in the secretary's office, having arranged for Hamilton to be at the House. Every door stood wide open, wedged back, so that no group of policemen should be out of sight of another.

"I cannot think what can happen," he whispered for the twentieth time to his superior. "It is impossible for those fellows to keep their promise—absolutely impossible."

"The question to my mind is, whether they will keep their other promise," was the commissioner's reply, "whether, having found that they have failed they will give up their attempt. One thing is certain," he proceeded, "if Ramon comes out of this alive, his rotten bill will pass without opposition."

He looked at his watch. To be exact, he had held his watch in his hand since Sir Philip had entered his room.

"It wants five minutes," he sighed anxiously.

He walked softly to the door of Sir Philip's room and listened.

"I can hear nothing," he said.

The next five minutes passed more slowly than any of the preceding.

“It is just on the hour,” said Falmouth in a strained voice, “we have——”

The distant chime of Big Ben boomed once.

“The hour!” he whispered, and both men listened.

“Two,” muttered Falmouth, counting the strokes.

“Three.”

“Four.”

“Five—what’s that?” he muttered quickly.

“I heard nothing,—yes, I heard something.” He sprang to the door and bent his head to the level of the keyhole. “What is that? What——”

Then from the room came a quick sharp cry of pain, a crash—and silence.

“Quick—this way, men!” shouted Falmouth and threw his weight against the door.

It did not yield a fraction of an inch.

“Together!”

Three burly constables flung themselves against the panels, and the door smashed open.

Falmouth and the commissioner ran into the room.

“My God!” cried Falmouth in horror.

Sprawled across the table at which he had been sitting was the figure of the foreign secretary.

The paraphernalia that littered his table had been thrown to the floor as in a struggle.

The commissioner stepped to the fallen man and raised him. One look at the face was sufficient.

“Dead!” he whispered hoarsely. He looked around—save for the police and the dead man the room was empty.

CHAPTER XII
A NEWSPAPER CUTTING

The Court was again crowded to-day in anticipation of the evidence of the assistant-commissioner of police and Sir Francis Katling, the famous surgeon.

Before the proceedings recommenced the coroner remarked that he had received a great number of letters from all kinds of people containing theories, some of them peculiarly fantastic, as to the cause of Sir Philip Ramon's death.

"The police inform me that they are eager to receive suggestions," said the coroner, "and will welcome any view however bizarre."

The assistant-commissioner of police was the first witness called, and gave in detail the story of the events that had led up to the finding of the late secretary's dead body. He then went on to describe the appearance of the room. Heavy book-cases filled two sides of the room, the third or south-west was pierced with three windows, the fourth was occupied by a case containing maps arranged on the roller principle.

Were the windows fastened?—Yes.

And adequately protected?—Yes; by wooden folding shutters sheathed with steel.

Was there any indication that these had been tampered with?—None whatever.

Did you institute a search of the room?—Yes; a minute search.

By the foreman of the jury: Immediately?—Yes; after the body was removed every article of furniture was taken out of the room, the carpets were taken up, and the walls and ceilings stripped.

And nothing was found?—Nothing.

Is there a fireplace in the room?—Yes.

Was there any possibility of any person effecting an entrance by that method?—Absolutely none.

You have seen the newspapers?—Yes; some of them.

You have seen the suggestion put forward that the deceased was slain by the introduction of a deadly gas?—Yes.

Was that possible?—I hardly think so.

By the foreman: Did you find any means by which such a gas could be introduced?—(The witness hesitated.) None, except an old disused gaspipe that had an opening above the desk. (Sensation.)

Was there any indication of the presence of such a gas?—Absolutely none.

No smell?—None whatever.

But there are gases which are at once deadly and scentless—carbon dioxide, for example?—Yes; there are.

By the foreman: Did you test the atmosphere for the presence of such a gas?—No; but I entered the room before it would have had time to dissipate; I should have noticed it.

Was the room disarranged in any way?—Except for the table there was no disarrangement.

Did you find the contents of the table disturbed?—Yes.

Will you describe exactly the appearance of the table?—One or two heavy articles of table furniture, such as the silver candlesticks, etc., alone remained in their positions. On the floor were a number of papers, the inkstand, a pen and (here the witness drew a notecase from his

pocket and extracted a small black shrivelled object) a smashed flower bowl and a number of roses.

Did you find anything in the dead man's hand?—Yes, I found this.

The detective held up a withered rosebud, and a thrill of horror ran through the court.

That is a rose?—Yes.

The coroner consulted the commissioner's written report.

Did you notice anything peculiar about the hand?—Yes, where the flower had been there was a round black stain. (Sensation.)

Can you account for that?—No.

By the foreman: What steps did you take when you discovered this?—I had the flowers carefully collected and as much of the water as was possible absorbed by clean blotting-paper; these were sent to the Home Office for analysis.

Do you know the result of that analysis?—So far as I know, it has revealed nothing.

Did the analysis include leaves from the rose you have in your possession?—Yes.

The assistant-commissioner then went on to give details of the police arrangements for the day. It was impossible, he emphatically stated, for any person to have entered or left 44, Downing Street without being observed. Immediately after the murder the police on duty were ordered to stand fast. Most of the men, said the witness, were on duty for twenty-six hours at a stretch.

At this stage there was revealed the most sensational feature of the inquiry. It came with dramatic suddenness, and was the result of a question put by the coroner, who constantly referred to the commissioner's signed statement that lay before him.

You know of a man called Thery?—Yes.

He was one of a band calling themselves "The Four Just Men?"—I believe so.

A reward was offered for his apprehension?—Yes.

He was suspected of complicity in the plot to murder Sir Philip Ramon?—Yes.

Has he been found?—Yes.

This monosyllabic reply drew a spontaneous cry of surprise from the crowded court.

When was he found?—This morning.

Where?—On Romney Marshes.

Was he dead?—Yes. (Sensation.)

Was there anything peculiar about the body? (The whole court waited for the answer with bated breath.)—Yes; on his right palm was a stain similar to that found on the hand of Sir Philip Ramon!

A shiver ran through the crowd of listeners.

Was a rose found in his hand also?—No.

By the foreman: Was there any indication as to how Thery came to be where he was found?—None.

The witness added that no papers or documents of any kind were found upon the man.

Sir Francis Katling was the next witness.

He was sworn and was accorded permission to give his evidence from the solicitors' table, on which he had spread the voluminous notes of his observations. For half an hour he devoted himself to a purely technical record of his examinations. There were three possible causes of death. It might have been natural: the man's weak heart was sufficient to cause such; it might have been by asphyxiation; it might have been the result of a blow that by some extraordinary means left no contusion.

There were no traces of poison?—None.

You have heard the evidence of the last witness?—Yes.

And that portion of the evidence that dealt with a black stain?—Yes.

Did you examine that stain?—Yes.

Have you formed any theories regarding it?—Yes; it seems to me as if it were formed by an acid.

Carbolic acid, for instance?—Yes; but there was no indication of any of the acids of commerce.

You saw the man Thery's hand?—Yes.

Was the stain of a similar character?—Yes, but larger and more irregular.

Were there any signs of acid?—None.

By the foreman: You have seen many of the fantastic theories put forward by the press and public?—Yes; I have paid careful attention to them.

And you see nothing in them that would lead you to believe that the deceased met his end by the methods suggested?—No.

Gas?—Impossible; it must have been immediately detected.

The introduction into the room of some subtle poison that would asphyxiate and leave no trace?—Such a drug is unknown to medical science.

You have seen the rose found in Sir Philip's hand?—Yes.

How do you account for that?—I cannot account for it.

Nor for the stain?—No.

By the foreman: You have formed no definite opinion regarding the cause of death?—No; I merely submit one of the three suggestions I have offered.

Are you a believer in hypnotism?—Yes, to a certain extent.

In hypnotic suggestion?—Again, to a certain extent.

Is it possible that the suggestion of death coming at a certain hour so persistently threatened might have led to death?—I do not quite understand you.

Is it possible that the deceased is a victim to hypnotic suggestion?—I do not believe it possible.

By the foreman: You speak of a blow leaving no contusion. In your experience have you ever seen such a case?—Yes; twice.

But a blow sufficient to cause death?—Yes.

Without leaving a bruise or any mark whatever?—Yes; I saw a case in Japan where a man by exerting a peculiar pressure on the throat produced instant death.

Is that ordinary?—No; it is very unordinary; sufficiently so to create a considerable stir in medical circles. The case was recorded in the *British Medical Journal* in 1896.

And there was no contusion or bruise?—Absolutely none whatever.

The famous surgeon then read a long extract from the *British Medical Journal* bearing out this statement.

Would you say that the deceased died in this way?—It is possible.

By the foreman: Do you advance that as a serious possibility?—Yes.

With a few more questions of a technical character the examination closed.

As the great surgeon left the box there was a hum of conversation, and keen disappointment was felt on all sides. It had been hoped that the evidence of the medical expert would have thrown light into dark places, but it left the mystery of Sir Philip Ramon's death as far from explanation as ever.

Superintendent Falmouth was the next witness called.

The detective, who gave his evidence in clear tones, was evidently speaking under stress of very great emotion. He seemed to appreciate very keenly the failure of the police to safeguard the life of the dead minister. It is an open secret that immediately after the tragedy both the officer and the assistant-commissioner tendered their resignations, which, at the express instruction of the prime minister, were not accepted.

Mr. Falmouth repeated a great deal of the evidence already given by the Commissioner, and told the story of how he had stood on duty outside the foreign secretary's door at the moment of the tragedy. As he detailed the events of that evening a deathly silence came upon the court.

You say you heard a noise proceeding from the study?—Yes.

What sort of a noise?—Well, it is hard to describe what I heard; it was one of those indefinite noises that sounded like a chair being pulled across a soft surface.

Would it be a noise like the sliding of a door or panel?—Yes. (Sensation.)

That is the noise as you described it in your report?—Yes.

Was any panel discovered?—No.

Or any sliding door?—No.

Would it have been possible for a person to have secreted himself in any of the bureaux or bookcases?—No; these were examined.

What happened next?—I heard a click and a cry from Sir Philip, and endeavoured to burst open the door.

By the foreman: It was locked?—Yes.

And Sir Philip was alone?—Yes; it was by his wish: a wish expressed earlier in the day.

After the tragedy did you make a systematic search both inside and outside of the house?—Yes.

Did you make any discovery?—None, except that I made a discovery curious in itself, but having no possible bearing on the case now.

What was this?—Well, it was the presence on the window-sill of the room of two dead sparrows.

Were these examined?—Yes; but the surgeon who dissected them gave the opinion that they died from exposure and had fallen from the parapet above.

Was there any trace of poison in these birds?—None that could be discovered.

At this point Sir Francis Katling was recalled. He had seen the birds. He could find no trace of poison.

Granted the possibility of such a gas as we have already spoken of—a deadly gas with the property of rapid dissipation—might not the escape of a minute quantity of such a fume bring about the death of these birds?—Yes, if they were resting on the window-sill.

By the foreman: Do you connect these birds with the tragedy?—I do not, replied the witness emphatically.

Superintendent Falmouth resumed his evidence.

Were there any other curious features that struck you?—None.

The Coroner proceeded to question the witness concerning the relations of Marks with the police.

Was the stain found on Sir Philip's hand, and on the hand of the man Thery, found also on Marks?—No.

It was as the court was dispersing, and little groups of men stood discussing the most extraordinary verdict ever given by a coroner's jury, "Death from some unknown cause, and wilful murder against some person or persons unknown," that the coroner himself met on the threshold of the court a familiar face.

"Hullo, Carson!" he said in surprise. "You here, too? I should have thought that your bankrupts kept you busy—even on a day like this—extraordinary case."

"Extraordinary," agreed the other.

"Were you there all the time?"

"Yes," replied the spectator.

"Did you notice what a bright foreman we had?"

"Yes; I think he would make a smarter lawyer than a company promoter."

"You know him, then?"

"Yes," yawned the Official Receiver; "poor devil, he thought he was going to set the Thames on fire, floated a company to reproduce photogravures and things—took Etheringtons' off our hands, but it's back again."

"Has he failed?" asked the coroner in surprise.

"Not exactly failed. He's just given it up, says the climate doesn't suit him—what is his name again?"

"Manfred," said the coroner.

CHAPTER XIII
CONCLUSION

Falmouth sat on the opposite side of the chief commissioner's desk, his hands clasped before him. On the blotting-pad lay a thin sheet of grey notepaper.

The commissioner picked it up again and reread it.

> "When you receive this," it ran, "we who for want of a better title call ourselves 'The Four Just Men' will be scattered throughout Europe, and there is little likelihood of your ever tracing us. In no spirit of boastfulness we say: We have accomplished that which we set ourselves to accomplish. In no sense of hypocrisy we repeat our regret that such a step as we took was necessary.
>
> "Sir Philip Ramon's death would appear to have been an accident. This much we confess. Thery bungled—and paid the penalty. We depended too much upon his technical knowledge. Perhaps by diligent search you will solve the mystery of Sir Philip Ramon's death—when such a search is rewarded you will realize the truth of this statement. Farewell."

"It tells us nothing," said the Commissioner.

Falmouth shook his head despairingly.

"Search!" he said bitterly. "We have searched the house in Downing Street from end to end—where else can we search?"

"Is there no paper amongst Sir Philip's documents that might conceivably put you on the track?"

"None that we have seen."

The chief bit the end of his pen thoughtfully.

"Has his country house been examined?"

Falmouth frowned.

"I didn't think that necessary."

"Nor Portland Place?"

"No; it was locked up at the time of the murder."

The commissioner rose.

"Try Portland Place," he advised. "At present it is in the hands of Sir Philip's executors."

The detective hailed a hansom, and in a quarter of an hour found himself knocking upon the gloomy portals of the late foreign secretary's town house. A grave man-servant opened the door; it was Sir Philip's butler, a man known to Falmouth, who greeted him with a nod.

"I want to make a search of the house, Perks," he said. "Has anything been touched?"

The man shook his head.

"No, Mr. Falmouth," he replied, "everything is just as Sir Philip left it. The lawyer gentlemen have not even made an inventory."

Falmouth walked through the chilly hall to the comfortable little room set apart for the butler.

"I should like to start with the study," he said.

"I'm afraid there will be a difficulty, then, sir," said Perks, respectfully.

"Why?" demanded Falmouth, sharply.

"It is the only room in the house for which we have no key. Sir Philip had a special lock for his study, and carried the key with him. You see, being a cabinet minister, and a very careful man, he was very particular about people entering his study."

Falmouth thought. A number of Sir Philip's private keys were deposited at Scotland Yard. He scribbled a brief note to his chief and sent a footman by cab to the Yard. Whilst he was waiting he sounded the butler.

"Where were you when the murder was committed, Perks?" he asked.

"In the country: Sir Philip sent away all the servants, you will remember."

"And the house?"

"Was empty—absolutely empty."

"Was there any evidence on your return that any person had effected an entrance?"

"None, sir; it would be next to impossible to burgle this house. There are alarm wires fixed communicating with the police station, and the windows are automatically locked."

"There were no marks on the doors or windows that would lead you to believe that an entrance had been attempted?"

The butler shook his head emphatically.

"None; in the course of my daily duty I make a very careful inspection of the paintwork, and I should have noticed any marks of the kind."

In half an hour the footman, accompanied by a detective, returned, and Falmouth took from the plain-clothed officer a small bunch of keys.

The butler led the way to the first floor.

He indicated the study, a massive oaken door, fitted with a microscopic lock.

Very carefully Falmouth made his selection of keys. Twice he tried unsuccessfully, but at the third attempt the lock turned with a click, and the door opened noiselessly.

He stood for a moment at the entrance, for the room was in darkness.

"I forgot," said Perks; "the shutters are closed—shall I open them?"

"If you please," said the detective.

In a few minutes the room was flooded with light.

It was a plainly furnished apartment, rather similar in appearance to that in which the Foreign Secretary met his end. It smelt mustily of old leather, and the walls of the room were covered with bookshelves. In the centre stood a big mahogany writing-table, with bundles of papers neatly arranged.

Falmouth took a rapid and careful survey of this desk. It was thick with accumulated dust. At one end, within reach of the vacant chair, stood an ordinary table telephone.

"No bells," said Falmouth.

"No," replied the butler. "Sir Philip disliked bells—there is a 'buzzer.' "

Falmouth remembered.

"Of course," he said quickly. "I remember—hullo!"

He bent forward eagerly.

"Why, what has happened to the telephone?"

He might well ask, for its steel was warped and twisted. Beneath where the vulcanite receiver stood was a tiny heap of black ash, and of the flexible cord that connected it with the outside world nothing remained but a twisted piece of discoloured wire.

The table on which it stood was blistered as with some great heat.

The detective drew a long breath.

He turned to his subordinate.

"Run across to Miller's in Regent Street—the electrician—and ask Mr. Miller to come here at once."

He was still standing gazing at the telephone when the electrician arrived.

"Mr. Miller," said Falmouth slowly, "what has happened to this telephone?"

The electrician adjusted his pince-nez and inspected the ruin.

"H'm," he said, "it rather looks as though some linesman had been criminally careless."

"Linesman? What do you mean?" demanded Falmouth.

"I mean the workmen engaged to fix telephone wires." He made another inspection. "Cannot you see?" He pointed to the battered instrument.

"I see that the machine is entirely ruined—but why?"

The electrician stooped and picked up the scorched wire from the ground.

"What I mean is this," he said; "somebody has attached a wire carrying a high voltage—probably an electric-lighting wire—to this telephone line; and if anybody had happened to be at——" He stopped suddenly, and his face went white. "Good God!" he whispered, "Sir Philip Ramon was electrocuted!"

For a while not one of the party spoke. Then Falmouth's hand darted into his pocket and he drew out the little notebook which Billy Marks had stolen.

"That is the solution," he cried; "here is the direction the wires took—but how is it that the telephone at Downing Street was not destroyed in a similar manner?"

The electrician, white and shaking, shook his head impatiently.

"I have given up trying to account for the vagaries of electricity," he said; "besides, the current, the full force of the current, might been have diverted—a short circuit might have effected—anything might have happened."

"Wait!" said Falmouth eagerly. "Suppose the man making the connection had bungled—had taken the full force of the current himself—would that have brought about this result?"

"It might——"

" 'Thery bungled—and paid the penalty,' " quoted Falmouth slowly. "Ramon got a slight shock—sufficient to frighten him—he had a weak heart—the burn on his hand, the dead sparrows! By Heaven! it's as clear as daylight!"

Later, a strong force of police raided the house in Carnaby Street, but they found nothing—nothing except a half-smoked cigarette bearing the name of a London tobacconist, and the counterfoil of a passage ticket to New York.

It was marked "per R.M.S. *Lucania*," and was for three first-class passengers.

When the *Lucania* arrived at New York she was searched from stem to stern but the Four Just Men were not discovered.

It was Gonsalez who had placed the "clue" for the police to find.

Falmouth expressed the thought of the whole police department—of all the forces of law and order—not so very long after this when, reviewing all the facts in the case of Sir Philip Ramon in a discussion with his chief, he suddenly burst out, "Think what it would mean if some time we might have these men working with us instead of *against* us!"

PART II
THE COUNCIL OF JUSTICE

CHAPTER I
THE RED HUNDRED

It is not for you or me to judge Manfred and his works. I say "Manfred," though I might as well have said "Gonsalez," or for the matter of that "Poiccart," since they are equally guilty or great according to the light in which you view their acts. The most lawless of us would hesitate to defend them, but the greater humanitarian could scarcely condemn them.

From the standpoint of us, who live within the law, going about our business in conformity with the code, and unquestioningly keeping to the left or to the right as the police direct, their methods were terrible, indefensible, revolting.

It does not greatly affect the issue that, for want of a better word, we call them criminals. Such would be mankind's unanimous designation, but I think—indeed, I know—that they were indifferent to the opinions of the human race. I doubt very much whether they expected posterity to honour them.

Their action towards the cabinet minister was murder, pure and simple. Yet, in view of the large humanitarian problems involved, who would describe it as pernicious?

Frankly I say of the three men who killed Sir Philip Ramon, and who slew ruthlessly in the name of Justice, that my sympathies are with them. There are crimes for which there is no adequate punishment, and offences that the machinery of the written law cannot efface. Therein lies the justification for the Four Just Men,—the Council of Justice as they presently came to call themselves,—a council of great intellects, passionless.

And not long after the death of Sir Philip and while England still rang with that exploit, they performed an act or a series of acts that won not alone from the Government of Great Britain, but from the Governments of Europe, a sort of unofficial approval and Falmouth had his wish. For here they waged war against great world-criminals; they pitted their strength, their cunning, and their wonderful intellects against the most powerful organization of the underworld; against past masters of villainous arts, and brains equally agile.

It was the day of days for the Red Hundred. The wonderful international congress was meeting in London, the first great congress of recognised Anarchism. This was no hole-and-corner gathering of hurried men speaking furtively, but one open and unafraid with three policemen specially retained for duty outside the hall, a commissionaire to take tickets at the outer lobby, and a shorthand writer with a knowledge of French and Yiddish to make notes of remarkable utterances.

The wonderful congress was a fact. When it had been broached there were people who laughed at the idea; Niloff of Vitebsk was one because he did not think such openness possible. But little Peter (his preposterous name was Konoplanikova, and he was a reporter on the staff of the foolish *Russkoye Znamźa*), this little Peter who had thought out the whole thing, whose idea it was to gather a conference of the Red Hundred in London, who hired the hall and issued the bills (bearing in the top left-hand corner the inverted triangle of the Hundred) asking those Russians in London interested in the building of a Russian Sailors' Home to apply for tickets, who, too, secured a hall where interruption was impossible, was happy—yea, little brothers, it was a great day for Peter.

"You can always deceive the police," said little Peter enthusiastically; "call a meeting with a philanthropic object and—*voilà!*"

Wrote Inspector Falmouth to the assistant-commissioner of police:—

> "Your respected communication to hand. The meeting to be held to-night at the Phoenix Hall, Middlesex Street, E., with the object of raising funds for a Russian Sailors' Home is, of course, the first international congress of the Red Hundred. Shall not be able to get a man inside, but do not think that matters much, as meeting will be engaged throwing flowers at one another and serious business will not commence till the meeting of the inner committee.
>
> "I inclose a list of men already arrived in London, and have the honour to request that you will send me portraits of under-mentioned men."

There were three delegates from Baden, Herr Schmidt from Frieburg, Herr Bleaumeau from Karlsruhe, and Herr Von Dunop from Mannheim. They were not considerable persons, even in the eyes of the world of Anarchism; they called for no particular notice, and therefore the strange thing that happened to them on the night of the congress is all the more remarkable.

Herr Schmidt had left his *pension* in Bloomsbury and was hurrying eastward. It was a late autumn evening and a chilly rain fell, and Herr Schmidt was debating in his mind whether he should go direct to the rendezvous where he had promised to meet his two compatriots, or whether he should call a taxi and drive direct to the hall, when a hand grasped his arm.

He turned quickly and reached for his hip-pocket. Two men stood behind him and but for themselves the square through which he was passing was deserted.

Before he could grasp the Browning pistol, his other arm was seized and the taller of the two men spoke.

"You are Augustus Schmidt?" he asked.

"That is my name."

"You are an Anarchist?"

"That is my affair."

"You are at present on your way to a meeting of the Red Hundred?"

Herr Schmidt opened his eyes in genuine astonishment.

"How did you know that?" he asked.

"I am Detective Simpson from Scotland Yard, and I shall take you into custody," was the quiet reply.

"On what charge?" demanded the German.

"As to that I shall tell you later."

The man from Baden shrugged his shoulders.

"I have yet to learn that it is an offence in England to hold opinions."

A closed motor-car entered the square, and the shorter of the two whistled and the chauffeur drew up near the group.

The Anarchist turned to the man who had arrested him.

"I warn you that you shall answer for this," he said wrathfully. "I have an important engagement that you have made me miss through your foolery and——"

"Get in!" interrupted the tall man tersely.

Schmidt stepped into the car and the door snapped behind him.

He was alone and in darkness. The car moved on and then Schmidt discovered that there were no windows to the vehicle. A wild idea came to him that he might escape. He tried the

door of the car; it was immovable. He cautiously tapped it. It was lined with thin sheets of steel.

"A prison on wheels," he muttered with a curse, and sank back into the corner of the car.

He did not know London; he had not the slightest idea where he was going. For ten minutes the car moved along. He was puzzled. These policemen had taken nothing from him, he still retained his pistol. They had not even attempted to search him for compromising documents. Not that he had any except the pass for the conference and—the Inner Code!

Heavens! He must destroy that. He thrust his hand into the inner pocket of his coat. It was empty. The thin leather case was gone! His face went grey, for the Red Hundred is no fanciful secret society but a bloody-minded organisation with less mercy for bungling brethren than for its sworn enemies. In the thick darkness of the car his nervous fingers groped through all his pockets. There was no doubt at all—the papers had gone.

In the midst of his search the car stopped. He slipped the flat pistol from his pocket. His position was desperate and he was not the kind of man to shirk a risk.

Once there was a brother of the Red Hundred who sold a password to the Secret Police. And the brother escaped from Russia. There was a woman in it, and the story is a mean little story that is hardly worth the telling. Only, the man and the woman escaped, and went to Baden, and Schmidt recognized them from the portraits he had received from headquarters, and one night. . . . You understand that there was nothing clever or neat about it. English newspapers would have described it as a "revolting murder," because the details of the crime were rather shocking. The thing that stood to Schmidt's credit in the books of the Society was that the murderer was undiscovered.

The memory of this episode came back to the Anarchist as the car stopped—perhaps this was the thing the police had discovered? Out of the dark corners of his mind came the scene again, and the voice of the man. . . . "Don't! don't! O Christ! don't!" and Schmidt sweated. . . .

The door of the car opened and he slipped back the cover of his pistol.

"Don't shoot," said a quiet voice in the gloom outside, "here are some friends of yours."

He lowered his pistol, for his quick ears detected a wheezing cough.

"Von Dunop!" he cried in astonishment.

"And Herr Bleaumeau," said the same voice. "Get in, you two."

Two men stumbled into the car, one dumfounded and silent—save for the wheezing cough—the other blasphemous and voluble.

"Wait, my friend!" raved the bulk of Bleaumeau; "wait! I will make you sorry. . . ."

The door shut and the car moved on.

The two men outside watched the vehicle with its unhappy passengers disappear round a corner and then walked slowly away.

"Extraordinary men," said the taller.

"Most," replied the other, and then, "Von Dunop—isn't he——?"

"The man who threw the bomb at the Swiss President—yes."

The shorter man smiled in the darkness.

"Given a conscience, he is enduring his hour," he said.

The pair walked on in silence and turned into Oxford Street as the clock of a church struck eight.

The tall man lifted his walking-stick and a sauntering taxi pulled up at the curb.

"Aldgate," he said, and the two men took their seats.

Not until the taxi was spinning along Newgate Street did either of the men speak, and then the shorter asked:

"You are thinking about the woman?"

The other nodded and his companion relapsed into silence; then he spoke again:

"She is a problem and a difficulty, in a way—yet she is the most dangerous of the lot. And the curious thing about it is that if she were not beautiful and young she would not be a problem at all. We're very human, George. God made us illogical that the minor businesses of life should not interfere with the great scheme. And the great scheme is that animal men should select animal women for the mothers of their children."

"*Venenum in auro bibitur*," the other quoted, which shows that he was an extraordinary detective, "and so far as I am concerned it matters little to me whether an irresponsible homicide is a beautiful woman or a misshapen negro."

They dismissed the taxi at Aldgate Station and turned into Middlesex Street.

The meeting-place of the great congress was a hall which was originally erected by an enthusiastic Christian gentleman with a weakness for the conversion of Jews to the New Presbyterian Church. With this laudable object it had been opened with great pomp and the singing of anthems and the enthusiastic proselytizer had spoken on that occasion two hours and forty minutes by the clock.

After twelve months' labour the Christian gentleman discovered that the advantages of Christianity only appeal to very rich Jews indeed, to the Cohens who become Cowans, to the Isaacs who become Grahames, and to the curious low-down Jews who stand in the same relation to their brethren as White Kaffirs to a European community.

So the hall passed from hand to hand, and, failing to obtain a music and dancing licence, went back to the mission-hall stage.

Successive generations of small boys had destroyed its windows and beplastered its walls. Successive fly-posters had touched its blank face with colour. To-night there was nothing to suggest that there was any business of extraordinary importance being transacted within its walls. A Russian or a Yiddish or any kind of reunion does not greatly excite Middlesex Street, and had little Peter boldly announced that the congress of the Red Hundred were to meet in full session there would have been no local excitement and—if the truth be told—he might still have secured the services of his three policemen and commissionaire.

To this worthy, a neat, cleanly gentleman in uniform, wearing on his breast the medals for the relief of Chitral and the Soudan Campaigns, the two men delivered the perforated halves of their tickets and passed through the outer lobby into a small room. By a door at the other end stood a thin man with a straggling beard. His eyes were red-rimmed and weak, he wore long narrow buttoned boots, and he had a trick of pecking his head forward and sideways like an inquisitive hen.

"You have the word, brothers?" he asked, speaking German like one unaccustomed to the language.

The taller of the two strangers shot a swift glance at the sentinel that absorbed the questioner from his cracked patent leather boots to his flamboyant watch-chain. Then he answered in Italian:

"Nothing!"

The face of the guardian flushed with pleasure at the familiar tongue.

"Pass, brother; it is very good to hear that language."

The air of the crowded hall struck the two men in the face like the blast from a destructor. It was unclean; unhealthy—the scent of an early-morning doss-house.

The hall was packed, the windows were closed and curtained, and as a precautionary measure, little Peter had placed thick blankets before the ventilators.

At one end of the hall was a platform on which stood a semicircle of chairs and in the centre was a table draped with red. On the wall behind the chairs—every one of which was occupied—was a huge red flag bearing in the centre a great white "C." It had been tacked to the wall, but one corner had broken away revealing a part of the painted scroll of the mission workers: ". . . are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

The two intruders pushed their way through a group that were gathered at the door. Three aisles ran the length of the building, and they made their way along the central gangway and found seats near the platform.

A brother was speaking. He was a good and zealous worker but a bad orator. He spoke in German and enunciated commonplace with hoarse emphasis. He said all the things that other men had said and forgotten. "This is the time to strike" was his most notable sentence, and notable only because it evoked a faint buzz of applause.

The audience stirred impatiently. The good Bentvitch had spoken beyond his allotted time; and there were other people to speak—and prosy at that. And it would be ten o'clock before the Woman of Gratz would rise.

The babble was greatest in the corner of the hall, where little Peter, all eyes and startled eyebrows, was talking to an audience of his own.

"It is impossible, it is absurd, it is most foolish!" his thin voice rose almost to a scream. "I should laugh at it—we should all laugh, but the Woman of Gratz has taken the matter seriously, and she is afraid!"

"Afraid!"

"Nonsense!"

"Oh, Peter, the fool!"

There were other things said because everybody in the vicinity expressed an opinion. Peter was distressed, but not by the epithets. He was crushed, humiliated, beaten by his tremendous tidings. He was nearly crying at the horrible thought. The Woman of Gratz was afraid! The Woman of Gratz who. . . . It was unthinkable.

He turned his eyes toward the platform, but she was not there.

"Tell us about it, Peter," pleaded a dozen voices; but the little man with the tears twinkling on his fair eyelashes waved them off.

So far from his incoherent outburst they had learnt only this—that the Woman of Gratz was afraid.

And that was bad enough.

For this woman—she was a girl really, a slip of a child who should have been finishing her education somewhere in Germany—this same woman had once risen and electrified the world.

There had been a meeting in a small Hungarian town to discuss ways and means. And when the men had finished their denunciation of Austria, she rose and talked. A short-skirted little girl with two long flaxen braids of hair, thin-legged, flat-chested, angular, hipless,—that is what the men of Gratz noticed as they smiled behind their hands and wondered why her father had brought her to the meeting.

But her speech . . . two hours she spoke and no man stirred. A little flat-chested girl full of sonorous phrases—mostly she had collected them from the talk in Old Joseph's kitchen. But with some power of her own, she had spun them together, these inconsiderable truisms, and had endowed them with a wondrous vitality.

They were old, old platitudes, if the truth be told, but at some time in the history of revolution, some long dead genius had coined them, and newly fashioned in the furnace of his soul they had shaped men's minds and directed their great and dreadful deeds.

So the Woman of Gratz arrived, and they talked about her and circulated her speeches in every language. And she grew. The hollow face of this lank girl filled, and the flat bosom rounded and there came softer lines and curves to her angular figure, and, almost before they realised the fact, she was beautiful.

So her fame had grown until her father died and she went to Russia. Then came a series of outrages which may be categorically and briefly set forth:—

1. General Maloff shot dead by an unknown woman in his private room at the Police Bureau, Moscow.
2. Prince Hazallarkoff shot dead by an unknown woman in the streets of Petrograd.
3. Colonel Kaverdavskov killed by a bomb thrown by a woman who made her escape.

And the Woman of Gratz leapt to a greater fame. She had been arrested half a dozen times, and whipped twice, but they could prove nothing against her and elicit nothing from her—and she was very beautiful.

Now to the thundering applause of the waiting delegates, she stepped upon the platform and took the last speaker's place by the side of the red-covered table.

She raised her hand and absolute and complete silence fell on the hall, so much so that her first words sounded strident and shrill, for she had attuned her voice to the din. She recovered her pitch and dropped her voice to a conversational tone.

She stood easily with her hands clasped behind her and made no gesture. The emotion that was within her she conveyed through her wonderful voice. Indeed, the power of the speech lay rather in its delivery than in its substance, for only now and then did she depart from the unwritten text of Anarchism: the right of the oppressed to overthrow the oppressor; the divinity of violence; the sacredness of sacrifice and martyrdom in the cause of enlightenment. One phrase alone stood apart from the commonplace of her oratory. She was speaking of the Theorists who counsel reform and condemn violence, "These Christs who deputize their Calvaries," she called them with fine scorn, and the hall roared its approval of the imagery.

It was the fury of the applause that disconcerted her; the taller of the two men who sat watching her realized that much. For when the shouting had died down and she strove to resume, she faltered and stammered and then was silent. Then abruptly and with surprising vehemence she began again. But she had changed the direction of her oratory, and it was upon another subject that she now spoke. A subject nearer to her at that moment than any other, for her pale cheeks flushed and a feverish light came to her eyes as she spoke.

". . . and now, with all our perfect organization, with the world almost within our grasp—there comes somebody who says 'Stop!'—and we who by our acts have terrorized kings and dominated the councils of empires, are ourselves threatened!"

The audience grew deadly silent. They were silent before, but now the silence was painful.

The two men who watched her stirred a little uneasily, as though something in her speech had jarred. Indeed, the suggestion of braggadocio in her assertion of the Red Hundred's power had struck a discordant note.

The girl continued speaking rapidly.

"We have heard—you have heard—we know of these men who have written to us. They say"—her voice rose—"that we shall not do what we do. They threaten us—they threaten me—that we must change our methods, or they will punish as—as we—punish; kill as we kill ____"

There was a murmuring in the audience and men looked at one another in amazement. For terror unmistakable and undisguised was written on her pale face and shone from those wondrous eyes of hers.

"But we will defy——"

Loud voices and the sound of scuffling in the little anteroom interrupted her, and a warning word shouted brought the audience to its feet.

"The police!"

A hundred stealthy hands reached for cunning pockets, but somebody leapt upon a bench, near the entrance, and held up an authoritative hand.

"Gentlemen, there is no occasion for alarm—I am Detective-Superintendent Falmouth from Scotland Yard, and I have no quarrel with the Red Hundred."

Little Peter, transfixed for the moment, pushed his way towards the detective.

"Who do you want—what do you want?" he asked.

The detective stood with his back to the door and answered.

"I want two men who were seen to enter this hall: two members of an organization that is outside the Red Hundred. They——"

"Ha!" The woman who still stood upon the platform leant forward with blazing eyes.

"I know—I know!" she cried breathlessly; "the men who threatened us—who threatened me—The Four Just Men!"

CHAPTER II
THE FOURTH MAN

The tall man's hand was in his pocket when the detective spoke.

When he had entered the hall he had thrown a swift glance round the place and taken in every detail. He had seen the beaded strip of unpainted wood which guarded the electric light cables, and had improved the opportunity whilst the prosy brother was speaking to make a further reconnaissance. There was a white porcelain switchboard with half a dozen switches at the left-hand side of the platform. He judged the distance and threw up the hand that held the pistol.

Bang! Bang!

A crash of broken glass, a quick flash of blue flame from the shattered fuses—and the hall was in darkness. It happened before the detective could spring from his form into the yelling, screaming crowd—before the police officer could get a glance at the man who fired the shots.

In an instant the place was a pandemonium.

"Silence!" Falmouth roared above the din; "silence! Keep quiet, you miserable cowards—show a light here, Brown, Curtis—Inspector, where are your men's lanterns!"

The rays of a dozen bull's-eye lamps waved over the struggling throng.

"Open your lanterns"—and to the seething mob, "Silence!"

Then a bright young officer remembered that he had seen gas-brackets in the room, and struggled through the howling mob till he came to the wall and found the gas-fitting with his lantern. He struck a match and lit the gas, and the panic subsided as suddenly as it had begun.

Falmouth, choked with rage, threw his eye round the hall.

"Guard the door," he said briefly; "the hall is surrounded and they cannot possibly escape." He strode swiftly along the central aisle, followed by two of his men, and with an agile leap, sprang on to the platform and faced the audience. The Woman of Gratz, with a white set face, stood motionless, one hand resting on the little table, the other at her throat. Falmouth raised his hand to enjoin silence and the law-breakers obeyed.

"I have no quarrel with the Red Hundred," he said. "By the law of this country it is permissible to hold opinions and propagate doctrines, however objectionable they be—I am here to arrest two men who have broken the laws of this country. Two persons who are part of the organization known as the Four Just Men."

All the time he was speaking his eyes searched the faces before him. He knew that one-half of the audience could not understand him and that the hum of talk that arose as he finished was his speech in course of translation.

The faces he sought he could not discern. To be exact, he hoped that his scrutiny would induce two men, of whose identity he was ignorant, to betray themselves.

There are little events, unimportant in themselves, which occasionally lead to tremendous issues. A skidding motor-bus that crashed into a private car in Piccadilly had led to the discovery that there were three vociferous foreign gentlemen imprisoned in the overturned vehicle. It led to the further discovery that the chauffeur had disappeared in the confusion of the collision. In the darkness, comparing notes, the three prisoners had arrived at a conclusion—to wit, that their abduction was a sequel to a mysterious letter each had received, which bore the signature "The Four Just Men."

So in the panic occasioned by the accident, they were sufficiently indiscreet to curse the Four Just Men by name, and, the Four Just Men being a sore topic with the police, they were questioned further, and the end of it was that Superintendent Falmouth motored eastward in great haste and was met in Middlesex Street by a reserve of police specially summoned.

He was at the same disadvantage he had always been—the Four Just Men were to him names only, symbols of a swift remorseless force that struck surely and to the minute—and nothing more.

Two or three of the leaders of the Red Hundred had singled themselves out and drew closer to the platform.

"We are not aware," said François, the Frenchman, speaking for his companions in faultless English, "we are not aware of the identity of the men you seek, but on the understanding that they are not brethren of our Society, and moreover"—he was at a loss for words to put the fantastic situation—"and moreover since they have threatened us—threatened us," he repeated in bewilderment, "we will afford you every assistance."

The detective jumped at the opportunity.

"Good!" he said and formed a rapid plan.

The two men could not have escaped from the hall. There was a little door near the platform, he had seen that—as the two men he sought had seen it. Escape seemed possible through there; they had thought so, too. But Falmouth knew that the outer door leading from the little vestibule was guarded by two policemen. This was the sum of the discovery made also by the two men he sought. He spoke rapidly to François.

"I want every person in the hall to be vouched for," he said quickly. "Somebody must identify every man, and the identifier must himself be identified."

The arrangements were made with lightning-like rapidity. From the platform in French, German and Yiddish, the leaders of the Red Hundred explained the plan. Then the police formed a line, and one by one the people came forward, and shyly, suspiciously or self-consciously, according to their several natures, they passed the police line.

"That is Simon Czech of Buda-Pest."

"Who identifies him?"

"I,"—a dozen voices.

"Pass."

"This is Michael Ranekov of Odessa."

"Who identifies him?"

"I," said a burly man, speaking in German.

"And you?"

There was a little titter, for Michael is the best-known man in the Order. Some there were who, having passed the line, waited to identify their kinsfolk and fellow-countrymen.

"It seems much simpler than I could have imagined."

It was the tall man with the trim beard, who spoke in a guttural tone which was neither German nor Yiddish. He was watching with amused interest the examination.

"Separating the lambs from the goats with a vengeance," he said with a faint smile, and his taciturn companion nodded. Then he asked—

"Do you think any of these people will recognize you as the man who fired?"

The tall man shook his head decisively.

"Their eyes were on the police—and besides I am too quick a shot. Nobody saw me unless ____"

"The Woman of Gratz?" asked the other, without showing the slightest concern.

"The Woman of Gratz," said George Manfred.

They formed part of a struggling line that moved slowly toward the police barrier.

"I fear," said Manfred, "that we shall be forced to make our escape in a perfectly obvious way—the bull-at-the-gate method is one that I object to on principle, and it is one that I have never been obliged to employ."

They were speaking all the time in the language of the harsh gutturals, and those who were in their vicinity looked at them in some perplexity, for it is a tongue unlike any that is heard in the Revolutionary Belt.

Closer and closer they grew to the inflexible inquisitor at the end of the police line. Ahead of them was a young man who turned from time to time as if seeking a friend behind. His was a face that fascinated the shorter of the two men, ever a student of faces. It was a face of deadly pallor, that the dark close-cropped hair and the thick black eyebrows accentuated. Aesthetic in outline, refined in contour, it was the face of a visionary, and in the restless, troubled eyes there lay a hint of the fanatic. He reached the barrier and a dozen eager men stepped forward for the honour of sponsorship. Then he passed and Manfred stepped calmly forward.

"Heinrich Rossenburg of Raz," he mentioned the name of an obscure Transylvanian village.

"Who identifies this man?" asked Falmouth monotonously. Manfred held his breath and stood ready to spring.

"I do."

It was the *spirituel* who had gone before him; the dreamer with the face of a priest.

"Pass."

Manfred, calm and smiling, sauntered through the police with a familiar nod to his saviour. Then he heard the challenge that met his companion.

"Rolf Woolfund," he heard Poiccart's clear, untroubled voice.

"Who identifies this man?"

Again he waited tensely.

"I do," said the young man's voice again.

Then Poiccart joined him, and they waited a little.

Out of the corner of his eye Manfred saw the man who had vouched for him saunter toward them. He came abreast, then:

"If you would care to meet me at Reggiori's at King's Cross I shall be there in an hour," he said, and Manfred noticed without emotion that this young man also spoke in Arabic.

They passed through the crowd that had gathered about the hall—for the news of the police raid had spread like wildfire through the East End—and gained Aldgate Station before they spoke.

"This is a curious beginning to our enterprise," said Manfred. He seemed neither pleased nor sorry. "I have always thought that Arabic was the safest language in the world in which to talk secrets—one learns wisdom with the years," he added philosophically.

Poiccart examined his well-manicured finger-nails as though the problem centred there. "There is no precedent," he said, speaking to himself.

"And he may be an embarrassment," added George; then, "let us wait and see what the hour brings."

The hour brought the man who had befriended them so strangely. It brought also a little in advance of him a fourth man who limped slightly but greeted the two with a rueful smile.

"Hurt?" asked Manfred.

"Nothing worth speaking about," said the other carelessly, "and now what is the meaning of your mysterious telephone message?"

Briefly Manfred sketched the events of the night, and the other listened gravely.

"It's a curious situation," he began, when a warning glance from Poiccart arrested him. The subject of their conversation had arrived.

He sat down at the table, and dismissed the fluttering waiter that hung about him.

The four sat in silence for a while and the newcomer was the first to speak.

"I call myself Bernard Courtlander," he said simply, "and you are the organization known as the Four Just Men."

They did not reply.

"I saw you shoot," he went on evenly, "because I had been watching you from the moment when you entered the hall, and when the police adopted the method of identification, I resolved to risk my life and speak for you."

"Meaning," interposed Poiccart calmly, "you resolved to risk—our killing you?"

"Exactly," said the young man, nodding, "a purely outside view would be that such a course would be a fiendish act of ingratitude, but I have a closer perception of principles, and I recognize that such a sequel to my interference is perfectly logical." He singled out Manfred leaning back on the red plush cushions. "You have so often shown that human life is the least considerable factor in your plan, and have given such evidence of your singleness of purpose, that I am fully satisfied that if my life—or the life of any one of you—stood before the fulfilment of your objects, that life would go—so!" He snapped his fingers.

"Well?" said Manfred.

"I know of your exploits," the strange young man went on, "as who does not?"

He took from his pocket a leather case, and from that he extracted a newspaper cutting. Neither of the three men evinced the slightest interest in the paper he unfolded on the white cloth. Their eyes were on his face.

"Here is a list of people slain—for justice' sake," Courtlander said, smoothing the creases from a cutting from the *Megaphone*, "men whom the law of the land passed by, sweaters and debauchers, robbers of public funds, corrupters of youth—men who bought 'justice' as you and I buy bread." He folded the paper again. "I have prayed God that I might one day meet you."

"Well?" It was Manfred's voice again.

"I want to be with you, to be one of you, to share your campaign and, and——" he hesitated, then added soberly, "if need be, the death that awaits you."

Manfred nodded slowly, then looked toward the man with the limp.

"What do you say, Gonsalez?" he asked.

This Leon Gonsalez was a famous reader of faces,—that much the young man knew,—and he turned for the test and met the other's appraising eyes.

"Enthusiast, dreamer, and intellectual, of course," said Gonsalez slowly; "there is reliability which is good, and balance which is better—but——"

"But——?" asked Courtlander steadily.

"There is passion, which is bad," was the verdict.

“It is a matter of training,” answered the other quietly. “My lot has been thrown with people who think in a frenzy and act in madness; it is the fault of all the organizations that seek to right wrong by indiscriminate crime, whose sense are senses, who have debased sentiment to sentimentality, and who muddle kings with kingship.”

“You are of the Red Hundred?” asked Manfred.

“Yes,” said the other, “because the Red Hundred carries me a little way along the road I wish to travel.”

“In the direction?”

“Who knows?” replied the other. “There are no straight roads, and you cannot judge where lies your destination by the direction the first line of path takes.”

“I do not tell you how great a risk you take upon yourself,” said Manfred, “nor do I labour the extent of the responsibility you ask to undertake. You are a wealthy man?”

“Yes,” said Courtlander, “as wealth goes; I have large estates in Hungary.”

“I do not ask that question aimlessly, yet it would make no difference if you were poor,” said Manfred. “Are you prepared to sell your estates—Buda-Gratz I believe they are called—Highness?”

For the first time the young man smiled.

“I did not doubt but that you knew me,” he said; “as to my estates I will sell them without hesitation.”

“And place the money at my disposal?”

“Yes,” he replied, instantly.

“Without reservation?”

“Without reservation.”

“And,” said Manfred, slowly, “if we felt disposed to employ this money for what might seem our own personal benefit, would you take exception?”

“None,” said the young man, calmly.

“And as a proof?” demanded Poiccart, leaning a little forward.

“The word of a Hap——”

“Enough,” said Manfred; “we do not want your money—yet money is the supreme test.” He pondered awhile before he spoke again.

“There is the Woman of Gratz,” he said abruptly; “at the worst she must be killed.”

“It is a pity,” said Courtlander, a little sadly.

He had answered the final test did he but know it.

A too willing compliance, an over-eagerness to agree with the supreme sentence of the “Four,” any one thing that might have betrayed the lack of that exact balance of mind, which their word demanded, would have irretrievably condemned him.

“Let us drink an arrogant toast,” said Manfred, beckoning a waiter.

The wine was opened and the glasses filled, and Manfred muttered the toast.

“The Four who were three, to the Fourth who died and the Fourth who is born.”

Once upon a time there was a fourth who fell riddled with bullets in a Bordeaux café, and him they pledged.

In Middlesex Street, in the almost emptied hall, Falmouth stood at bay before an army of reporters.

“Were they the Four Just Men, Mr. Falmouth?”

“Did you see them?”

"Have you any clue?"

Every second brought a fresh batch of newspaper men, taxi after taxi came into the dingy street, and the string of vehicles lined up outside the hall was suggestive of a fashionable gathering. The Telephone Tragedy was still fresh in the public mind, and it needed no more than the utterance of the magical words "Four Just Men" to fan the spark of interest to flame again. The delegates of the Red Hundred formed a privileged throng in the little wilderness of a forecourt, and through these the journalists circulated industriously.

Smith of the *Megaphone* and his youthful assistant, Maynard, slipped through the crowd and found their taxi.

Smith shouted a direction to the driver and sank back in the seat with a whistle of weariness.

"Did you hear those chaps talking about police protection?" he asked; "all the blessed anarchists from all over the world—and talking like a mothers' meeting! To hear 'em you would think they were the most respectable members of society that the world had ever seen. Our civilization is a wonderful thing," he added, cryptically.

"One man," said Maynard, "asked me in very bad French if the conduct of the Four Just Men was actionable!"

At that moment, another question was being put to Falmouth by a leader of the Red Hundred, and Falmouth, a little ruffled in his temper, replied with all the urbanity that he could summon.

"You may have your meetings," he said with some asperity, "so long as you do not utter anything calculated to bring about a breach of the peace, you may talk sedition and anarchy till you're blue in the face. Your English friends will tell you how far you can go—and I might say you can go pretty far—you can advocate the assassination of kings, so long as you don't specify which king; you can plot against governments and denounce armies and grand dukes; in fact, you can do as you please—because that's the law."

"What is—a breach of the peace?" asked his interrogator, repeating the words with difficulty.

Another detective explained.

François and one Rudulph Starque escorted the Woman of Gratz to her Bloomsbury lodgings that night, and they discussed the detective's answer.

This Starque was a big man, strongly built, with a fleshy face and little pouches under his eyes. He was reputed to be well off, and to have a way with women.

"So it would appear," he said, "that we may say 'Let the kings be slain,' but not 'Let the king be slain'; also that we may preach the downfall of governments, but if we say 'Let us go into this café—how do you call it?—'public-house, and be rude to the *propritaire*' we commit a—er—breach of the peace—*ne c'est pas?*"

"It is so," said François, "that is the English way."

"It is a mad way," said the other.

They reached the door of the girl's pension. She had been very quiet during the walk, answering questions that were put to her in monosyllables. She had ample food for thought in the events of the night.

François bade her a curt good night and walked a little distance.

It had come to be regarded as Starque's privilege to stand nearest the girl. Now he took her slim hands in his and looked down at her.

Some one has said the East begins at Bukarest, but there is a touch of the Eastern in every Hungarian, and there is a crudeness in their whole attitude to womankind that shocks the more tender susceptibilities of the Western.

"Good night, little Maria," he said in a low voice. "Some day you will be kinder, and you will not leave me at the door."

She looked at him steadfastly.

"That will never be," she replied, without a tremor.

CHAPTER III
JESSEN, ALIAS LONG

The front page of every big London daily was again black with the story of the Four Just Men.

"What I should like," said the editor of the *Megaphone*, wistfully, "is a sort of official propaganda from the Four—a sort of inspired manifesto that we could spread into six columns."

Charles Garret, the *Megaphone's* "star" reporter, with his hat on the back of his head, and an apparently inattentive eye fixed on the electrolier, sniffed.

The editor looked at him reflectively.

"A smart man might get into touch with them."

Charles said, "Yes," but without enthusiasm.

"If it wasn't that I knew you," mused the editor, "I should say you were afraid."

"I am," said Charles shamelessly.

"I don't want to put a younger reporter on this job," said the editor sadly, "it would look bad for you; but I'm afraid I must."

Presently, he found himself in Fleet Street, and, standing at the edge of the curb, he answered a taxi-driver's expectant look with a nod.

"Do," said Charles with animation, "do, and put me down ten shillings toward the wreath."

He left the office a few minutes later with the ghost of a smile at the corners of his mouth, and one fixed determination in the deepest and most secret recesses of his heart. It was rather like Charles that, having by an uncompromising firmness established his right to refuse work of a dangerous character, he should of his own will undertake the task against which he had officially set his face. Perhaps his chief knew him as well as he knew himself, for as Charles, with a last defiant snort, stalked from the office, the smile that came to his lips was reflected on the editor's face.

Walking through the echoing corridors of Megaphone House, Charles whistled that popular and satirical song, the chorus of which runs—

> By kind permission of the *Megaphone*,
> By kind permission of the *Megaphone*.
> Summer comes when Spring has gone,
> And the world goes spinning on,
> By permission of the *Daily Megaphone*.

"Where to, sir?" asked the driver.

"37, Presley Street, Walworth—round by the 'Blue Bob' and the second turning to the left."

Crossing Waterloo Bridge it occurred to him that the taxi might attract attention, so halfway down the Waterloo Road he gave another order, and dismissing the vehicle, he walked the remainder of the way.

Charles knocked at 37 Presley Street, and after a little wait a firm step echoed in the passage, and the door was half opened. The passage was dark, but he could see dimly the thick-set figure of the man who stood waiting silently.

"Is that Mr. Long?" he asked.

"Yes," said the man curtly.

Charles laughed, and the man seemed to recognize the voice and opened the door a little wider.

"Not Mr. Garrett?" he asked in surprise.

"That's me," said Charles, and walked into the house.

His host stopped to fasten the door, and Charles heard the snap of the well-oiled lock and the scraping of a chain. Then with an apology the man pushed past him and, opening the door, ushered him into a well-lighted room, motioned Charles to a deep-seated chair, seated himself near a small table, turned down the page of the book from which he had evidently been reading, and looked inquiringly at his visitor.

"I've come to consult you," said Charles.

A lesser man than Mr. Long might have been grossly flippant, but this young man—he was thirty-five, but looked older—did not descend to such a level.

"I wanted to consult you," he said in reply.

His language was the language of a man who addresses an equal, but there was something in his manner which suggested deference.

"You spoke to me about Milton," he went on, "but I find I can't read him. I think it is because he is not sufficiently material." He paused a little. "The only poetry I can read is the poetry of the Bible, and that is because materialism and mysticism are so ingeniously blended ——"

He may have seen the shadow on the journalist's face, but he stopped abruptly.

"I can talk about books another time," he said.

Charles did not make the conventional disclaimer, but accepted the other's interpretation of the urgency of his business.

"You know everybody," said Charles, "all the queer fish in the basket, and a proportion of them get to know you—in time."

The other nodded gravely.

"When other sources of information fail," continued the journalist, "I have never hesitated to come to you—Jessen."

It may be observed that "Mr. Long" at the threshold of the house became "Mr. Jessen" in the intimacy of the inner room.

"I owe more to you than ever you can owe to me," he said earnestly; "you put me on the track," he waved his hand round the room as though the refinement of the room was the symbol of that track of which he spoke. "You remember that morning?—if you have forgotten, I haven't—when I told you that to forget—I must drink? And you said——"

"I haven't forgotten, Jessen," said the correspondent quietly; "and the fact that you have accomplished all that you have is a proof that there's good stuff in you."

The other accepted the praise without comment.

"Now," Charles went on, "I want to tell you what I started out to tell: I'm following a big story. It's the Four Just Men story; you know all about it? I see that you do; well, I've got to get into touch with them somehow. I do not for one moment imagine that you can help me, nor do I expect that these chaps have any accomplices amongst the people you know."

"They have not," said Jessen; "I haven't thought it worth while inquiring. Would you like to go to the Guild?"

Charles pursed his lips in thought.

"Yes," he said slowly, "that's an idea; yes, when?"

"To-night—if you wish."

"To-night let it be," said Charles.

His host rose and left the room.

He reappeared presently, wearing a dark overcoat and about his throat a black silk muffler that emphasized the pallor of his strong square face.

"Wait a moment," he said, and unlocked a drawer, from which he took a revolver.

He turned the magazine carefully, and Charles smiled.

"Will that be necessary?" he asked.

Jessen shook his head.

"No," he said with a little embarrassment, "but—I have given up all my follies and fancies, but this one sticks."

"The fear of discovery?"

Jessen nodded.

"It's the only folly left——this fear. It's the fly in the ointment."

He led the way through the narrow passage, first having extinguished the lamp.

They stood together in the dark street, whilst Jessen made sure the fastening of the house.

"Now," he said, and in a few minutes they found themselves amidst the raucous confusion of a Walworth Road market-night.

They walked on in silence, then turning into East Street, they threaded a way between loitering shoppers, dodged between stalls overhung by flaring naphtha lamps, and turned sharply into a narrow street.

Both men seemed sure of their ground, for they walked quickly and unhesitatingly, and striking off through a tiny court that connected one malodorous thoroughfare with the other, they stopped simultaneously before the door of what appeared to be a disused factory.

A peaky-faced youth who sat by the door and acted as doorkeeper thrust his hand forward as they entered, but recognizing them drew back without a word.

They ascended the flight of ill-lighted stairs that confronted them, and pushing open a door at the head of the stairs, Jessen ushered his friend into a large hall.

It was a curious scene that met the journalist's eye. Well acquainted with "The Guild" as he was, and with its extraordinary composition, he had never yet put his foot inside its portals. Basing his conception upon his knowledge of working-men's clubs and philanthropic institutions for the regeneration of degraded youth, he missed the inevitable billiard-table, he missed, too, the table strewn with month-old literature, but most of all he missed the smell of free coffee.

The floor was covered with sawdust, and about the fire that crackled and blazed at one end of the room there was a semi-circle of chairs occupied by men of varying ages. Old-looking young men and young-looking old men, men in rags, men well dressed, men flashily attired in loud clothing and resplendent with shoddy jewellery. And they were drinking.

Two youths at one end of the crescent shared a quart pewter pot; the flashy man whose voice dominated the conversation held a glass of whisky in one beringed hand, and the white-haired man with the scarred face who sat with bowed head listening had a spirit glass half filled with some colourless fluid.

Nobody rose to greet the newcomers.

The flashy man nodded genially, and one of the circle pushed his chair back to give place to Jessen.

"I was just a-saying——" said the flashy man, then looked at Charles.

"All right," signalled Jessen.

"I was just a-sayin' to these lads," continued the flashy one, "that takin' one thing with the other, there's worse places than 'stir.' "

Jessen made no reply to this piece of dogmatism, and he of the rings went on.

"An' what's the good of a man tryin' to go straight. The police will pull you all the same: not reportin' change of address, loitering with intent; it don't matter what you do if you've been in trouble once, you're sure to get in again."

There was a murmur of assent.

"Look at me," said the speaker with pride. "I've never tried to go straight—been in twice an' it took six policemen to take me last time, and they had to use the 'stick.' "

Jessen looked at him with mild curiosity.

"What does that prove, except that the policemen were pretty soft?"

"Not a bit!" The man stood up.

Under the veneer of tawdry foppery, Charles detected the animal strength of the criminal.

"Why, when I'm fit, as I am now," the man went on, "there ain't two policemen, nor four neither, that could handle me."

Jessen's hand shot out and caught him by the forearm.

"Get away," he suggested, and the man swung round like lightning, but Jessen had his other arm in a grip of iron.

"Get away," he said again; but the man was helpless, and knew it, and after a pause Jessen released his hold.

"How was that?" he asked.

The amused smiles of the men did not embarrass the prisoner.

"The guv'nor's different," he explained easily; "he's got a knack of his own that the police haven't got."

Jessen drew up a chair, and whatever there was in the action that had significance, it was sufficient to procure an immediate silence.

He looked round the attentive faces that were turned toward him. Charles, an interested spectator, saw the eager faces that bent in his friend's direction, and marvelled not a little at the reproductive qualities of the seed he had sown.

Jessen began to speak slowly, and Charles saw that what he said was in the nature of an address. That these addresses of Jessen were nothing unusual, and that they were welcome, was evident from the attention with which they were received.

"What Falk has been telling you," said Jessen, indicating the man with the rings, "is true—so far as it goes. There are worse places than 'stir,' and it's true that the police don't give an old lag a chance, but that's because a lag won't change his job. And a lag won't change his job, because he doesn't know any other trade where he gets money so quickly. Wally"—he jerked his head toward a weedy-looking youth—"Wally there got a stretch for what? For stuff that fetched thirty pounds from a fence. Twelve months hard work for thirty pounds! It works out at about 10*s.* 6*d.* a week. And his lawyer and the mouthpiece cost him a fiver out of that. Old man Garth"—he pointed to the white-headed man with the gin—"did five stretch for less than that, and he's out on brief. His wage works out at about a shilling a week."

He checked the impatient motion that Falk made.

"I know that Falk would say," he went on smoothly, "that what I'm saying is outside the bargain; when I fixed up the Guild, I gave my 'davy that there wouldn't be any parson talk or Come All-ye-Faithful singing. Everybody knows that being on the crook's a mug's game, and

I don't want to rub it in. What I've always said and done is in the direction of making you fellows earn bigger money at your own trade.

"There's a man who writes about the army who's been trying to induce soldiers to learn trades, and he started right by making the Tommies dissatisfied with their own trade; and that is what I am trying to do. What did I do with young Isaacs? I didn't preach at him, and I didn't pray over him. Ike was one of the finest snide merchants in London. He used to turn out half-crowns made from pewter pots that defied detection. They rang true and they didn't bend. Ike got three years, and when he came out I found him a job. Did I try to make him a wood-chopper, or a Salvation Army plough-boy? No. He'd have been back on the crook in a week if I had. I got a firm of medal makers in Birmingham to take him, and when Ike found himself amongst plaster moulds and electric baths, and discovered he could work at his own trade honestly, he stuck to it."

"We ain't snide merchants," growled Falk discontentedly.

"It's the same with all branches," Jessen went on, "only you chaps don't know it. Take tale-pitching——"

It would not be fair to follow Jessen through the elaborate disquisition by which he proved to the satisfaction of his audience that the "confidence" man was a born commercial traveller. Many of his arguments were as unsound as they could well be; he ignored first principles, and glossed over what seemed to such a clear-headed hearer as Charles to be insuperable obstacles in the scheme of regeneration. But his audience was convinced. The fringe of men round the fire was reinforced as he continued. Men came into the room singly, and in twos and threes, and added themselves to the group at the fire. The news had spread that Jessen was talking—they called him "Mr. Long," by the way—and some of the newcomers arrived breathlessly, as though they had run in order that no part of the address should be missed.

That the advocate of discontent had succeeded in installing into the minds of his hearers that unrest and dissatisfaction which he held to be the basis of a new moral code, was certain. For every face bore the stamp of introspective doubt.

Interesting as it all was, Charles Garrett had not lost sight of the object of his visit, and he fidgeted a little as the speaker proceeded.

Immediately on entering the room he had grasped the exact relationship in which Jessen stood to his pupils. Jessen he knew could put no direct question as to their knowledge of the Four Just Men without raising a feeling of suspicion which would have been fatal to the success of the mission, and indeed would have imperilled the very existence of the "Guild."

It was when Jessen had finished speaking, and had answered a dozen questions fired simultaneously from a dozen quarters, and had answered the questions that had arisen out of these queries, that an opening came from an unexpected quarter.

For, with the serious business of the meeting disposed of, the questions took the inevitable facetious turn.

"What trade would you give the Four Just Men?" asked Falk flippantly, and there was a little rumble of laughter.

The journalist's eyes met the reformer's for one second, and through the minds of both men flashed the answer. Jessen's mouth twitched a little, and his restless hands were even more agitated as he replied slowly:

"If anybody can tell me exactly what the Four Just Men—what their particular line of business is, I could reply to that."

It was the old man sipping his gin in silence who spoke for the first time.

"D'ye remember Billy Marks?" he asked.

His voice was harsh, as is that of a man who uses his voice at rare intervals.

"Billy Marks is dead," he continued, "deader than a door-nail. He knew the Four Just Men; pinched the watch an' the notebook of one, an' nearly pinched them."

There was a man who sat next to Falk who had been regarding Charles with furtive attention.

Now he turned to Jessen and spoke to the point.

"Don't get any idea in your head that the likes of us will ever have anything to do with the Four," he said. "Why, Mr. Long," he went on, "the Four Just Men are as likely to come to you as to us; bein' as you are a government official, it's very likely indeed."

Again Jessen and Charles exchanged a swift glance, and in the eyes of the journalist was a strange light.

Suppose they came to Jessen! It was not unlikely.

Once before, in pursuing their vengeance in a South American State, they had come to such a man as Jessen.

It was a thought, and one worth following.

Turning the possibilities over in his mind Charles stood deep in thought as Jessen, still speaking, was helped into his overcoat by one of the men.

Then as they left the hall together, passing the custodian of the place at the foot of the stairs, the journalist turned to his companion.

"Should they come to you——?"

Jessen shook his head.

"That is unlikely," he said; "they hardly require outside help."

They walked the rest of the way in silence.

Charles shook hands at the door of Jessen's house.

"If by any chance they should come——" he said.

Jessen laughed.

"I will let you know," he said a little ironically.

Then he entered his house, and Charles heard again the snap of the lock as the strange man closed the door behind him.

Within twenty-four hours the newspapers recorded the mysterious disappearance of a Mr. J. Long, of Presley Street. Such a disappearance would have been without interest, but for a note that was found on his table. It ran:

> "Mr. Long being necessary for our purpose, we have taken him.
>
> "THE FOUR JUST MEN."

That the affair had connection with the Four was sufficient to give it an extraordinary news value. That the press was confounded goes without saying. For Mr. Long was a fairly unimportant man with some self-education and a craze for reforming the criminal classes. But the Home Office, which knew Mr. Long as "Mr. Jessen," was greatly perturbed, and the genius of Scotland Yard was employed to discover his whereabouts.

CHAPTER IV
THE RED BEAN

The Inner Council sent out an urgent call to the men who administer the affairs of the Red Hundred.

Starque came, François, the Frenchman, came, Hollom, the Italian, Paul Mirtisky, George Grabe, the American, and Lauder Bartholomew, the ex-captain of Irregular Cavalry, came also. Bartholomew was the best dressed of the men who gathered about the green table in Greek Street, for he had held the King's commission, which is of itself a sartorial education. People who met him vaguely remembered his name and frowned. They had a dim idea that there was "something against him," but were not quite sure what it was. It had to do with the South African War and a surrender—not an ordinary surrender, but an arrangement with the enemy on a cash basis, and the transference of stores. There was a court-martial, and a cashiering, and afterwards Bartholomew came to England and bombarded first the War Office and then the Press with a sheaf of type-written grievances. Afterwards he went into the theatrical line of business and appeared in music-hall sketches as "Captain Lauder Bartholomew—the Hero of Dopfontein."

There were other chapters which made good reading, for he figured in a divorce case, ran a society newspaper, owned a few selling platers, and achieved the distinction of appearing in the *Racing Calendar* in a paragraph which solemnly and officially forbade his presence on Newmarket Heath.

That he should figure on the Inner Council of the Red Hundred is remarkable only in so far as it demonstrates how much out of touch with British sentiments and conditions is the average continental politician. For Bartholomew's secret application to be enrolled a member of the Red Hundred had been received with acclamation, and his promotion to the Inner Council had been rapid. Was he not an English officer—an aristocrat? A member of the most exclusive circle of English society? Thus argued the Red Hundred, to whom a subaltern in a scallywag corps did not differ perceptibly from a Commander of the Household Cavalry.

Bartholomew lied his way to the circle, because he found, as he had all along suspected, that there was a strong business end to terrorism. There were grants for secret service work, and with his fertile imagination it was not difficult to find excuses and reasons for approaching the financial executive of the Red Hundred at frequent intervals.

He claimed intimacy with royal personages. He not only stated as a fact that he was in their confidence, but he suggested family ties which reflected little credit upon his progenitors.

The Red Hundred was a paying speculation; membership of the Inner Council was handsomely profitable. He had drawn a bow at a venture when under distress—literally it was a distress warrant issued at the instance of a importunate landlord—he had indited a letter to a revolutionary offering to act as London agent for an organization which was then known as The Friends of the People, but which has since been absorbed into the body corporate of the Red Hundred. It is necessary to deal fully with the antecedents of this man because he played a part in the events that are chronicled in the Council of Justice that had effects further reaching than Bartholomew, the mercenary of anarchism, could in his wildest moments have imagined.

He was one of the seven that gathered in the dingy drawing-room of a Greek Street boarding-house, and it was worthy of note that five of his fellows greeted him with a deference amounting to humility. The exception was Starque, who, arriving late, found an admiring circle hanging upon the words of this young man with the shifty eyes, and he frowned his displeasure.

Bartholomew looked up as Starque entered and nodded carelessly.

Starque took his place at the head of the table, and motioned impatiently to the others to be seated. One, whose duty it was, rose from his chair and locked the door. The windows were shuttered, but he inspected the fastenings; then, taking from his pocket two packs of cards, he scattered them in a confused heap upon the table. Every man produced a handful of money and placed it before him.

Starque was an ingenious man and had learnt many things in Russia. Men who gather round a green baize-covered table with locked doors are apt to be dealt with summarily if no adequate excuse for their presence is evident, and it is more satisfactory to be fined a hundred roubles for gambling than to be dragged off at a moment's notice to an indefinite period of labour in the mines on suspicion of being concerned in a revolutionary plot.

Starque now initiated the business of the evening. If the truth be told, there was little in the earlier proceedings that differed from the procedure of the typical committee.

There were monies to be voted. Bartholomew needed supplies for a trip to Paris, where, as the guest of an Illustrious Personage, he hoped to secure information of vital importance to the Hundred.

"This is the fourth vote in two months, comrade," said Starque testily, "last time it was for information from your Foreign Office, which proved to be inaccurate."

Bartholomew shrugged his shoulders with an assumption of carelessness.

"If you doubt the wisdom of voting the money, let it pass," he said; "my men fly high—I am not bribing policemen or *sous-officiers* of diplomacy."

"It is not a question of money," said Starque sullenly, "it is a question of results. Money we have in plenty, but the success of our glorious demonstration depends upon the reliability of our information."

The vote was passed, and with its passing came a grim element into the council.

Starque leant forward and lowered his voice.

"There are matters that need your immediate attention," he said. He took a paper from his pocket, and smoothed it open in front of him. "We have been so long inactive that the tyrants to whom the name of Red Hundred is full of terror, have come to regard themselves as immune from danger. Yet," his voice sank lower, "yet we are on the eve of the greatest of our achievements, when the oppressors of the people shall be moved at one blow! And we will strike a blow at kingship as shall be remembered in the history of the world, aye, when the victories of Caesar and Alexander are forgotten, and when the scenes of our acts are overlaid with the dust and débris of a thousand years. But that great day is not yet—first we must remove the lesser men that the blow may fall surer; first the servant, then the master." He stabbed the list before him with a thick forefinger.

"Fritz von Hedlitz," he read, "Chancellor to the Duchy of Hamburg-Altoona."

He looked round the board and smiled.

"A man of some initiative, comrades—he foiled our attempt on his master with some cunning—do I interpret your desire when I say—death?"

"Death!"

It was a low murmured chorus.

Bartholomew, renegade and adventurer, said it mechanically. It was nothing to him a brave gentleman should die for no other reason than that he had served his master faithfully.

"Marquis de Santo-Strato, private secretary to the Prince of the Escorial," read Starque.

"Death!" Again the murmured sentence.

One by one, Starque read the names, stopping now and again to emphasize some enormity of the man under review.

"Here is Hendrik Houssmann," he said, tapping the paper, "of the Berlin Secret Police: an interfering man and a dangerous one. He has already secured the arrest and punishment of one of our comrades."

"Death," murmured the council mechanically.

The list took half an hour to dispose of.

"There is another matter," said Starque.

The council moved uneasily, for that other matter was uppermost in every mind.

"By some means we have been betrayed," the chairman went on, and his voice lacked that confidence which characterized his earlier speech; "there is an organization—an organization of reaction—which has set itself to thwart us. That organization has discovered our identity." He paused a little.

"This morning I received a letter which named me president of the Inner Council and threatened me." Again he hesitated.

"It was signed 'The Four Just Men.' "

His statement was received in dead silence—a silence that perplexed him, for his compensation for the shock he had received had been the anticipation of the sensation his announcement would make.

He was soon enlightened as to the cause of the silence.

"I also have received a letter," said François quietly.

"And I."

"And I."

"And I."

Only Bartholomew did not speak, and he felt the unspoken accusation of the others.

"I have received no letter," he said with an easy laugh—"only these." He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket and produced two beans. There was nothing peculiar in these save one was a natural black and the other had been dyed red.

"What do they mean?" demanded Starque suspiciously.

"I have not the slightest idea," said Bartholomew with a contemptuous smile; "they came in a little box, such as jewellery is sent in, and were unaccompanied either by letter or anything of the kind. These mysterious messages do not greatly alarm me."

"But what does it mean?" persisted Starque, and every neck was craned toward the seeds; "they must have some significance—think."

Bartholomew yawned.

"So far as I know, they are beyond explanation," he said carelessly; "neither red nor black beans have played any conspicuous part in my life, so far as I——"

He stopped short and they saw a wave of colour rush to his face, then die away, leaving it deadly pale.

"Well?" demanded Starque; there was a menace in the question.

"Let me see," faltered Bartholomew, and he took up the red bean with a hand that shook.

He turned it over and over in his hand, calling up his reserve of strength.

He could not explain, that much he realized.

The explanation might have been possible had he realized earlier the purport of the message he had received, but now with six pairs of suspicious eyes turned upon him, and with his confusion duly noted, his hesitation would tell against him.

He had to invent a story that would pass muster.

"Years ago," he began, holding his voice steady, "I was a member of such an organization as this: and—and there was a traitor." The story was plain to him now, and he recovered his balance. "The traitor was discovered and we balloted for his life. There was an equal number for death and immunity, and I as president had to give the casting vote. A red bean was for life and a black for death—and I cast my vote for the man's death."

He saw the impression his invention had created and elaborated the story. Starque, holding the red bean in his hand, examined it carefully.

"I have reason to think that by my action I made many enemies, one of whom probably sent this reminder." He breathed an inward sigh of relief as he saw the clouds of doubt lifting from the faces about him. Then——

"And the £1,000?" asked Starque quietly.

Nobody saw Bartholomew bite his lip, because his hand was caressing his soft black moustache. What they all observed was the well simulated surprise expressed in the lift of his eyebrows.

"The thousand pounds?" he said puzzled, then he laughed. "Oh, I see you, too, have heard the story—we found the traitor had accepted that sum to betray us—and this we confiscated for the benefit of the Society—and rightly so," he added, indignantly.

The murmur of approbation relieved him of any fear as to the result of his explanation.

Even Starque smiled.

"I did not know the story," he said, "but I did see the '£1,000' which had been scratched on the side of the red bean; but this brings us no nearer to the solution of the mystery. Who has betrayed us to the Four Just Men?"

There came, as he spoke, a gentle tapping on the door of the room. François, who sat at the president's right hand, rose stealthily and tiptoed to the door.

"Who is there?" he asked in a low voice.

Somebody spoke in German, and the voice carried so that every man knew the speaker.

"The Woman of Gratz," said Bartholomew, and in his eagerness he rose to his feet.

If one sought for the cause of friction between Starque and the ex-captain of Irregular Cavalry, here was the end of the search. The flame that came to the eyes of these two men as she entered the room told the story.

Starque, heavily made, animal man to his fingertips, rose to greet her, his face aglow.

"Madonna," he murmured, and kissed her hand.

She was dressed well enough, with a rich sable coat that fitted tightly to her sinuous figure, and a fur toque upon her beautiful head.

She held a gloved hand toward Bartholomew and smiled.

Bartholomew, like his rival, had a way with women; but it was a gentle way, overladened with Western conventions and hedged about with set proprieties. That he was a contemptible villain according to our conceptions is true, but he had received a rudimentary training in the world of gentlemen. He had moved amongst men who took their hats off to their women-kind, and who controlled their actions by a nebulous code. Yet he behaved with greater

extravagance than did Starque, for he held her hand in his, looking into her eyes, whilst Starque fidgeted impatiently.

"Comrade," at last he said testily, "we will postpone our talk with our little Maria. It would be bad for her to think that she is holding us from our work—and there are the Four——"

He saw her shiver.

"The Four?" she repeated. "Then they have written to you, also?"

Starque brought his fist with a crash down on the table.

"You—you! They have dared threaten you? By Heaven——"

"Yes," she went on, and it seemed that her rich sweet voice grew a little husky; "they have threatened—me."

She loosened the furs at her throat as though the room had suddenly become hot and the atmosphere unbreathable.

The torrent of words that came tumbling to the lips of Starque was arrested by the look in her face.

"It isn't death that I fear," she went on slowly; "indeed, I scarcely know what I fear."

Bartholomew, superficial and untouched by the tragic mystery of her voice, broke in upon their silence. For silenced they were by the girl's distress.

"With such men as we about, why need you notice the theatrical play of these Four Just Men?" he asked, with a laugh; then he remembered the two little beans and became suddenly silent with the rest.

So complete and inexplicable was the chill that had come to them with the pronouncement of the name of their enemy, and so absolutely did the spectacle of the Woman of Gratz on the verge of tears move them, that they heard then what none had heard before—the ticking of the clock.

It was the habit of many years that carried Bartholomew's hand to his pocket, mechanically he drew out his watch, and automatically he cast his eyes about the room for the clock wherewith to check the time.

It was one of those incongruous pieces of commonplace that intrude upon tragedy, but it loosened the tongues of the council, and they all spoke together.

It was Starque who gathered the girl's trembling hands between his plump palms.

"Maria, Maria," he chided softly, "this is folly. What! the Woman of Gratz who defied all Russia—who stood before Mirtowsky and bade him defiance—what is it?"

The last words were sharp and angry and were directed to Bartholomew.

For the second time that night the Englishman's face was white, and he stood clutching the edge of the table with staring eyes and with his lower jaw drooping.

"God, man!" cried Starque, seizing him by the arm, "what is it—speak—you are frightening her!"

"The clock!" gasped Bartholomew in a hollow voice, "where—where is the clock?"

His staring eyes wandered helplessly from side to side.

"Listen," he whispered, and they held their breath.

Very plainly indeed did they hear the "tick—tick—tick."

"It is under the table," muttered François.

Starque seized the cloth and lifted it. Underneath, in the shadow, he saw the black box and heard the ominous whir of clock-work.

"Out!" he roared and sprang to the door.

It was locked and from the outside.

Again and again he flung his huge bulk against the door, but the men who pressed round him, whimpering and slobbering in their pitiable fright, crowded about him and gave him no room.

With his strong arms he threw them aside left and right; then leapt at the door, bringing all his weight and strength to bear, and the door crashed open.

Alone of the party the Woman of Gratz preserved her calm. She stood by the table, her foot almost touching the accursed machine, and she felt the faint vibrations of its working. Then Starque caught her up in his arms and through the narrow passage he half led, half carried her, till they reached the street in safety.

The passing pedestrians saw the dishevelled group, and, scenting trouble, gathered about them.

"What was it? What was it?" whispered François, but Starque pushed him aside with a snarl.

A taxi was passing and he called it, and lifting the girl inside, he shouted directions and sprang in after her.

As the taxi whirled away, the bewildered Council looked from one to the other.

They had left the door of the house wide open and in the hall a flickering gas-jet gyrated wildly.

"Get away from here," said Bartholomew beneath his breath.

"But the papers—the records," said the other wringing his hands.

Bartholomew thought quickly.

The records were such as could not be left lying about with impunity. For all he knew these madmen had implicated him in their infernal writings. He was not without courage, but it needed all he possessed to re-enter the room where a little machine in a black box ticked mysteriously.

"Where are they?" he demanded.

"On the table," almost whispered the other. "*Mon Dieu!* what disaster!" The Englishman made up his mind.

He sprang up the three steps into the hall. Two paces brought him to the door, another stride to the table. He heard the "tick" of the machine, he gave one glance to the table and another to the floor, and was out again in the street before he had taken two long breaths.

François stood waiting, the rest of the men had disappeared.

"The papers! the papers!" cried the Frenchman.

"Gone!" replied Bartholomew between his teeth.

Less than a hundred yards away another conference was being held.

"Manfred," said Poiccart suddenly—there had been a lull in the talk—"shall we need our friend?"

Manfred smiled.

"Meaning the admirable Mr. Jessen?"

Poiccart nodded.

"I think so," said Manfred quietly; "I am not so sure that the cheap alarm-clock we put in the biscuit box will be a sufficient warning to the Inner Council—here is Leon."

Gonsalez walked into the room and removed his overcoat deliberately.

Then they saw that the sleeve of his dress coat was torn, and Manfred remarked the stained handkerchief that was lightly bound round one hand.

"Glass," explained Gonsalez laconically. "I had to scale a wall."

“Well?” asked Manfred.

“Very well,” replied the other; “they bolted like sheep, and I had nothing to do but to walk in and carry away the extremely interesting record of sentences they have passed.”

“What of Bartholomew?”

Gonsalez was mildly amused.

“He was less panicky than the rest—he came back to look for the papers.”

“Will he——?”

“I think so,” said Leon. “I noticed he left the black bean behind him in his flight—so I presume we shall see the red.”

“It will simplify matters,” said Manfred gravely.

CHAPTER V
THE COUNCIL OF JUSTICE

Lauder Bartholomew knew a man who was farming in Uganda. It was not remarkable that he should suddenly remember his friend's existence and call to mind a three years' old invitation to spend a winter in that part of Africa. Bartholomew had a club. It was euphemistically styled in all the best directories as "Social, Literary and Dramatic," but knowing men about town called it by a shorter title. To them it was a "night club." Poorly as were the literary members catered for, there were certain weeklies, the *Times*, and a collection of complimentary time tables to be obtained for the asking, and Bartholomew sought and found particulars of sailings. He might leave London on the next morning and overtake (via Brindisi and Suez) the German boat that would land him in Uganda in a couple of weeks.

On the whole he thought this course would be wise.

To tell the truth, the Red Hundred was becoming too much of a serious business; he had a feeling that he was suspect, and was more certain that the end of his unlimited financing was in sight. That much he had long since recognized, and had made his plans accordingly. As to the Four Just Men, they would come in with Menshikoff; it would mean only a duplication of treachery. Turning the pages of a Bradshaw, he mentally reviewed his position. He had in hand some seven hundred pounds, and his liabilities were of no account because the necessity for discharging them never occurred to him. Seven hundred pounds—and the red bean, and Menshikoff.

"If they mean business," he said to himself, "I can count on three thousand."

The obvious difficulty was to get into touch with the Four. Time was everything and one could not put an advertisement in the paper: "If the Four Just Men will communicate with L —— B—— they will hear of something to their advantage."

Nor was it expedient to make in the agony columns of the London press even the most guarded reference to Red Beans after what had occurred at the Council Meeting. The matter of the Embassy was simple. Under his breath he cursed the Four Just Men for their unbusinesslike communication. If only they had mentioned or hinted at some rendezvous the thing might have been arranged.

A man in evening dress asked him if he had finished with the Bradshaw. He resigned it ungraciously, and calling a club waiter, ordered a whisky and soda and flung himself into a chair to think out a solution.

The man returned the Bradshaw with a polite apology.

"So sorry to have interrupted, but I've been called abroad at a moment's notice," he said.

Bartholomew looked up resentfully. This young man's face seemed familiar.

"Haven't I met you somewhere?" he asked.

The stranger shrugged his shoulders.

"One is always meeting and forgetting," he smiled. "I thought I knew you, but I cannot quite place you."

Not only the face but the voice was strangely familiar.

"Not English," was Bartholomew's mental analysis, "possibly French, more likely Slav ——who the dickens can it be?"

In a way he was glad of the diversion, and found himself engaged in a pleasant discussion on fly fishing.

As the hands of the clock pointed to midnight, the stranger yawned and got up from his chair.

"Going west?" he asked pleasantly.

Bartholomew had no definite plans for spending the next hour, so he assented and the two men left the club together. They strolled across Piccadilly Circus and into Piccadilly, chatting pleasantly.

Through Half Moon Street into Berkeley Square, deserted and silent, the two men sauntered, then the stranger stopped.

"I'm afraid I've taken you out of your way," he said.

"Not a bit," replied Bartholomew, and was conventionally amiable.

Then they parted, and the ex-captain walked back by the way he had come, picking up again the threads of the problem that had filled his mind in the earlier part of the evening.

Halfway down Half Moon Street was a motor-car, and as he came abreast, a man who stood by the curb—and whom he had mistaken for a waiting chauffeur—barred his further progress.

"Captain Bartholomew?" he asked respectfully.

"That is my name," said the other in surprise.

"My master wishes to know whether you have decided."

"What——?"

"If," went on his imperturbable examiner, "if you have decided on the red—here is the car, if you will be pleased to enter."

"And if I have decided on the black?" he asked with a little hesitation.

"Under the circumstances," said the man without emotion, "my master is of opinion that for his greater safety, he must take steps to ensure your neutrality."

There was no menace in the tone, but an icy matter-of-fact confidence that shocked this hardened adventurer.

In the dim light he saw something in the man's hand—a thin bright something that glittered.

"It shall be red!" he said hoarsely.

The man bowed and opened the door of the car.

Bartholomew had regained a little of his self-assurance by the time he stood before the men.

He was not unused to masked tribunals. There had been one such since his elevation to the Inner Council.

But these four men were in evening dress, and the stagey setting that had characterized the Red Hundred's Court of Justice was absent. There was no weird adjustment of lights, or tollings of bells, or partings of sombre draperies. None of the cheap trickery of the Inner Council.

The room was evidently a drawing-room, very much like a hundred other drawing-rooms he had seen.

The four men who sat at equal distance before him were sufficiently ordinary an appearance save for their masks. He thought one of them wore a beard, but he was not sure. This man did most of the speaking.

"I understand," he said smoothly, "you have chosen the red."

"You seem to know a great deal about my private affairs," replied Bartholomew.

"You have chosen the red—again?" said the man.

"Why—again?" demanded the prisoner.

The masked man's eyes shone steadily through the holes in the mask.

"Years ago," he said quietly, "there was an officer who betrayed his country and his comrades."

"That is an old lie."

"He was in charge of a post at which was stored a great supply of food-stuffs and ammunition," the mask went on. "There was a commandant of the enemy who wanted those stores, but had not sufficient men to rush the garrison."

"An old lie," repeated Bartholomew sullenly.

"So the commandant hit upon the ingenious plan of offering a bribe. It was a risky thing, and in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand, it would have been a futile business. Indeed, I am sure that I am understating the proportion—but the wily old commandant knew his man."

"There is no necessity to continue," said Bartholomew.

"No correspondence passed," Manfred went on; "our officer was too cunning for that, but it was arranged that the officer's answer should be conveyed thus."

He opened his hand and Bartholomew saw two beans, one red and the other black, reposing in the palm.

"The black was to be a refusal, the red an acceptance, the terms were to be scratched on the side of the red bean with a needle—and the sum agreed was £1,000."

Bartholomew made no answer.

"Exactly that sum we offer you to place us from time to time in possession of such information as we require concerning the movements of the Red Hundred."

"If I refuse?"

"You will not refuse," replied the mask calmly; "you need the money, and you have even now under consideration a plan for cutting yourself adrift from your friends."

"You know so much——" began the other with a shrug.

"I know a great deal. For instance, I know that you contemplate immediate flight—by the way, are you aware that the *Lucus Woerhmann* is in dock at Naples with a leaking boiler?"

Bartholomew started, as well he might, for nobody but himself knew that the *Lucus Woerhmann* was the ship he had hoped to overtake at Suez.

Manfred saw his bewilderment and smiled.

"I do not ask credit for supernatural powers," he said; "frankly, it was the merest guess-work, but you must abandon your trip. It is necessary for our greater success that you should remain."

Bartholomew bit his lips. This scheme did not completely fall in with his plans. He affected a sudden geniality.

"Well, if I must, I must," he said heartily, "and since I agree, may I ask whom I have the honour of addressing, and further, since I am now your confidential agent, that I may see the faces of my employers?"

He recognized the contempt in Manfred's laugh.

"You need no introduction to us," said Manfred coldly, "and you will understand we do not intend taking you into our confidence. Our agreement is that we share your confidence, not that you shall share ours."

“I must know something,” said Bartholomew doggedly. “What am I to do? Where am I to report? How shall I be paid?”

“You will be paid when your work is completed.” Manfred reached out his hand toward a little table that stood within his reach.

Instantly the room was plunged into darkness.

The traitor sprang back, fearing he knew not what.

“Come—do not be afraid,” said a voice.

“What does this mean?” cried Bartholomew, and stepped forward.

He felt the floor beneath him yield and tried to spring backwards, but already he had lost his balance, and with a scream of terror he felt himself falling, falling. . . .

“Here, wake up!”

Somebody was shaking his arm and he was conscious of an icy coldness and a gusty raw wind that buffeted his face.

He shivered and opened his eyes.

First of all he saw an iron camel with a load on its back; then he realized dimly that it was the ornamental support of a garden seat; then he saw a dull grey parapet of grimy stone. He was sitting on a seat on the Thames Embankment, and a policeman was shaking him, not ungently, to wakefulness.

“Come along, sir—this won’t do, ye know.”

He staggered to his feet unsteadily. He was wearing a fur coat that was not his.

“How did I come here?” he asked in a dull voice.

The policeman laughed good humouredly.

“Ah, that’s more than I can tell you—you weren’t here ten minutes ago, that I’ll swear.”

Bartholomew put his hand in his pocket and found some money.

“Call me a taxi,” he said shakily and one was found.

He left the policeman perfectly satisfied with the result of his morning’s work and drove home to his lodgings. By what extraordinary means had he reached the Embankment? He remembered the Four, he remembered the suddenly darkened room, he remembered falling —— Perhaps he lost consciousness, yet he could not have been injured by his fall. He had a faint recollection of somebody telling him to breathe and of inhaling a sweet sickly vapour—and that was all.

The coat was not his. He thrust his hands into both pockets and found a letter. Did he but know it was of the peculiar texture that had made the greenish-grey paper of the Four Just Men famous throughout Europe.

The letter was brief and to the point:

> “For faithful service, you will be rewarded; for treachery, there will be no net to break your fall.”

He shivered again. Then his impotence, his helplessness, enraged him, and he swore softly and weakly.

He was ignorant of the locality in which the interview had taken place. On his way thither he had tried in vain to follow the direction the shuttered motor-car had taken.

By what method the Four would convey their instructions he had no idea. He was quite satisfied that they would find a way.

He reached his flat with his head swimming from the effects of the drug they had given him, and flung himself, dressed as he was, upon his bed and slept. He slept well into the afternoon, then rose stiff and irritable. A bath and a change refreshed him, and he walked out to keep an appointment he had made.

On his way he remembered impatiently that there was a call to the Council at five o'clock. It reminded him of his old rehearsal days. Then he recollected that no place had been fixed for the council meeting. He would find the quiet François in Leicester Square, so he turned his steps in that direction.

François, patient, smiling, and as deferential as ever, awaited him. "The council was held at two o'clock," he said, "and I am to tell you that we have decided on two projects." He looked left and right, with elaborated caution.

"There is at Gravesend"—he pronounced it "Gwayvse-end"—"a battleship that has put in for stores. It is the *Grondovitch*. It will be fresh in your mind that the captain is the nobleman Svardo—we have no reason to love him."

"And the second?" asked Bartholomew.

Again François went through the pantomime that had so annoyed his companion before.

"It is no less than the Bank," he said triumphantly.

Bartholomew was aghast.

"The Bank—the Bank of England! Why, you're mad—you have taken leave of your senses!"

François shrugged his shoulders tolerantly.

"It is the order," he said; then, abruptly, "*Au revoir*," he said, and, with his extravagant little bow, was gone.

If Bartholomew's need for cutting himself adrift from the Red Hundred existed before, the necessity was multiplied now a thousand times. Any lingering doubt he might have had, any remote twinge of conscience at the part he was playing, these vanished.

He glanced at his watch, and hurried to his destination.

It was the Red Room of the Hotel Larboune that he sought.

He found a table and ordered a drink.

The waiter was unusually talkative.

He stood by the solitary table at which Bartholomew sat, and chatted pleasantly and respectfully. This much the other patrons of the establishment noticed idly, and wondered whether it was racing or house property that the two had in common.

The waiter was talking.

". . . I am inclined to disbelieve the story of the *Grondovitch*, but the Embassy and the commander shall know—when do you leave?"

"Just as soon as I can," said Bartholomew.

The waiter nodded and flicked some cigarette ash from the table with his napkin.

"And the Woman of Gratz?" he asked.

Bartholomew made a gesture of doubt.

"Why not," said the waiter, looking thoughtfully out of the window, "why not take her with you?"

There had been the germ of such a thought in Bartholomew's mind, but he had never given form to it—even to himself.

"She is very beautiful, and, it occurred to me, not altogether indifferent to your attractions—that kind of woman has a penchant for your type, and frankly we would gladly see her out

of the way—or dead."

M. Menshikoff was by no means vindictive, but there was obvious sincerity in his voice when he pronounced the last two words. M. Menshikoff had been right-hand man of the Grand Master of the Secret Police for too many years to feel any qualms at the project of removing an enemy to the system.

"I thought we had her once," he said meditatively; "they would have flogged her in the fortress of St. Peter and Paul, but I stopped them. She was grateful I think, and almost human . . . but it passed off."

Bartholomew paid for his drink, and ostentatiously tipped the obsequious man before him. He remembered as he did so that Menshikoff was reputably a millionaire.

"Your change, m'sieur," said Menshikoff gravely, and he handed back a few jingling coppers and two tightly folded bank-notes for a hundred pounds. He was a believer in the principle of "pay as you go." Bartholomew pocketed the money carelessly.

"Good day," he said loudly.

"*Au revoir, m'sieur, et bon voyage*," said the waiter.

CHAPTER VI
PRINCESS REVOLUTIONARY

The Woman of Gratz was very human. But to Bartholomew she seemed a thing of ice, passionless, just a beautiful woman who sat stiffly in a straight-backed chair, regarding him with calm, questioning eyes. They were in her flat in Bloomsbury on the evening of the day following his interview with Menshikoff. Her coolness chilled him, and strangled the very passion of his speech, and what he said came haltingly, and sounded lame and unconvincing.

"But why?" that was all she asked. Thrice he had paused appealingly, hoping for encouragement, but her answer had been the same.

He spoke incoherently, wildly. The fear of the Four on the one hand and the dread of the Reds on the other, were getting on his nerves.

He saw a chance of escape from both, freedom from the four-walled control of these organizations, and before him the wide expanse of a trackless wilderness, where the vengeance of neither could follow.

Eden in sight—he pleaded for an Eve.

The very thought of the freedom ahead overcame the depression her coldness laid upon him.

"Maria—don't you see? You are wasting your life doing this man's work—this assassin's work. You were made for love and for me!" He caught her hand and she did not withdraw it, but the palm he pressed was unresponsive and the curious searching eyes did not leave his face.

"But why?" she asked again. "And how? I do not love you, I shall never love any man—and there is the work for you and the work for me. There is the cause and your oath. Your comrades——"

He started up and flung away her hand. For a moment he stood over her, glowering down at her upturned face.

"Work!—Comrades!" he grated with a laugh. "D'ye think I'm going to risk my precious neck any further?"

He did not hear the door open softly, nor the footfall of the two men who entered.

"Are you blind as well as mad?" he went on brutally. "Don't you see that the thing is finished? The Four Just Men have us all in the hollow of their hands! They've got us like that!" He snapped his fingers contemptuously. "They know everything—even to the attempt that is to be made on the Prince of the Escorials! Ha! that startles you—yet it is true, every word I say—they know."

"If it is true," she said slowly, "there has been a traitor."

He waved his hand carelessly, admitting and dismissing the possibility.

"There are traitors always—when the pay for treachery is good," he said easily; "but traitor or no traitor, London is too hot for you and me."

"For you," corrected the girl.

"And for you," he said savagely; he snatched up her hand again. "You've got to come—do you hear—you beautiful snow woman—you've got to come with me!"

He drew her to him, but a hand grasped his arm, and he turned to meet the face of Starque, livid and puckered, and creased with silent anger.

Starque was prepared for the knife or for the pistol, but not for the blow that caught him full in the face and sent him staggering back to the wall.

He recovered himself quickly, and motioned to François, who turned and locked the door.

"Stand away from that door!"

"Wait!"

Starque, breathing quickly, wiped the blood from his face with the back of his hand.

"Wait," he said in his guttural tone; "before you go there is a matter to be settled."

"At any time, in any place," said the Englishman.

"It is not the blow," breathed Starque, "that is nothing; it is the matter of the Inner Council —traitor!"

He thrust out his chin as he hissed the last word.

Bartholomew had very little time to decide upon his course of action. He was unarmed; but he knew instinctively that there would be no shooting. It was the knife he had to fear and he grasped the back of a chair. If he could keep them at a distance he might reach the door and get safely away. He cursed his folly that he had delayed making the coup that would have so effectively laid Starque by the heels.

"You have betrayed us to the Four Just Men—but that we might never have known, for the Four have no servants to talk. But you sold us to the Embassy—and that was your undoing."

He had recovered his calm.

"We sent you a message telling you of our intention to destroy the Bank of England. The Bank was warned—by the Four. We told you of the attempt to be made on the *Grondovitch*—the captain was warned by the Embassy—you are doubly convicted. No such attempts were ever contemplated. They were invented for your particular benefit, and you fell into the trap."

Bartholomew took a fresh grip of the chair. He realized vaguely that he was face to face with death, and for one second he was seized with a wild panic.

"Last night," Starque went on deliberately, "the Council met secretly, and your name was read from the list."

The Englishman's mouth went dry.

"And the Council said with one voice . . ." Starque paused to look at the Woman of Gratz. Imperturbable she stood with folded hands, neither approving nor dissenting. Momentarily Bartholomew's eyes too sought her face—but he saw neither pity nor condemnation. It was the face of Fate, inexorable, unreasoning, inevitable.

"Death was the sentence," said Starque in so soft a voice that the man facing him could scarcely hear him. "Death . . ."

With a lightning motion he raised his hand and threw the knife. . . .

"Damn you . . ." whimpered the stricken man, and his helpless hands groped at his chest . . . then he slid to his knees and François struck precisely . . .

Again Starque looked at the woman.

"It is the law," he stammered, but she made no reply.

Only her eyes sought the huddled figure on the floor and her lips twitched.

"We must get away from here," whispered Starque.

He was shaking a little, for this was new work for him. The forces of jealousy and fear for his personal safety had caused him to take upon himself the office that on other occasions he left to lesser men.

"Who lives in the opposite flat?"

He had peeped through the door.

"A student—a chemist," she replied in her calm, level tone.

Starque flushed, for her voice sounded almost strident coming after the whispered conference between his companion and himself.

"Softly, softly," he urged.

He stepped gingerly back to where the body was lying, made a circuit about it, and pulled down the blind. He could not have explained the instinct that made him do this. Then he came back to the door and gently turned the handle, beckoning the others. It seemed to him that the handle turned itself, or that somebody on the other side was turning at the same time.

That this was so he discovered, for the door suddenly jerked open, sending him staggering backward, and a man stood on the threshold.

With the drawn blind, the room was in semi-darkness, and the intruder, standing motionless in the doorway, could see nothing but the shadowy figures of the inmates.

As he waited he was joined by three others, and he spoke rapidly in a language that Starque, himself no mean linguist, could not understand. One of his companions opened the door of the student's room and brought out something that he handed to the watcher on the threshold.

Then the man entered the room alone and closed the door behind him, not quite close, for he had trailed what looked like a thick cord behind him and this prevented the shutting of the door.

Starque found his voice.

"What do you want?" he asked, quietly.

"I want Bartholomew, who came into this room half an hour ago," replied the intruder.

"He has left," said Starque, and in the darkness he felt at his feet for the dead man—he needed the knife.

"That is a lie," said the stranger coolly; "neither he nor you, Rudolph Starque, nor the Woman of Gratz, nor the murderer François has left."

"Monsieur knows too much," said Starque evenly, and lurched forward, swinging his knife.

"Keep your distance," warned the stranger, and at that moment Starque and the silent François sprang forward and struck. . . .

The exquisite agony of the shock that met them paralysed them for the moment. The sprayed threads of the "live" wire the man held before him like a shield jerked the knife from Starque's hands, and he heard François groan as he fell.

"You are foolish," said the voice again, "and you, madame, do not move, I beg—tell me what has become of Bartholomew."

A silence, then:

"He is dead," said the Woman of Gratz.

She heard the man move.

"He was a traitor—so we killed him," she continued calmly enough. "What will you do—you, who stand as a self-constituted judge?"

He made no reply, and she heard the soft rustle of his fingers on the wall.

"You are seeking the light—as we all seek it," she said, unmoved, and she switched on the light.

He saw her standing near the body of the man she had lured to his death, scornful, defiant, and strangely aloof from the sordidness of the tragedy she had all but instigated.

She saw a tanned man of thirty-five, with deep grave eyes, a broad forehead, and a trim pointed beard. A man of inches, with strength in every line of his fine figure, and strength in every feature of his face.

She stared at him insolently, uncaring, but before the mastery of his eyes, she lowered her lids.

It seemed the other actors in the drama were so inconsiderate as to be unworthy of notice. The dead man in his grotesque posture, the unconscious murderer at his feet, and Starque, dazed and stunned, crouching by the wall.

"Here is the light you want," she went on, "not so easily do we of the Red Hundred illuminate the gloom of despair and oppression——"

"Spare me your speech-making," said Manfred coldly, and the scorn in his voice struck her like the lash of a whip. For the first time the colour came to her face and her eyes lit with anger.

"You have bad counsellors," Manfred went on, "you, who talk of autocrats and corrupt kingship—what are you but a puppet living on flattery? It is your whim that you should be regarded as a conspirator—a Corday. And when you are acclaimed Princess Revolutionary, it is satisfactory to your vanity—more satisfactory than your title to be hailed Princess Beautiful."

He chose his words nicely.

"Yet men—such men as these," he indicated Starque, "think only of the Princess Beautiful—not the lady of the Inspiring Platitudes; not the frail, heroic Patriot of the Flaming Words, but the warm flesh and blood woman, lovable and adorable."

He spoke in German, and there were finer shades of meaning in his speech than can be exactly or literally translated. He spoke of a purpose, evenly and without emotion. He intended to wound, and wound deeply, and he knew he had succeeded.

He saw the rapid rise and fall of her bosom as she strove to regain control of herself, and he saw, too, the blood on her lips where her sharp white teeth bit.

"I shall know you again," she said with an intensity of passion that made her voice tremble. "I shall look for you and find you, and be it the Princess Revolutionary or the Princess Beautiful who brings about your punishment, be sure I shall strike hard."

He bowed.

"That is as it may be," he said calmly; "for the moment you are powerless, if I willed it you would be powerless forever—for the moment it is my wish that you should go."

He stepped aside and opened the door.

The magnetism in his eyes drew her forward.

"There is your road," he said when she hesitated. She was helpless; the humiliation was maddening.

"My friends——" she began, as she hesitated on the threshold.

"Your friends will meet the fate that one day awaits you," he said calmly.

White with passion, she turned on him.

"You!—threaten me! a brave man indeed to threaten a woman!"

She could have bitten her tongue at the slip she made. She as a woman had appealed to him as a man! This was the greatest humiliation of all.

"There is your road," he said again, courteously but uncompromisingly.

She was scarcely a foot from him, and she turned and faced him, her lips parted and the black devil of hate in her eyes.

“One day—one day,” she gasped, “I will repay you!”

Then she turned quickly and disappeared through the door, and Manfred waited until her footsteps had died away before he stooped to the half-conscious Starque and jerked him to his feet.

CHAPTER VII
THE GOVERNMENT AND MR. JESSEN

In recording the events that followed the reappearance of the Four Just Men, I have confined myself to those which I know to have been the direct outcome of the Red Hundred propaganda and the counter-activity of the Four Just Men.

Thus I make no reference to the explosion at Woolwich Arsenal, which was credited to the Red Hundred, knowing, as I do, that the calamity was due to the carelessness of a workman. Nor to the blowing up of the main in Oxford Street, which was a much more simple explanation than the fantastic theories of the *Megaphone* would have you imagine. This was not the first time that a fused wire and a leaking gas main brought about the upheaval of a public thoroughfare, and the elaborate plot with which organized anarchy was credited was without existence.

I think the most conscientiously accurate history of the Red Hundred movement is that set forth in the series of ten articles contributed to the *Morning Leader* by Harold Ashton under the title of "Forty Days of Terrorism," and, whilst I think the author frequently fails from lack of sympathy for the Four Just Men to thoroughly appreciate the single-mindedness of this extraordinary band of men, yet I shall always regard "Forty Days of Terrorism" as being the standard history of the movement, and its failure.

On one point in the history alone I find myself in opposition to Mr. Ashton, and that is the exact connection between the discovery of the Carlby Mansion Tragedy, and the extraordinary return of Mr. Jessen of 37, Presley Street.

It is perhaps indiscreet of me to refer at so early a stage to this return of Jessen's, because whilst taking exception to the theories put forward in "Forty Days of Terrorism," I am not prepared to go into the evidence on which I base my theories.

The popular story is that one morning Mr. Jessen walked out of his house and demanded from the astonished milkman why he had omitted to leave his morning supply. Remembering that the disappearance of "Long"—perhaps it would be less confusing to call him the name by which he was known in Presley Street—had created an extraordinary sensation; that pictures of his house and the interior of his house had appeared in all the newspapers; that the newspaper crime experts had published columns upon columns of speculative theories, and that 37, Presley Street, had for some weeks been the Mecca of the morbid minded, who, standing outside, stared the unpretentious façade out of countenance for hours on end; you may imagine that the milkman legend had the exact journalistic touch that would appeal to a public whose minds had been trained by generations of magazine-story writers to just such *dénouement* as this.

The truth is that Mr. Long, upon coming to life, went immediately to the Home Office and told his story to the Under Secretary. He did not drive up in a taxi, nor was he lifted out in a state of exhaustion as one newspaper had erroneously had it, but he arrived on the top of a motor omnibus which passed the door, and was ushered into the Presence almost at once. When Mr. Long had told his story he was taken to the Home Secretary himself, and the chief commissioner was sent for, and came hurriedly from Scotland Yard, accompanied by Superintendent Falmouth. All this is made clear in Mr. Ashton's book.

"For some extraordinary reason," I quote the same authority, "Long, or Jessen, seems by means of documents in his possession to have explained to the satisfaction of the Home

Secretary and the Police Authorities his own position in the matter, and moreover to have inspired the right hon. gentleman with these mysterious documents, that Mr. Ridgeway, so far from accepting the resignation that Jessen placed in his hands, reinstated him in his position."

As to how two of these documents came to Jessen or to the Four Just Men, Mr. Ashton is very wisely silent, not attempting to solve a mystery which puzzled both the Quai d'Orsay and Petrograd. For these two official forms, signed in the one case by the French President and in the other with the sprawling signature of Czar Nicholas, were supposed to be incorporated with other official memoranda in well-guarded national archives.

It was subsequent to Mr. Jessen's visit to the Home Office that the discovery of the Carlby Mansions Tragedy was made, and I cannot do better than quote the *Times*, since that journal, jealous of the appearance in its columns of any news of a sensational character, reduced the intelligence to its most constricted limits. Perhaps the *Megaphone* account might make better reading, but the space at my disposal will not allow of the inclusion in this book of the thirty-three columns of reading matter, headlines, portraits, and diagrammatic illustrations with which that enterprising journal served up particulars of the grisly horror to its readers.

Thus, the *Times*:—

> "Shortly after one o'clock yesterday afternoon and in consequence of information received, Superintendent Falmouth, of the Criminal Investigation Department, accompanied by Detective-Sergeants Boyle and Lawley, effected an entrance into No. 69, Carlby Mansions, occupied by the Countess Slienvitch, a young Russian lady of independent means. Lying on the floor were the bodies of three men who have since been identified as—
>
> "Lauder Bartholomew, aged 33, late of the Koon-dorp Mounted Rifles;
>
> "Rudolph Starque, aged 40, believed to be an Austrian and a prominent revolutionary propagandist;
>
> "Henri Delaye François, aged 36, a Frenchman, also believed to have been engaged in propaganda work.
>
> "The cause of death in the case of Bartholomew seems to be evident, but with the other two men some doubt exists, and the police, who preserve an attitude of rigid reticence, will await the medical examination before making any statement.
>
> "One unusual feature of the case is understood to be contained in a letter found in the room accepting, on behalf of an organization known as the Four Just Men, full responsibility for the killing of the two foreigners, and another, writes a correspondent, is the extraordinary structural damage to the room itself. The tenant, the Countess Slienvitch, had not, up to a late hour last night, been traced."

Superintendent Falmouth, standing in the centre of the room, from which most traces of the tragedy had been removed, was mainly concerned with the "structural damage" that the *Times* so lightly passed over.

At his feet yawned a great square hole, and beneath, in the empty flat below, was a heap of plaster and laths, and the débris of destruction.

"The curious thing is, and it shows how thorough these men are," explained the superintendent to his companion, "that the first thing we found when we got there was a twenty-pound note pinned to the wall with a brief note in pencil saying that this was to pay the owner of the property for the damage."

It may be added that by the expressed desire of the young man at his side he dispensed with all ceremony of speech.

Once or twice in speaking, he found himself on the verge of saying, “Your Highness,” but the young man was so kindly, and so quickly put the detective at his ease, that he overcame the feeling of annoyance that the arrival of the distinguished visitor with the letter from the commissioner had caused him, and became amiable.

“Of course, I have an interest in all this,” said the young man quietly; “these people, for some reason, have decided I am not fit to encumber the earth——”

“What have you done to the Red Hundred, sir?”

The young man laughed.

“Nothing. On the contrary,” he added with a whimsical smile, “I have helped them.”

The detective remembered that this hereditary Prince of the Escorial bore a reputation for eccentricity.

With a suddenness which was confusing, the Prince turned with a smile on his lips.

“You are thinking of my dreadful reputation?”

“No, no!” disclaimed the embarrassed Mr. Falmouth. “I——”

“Oh, yes—I’ve done lots of things,” said the other with a little laugh; “it’s in the blood—my illustrious cousin——”

“I assure your Highness,” said Falmouth impressively, “my reflections were not—er—reflections on yourself——there is a story that you have dabbled in socialism—but that, of course——”

“Is perfectly true,” concluded the Prince calmly. He turned his attention to the hole in the floor. “Have you any theory?” he asked.

The detective nodded.

“It’s more than a theory—it’s knowledge—you see we’ve seen Jessen, and the threads of the story are all in hand.”

“What will you do?”

“Nothing,” said the detective stolidly; “hush up the inquest until we can lay the Four Just Men by the heels.”

“And the manner of killing?”

“That must be kept quiet,” replied Falmouth emphatically.

This conversation may furnish a clue as to the unprecedented conduct of the police at the subsequent inquest.

In the little coroner’s court there was accommodation for three pressmen and some fifty of the general public. Without desiring in any way to cast suspicion upon the cleanest police force in the world, I can only state that the jury were remarkably well disciplined, that the general public found the body of the court so densely packed with broad-shouldered men that they were unable to obtain admission. As to the press, the confidential circular had done its work, and the three shining lights of journalism that occupied the reporters’ desk were careful to carry out instructions.

The proceedings lasted a very short time, a verdict, “. . . some person or persons unknown,” was recorded, and another London mystery was added (I quote from the *Evening News*) to the already alarming and formidable list of unpunished crimes.

Charles Garrett was one of the three journalists admitted to the inquest, and after it was all over he confronted Falmouth.

“Look here, Falmouth,” he said pugnaciously, “what’s the racket?” Falmouth, having reason to know, and to an extent stand in awe of, the little man, waggled his head darkly.

“Oh, rot!” said Charles rudely, “don’t be so disgustingly mysterious—why aren’t we allowed to say these chaps died——?”

“Have you seen Jessen?” asked the detective.

“I have,” said Charles bitterly, “and after what I’ve done for that man; after I’ve put his big feet on the rungs of culture——”

“Wouldn’t he speak?” asked Falmouth innocently.

“He was as close,” said Charles sadly, “as the inside washer of a vacuum pump.”

“Hm!” the detective was considering. Sooner or later the connection must occur to Charles, and he was the only man who would be likely to surprise Jessen’s secret. Better that the journalist should know now.

“If I were you,” said Falmouth quietly, “I shouldn’t worry Jessen; you know what he is, and in what capacity he serves the Government. Come along with me.”

He did not speak a word in reply to the questions Charles put until they passed through the showy portals of Carlby Mansions and a lift had deposited them at the door of the flat.

Falmouth opened the door with a key, and Charles went into the flat at his heels.

He saw the hole in the floor.

“This wasn’t mentioned at the inquest,” he said; “but what’s this to do with Jessen?”

He looked up at the detective in perplexity, then a light broke upon him and he whistled.

“Well, I’m——” he said, then he added softly—“But what does the Government say to this?”

“The Government,” said Falmouth in his best official manner, smoothing the nap of his hat the while—“the Government regard the circumstances as unusual, but they have accepted the situation with great philosophy.”

That night Mr. Long (or Jessen) reappeared at the Guild as though nothing whatever had happened, and addressed his audience for half an hour on the subject of “Do burglars make good caretakers?”

CHAPTER VIII
AN INCIDENT IN THE FIGHT

From what secret place in the metropolis the Woman of Gratz reorganized her forces we shall never know; whence came her strength of purpose and her unbounded energy we can guess. With Starque's death she became virtually and actually the leader of the Red Hundred, and from every corner of Europe came reinforcements of men and money to strengthen her hand and to re-establish the shaking prestige of the most powerful association that Anarchism had ever known.

Great Britain had ever been immune from the active operations of the anarchist. It had been the sanctuary of the revolutionary for centuries, and Anarchism had hesitated to jeopardize the security of refugees by carrying on its propaganda on British soil. That the extremists of the movement had chafed under the restriction is well known, and when the Woman of Gratz openly declared war on England, she was acclaimed enthusiastically.

Then followed perhaps the most extraordinary duels that the world had ever seen. Two powerful bodies, both outside the pale of the law, fought rapidly, mercilessly, asking no quarter and giving none. And the eerie thing about it all was, that no man saw the agents of either of the combatants. It was as though two spirit forces were engaged in some titanic combat. The police were almost helpless. The fight against the Red Hundred was carried on, almost single-handedly, by the Four Just Men, or, to give them the title with which they signed their famous proclamation, "The Council of Justice."

Since the days of the Fenian scare, London had never lived under the terror that the Red Hundred inspired. Never a day passed but preparations for some outrage were discovered, the most appalling of which was the attempt on the Tube Railway. If I refer to them as "attempts," and if the repetition of that word wearies the reader, it is because, thanks to the extraordinary vigilance of the Council of Justice, they were no more.

"This sort of thing cannot go on," said the Home Secretary petulantly at a meeting of the heads of the police. "Here we have admittedly the finest police force in the world, and we must needs be under obligation to men for whom warrants exist on a charge of murder!"

The chief commissioner was sufficiently harassed, and was inclined to resent the criticism in the minister's voice.

"We've done everything that can be done, sir," he said shortly; "if you think my resignation would help you out of the difficulty——"

"Now for heaven's sake, don't be a fool," pleaded the Home Secretary, in his best unparliamentary manner. "Cannot you see——"

"I can see that no harm has been done so far," said the commissioner doggedly; then he burst forth:

"Look here, sir! our people have very often to employ characters a jolly sight worse than the Four Just Men—if we don't employ them we exploit them. Mean little sneak-thieves, 'narks' they call 'em, old lags, burglars—and once or twice something worse. We are here to protect the public; so long as the public is being protected, nobody can kick——"

"But it is not you who are protecting the public—you get your information——"

"From the Council of Justice, that is so; but where it comes from doesn't matter. Now, listen to me, sir."

He was very earnest and emphasized his remarks with little raps on the desk.

"Get the Prince of the Escorial out of the country," he said seriously. "I've got information that the Reds are after his blood. No, I haven't been warned by the Just Men, that's the queer part about it. I've got it straight from a man who's selling me information. I shall see him to-night if they haven't butchered him."

"But the Prince is our guest."

"He's been here too long," said the practical and unsentimental commissioner; "let him go back to Spain—he's to be married in a month; let him go home and buy his trousseau or whatever he buys."

"Is that a confession that you cannot safeguard him?"

The commissioner looked vexed.

"I could safeguard a child of six or a staid gentleman of sixty, but I cannot be responsible for a young man who insists on seeing London without a guide, who takes solitary motor-car drives, and refuses to give us any information beforehand as to his plans for the day—or if he does, breaks them!"

The minister was pacing the apartment with his head bent in thought.

"As to the Prince of the Escorial," he said presently, "advice has already been conveyed to his Highness—from the highest quarter—to make his departure at an early date. To-night, indeed, is his last night in London."

The Commissioner of Police made an extravagant demonstration of relief.

"He's going to the Auditorium to-night," he said, rising. He spoke a little pityingly, and, indeed, the Auditorium, although a very first-class music hall, had a slight reputation. "I shall have a dozen men in the house and we'll have his motor-car at the stage door at the end of the show."

That night his Highness arrived promptly at eight o'clock and stood chatting pleasantly with the bare-headed manager in the vestibule. Then he went alone to his box and sat down in the shadow of the red velvet curtain.

Punctually at eight there arrived two other gentlemen, also in evening dress. Antonio Selleni was one and Karl Ollmanns was the other. They were both young men, and before they left the motor-car they completed their arrangement.

"You will occupy the box on the opposite side, but I will endeavour to enter the box. If I succeed—it will be finished. The knife is best," there was pride in the Italian's tone.

"If I cannot reach him the honour will be yours." He had the stilted manner of the young Latin. The other man grunted. He replied in halting French.

"Once I shot an egg from between fingers—so," he said.

They made their entry separately.

In the manager's office, Superintendent Falmouth relieved the tedium of waiting by reading the advertisements in an evening newspaper.

To him came the manager with a message that under no circumstances was his Highness in Box A to be disturbed until the conclusion of the performance.

In the meantime Signor Selleni made a cautious way to Box A. He found the road clear, turned the handle softly, and stepped quickly into the dark interior of the box.

Twenty minutes later Falmouth stood at the back of the dress circle issuing instructions to a subordinate.

"Have a couple of men at the stage door—my God!"

Over the soft music, above the hum of voices, a shot rang out and a woman screamed. From the box opposite the Prince's a thin swirl of smoke floated.

Karl Ollmanns, tired of waiting, had fired at the motionless figure sitting in the shadow of the curtain. Then he walked calmly out of the box into the arms of two breathless detectives.

"A doctor!" shouted Falmouth as he ran. The door of the Box A was locked, but he broke it open.

A man lay on the floor of the box very still and strangely stiff.

"Why, what——!" began the detective, for the dead man was bound hand and foot.

There was already a crowd at the door of the box, and he heard an authoritative voice demand admittance.

He looked over his shoulder to meet the eye of the commissioner.

"They've killed him, sir," he said bitterly.

"Whom?" asked the commissioner in perplexity.

"His Highness."

"His Highness!" the commissioner's eyebrows rose in genuine astonishment. "Why, the Prince left Charing Cross for the Continent half an hour ago!"

The detective gasped.

"Then who in the name of Fate is this?"

It was M. Menshikoff, who had come in with the commissioner, who answered.

"Antonio Selleni, an anarchist of Milan," he reported.

Carlos Ferdinand Bourbon, Prince of the Escorial, Duke of Buda-Gratz, and heir to three thrones, was married, and his many august cousins scattered throughout Europe had a sense of heartfelt relief.

A prince with admittedly advanced views, an idealist, with Utopian schemes for the regeneration of mankind, and, coming down to the mundane practical side of life, a reckless motor-car driver, an outrageously daring horseman, and possessed of the indifference to public opinion which is equally the equipment of your fool and your truly great man, his marriage had been looked forward to throughout the courts of Europe in the light of an international achievement.

Said his Imperial Majesty of Central Europe to the grizzled chancellor:

"Te Deums—you understand, von Hedlitz? In every church."

"It is a great relief," said the chancellor, wagging his head thoughtfully.

"Relief!" the Emperor stretched himself as though the relief were physical, "that young man owes me two years of life. You heard of the London essay?"

The chancellor had heard—indeed, he had heard three or four times—but he was a polite chancellor and listened attentively. His Majesty had the true story-telling faculty, and elaborated the introduction.

". . . if I am to believe his Highness, he was sitting quietly in his box when the Italian entered. He saw the knife in his hand and half rose to grapple with the intruder. Suddenly, from nowhere in particular, sprang three men, who had the assassin on the floor bound and gagged. You would have thought our Carlos Ferdinand would have made an outcry! But not he! He sat stock still, dividing his attention between the stage and the prostrate man and the leader of this mysterious band of rescuers."

"The Four Just Men!" put in the chancellor.

"Three, so far as I can gather," corrected the imperial story-teller. "Well, it would appear that this leader, in quite a logical calm, matter-of-fact way, suggested that the prince should

leave quietly; that his motor-car was at the stage door, that a saloon had been reserved at Charing Cross, a cabin at Dover, and a special train at Calais."

His Majesty had a trick of rubbing his knee when anything amused him, and this he did now.

"Carl obeyed like a child—which seems the remarkably strange point about the whole proceedings—the captured anarchist was trussed and bound and sat on the chair, and left to his own unpleasant thoughts."

"And killed," said the chancellor.

"No, not killed," corrected the Emperor. "Part of the story I tell you is his—he told it to the police at the hospital—no, no, not killed—his friend was not the marksman he thought."

CHAPTER IX
THE FOUR VS. THE HUNDRED

Some workmen, returning home of an evening and taking a short cut through a field two miles from Catford, saw a man hanging from a tree.

They ran across and found a fashionably dressed gentleman of foreign appearance. One of the labourers cut the rope with his knife, but the man was dead when they cut him down. Beneath the tree was a black bag, to which somebody had affixed a label bearing the warning, "Do not touch—this bag contains explosives: inform the police." More remarkable still was the luggage label tied to the lapel of the dead man's coat. It ran: "This is Franz Kitsinger, convicted at Prague in 1904, for throwing a bomb: escaped from prison March 17, 1905: was one of the three men responsible for the attempt on the Tower Bridge to-day. Executed by order of The Council of Justice."

"It's a humiliating confession," said the chief commissioner when they brought the news to him, "but the presence of these men takes a load off my mind."

But the Red Hundred were grimly persistent.

That night a man, smoking a cigar, strolled aimlessly past the policeman on point duty at the corner of Kensington Park Gardens, and walked casually into Ladbroke Square. He strolled on, turned a corner and crossing a road, till he came to where one great garden served for a double row of middle-class houses. The backs of these houses opened on to the square. He looked round and, seeing the coast clear, he clambered over the iron railings and dropped into the big pleasure ground, holding very carefully an object that bulged in his pocket.

He took a leisurely view of the houses before he decided on the victim. The blinds of this particular house were up and the French windows of the dining-room were open, and he could see the laughing group of young people about the table. There was a birthday party or something of the sort in progress, for there was a great parade of Parthian caps and paper sunbonnets.

The man was evidently satisfied with the possibilities for tragedy, and he took a pace nearer. . . .

Two strong arms were about him, arms with muscles like cords of steel.

"Not that way, my friend," whispered a voice in his ear. . . .

The man showed his teeth in a dreadful grin.

The sergeant on duty at Notting Hill Gate Station received a note at the hands of a grimy urchin, who for days afterwards maintained a position of enviable notoriety.

"A gentleman told me to bring this," he said.

The sergeant looked at the small boy sternly and asked him if he ever washed his face. Then he read the letter:

"The second man of the three concerned in the attempt to blow up the Tower Bridge will be found in the garden of Maidham Crescent, under the laurel bushes, opposite No. 72."

It was signed "The Council of Justice."

The commissioner was sitting over his coffee at the Ritz, when they brought him the news. Falmouth was a deferential guest, and the chief passed him the note without comment.

"This is going to settle the Red Hundred," said Falmouth. "These people are fighting them with their own weapons—assassination with assassination, terror with terror. Where do we come in?"

“We come in at the end,” said the commissioner, choosing his words with great niceness, “to clean up the mess, and take any scraps of credit that are going”—he paused and shook his head. “I hope—I should be sorry——” he began.

“So should I,” said the detective sincerely, for he knew that his chief was concerned for the ultimate safety of the men whose arrest it was his duty to effect. The commissioner’s brows were wrinkled thoughtfully.

“Two,” he said musingly; “now, how on earth do the Four Just Men know the number in this—and how did they track them down—and who is the third?—heavens! one could go on asking questions the whole of the night!”

On one point the Commissioner might have been informed earlier in the evening—he was not told until three o’clock the next morning.

The third man was Von Dunop. Ignorant of the fate of his fellow-Terrorists, he sallied forth to complete the day notably.

The crowd at a theatre door started a train of thought, but he rejected that outlet to ambition. It was too public, and the chance of escape was nil. These British audiences did not lose their heads so quickly; they refused to be confounded by noise and smoke, and a writhing figure here and there. Von Dunop was no exponent of the Glory of Death school. He greatly desired glory, but the smaller the risk, the greater the glory. This was his code.

He stood for a moment outside the Hotel Ritz. A party of diners were leaving, and motor-cars were being steered up to carry these accursed plutocrats to the theatre. One soldierly-looking gentleman, with a grey moustache, and attended by a quiet, observant, clean-shaven man, interested the anarchist.

He and the soldier exchanged glances.

“Who the dickens was that?” asked the commissioner as he stepped into the taxi. “I seem to know his face.”

“I have seen him before,” said Falmouth. “I won’t go with you, sir—I’ve a little business to do in this part of the world.”

Thereafter Von Dunop was not permitted to enjoy his walk in solitude, for, unknown to him, a man “picked him up” and followed him throughout the evening. And as the hour grew later, that one man became two, at eleven o’clock he became three, and at quarter to twelve, when Von Dunop had finally fixed upon the scene and scope of his exploit, he turned from Park Lane into Brook Street to discover, to his annoyance, quite a number of people within call. Yet he suspected nothing. He did not suspect the night wanderer mouching along the curb with downcast eyes, seeking the gutter for the stray cigar end; nor the two loudly talking men in suits of violet check who wrangled as they walked concerning the relative merits of the favourites for the Derby; nor the commissionaire trudging home with his bag in his hand and a pipe in his mouth, nor the clean-shaven man in evening dress.

The Home Secretary had a house in Berkeley Square. Von Dunop knew the number very well. He slackened pace to allow the man in evening dress to pass. The slow-moving taxi that was fifty yards away he must risk. This taxi had been his constant attendant during the last hour, but he did not know it.

He dipped his hand into his overcoat pocket and drew forth the machine. It was one of Culveri’s masterpieces and, to an extent, experimental—that much the master had warned him in a letter that bore the date mark “Riga.” He felt with his thumb for the tiny key that “set” the machine and pushed it.

Then he slipped into the doorway of No. 196 and placed the bomb. It was done in a second, and so far as he could tell no man had seen him leave the pathway and he was back again on the sidewalk very quickly. But as he stepped back, he heard a shout and a man darted across the road, calling on him to surrender. From the left two men were running, and he saw the man in evening dress blowing a whistle.

He was caught; he knew it. There was a chance of escape—the other end of the street was clear—he turned and ran like the wind. He could hear his pursuers pattering along behind him. His ear, alert to every phase of the chase, heard one pair of feet check and spring up the steps of 196. He glanced round. They were gaining on him, and he turned suddenly and fired three times. Somebody fell; he saw that much. Then right ahead of him a tall policeman sprang from the shadows and clasped him round the waist.

"Hold that man!" shouted Falmouth, running up. Blowing hard, came the night wanderer, a ragged object but skilful, and he had Von Dunop handcuffed in a trice.

It was he who noticed the limpness of the prisoner.

"Hullo!" he said, then held out his hand. "Show a light here."

There were half a dozen policemen and the inevitable crowd on the spot by now, and the rays of the bull's-eye focussed on the detective's hand. It was red with blood. Falmouth seized a lantern and flashed it on the man's face.

There was no need to look farther. He was dead,—dead with the inevitable label affixed to the handle of the knife that killed him.

Falmouth rapped out an oath.

"It is incredible; it is impossible! he was running till the constable caught him, and he has not been out of our hands! Where is the officer who held him?"

Nobody answered, certainly not the tall policeman, who was at that moment being driven eastward, making a rapid change into the conventional evening costume of an English gentleman.

CHAPTER X
THE TRIAL

To fathom the mind of the Woman of Gratz is no easy task, and one not to be lightly undertaken. Remembering her obscure beginning, the bare-legged child drinking in revolutionary talk in the Transylvanian kitchen, and the development of her intellect along unconventional lines—remembering, also, that early in life she made acquaintance with the extreme problems of life and death in their least attractive forms, and that the proportion of things had been grossly distorted by her teachers, you may arrive at a point where your vacillating judgment hesitates between blame and pity.

I would believe that the power of introspection had no real place in her mental equipment, else how can we explain her attitude towards the man whom she had once defied and reconcile those outbursts of hers, wherein she called for his death, for his terrible punishment, wherein, too, she allowed herself the rare luxury of unrestrained speech, how can we reconcile these tantrums with the fact that this man's voice filled her thoughts day and night, the recollection of this man's eyes through his mask followed her every movement, till the image of him became an obsession?

It may be that I have no knowledge of women and their ways (there is no subtle smugness in the doubt I express) and that her inconsistency was general to her sex. It must not be imagined that she had spared either trouble or money to secure the extermination of her enemies, and the enemies of the Red Hundred. She had described them, as well as she could, after her first meeting, and the sketches made under her instruction had been circulated by the officers of the Reds.

Sitting near the window of her house, she mused, lulled by the ceaseless hum of traffic in the street below, and half dozing.

The turning of the door-handle woke her from her dreams.

It was Schmidt, the unspeakable Schmidt, all perspiration and excitement. His round coarse face glowed with it, and he could scarcely bring his voice to tell the news.

"We have him! we have him!" he cried in glee, and snapped his fingers. "Oh, the good news!—I am the first! Nobody has been, Little Friend? I have run and have taken taxis——"

"You have—whom?" she asked.

"The man—one of the men," he said, "who killed Starque and François, and——"

"Which—which man?" she said harshly.

He fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a discoloured sketch.

"Oh!" she said, it could not be the man whom she had defied. "Why, why?" she asked stormily, "why only this man? Why not the others—why not the leader?—have they caught him and lost him?"

Chagrin and astonishment sat on Schmidt's round face. His disappointment was almost comic.

"But, Little Mother!" he said, crestfallen and bewildered, "this is one—we did not hope even for one and——"

The storm passed over.

"Yes, yes," she said wearily, "one—even one is good. They shall learn that the Red Hundred can still strike—this leader shall know—— This man shall have a death," she said, looking at Schmidt, "worthy of his importance. Tell me how he was captured."

"It was the picture," said the eager Schmidt, "the picture you had drawn. One of our comrades thought he recognized him and followed him to his house."

"He shall be tried—to-night," and she spent the day anticipating her triumph.

Conspirators do not always choose dark arches for their plottings. The Red Hundred especially were notorious for the likeliness of their rendezvous. They went to nature for a precedent, and as she endows the tiger with stripes that are undistinguishable from the jungle grass, so the Red Hundred would choose for their meetings such a place where meetings were usually held.

It was in the Lodge Room of the Pride of Millwall, A.O.S.A.—which may be amplified as the Associated Order of the Sons of Abstinence—that the trial took place. The financial position of the Pride of Millwall was not strong. An unusual epidemic of temperate seafaring men had called the Lodge into being, the influx of capital from eccentric bequests had built the tiny hall, and since the fiasco attending the first meeting of the League of London, much of its public business had been skilfully conducted in these riverside premises. It had been raided by the police during the days of terror, but nothing of an incriminating character had been discovered. Because of the success with which the open policy had been pursued the Woman of Gratz preferred to take the risk of an open trial in a hall liable to police raid.

The man must be so guarded that escape was impossible. Messengers sped in every direction to carry out her instructions. There was a rapid summoning of leaders of the movement, the choice of the place of trial, the preparation for a ceremony which was governed by well-established precedent, and the arrangement of the properties which played so effective a part in the trials of the Hundred.

In the black-draped chamber of trial the Woman of Gratz found a full company. Maliscrivona, Tchezki, Vellantini, De Romans, to name a few who were there sitting altogether side by side on the low forms, and they buzzed a welcome as she walked into the room and took her seat at the higher place. She glanced round the faces, bestowing a nod here and a glance of recognition there. She remembered the last time she had made an appearance before the rank and file of the movement. She missed many faces that had turned to her in those days: Starque, François, Kitsinger—dead at the hands of the Four Just Men. It fitted her mood to remember that to-night she would judge one who had at least helped in the slaying of Starque.

Abruptly she rose. Lately she had had few opportunities for the display of that oratory which was once her sole title to consideration in the councils of the Red Hundred. Her powers of organization had come to be respected later. She felt the want of practice as she began speaking. She found herself hesitating for words, and once she felt her illustrations were crude. But she gathered confidence as she proceeded and she felt the responsive thrill of a fascinated audience.

It was the story of the campaign that she told. Much of it we know; the story from the point of view of the Reds may be guessed. She finished her speech by recounting the capture of the enemy.

"To-night we aim a blow at these enemies of progress; if they have been merciless, let us show them that the Red Hundred is not to be outdone in ferocity. As they struck, so let us strike—and, in striking, read a lesson to the men who killed our comrades, that they, nor the world, will ever forget."

There was no cheering as she finished—that had been the order—but a hum of words as they flung their tributes of words at her feet—a ruck of incoherent phrases of praise and

adoration.

Then two men led in the prisoner.

He was calm and interested, throwing out his square chin resolutely when the first words of the charge were called and twiddling the fingers of his bound hands absently.

He met the scowling faces turned to him serenely, but as they proceeded with the indictment, he grew attentive, bending his head to catch the words.

Once he interrupted.

"I cannot quite understand that," he said in fluent Russian, "my knowledge of German is limited."

"What is your nationality?" demanded the woman.

"English," he replied.

"Do you speak French?" she asked.

"I am learning," he said naïvely, and smiled.

"You speak Russian," she said. Her conversation was carried on in that tongue.

"Yes," he said simply; "I was there for many years."

After this, the sum of his transgressions were pronounced in a language he understood. Once or twice as the reader proceeded—it was Ivan Oranvitch who read—the man smiled.

The Woman of Gratz recognized him instantly as the fourth of the party that gathered about her door the day Bartholomew was murdered. Formally she asked him what he had to say before he was condemned.

He smiled again.

"I am not one of the Four Just Men," he said; "whoever says I am—lies."

"And is that all you have to say?" she asked scornfully.

"That is all," was his calm reply.

"Do you deny that you helped slay our comrade Starque?"

"I do not deny it," he said easily, "I did not help—I killed him."

"Ah!" the exclamation came simultaneously from every throat.

"Do you deny that you have killed many of the Red Hundred?"

He paused before he answered.

"As to the Red Hundred—I do not know; but I have killed many people." He spoke with the grave air of a man filled with a sense of responsibility, and again the exclamatory hum ran through the hall. Yet, the Woman of Gratz had a growing sense of unrest in spite of the success of the examination.

"You have said you were in Russia—did men fall to your hand there?"

He nodded.

"And in England?"

"Also in England," he said.

"What is your name?" she asked. By an oversight it was a question she had not put before.

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Does it matter?" he asked. A thought struck her. In the hall she had seen Magnus the Jew. He had lived for many years in England, and she beckoned him.

"Of what class is this man?" she asked in a whisper.

"Of the lower orders," he replied; "it is astounding—did you not notice when—no, you did not see his capture. But he spoke like a man of the streets, dropping his aspirates."

He saw she looked puzzled and explained.

“It is a trick of the order—just as the Moujik says. . . .” he treated her to a specimen of colloquial Russian.

“What is your name?” she asked again.

He looked at her slyly.

“In Russia they called me Father Kopab[1] . . .”

The majority of those who were present were Russian, and at the word they sprang to their feet, shrinking back with ashen faces, as though they feared contact with the man who stood bound and helpless in the middle of the room.

The Woman of Gratz had risen with the rest. Her lips quivered and her wide open eyes spoke her momentary terror.

“I killed Starque,” he went on, “by authority. François also. Some day”—he looked leisurely about the room—“I shall also——”

“Stop!” she cried, and then:

“Release him,” she said, and, wonderingly, Schmidt cut the bonds that bound him. He stretched himself.

“When you took me,” he said, “I had a book; you will understand that here in England I find—forgetfulness in books—and I, who have seen so much suffering and want caused through departure from the law, am striving as hard for the regeneration of mankind as you—but differently.”

Somebody handed him a book.

He looked at it, nodded, and slipped it into his pocket.

“Farewell,” he said as he turned to the open door.

“In God’s name!” said the Woman of Gratz, trembling, “go in peace, Little Father.”

And the man Jessen, sometime headsman to the Supreme Council, and latterly public executioner of England, walked out, no man barring his exit.

The power of the Red Hundred was broken. This much Falmouth knew. He kept an ever-vigilant band of men on duty at the great termini of London, and to these were attached the members of a dozen secret police forces of Europe. Day by day, there was the same report to make. Such and such a man, whose very presence in London had been unsuspected, had left viâ Harwich. So-and-so, surprisingly sprung from nowhere, had gone by the eleven o’clock train from Victoria; by the Hull and Stockholm route twenty had gone in one day, and there were others who made Liverpool, Glasgow, and Newcastle their port of embarkation.

I think that it was only then that Scotland Yard realized the strength of the force that had lain inert in the metropolis, or appreciated the possibilities for destruction that had been to hand in the days of the Terror.

Certainly every batch of names that appeared on the commissioner’s desk made him more thoughtful than ever.

“Arrest them!” he said in horror when the suggestion was made. “Arrest them! Look here, have you ever seen driver ants attack a house in Africa? Marching in, in endless battalions at midnight and clearing out everything living from chickens to beetles? Have you ever seen them re-form in the morning and go marching home again? You wouldn’t think of arresting ’em, would you? No, you’d just sit down quietly out of their reach and be happy when the last little red leg has disappeared round the corner!”

Those who knew the Red Hundred best were heartily in accord with his philosophy.

“They caught Jessen,” reported Falmouth.

"Oh!" said the Commissioner.

"When he disclosed his identity, they got rid of him quick."

"I've often wondered why the Four Just Men didn't do the business of Starque themselves," mused the Commissioner.

"It was rather rum," admitted Falmouth, "but Starque was a man under sentence, as also was François. By some means they got hold of the original warrants, and it was on these that Jessen—did what he did."

The commissioner nodded.

"And now," he asked, "what about them?"

Falmouth had expected this question sooner or later.

"Do you suggest that we should catch them, sir?" he asked with thinly veiled sarcasm; "because if you do, sir, I have only to remind you that we've been trying to do that for some years."

The chief commissioner frowned.

"It's a remarkable thing," he said, "that as soon as we get a situation such as—the Red Hundred scare and the Four Just Men scare, for instance, we're completely at sea, and that's what the papers will say. It doesn't sound creditable, but it's so."

I place the superintendent's defence of Scotland Yard on record *in extenso*.

"What the papers say," said Falmouth, "never keeps me awake at night. Nobody's quite got the hang of the police force in this country—certainly the writing people haven't.

"There are two ways of writing about the police, sir. One way is to deal with them in the newspaper fashion with the headline 'Another Police Blunder' or 'The Police and The Public,' and the other way is to deal with them in the magazine style, which is to show them as softies on the wrong scent, whilst an ornamental civilian is showing them their business, or as mysterious people with false beards who pop up at the psychological moment, and say, in a loud voice, 'In the name of the Law, I arrest you!'

"Well, I don't mind admitting that I know neither kind. I've been a police officer for twenty-three years, and the only assistance I've had from a civilian was from a man named Blackie, who helped me to find the body of a woman that had disappeared. I was rather prejudiced against him, but I don't mind admitting that he was pretty smart and followed his clues with remarkable ingenuity.

"The day we found the body I said to him:

" 'Mr. Blackie, you have given me a great deal of information about this woman's movements—in fact, you know a great deal more than you ought to know—so I shall take you into custody on the suspicion of having caused her death.'

"Before he died he made a full confession, and ever since then I have always been pleased to take as much advice and help from outside as I could get.

"When people sometimes ask me about the cleverness of Scotland Yard, I can't tell 'em tales such as you read about. I've had murderers, anarchists, burglars, and average low-down people to deal with, but they have mostly done their work in a commonplace way and bolted. And as soon as they have bolted, we've employed fairly commonplace methods and brought 'em back.

"If you ask me whether I've been in dreadful danger, when arresting desperate murderers and criminals, I say 'No.'

"When your average criminal finds himself cornered, he says, 'All right, Mr. Falmouth; it's a cop,' and goes quietly.

“Crime and criminals run in grooves. They’re hardy annuals with perennial methods. Extraordinary circumstances baffle the police as they baffle other folks. You can’t run a business on business lines and be absolutely prepared for anything that turns up. Whiteley’s will supply you with a flea or an elephant, but if a woman asked a shopgirl to hold her baby whilst she went into the tinned meat department, the girl and the manager and the whole system would be floored, because there is no provision for holding babies. And if a Manchester goods merchant, unrolling his stuff, came upon a snake lying all snug in the bale, he’d be floored too, because natural history isn’t part of their business training, and they wouldn’t be quite sure whether it was a big worm or a boa constrictor.”

The Commissioner was amused.

“You’ve an altogether unexpected sense of humor,” he said, “and the moral is——”

“That the unexpected always floors you, whether it’s humour or crime,” said Falmouth, and went away fairly pleased with himself.

In his room he found a waiting messenger.

“A lady to see you, sir.”

“Who is it?” he asked in surprise.

The messenger handed him a slip of paper and when he read it whistled.

“The unexpected, by——! Show her up.”

On the paper was written—“The Woman of Gratz.”

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[1] Literally, “Head off.”

CHAPTER XI
MANFRED

Manfred sat alone in his Lewisham house,—he was known to the old lady who was his caretaker as "a foreign gentleman in the music line"—and in the subdued light of the shaded lamp, he looked tired. A book lay on the table near at hand, and a silver coffee-service and an empty coffee-cup stood on the stool by his side. Reaction he felt. This strange man had set himself to a task that was never ending. The destruction of the forces of the Red Hundred was the end of a fight that cleared the ground for the commencement of another—but physically he was weary.

Gonsalez had left that morning for Paris, Poiccart went by the afternoon train, and he was to join them to-morrow.

The strain of the fight had told on them, all three. Financially, the cost of the war had been heavy, but that strain they could stand better than any other, for had they not the fortune of—Courlander; in case of need they knew their man.

All the world had been searched before they—the first Four—had come together—Manfred, Gonsalez, Poiccart, and the man who slept eternally in the flower-grown grave at Bordeaux. As men taking the oaths of priesthood they lived down the passions and frets of life. Each man was an open book to the other, speaking his most secret thought in the faith of sympathy, one dominating thought controlling them all.

They had made the name of the Four Just Men famous or infamous (according to your point of reckoning) throughout the civilized world. They came as a new force into public and private life. There were men, free of the law, who worked misery on their fellows; dreadful human ghouls fattening on the bodies and souls of the innocent and helpless; great magnates calling the law to their aid, or pushing it aside as circumstances demanded. All these became amenable to a new law, a new tribunal. There had grown into being systems which defied correction; corporations beyond chastisement; individuals protected by cunningly drawn legislation, and others who knew to an inch the scope of toleration. In the name of justice, these men struck swiftly, dispassionately, mercilessly. The great swindler, the *procureur*, the suborner of witnesses, the briber of juries—they died.

There was no gradation of punishment: a warning, a second warning—then death.

Thus their name became a symbol, at which the evil-doer went tremblingly about his work, dreading the warning and ready in most cases to heed it. Life became a sweeter, a more wholesome thing for many men who found the thin greenish-grey envelope on their breakfast-table in the morning; but others persisted on their way, loudly invoking the law, which in spirit, if not in letter, they had outraged. The end was very sure, and I do not know of one man who escaped the consequence.

Speculating on their identity, the police of the world decided unanimously upon two points. The first was that these men were enormously rich—as indeed they were, and the second that one or two of them were no mean scientists—that also was true. Of the fourth man who had joined them recently, speculation took a wider turn. Manfred smiled as he thought of this fourth member, of his honesty, his splendid qualities of heart and brain, his enthusiasm, and his proneness to "lapse from the balance"—Gonsalez coined the phrase. It was an affectionate smile. The fourth man was no longer of the brotherhood; he had gone, the work being completed, and there were other reasons.

So Manfred was musing, till the little clock on the mantelpiece chimed ten, then he lit the spirit-kettle and brewed another cup of coffee. Thus engaged, he heard the far-away tinkle of a bell and the opening of a door. Then a murmur of voices and two steps on the stairs. He did not expect visitors, but he was always prepared for them at any hour.

"Come in," he said, in answer to the knock; he recognized the apologetic rap of his housekeeper.

"A lady—a foreign lady to see you."

"Show her in, please," he said courteously.

He was busy with the kettle when she came in. He did not look up, nor did he ask who it was. His housekeeper stood a moment uncertain on the threshold, then went out, leaving them together.

"You will excuse me a moment," he said. "Please sit down."

He poured out the coffee with a steady hand, walked to his desk, sorted a number of letters, tossed them into the grate, and stood for a moment watching them burn, then looked at her.

Taking no notice of his invitation, the girl stood waiting at ease, one hand on her hip, the other hanging loosely.

"Won't you sit down?" he asked again.

"I prefer to stand," she said shortly.

"Then you are not so tired as I am," he said, and sank back into the depths of his chair.

She did not reply, and for a few seconds neither spoke.

"Has the Woman of Gratz forgotten that she is an orator?" he said banteringly. It seemed to him that there was in those eyes of hers a great yearning, and he changed his tone.

"Sit down, Maria," he said gently. He saw the flush that rose to her cheek, and mistook its significance.

"No, no!" he hastened to rectify an impression. "I am serious now, I am not gibing—why have you not gone with the others?"

"I have work to do," she said.

He stretched out his hands in a gesture of weariness.

"Work, work, work!" he said with a bitter smile, "isn't the work finished? Isn't there an end to this work of yours?"

"The end is at hand," she said, and looked at him strangely.

"Sit down," he commanded, and she took the nearest chair and watched him.

Then she broke the silence.

"What are you?" she asked, with a note of irritation. "Who gave you authority?"

He laughed.

"What am I—just a man, Maria. Authority? As you understand it—none."

She was thoughtful for a moment.

"You have not asked me why I have come," she said.

"I have not asked myself—yet it seems natural that you and I should meet again—to part."

"What do they call you—your friends?" she asked suddenly. "Do they say 'The man with the beard,' or 'The tall man'—did any woman ever nurse you and call you by name?"

A shadow passed over his face for a second.

"Yes," he said quietly; "I have told you I am human; neither devil nor demi-god, no product of sea-foam or witches' cauldron," he smiled, "but a son of earthly parents—and men call me George Manfred."

“George,” she repeated as though learning a lesson. “George Manfred.” She looked at him long and earnestly, and frowned.

“What is it you see that displeases you?” he asked.

“Nothing,” she said quickly, “only I am—I cannot understand—you are different——”

“From what you expected.” She bent her head. “You expected me to air a triumph. To place myself in defence?” She nodded again.

“No, no,” he went on, “that is finished. I do not pursue a victory—I am satisfied that the power of your friends is shattered. I disassociate you from the humiliation of their defeat.”

“I am no better nor worse than they,” she said defiantly.

“You will be better when the madness passes,” he said gravely, “when you realize that your young life was not meant for the dreadful sacrifice of anarchy.”

He leant over and took her listless hand and held it between his palms.

“Child, you must leave this work,” he said softly, “forget the nightmare of your past—put it out of your mind, so that you will come to believe that the Red Hundred never existed.”

She did not draw away her hand, nor did she attempt to check the tears that came to her eyes. Something had entered her soul—an influence that was beyond all description or definition. A wonderful element that had dissolved the thing of granite and steel, that she had fondly thought was her heart, and left her weak and shaking in the process.

“Maria, if you ever knew a mother’s love”—how soft his voice was—“think of that: have you ever realized what your tiny life was to her—how she planned and thought and suffered for you—and to what end? That the hands she kissed should be set against men’s lives! Did she pray to God that He might keep you strong in health and pure in soul—only that His gifts should prove a curse to His beautiful world?”

With the tenderness of a father he drew her to him, till she was on her knees before him and her weeping face was pressed closely against him.

His strong arms were about her, and his hand smoothed her hair.

“I am a wicked woman,” she sobbed, “a wicked, wicked woman.”

“Hush,” he said sadly; “do not let us take our conception of wickedness from our deeds, but from our intentions, however mistaken, however much they traverse the written law.”

But her sobbing grew wilder, and she clutched him as though in fear that he would leave her.

He talked to her as though she were a frightened child, chiding her, laughing at her in gentle raillery, and she grew calmer and presently lifted her stained face to his.

“Listen,” she said; “I—I—oh, I cannot, I cannot say it.” And she buried her face on her breast.

Then with an effort she raised her head again.

“If I asked you—if I begged you to do something for me—would you?”

He looked into her eyes, smiling.

“You have done many things—you have killed—yes—yes, let me say it—I know I am hurting you, but let me finish.”

“Yes,” he said simply; “I have killed.”

“Have you—pitied as you killed?”

He shook his head.

“Yet you would,” she went on, and her distress moved him, “you would if you thought that you could kill a body and save a soul.”

He shook his head again.

"Yes, yes," she whispered, and tried to speak. Twice she attempted to frame the words, and twice she failed. Then she pushed herself slowly backward with her hands at his chest, and crouched before him with parted lips and heaving bosom.

"Kill me," she breathed, "for I have betrayed you to the police."

Still he made no sign, sitting there all huddled in the big chair, as though every muscle of his body had relaxed.

"Do you hear?" she cried fiercely. "I have betrayed you because—I think—I love you—but I—I did not know it—I did not know it! I hated you so that I pitied you—and always I thought of you!"

She knew by the look of pain in his eyes what her words had cost him.

Somehow she defined that the betrayal hurt least.

"I have never said it to myself," she whispered; "I have never thought it in my most secret thoughts—yet it was there, there all the time, waiting for expression—and I am happier, though you die, and though every hour of my life be a lifetime of pain, I am happier that I have said it, happier than I thought I could ever be.

"I have wondered why I remembered you, and why I thought of you, and why you came into my every dream. I thought it was because I hated you, because I wanted to kill you, and to hold you at my mercy—but I know now, I know now."

She rocked from side to side, clasping her hands in the intensity of her passion.

"You do not speak?" she cried. "Do you not understand, beloved? I have handed you over to the police, because—O God! because I love you! It must be that I do!"

He leant forward and held out his hands and she came to him half swooning.

"Marie, child," he murmured, and she saw how pale he was, "we are strangely placed, you and I to talk of love. You must forget this, little girl; let this be the waking point of your bad dream; go forth into the new life—into a life where flowers are, and birds sing, and where rest and peace is."

She had no thought now save for his danger.

"They are below," she moaned. "I brought them here—I guided them."

He smiled into her face.

"I knew," he said.

She looked at him incredulously.

"You knew," she said, slowly.

"Yes—when you came"—he pointed to the heap of burnt papers in the grate—"I knew."

He walked to the window and looked out. What he saw satisfied him.

He came back to where she still crouched on the floor and lifted her to her feet.

She stood unsteadily, but his arm supported her. He was listening, he heard the door open below.

"You must not think of me," he said again.

She shook her head helplessly, and her lips quivered.

"God bless you and help you," he said reverently, and kissed her.

Then he turned to meet Falmouth.

"George Manfred," said the officer, and looked at the girl in perplexity.

"That is my name," said Manfred quietly. "You are Inspector Falmouth."

"Superintendent," corrected the other.

"I'm sorry," said Manfred.

“I shall take you into custody,” said Falmouth, “on suspicion of being a member of an organization known as the Four Just Men, and accordingly concerned in the following crimes ____”

“I will excuse you the recital,” said Manfred pleasantly, and held out his hands. For the first time in his life he felt the cold contact of steel at his wrists.

The man who snapped the handcuffs on was nervous and bungled, and Manfred, after an interested glance at the gyves, lifted his hands.

“This is not quite fastened,” he said.

Then as they closed round him, he half turned toward the girl and smiled.

“Who knows how bright are the days in store for us both?” he said softly.

Then they took him away.

CHAPTER XII
IN WANDSWORTH JAIL

Charles Garrett, admirable journalist, had written the last line of a humorous description of a local concert at which a cabinet minister had sung pathetic ballads. Charles wrote with difficulty, for the situation had been of itself so funny, that extracting its hidden humours was a more than ordinarily heart-breaking thing. But he had finished and the thick batch of copy lay on the chief sub-editor's desk—Charles wrote on an average six words to a folio, and a half a column story from his pen bulked like a three-volume novel.

Charles stopped to threaten an office-boy who had misdirected a letter, strolled into various quiet offices to "see who was there" and with his raincoat on his arm, and his stick in his hand, stopped at the end of his wanderings before the chattering tape machine. He looked through the glass box that shielded the mechanism, and was interested in a message from Teheran in the course of transmission.

". . . at early date. Grand Vizier has informed Exchange Correspondent that the construction of line will be pushed forward . . ."

The tape stopped its stuttering and buzzed excitedly, then came a succession of quick jerks that cleared away the uncompleted message.

Then ". . . the leader of the Four Just Men was arrested in London to-night," said the tape, and Charles broke for the editor's room.

He flung open the door without ceremony, and repeated the story the little machine had told.

The grey chief received the news quietly, and the orders he gave in the next five minutes inconvenienced some twenty or thirty unoffending people.

The constructions of the "story" of the Four Just Men, began at the lower rung of the intellectual ladder.

"You boy! get half a dozen taxicabs here quick. . . . Poynter, 'phone the reporters in . . ., get the Lambs Club on the 'phone and see if O'Mahony or any other of our bright youths are there. . . . There are five columns about the Four Just Men standing in the gallery, get it pulled up, Mr. Short. . . . pictures—h'm . . . yet wire Massonni to get down to the police station and see if he can find a policeman who'll give him material for a sketch. . . . Off you go, Charles, and get the story."

There was no flurry, no rush; it was for all the world like the scene on a modern battleship when "clear lower deck for action" had sounded. Two hours to get the story into the paper was ample, and there was no need for the whip.

Later, with the remorseless hands of the clock moving on, taxi after taxi flew up to the great newspaper office, discharging alert young men who literally leapt into the building. Later, with waiting operators sitting tensely before the key-boards of the linotypes, came Charles Garrett doing notable things with a stump of pencil and a ream of thin copy paper.

It was the *Megaphone* that shone splendidly amidst its journalistic fellows, with pages—I quote the envenomed opinion of the news editor of the *Mercury*—that "shouted like the checks on a bookmaker's waistcoat."

It was the *Megaphone* that fed the fires of public interest, and was mainly responsible for the huge crowds that gathered outside Greenwich Police Court, and overflowed in dense masses to the foot of Blackheath Hill, whilst Manfred underwent his preliminary inquiries.

“George Manfred, aged 39, of no occupation, residing at Hill Crest Lodge, St. John’s.” In this prosaic manner he was introduced to the world.

He made a striking figure in the steel-railed dock. A chair was placed for him, and he was guarded as few prisoners had been guarded. A special cell had been prepared for his reception, and departing from established custom, extra warders were detailed to watch him. Falmouth took no risks.

The charge that had been framed had to do with no well-known case. Many years before, one Samuel Lipski, a notorious East End sweater, had been found dead with the stereotyped announcement that he had fallen to the justice of the Four. Upon this the Treasury founded its case for the prosecution—a case which had been very thoroughly and convincingly prepared, and pigeon-holed against such time as arrest should overtake one or the other of the Four Just Men.

Reading over the thousands of newspaper cuttings dealing with the preliminary examination and trial of Manfred, I am struck with the absence of any startling feature, such as one might expect to find in a great state trial of this description. Summarizing the evidence that was given at the police court, one might arrange the “parts” of the dozen or so commonplace witnesses so that they read:

A policeman: “I found the body.”

An inspector: “I read the label.”

A doctor: “I pronounced him dead.”

An only man with a slight squint and broken English: “This man Lipski, I known him, he were a goot man and make the business wit the head, ker-vick.”

And the like.

Manfred refused to plead “guilty” or “not guilty.” He spoke only once during the police court proceedings, and then only when the formal question had been put to him.

“I am prepared to abide by the result of my trial,” he said clearly, “and it cannot matter much one way or the other whether I plead ‘guilty’ or ‘not guilty.’ ”

“I will enter your plea as ‘not guilty,’ ” said the magistrate.

Manfred bowed.

“That is at your worship’s discretion,” he said.

On the seventh of June he was formally committed for trial. He had a short interview with Falmouth before he was removed from the police-court cells.

Falmouth would have found it difficult to analyse his feelings towards this man. He scarcely knew himself whether he was glad or sorry that fate had thrown the redoubtable leader into his hands.

His attitude to Manfred was that of a subordinate to a superior, and that attitude he would have found hardest to explain.

When the cell door was opened to admit the detective, Manfred was reading. He rose with a cheery smile to greet his visitor.

“Well, Mr. Falmouth,” he said lightly, “we enter upon the second and more serious act of the drama.”

“I don’t know whether I’m glad or sorry,” said Falmouth bluntly.

“You ought to be glad,” said Manfred with his quizzical smile. “For you’ve vindicated ____”

“Yes, I know all about that,” said Falmouth dryly, “but it’s the other part I hate.”

“You mean——?”

Manfred did not complete the question.

"I do—it's a hanging job, Mr. Manfred, and that is the hateful business after the wonderful work you've done for the country."

Manfred threw back his head, and laughed in unrestrained amusement.

"Oh, it's nothing to laugh about," said the plain-spoken detective, "you are against a bad proposition—the Home Secretary is a cousin of Ramon's, and he hates the very name of the Four Just Men."

"Yet I may laugh," said Manfred calmly, "for I shall escape."

There was no boastfulness in the speech, but a quiet assurance that had the effect of nettling the other.

"Oh, you will, will you?" he said grimly. "Well, we shall see."

There was no escape for Manfred in the dozen yards or so between his cell door and the prison van. He was manacled to two warders, and a double line of policemen formed an avenue through which he was marched. Not from the van itself that moved in a solid phalanx of mounted men with drawn swords. Nor from the gloomy portals of Wandsworth Gaol where silent, uniformed men closed round him and took him to the triple-locked cell.

Once in the night, as he slept, he was awakened by the sound of the changing guard, and this amused him.

If one had the space to write, one could compile a whole book concerning Manfred's life during the weeks he lay in gaol awaiting trial. He had his visitors. Unusual laxity was allowed in this respect. Falmouth hoped to find the other two men. He generously confessed his hope to Manfred.

"You may make your mind easy on that point," said Manfred; "they will not come."

Falmouth believed him.

"If you were an ordinary criminal, Mr. Manfred," he said smilingly, "I should hint the possibilities of King's evidence, but I won't insult you."

Manfred's reply staggered him.

"Of course not," he said with an air of innocence; "if they were arrested, who on earth would arrange my escape?"

The Woman of Gratz did not come to see him, and he was glad.

He had his daily visits from the governor, and found him charmingly agreeable. They talked of countries known to both, of people whom each knew equally well, and tacitly avoided forbidden subjects. Only——

"I hear you are going to escape?" said the governor, as he concluded one of these visits. He was a largely built man, sometime Major of Marine Artillery, and he took life seriously. Therefore he did not share Falmouth's view of the projected escape as being an ill-timed jest.

"Yes," replied Manfred.

"From here?"

Manfred shook his head solemnly.

"The details have not yet been arranged," he said with admirable gravity. The governor frowned.

"I don't believe you're trying to pull my leg—it's too devilishly serious a matter to joke about—but it would be an awkward thing for me if you got away." He was of the prisoner's own caste and he had supreme faith in the word of the man who discussed prison-breaking so lightheartedly.

“That I realize,” said Manfred with a little show of deference, “and I shall accordingly arrange my plans, so that the blame shall be equally distributed.”

The governor, still frowning thoughtfully, left the cell. He came back in a few minutes.

“By the way, Manfred,” he said, “I forgot to tell you that you’ll get a visit from the chaplain. He’s a very decent young fellow, and I know I needn’t ask you to let him down lightly.”

With this subtle assumption of mutual paganism, he left finally.

“That is a worthy gentleman,” thought Manfred.

The chaplain was nervously anxious to secure an opening, and sought amidst the trivialities that led out of the conventional exchange of greetings a fissure for the insertion of a tactful inquiry.

Manfred, seeing his embarrassment, gave him the chance, and listened respectfully while the young man talked, earnestly, sincerely, manfully.

“N—no,” said the prisoner after a while, “I don’t think, Mr. Summers, that you and I hold very different opinions, if they were all reduced to questions of faith and appreciation of God’s goodness—but I have got to a stage where I shrink from labelling my inmost beliefs with this or that creed, or circumscribing the boundless limits of my faith with words. I know you will forgive me and believe that I do not say this from any desire to hurt you, but I have reached, too, a phase of conviction where I am adamant to outside influence. For good or ill, I must stand by the conceptions that I have built out of my own life and its teachings.

“There is another, and a more practical reason,” he added, “why I should not do you or any other chaplain the disservice of taking up your time—I have no intention of dying.”

With this, the young minister was forced to be content. He met Manfred frequently, talking of books and people and of strange religions.

To the warders and those about him, Manfred was a source of constant wonder. He never wearied them with the recital of his coming attempt. Yet all that he said and did seemed founded on that one basic article of faith: I shall escape.

The governor took every precaution to guard against rescue. He applied for and secured reinforcements of warders, and Manfred, one morning at exercise seeing strange faces amongst his guards, bantered him with over-nervousness.

“Yes,” said the Major, “I’ve doubled the staff. I’m taking you at your word, that is all—one must cling tight to the last lingering shreds of faith one has in mankind. You say that you’re going to escape, and I believe you.” He thought a moment, “I’ve studied you,” he added.

“Indeed?”

“Not here,” said the governor, comprehending the prison in a sweep of his hand, “but outside—read about you and thought about you and a little dimly understood you—that makes me certain that you’ve got something at the back of your mind when you talk so easily of escape.”

Manfred nodded. He nodded many times thoughtfully, and felt a new interest in the bluff, brusque man.

“And whilst I’m doubling the guard and that sort of thing, I know in my heart that that ‘something’ of yours isn’t ‘something’ with dynamite in it, or ‘something’ with brute force behind it, but it’s ‘something’ that’s devilishly deep—that’s how I read it.”

He jerked his head in farewell, and the cell door closed behind him with a great jangling and snapping of keys.

He might have been tried at the sessions following his committal, but the Crown applied for a postponement, and being informed and asked whether he would care to raise any objection to that course, he replied that so far from objecting, he was grateful, because his arrangements were not yet completed, and when they asked him, knowing that he had refused solicitor and counsel, what arrangements he referred to, he smiled enigmatically and they knew he was thinking of this wonderful plan of escape. That such persistent assurances of delivery should eventually reach the public through the public press was only to be expected, and although "Manfred says he will escape from Wandsworth" in the *Megaphone* headline, became "A prisoner's strange statement" in the *Times*, the substance of the story was the same, and you may be sure that it lost nothing in the telling. A Sunday journal, with a waning circulation, rallied on the discovery that Manfred was mad, and published a column-long account of this "poor lunatic gibbering of freedom."

Being allowed to read the newspapers, Manfred saw this, and it kept him amused for a whole day.

The warders in personal attendance on him were changed daily, he never had the same custodian twice till the governor saw a flaw in the method that allowed a warder with whom he was only slightly acquainted, and of whose integrity he was ignorant, to come into close contact with his prisoner. Particularly did this danger threaten from the new officers who had been drafted to Wandsworth to reinforce the staff, and the governor went to the other extreme, and two trusted men, who had grown old in the service, were chosen for permanent watch-dogs.

"You won't be able to have any more newspapers," said the governor one morning. "I've had orders from headquarters—there have been some suspicious-looking 'agonies' in the *Megaphone* this last day or so."

"I did not insert them," said Manfred, smiling.

"No—but you may have read them," said the governor dryly.

"So I might have," said the thoughtful Manfred.

"Did you?"

Manfred made no reply.

"I suppose that isn't a fair question," said the governor cheerfully; "anyhow, no more papers. You can have books—any books you wish within limits."

So Manfred was denied the pleasure of reading the little paragraphs that described the movements and doings of the fashionable world. Just then these interested him more than the rest of the newspaper put together. Such news as he secured was of a negative kind and through the governor.

"Am I still mad?" he asked.

"No."

"Was I born in Brittany—the son of humble parents?"

"No—there's another theory now."

"Is my real name still supposed to be Isadore something-or-other?"

"You are now a member of a noble family, disappointed at an early age by a reigning princess," said the governor impressively.

"How romantic!" said Manfred in hushed tones.

The gravity of his years, that was beyond his years, fell away from him in that time of waiting. He became almost boyish again. He had a never-ending fund of humour that turned even the tremendous issues of his trial into subject-matter of amusement.

Armed with the authority of the Home-Secretary came Luigi Fressini, the youthful director of the Anthropological Institute of Rome.

Manfred agreed to see him and made him as welcome as the circumstances permitted. Fressini was a little impressed with his own importance, and had the professional manner strongly developed. He had a perky way of dropping his head on one side when he made observations, and reminded Manfred of a horse-dealer blessed with a little knowledge, but anxious to discover at all hazards the "points" that fitted in with his preconceived theories.

"I would like to measure your head," he said.

"I'm afraid I cannot oblige you," said Manfred coolly; "partly because I object to the annoyance of it, and partly because headmeasuring in anthropology is as much out of date as blood-letting in surgery."

The director was on his dignity.

"I'm afraid I cannot take lessons in the science——" he began.

"Oh, yes, you can," said Manfred, "and you'd be a greater man if you did. As it is Antonio de Costa and Felix Hedeman are both beating you on your own ground—that monograph of yours on 'Cerebral Dynamics' was awful nonsense."

Whereupon Fressini went very red and spluttered and left the cell, afterwards in his indiscretion granting an interview to an evening newspaper, in the course of which he described Manfred as a typical homicide with those peculiarities of parietal development, that are invariably associated with cold-blooded murderers. For publishing what constituted a gross contempt of court, the newspaper was heavily fined, and at the instance of the British Government, Fressini was reprimanded, and eventually superseded by that very De Costa of whom Manfred spoke.

All these happenings formed the comedy of the long wait, and as to the tragedy, there was none.

A week before the trial Manfred, in the course of conversation, expressed a desire for a further supply of books.

"What do you want?" asked the governor, and prepared to take a note.

"Oh, anything," said Manfred lazily—"travel, biography, science, sport—anything new that's going."

"I'll get you a list," said the governor, who was not a booky man. "The only travel books I know are those two new things, *Three Months in Morocco* and *Through the Ituri Forest*. One of them's by a new man, Theodore Max—do you know him?"

Manfred shook his head.

"But I'll try them," he said.

"Isn't it about time you started to prepare your defence?" the governor asked gruffly.

"I have no defence to offer," said Manfred, "therefore no defence to prepare."

The governor seemed vexed.

"Isn't life sufficiently sweet to you—to urge you to make an effort to save it?" he asked roughly, "or are you going to give it up without a struggle?"

"I shall escape," said Manfred again; "aren't you tired of hearing me tell you why I make no effort to save myself?"

"When the newspapers start the 'mad' theory again," said the exasperated prison official, "I shall feel most inclined to break the regulations and write a letter in support of the speculation."

“Do,” said Manfred cheerfully, “and tell them that I run round my cell on all fours biting visitors’ legs.”

The next day the books arrived. The mysteries of the Ituri Forest remained mysteries, but *Three Months in Morocco* (big print, wide margins, 12*s.* 6*d.*) he read with avidity from cover to cover, notwithstanding the fact that the reviewers to a man condemned it as being the dullest book of the season. Which was an unkindly reflection upon the literary merits of its author, Leon Gonsalez, who had worked early and late to prepare the book for the press, writing far into the night, whilst Poiccart, sitting at the other side of the table, corrected the damp proofs as they came from the printer.

CHAPTER XIII
THE "RATIONAL FAITHERS"

In the handsomely furnished sitting-room of a West Kensington flat, Gonsalez and Poiccart sat over their post-prandial cigars, each busy with his own thoughts. Poiccart tossed his cigar into the fireplace and pulled out his polished briar and slowly charged it from a gigantic pouch. Leon watched him under half-closed lids, piecing together the scraps of information he had collected from his persistent observation.

"You are getting sentimental, my friend," he said.

Poiccart looked up inquiringly.

"You were smoking one of George's cigars without realizing it. Halfway through the smoke you noticed the band had not been removed, so you go to tear it off. By the band you are informed that it is one of George's favourite cigars, and that starts a train of thought that makes the cigar distasteful to you, and you toss it away."

Poiccart lit his pipe before replying.

"Spoken like a cheap little magazine detective," he said frankly. "If you would know I was aware that it was George's, and from excess of loyalty I was trying to smoke it; halfway through I reluctantly concluded that friendship had its limits; it is you who are sentimental."

Gonsalez closed his eyes and smiled. "There's another review of your book in the *Evening Mirror* to-night," Poiccart went on maliciously; "have you seen it?"

The recumbent figure shook its head.

"It says," the merciless Poiccart continued, "that an author who can make Morocco as dull as you have done, would make——"

"Spare me," murmured Gonsalez half asleep.

They sat for ten minutes, the tick-tick of the little clock on the mantelpiece and the regular puffs from Poiccart's pipe breaking the silence.

"It would seem to me," said Gonsalez, speaking with closed eyes, "that George is in the position of a master who has set his two pupils a difficult problem to solve, quite confident that, difficult as it is, they will surmount all obstacles and supply the solution."

"I thought you were asleep," said Poiccart.

"I was never more awake," said Gonsalez calmly. "I am only marshalling details. Do you know Mr. Peter Sweeney?"

"No," said Poiccart.

"He's a member of the Borough Council of Chelmsford. A great and a good man."

Poiccart made no response.

"He is also the head and front of the 'Rational Faith' movement, of which you may have heard."

"I haven't," admitted Poiccart, stolid but interested.

"The 'Rational Faithers,' " Gonsalez explained sleepily, "are an off shoot of the New Unitarians, and the New Unitarians are a hotch-potch people with grievances."

Poiccart yawned.

"The 'Rational Faithers' " Gonsalez went on, "have a mission in life, they have also a brass band, and a collection of drivelling songs, composed, printed and gratuitously distributed by Mr. Peter Sweeney, who is a man of substance."

He was silent after this for quite a minute.

"A mission in life, and a nice loud brassy band—the members of which are paid monthly salaries—by Peter."

Poiccart turned his head and regarded his friend curiously.

"What is all this about?" he asked.

"The 'Rational Faithers,' " the monotonous Gonsalez continued, "are the sort of people who for all time have been in the eternal minority. They are against things, against public-houses, against music-halls, against meat eating, and vaccination—and capital punishment," he repeated softly.

Poiccart waited.

"Years ago they were regarded as a nuisance—rowdies broke up their meetings; the police prosecuted them for obstruction, and some of them were sent to prison and came out again, being presented with newly furbished haloes at meat breakfasts—Peter presiding.

"Now they have lived down their persecutions—martyrdom is not to be so cheaply bought—they are an institution like the mechanical spinning jenny and fashionable socialism—which proves that if you go on doing things often enough and persistently, saying with a loud voice, '*Pro bono publico*,' people will take you at your own valuation, and will tolerate you."

Poiccart was listening intently now.

"These people demonstrate—Peter is really well off, with heaps of slum property, and he has lured other wealthy ladies and gentlemen into the movement. They demonstrate on all occasions. They have chants—Peter calls them 'chants,' and it is a nice distinction, stamping them as it does with the stamp of semi-secularity—for these festive moments, chants for the confusion of vaccinators, and eaters of beasts, and such. But of all their 'Services of Protest' none is more thorough, more beautifully complete, than that which is specially arranged to express their horror and abhorrence of capital punishment."

His pause was so long that Poiccart interjected an impatient—

"Well?"

"I was trying to think of the chant," said Leon thoughtfully. "If I remember right one verse goes—

Come fight the gallant fight,
  This horror to undo;
Two blacks will never make a white,
  Nor legal murder too."

"The last line," said Gonsalez tolerantly, "is a trifle vague, but it conveys with delicate suggestion the underlying moral of the poem. There is another verse which has for the moment eluded me, but perhaps I shall think of it later."

He sat up suddenly and leant over, dropping his hand on Poiccart's arm.

"When we were talking of—our plan the other day you spoke of our greatest danger, the one thing we could not avoid. Does it not seem to you that the 'Rational Faithers' offer a solution with their querulous campaigns, their demonstrations, their brassy brass band, and their preposterous chants?"

Poiccart pulled steadily at his pipe.

"You're a wonderful man, Leon," he said.

Leon walked over to the cupboard, unlocked it, and drew out a big portfolio such as artists use to carry their drawings in. He untied the strings and turned over the loose pages. It was a collection that had cost the Four Just Men much time and a great deal of money.

"What are you going to do?" asked Poiccart, as the other, slipping off his coat and fixing his pince-nez, sat down before a big plan he had extracted from the portfolio. Leon took up a fine drawing-pen from the table, examined the nib with the eye of a skilled craftsman, and carefully uncorked a bottle of architect's ink.

"Have you ever felt a desire to draw imaginary islands?" he asked, "naming your own bays, christening your capes, creating towns with a scratch of your pen, and raising up great mountains with herringbone strokes? Because I'm going to do something like that—I feel in that mood which in little boys is eloquently described as 'trying,' and I have the inclination to annoy Scotland Yard."

It was the day before the trial that Falmouth made the discovery. To be exact it was made for him. The keeper of a Gower Street boarding house reported that two mysterious men had engaged rooms. They came late at night with one portmanteau bearing divers foreign labels; they studiously kept their faces in the shadow, and the beard of one was obviously false. In addition to which they paid for their lodgings in advance, and that was the most damning circumstance of all. Imagine mine host, showing them to their rooms, palpitating with his tremendous suspicion, calling to the full upon his powers of simulation, ostentatiously nonchalant, and impatient to convey the news to the police-station round the corner. For one called the other Leon, and they spoke despairingly in stage whispers of "poor Manfred."

They went out together, saying they would return soon after midnight, ordering a fire for their bedroom, for the night was wet and chilly.

Half an hour later the full story was being told to Falmouth over the telephone.

"It's too good to be true," was his comment, but gave orders. The hotel was well surrounded by midnight, but so skilfully that the casual passer-by would never have suspected it. At three in the morning, Falmouth decided that the men had been warned, and broke open their doors to search the rooms. The portmanteau was their sole find. A few articles of clothing, bearing the "tab" of a Parisian tailor, was all they found till Falmouth, examining the bottom of the portmanteau, found that it was false.

"Hullo!" he said, and in the light of his discovery the exclamation was modest in its strength, for, neatly folded, and cunningly hidden, he came upon the plans. He gave them a rapid survey and whistled. Then he folded them up and put them carefully in his pocket.

"Keep the house under observation," he ordered. "I don't expect they'll return, but if they do, take 'em."

Then he flew through the deserted streets as fast as a motor-car could carry him, and woke the chief commissioner from a sound sleep.

"What is it?" he asked as he led the detective to his study.

Falmouth showed him the plans.

The Commissioner raised his eyebrows, and whistled.

"That's what I said," confessed Falmouth.

The chief spread the plans upon the big table.

"Wandsworth, Pentonville and Reading," said the Commissioner. "Plans, and remarkably good plans, of all three prisons."

Falmouth indicated the writing in the cramped hand and the carefully ruled lines that had been drawn in red ink.

"Yes, I see them," said the Commissioner, "and read 'Wall 3 feet thick—dynamite here, warder on duty here—can be shot from wall, distance to entrance to prison hall 25 feet; condemned cell here, walls 3 feet, one window, barred 10 feet 3 inches from ground.' "

“They’ve got the thing down very fine—what is this—Wandsworth?”

“It’s the same with the others, sir,” said Falmouth. “They’ve got distances, heights and posts worked out; they must have taken years to get this information.”

“One thing is evident,” said the Commissioner; “they’ll do nothing until after the trial—all these plans have been drawn with the condemned cell as the point of objective.”

Next morning Manfred received a visit from Falmouth.

“I hate to tell you, Mr. Manfred,” he said, “that we have in our possession full details of your contemplated rescue.”

Manfred looked puzzled.

“Last night your two friends escaped by the skin of their teeth, leaving behind them elaborate plans——”

“In writing?” asked Manfred, with his quick smile.

“In writing,” said Falmouth solemnly. “I think it is my duty to tell you this, because it seems that you are building too much upon what is practically an impossibility, an escape from gaol.”

“Yes,” answered Manfred absently, “perhaps so—in writing I think you said.”

“Yes, the whole thing was worked out”—he thought he had said quite enough, and turned the subject. “Don’t you think you ought to change your mind and retain a lawyer?”

“I think you’re right,” said Manfred slowly. “Will you arrange for a member of some respectable firm of solicitors to see me?”

“Certainly,” said Falmouth, “though you’ve left your defence——”

“Oh, it isn’t my defence,” said Manfred cheerfully; “only I think I ought to make a will.”

CHAPTER XIV
AT THE OLD BAILEY

They were privileged people who gained admission to the Old Bailey, people with tickets from sheriffs, reporters, great actors, and very successful authors. The early editions of the evening newspapers announced the arrival of these latter spectators. The crowd outside the court contented themselves with discussing the past and the probable future of the prisoner.

The *Megaphone* had scored heavily again, for it published *in extenso* the particulars of the prisoner's will. It referred to this in its editorial columns variously as "An Astounding Document" and "An Extraordinary Fragment." It was remarkable alike for the amount bequeathed, and for the generosity of its legacies.

Nearly half a million was the sum disposed of, and of this the astonishing sum of £60,000 was bequeathed to "the sect known as the 'Rational Faithers' for the furtherance of their campaign against capital punishment," a staggering legacy remembering that the Four Just Men knew only one punishment for the people who came under its ban.

"You want this kept quiet, of course," said the lawyer when the will had been attested.

"Not a bit," said Manfred; "in fact I think you had better hand a copy to the *Megaphone*."

"Are you serious?" asked the dumbfounded lawyer.

"Perfectly so," said the other. "Who knows," he smiled, "it might influence public opinion in—er—my favour."

So the famous will became public property, and when Manfred, climbing the narrow wooden stairs that led to the dock of the Old Bailey, came before the crowded court, it was this latest freak of his that the humming court discussed.

"Silence!"

He looked round the big clock curiously, and when a warder pointed out the seat, he nodded, and sat down. He got up when the indictment was read.

"Are you guilty or not guilty?" he was asked, and replied briefly:

"I enter no plea."

He was interested in the procedure. The scarlet-robed judge with his old wise face and his quaint detached air interested him mostly. The business-like sheriffs in furs, the clergyman who sat with crossed legs, the triple row of wigged barristers, the slaving bench of reporters with their fierce whispers of instructions as they passed their copy to the waiting boys, and the strong force of police that held the court: they had all a special interest for him.

The leader for the Crown was a little man with a keen, strong face and a convincing dramatic delivery. He seemed to be possessed all the time with a desire to deal fairly with the issues, fairly to the Crown and fairly to the prisoner. He was not prepared, he said, to labour certain points which had been brought forward at the police-court inquiry, or to urge the jury that the accused man was wholly without redeeming qualities.

He would not even say that the man who had been killed, and with whose killing Manfred was charged, was a worthy or a desirable citizen of the country. Witnesses who had come forward to attest their knowledge of the deceased, were ominously silent on the point of his moral character. He was quite prepared to accept the statement he was a bad man, an evil influence on his associates, a corrupting influence on the young women whom he employed, a breaker of laws, a blackguard, a debauchée.

“But, gentlemen of the jury,” said the counsel impressively, “a civilized community such as ours has accepted a system—intricate and imperfect though it may be—by which the wicked and the evil-minded are punished. Generation upon generation of wise law-givers have moulded and amended a scale of punishment to meet every known delinquency. It has established its system laboriously, making great national sacrifices for the principles that system involved. It has wrested with its life-blood the charters of a great liberty—the liberty of a law administered by its chosen officers and applied in the spirit of untainted equity.”

So he went on to speak of the Four Just Men who had founded a machinery for punishment, who had gone outside and had overridden the law; who had condemned and executed their judgment independent and in defiance of the established code.

“Again I say, that I will not commit myself to the statement that they punished unreasonably: that with the evidence against their victims, such as they possessed, the law officers of the Crown would have hesitated at initiating a prosecution. If it had pleased them to have taken an abstract view of this or that offence, and they had said this or that man is deserving of punishment, we, the representatives of the established law, could not have questioned for one moment the justice of their reasoning. But we have come into conflict on the question of the adequacy of punishment, and upon the more serious question of the right of the individual to inflict that punishment, which results in the appearance of this man in the dock on a charge of murder.”

Throughout the opening speech, Manfred leant forward, following the counsel’s words.

Once or twice he nodded, as though he were in agreement with the speaker, and never once did he show sign of dissent.

The witnesses came in procession. The constable again, and the doctor, and the voluble man with the squint. As he finished with each, the counsel asked whether he had any question to put, but Manfred shook his head.

“Have you ever seen the accused before?” the judge asked the last witness.

“No, sar, I haf not,” said the witness emphatically, “I haf not’ing to say against him.”

As he left the witness-box, he said audibly:

“There are anoder three yet—I haf no desire to die,” and amidst the laughter that followed this exhibition of caution, Manfred recalled him sharply.

“If you have no objection, my lord?” he said.

“None whatever,” replied the judge courteously.

“You have mentioned something about another three,” he said. “Do you suggest that they have threatened you?”

“No, sar—no!” said the eager little man.

“I cannot examine counsel,” said Manfred, smiling; “but I put it to him, that there has been no suggestion of intimidation of witnesses in this case.”

“None whatever,” counsel hastened to say; “it is due to you to make that statement.”

“Against this man”—the prisoner pointed to the witness-box—“we have nothing that would justify our action. He is a saccharine smuggler, and a dealer in stolen property—but the law will take care of him.”

“It’s a lie,” said the little man in the box, white and shaking; “it is libelous!”

Manfred smiled again and dismissed him with a wave of his hand.

The judge might have reproved the prisoner for his irrelevant accusation, but allowed the incident to pass.

The case for the prosecution was drawing to a close when an official of the court came to the judge's side and, bending down, began a whispered conversation with him.

As the final witness withdrew, the judge announced an adjournment and the prosecuting counsel was summoned to his lordship's private room.

In the cells beneath the court, Manfred received a hint at what was coming and looked grave.

After the interval, the judge, on taking his seat, addressed the jury:

"In a case presenting the unusual features that characterize this," he said, "it is to be expected that there will occur incidents of an almost unprecedented nature. The circumstances under which the evidence that will be given now, are, however, not entirely without precedent." He opened a thick law book before him at a place marked by a slip of paper. "Here in the Queen against Forsythe, and earlier, the Queen against Berander, and earlier still and quoted in all these rulings, the King against Sir Thomas Mandory, we have parallel cases." He closed the book.

"Although the accused has given no intimation of his desire to call witnesses on his behalf, a gentleman has volunteered his evidence. He desires that his name shall be withheld, and there are peculiar circumstances that compel me to grant his request. You may be assured, gentlemen of the jury, that I am satisfied both as to the identity of the witness, and that he is in every way worthy of credence."

He nodded a signal to an officer, and through the judge's door to the witness box there walked a young man. He was dressed in a tightly fitting frock coat, and across the upper part of his face was a half mask.

He leant lightly over the rail, looking at Manfred with a little smile on his clean-cut mouth, and Manfred's eyes challenged him.

"You come to speak on behalf of the accused?" asked the judge.

"Yes, my lord."

It was the next question that sent a gasp of surprise through the crowded court.

"You claim equal responsibility for his actions?"

"Yes, my lord!"

"You are, in fact, a member of the organization known as the Four Just Men?"

"I am."

He spoke calmly, and the thrill that the confession produced, left him unmoved.

"You claim, too," said the judge, consulting a paper before him, "to have participated in their councils?"

"I claim that."

There were long pauses between the questions, for the judge was checking the replies and counsel was writing busily.

"And you say you are in accord both with their objects and their methods?"

"Absolutely."

"You have helped carry out their judgment?"

"I have."

"And have given it the seal of your approval?"

"Yes."

"And you state that their judgments were animated with a high sense of their duty and responsibility to mankind?"

"Those were my words."

"And that the men they killed were worthy of death?"

"Of that I am satisfied."

"You state this as a result of your personal knowledge and investigation?"

"I state this from personal knowledge in two instances, and from the investigations of myself and the independent testimony of high legal authority."

"Which brings me to my next question," said the judge. "Did you ever appoint a commission to investigate all the circumstances of the known cases in which the Four Just Men have been implicated?"

"I did."

"Was it composed of a Chief Justice of a certain European State, and four eminent criminal lawyers?"

"It was."

"And what you have said is the substance of the finding of that Commission?"

"Yes."

The Judge nodded gravely and the public prosecutor rose to cross-examination.

"Before I ask you any question," he said, "I can only express myself as being in complete agreement with his lordship on the policy of allowing your identity to remain hidden." The young man bowed.

"Now," said the counsel, "let me ask you this. How long have you been in association with the Four Just Men?"

"Six months," said the other.

"So that really you are not in a position to give evidence regarding the merits of this case —which is five years old, remember."

"Save from the evidence of the Commission."

"Let me ask you this—but I must tell you that you need not answer unless you wish—are you satisfied that the Four Just Men were responsible for that tragedy?"

"I do not doubt it," said the young man instantly.

"Would anything make you doubt it?"

"Yes," said the witness smiling, "if Manfred denied it, I should not only doubt it, but be firmly assured of his innocence."

"You say you approve both of their methods and their objects?"

"Yes."

"Let us suppose you were the head of a great business firm controlling a thousand workmen, with rules and regulations for their guidance and a scale of fines and punishments for the preservation of discipline. And suppose you found one of those workmen had set himself up as an arbiter of conduct, and had superimposed upon your rules a code of his own."

"Well?"

"Well, what would be your attitude toward that man?"

"If the rules he initiated were wise and needful I would incorporate them in my code."

"Let me put another case. Suppose you governed a territory, administering the laws——"

"I know what you are going to say," interrupted the witness, "and my answer is that the laws of a country are as so many closely-set palings erected for the benefit of the community. Yet try as you will, the interstices exist, and some men will go and come at their pleasure, squeezing through this fissure, or walking boldly through that gap."

"And you would welcome an unofficial form of justice that acted as a kind of moral stop-gap?"

"I would welcome clean justice."

"If it were put to you as an abstract proposition, would you accept it?"

The young man paused before he replied.

"It is difficult to accommodate one's mind to the abstract, with such tangible evidence of the efficacy of the Four Just Men's system before one's eyes," he said.

"Perhaps it is," said the counsel, and signified that he had finished.

The witness hesitated before leaving the box, looking at the prisoner, but Manfred shook his head smilingly, and the straight slim figure of the young man passed out of court by the way he had come.

The unrestrained buzz of conversation that followed his departure was allowed to go unchecked as judge and counsel consulted earnestly across the bench.

Garrett, down amongst the journalists, put into words the vague thought that had been present in every mind in court.

"Do you notice, Jimmy," he said to James Sinclair of the *Review*, "how blessed unreal this trial is? Don't you miss the very essence of a murder trial, the mournfulness of it and the horror of it? Here's a feller been killed and not once has the prosecution talked about 'this poor man struck down in the prime of life' or said anything that made you look at the prisoner to see how he takes it. It's a philosophical discussion with a hanging at the end of it."

"Sure," said Jimmy.

"Because," said Garrett, "if they find him guilty, he's got to die. There's no doubt about that; if they don't hang him, crack! goes the British Constitution, the Magna Charta, the Diet of Worms, and a few other things that Bill Seddon was gassing about."

His irreverent reference was to the prosecutor's opening speech.

Now Sir William Seddon was on his feet again, beginning his closing address to the jury. He applied himself to the evidence that had been given, to the prisoner's refusal to call that evidence into question, and conventionally traced step by step the points that told against the man in the dock. He touched on the appearance of the masked figure in the witness-box. For what it was worth it deserved their consideration, but it did not affect the issue before the court. The jury were there to formulate a verdict in accordance with the law as it existed, not as if it did not exist at all, to apply the law, not to create it—that was their duty. The prisoner would be offered an opportunity to speak in his own defence. Counsel for the Crown had waived his right to make the final address. They would, if he spoke, listen attentively to the prisoner, giving him the benefit of any doubt that might be present in their minds. But he could not see, he could not conceivably imagine, how the jury could return any but one verdict.

It seemed for a while that Manfred did not intend availing himself of the opportunity, for he made no sign, then he rose to his feet, and, resting his hands on the inkstand ledge before him:

"My lord," he said, and turned apologetically to the jury, "and gentlemen."

The court was so still that he could hear the scratchings of the reporters' pens, and unexpected noises came from the street outside.

"I doubt either the wisdom or the value of speaking," he said, "not that I suggest that you have settled in your minds the question of my guilt without very excellent and convincing reasons.

"I am under an obligation to Counsel for the Treasury," he bowed to the watchful prosecutor, "because he spared me those banalities of speech which I feared would mar this

trial. He did not attempt to whitewash the man we killed, or to exonerate him from his gross and sordid crimes. Rather, he made plain the exact position of the law in relation to myself, and with all he said I am in complete agreement. The inequalities of the law are notorious, and I recognize the impossibility, as society is constituted, of amending the law so that crimes such as we have dealt with shall be punished as they deserve. I do not rail against the fate that sent me here. When I undertook my mission, I undertook it with my eyes open, for I, too," he smiled at the upturned faces at the counsels' bench, "I too am learned in the law—and other things.

"There are those who imagine that I am consumed with a burning desire to alter the laws of this country; that is not so. Set canons, inflexible in their construction, cannot be adapted according to the merits of a case, and particularly is this so when the very question of 'merit' is a contentious point. The laws of England are good laws, wise and just and equitable. What other commendation is necessary than this one fact, that I recognize that my life is forfeit by those laws, and assent to the justice which condemns me?

"None the less, when I am free again," he went on easily, "I shall continue to merit your judgment because there is that within me, which shows clearly which way my path lies, and how best I may serve humanity. If you say that to choose a victim here and a victim there for condemnation, touching only the veriest fringe of the world of rascaldom, I am myself unjust —since I leave the many and punish the few—I answer that for every man we slew, a hundred turned at the terror of our name and walked straightly; that the example of one death saved thousands. And if you should seriously ask: Have you helped reform mankind, I answer as seriously—Yes."

He talked all this time to the judge.

"It would be madness to expect a civilized country to revert to the barbarism of an age in which death was the penalty for every other crime, and I will not insult your intelligence by denying that such a return to the bad days was ever suggested by me. But there has come into existence a spurious form of humanitarianism, the exponents of which have, it would appear, lost their sense of proportion, and have promoted the Fear of Pain to a religion; who have forgotten that the age of Reason is not yet, and that men who are animal in all but human semblance share the animal's obedience to corrective discipline, share too his blind fear of death—and are amenable to methods that threaten his comfort or his life."

He flung out his hand toward the judge.

"You, my lord," he cried, "can you order the flogging of a brute who has half killed one of his fellows, without incurring the bleating wrath of men and women, who put everything before physical pain—honour, patriotism, justice? Can you sentence a man to death for a cruel murder without a thousand shrieking products of our time rushing hither and thither like ants, striving to secure his release? Without a chorus of pity—that was unexcited by the mangled victim of his ferocity? 'Killing, deliberate, wolfish killing by man,' say they in effect, 'is the act of God; but the legal punishment of death, is murder.' That is why I expect no sympathy for the methods the Four Just Men adopted. We represented a law—we executed expeditiously. We murdered if you like. In the spirit and the letter of the laws of England, we did murder. I acknowledge the justice of my condemnation. I do not desire to extenuate the circumstances of my crime. Yet none the less the act I cannot justify to your satisfaction I justify to my own."

He sat down.

A barrister, leaning over the public prosecutor's back, asked:

“What do you think of that?”

Sir William shook his head.

“Bewildering,” he said in despair.

The judge’s summing up was one of the briefest on record.

The jury had to satisfy their minds that the prisoner committed the crime with which he was charged, and must not trouble themselves with any other aspect of the case but that part plainly before them. Was the man in the dock responsible for the killing of Lipski?

Without leaving the box, the jury returned its verdict.

“Guilty!”

Those used to such scenes noticed that the judge in passing sentence of death omitted the striking and sombre words that usually accompany the last sentence of the law, and that he spoke, too, without emotion.

“Either he’s going to get a reprieve or else the judge is certain he’ll escape,” said Garrett, “and the last explanation seems ridiculous.”

“By the way,” said his companion as they passed slowly with the crowd into the roadway, “who was that swell that came late and sat on the bench?”

“That was his Highness the Prince of the Escorial,” said Charles, “he’s in London just now on his honeymoon.”

“I know all about that,” said Jimmy, “but I heard him speaking to the sheriff just before we came out, and it struck me that I’d heard his voice before.”

“It seemed to me,” said the discreet Charles—so discreet indeed that he never even suggested to his editor that the mysterious mask who gave evidence on behalf of George Manfred was none other than his Royal Highness.

CHAPTER XV
CHELMSFORD

They took Manfred back to Wandsworth Gaol on the night of the trial. The governor, standing in the gloomy courtyard as the van drove in with its clanking escort, received him gravely.

"Is there anything you want?" he asked when he visited the cell that night.

"A cigar," said Manfred, and the governor handed him the case. Manfred selected with care, the prison-master watching him wonderingly.

"You're an extraordinary man," he said.

"And I need to be," was the reply, "for I have before me an ordeal which is only relieved of its gruesomeness by its uniqueness."

"There will be a petition for reprieve, of course," said the governor.

"Oh, I've killed that," laughed Manfred, "killed it with icy blast of satire—although I trust I haven't discouraged the 'Rational Faithers' for whom I have made such handsome posthumous provision."

"You are an extraordinary man," mused the governor again. "By the way, Manfred, what part does the lady play in your escape?"

"The lady?" Manfred was genuinely astonished.

"Yes, the woman who haunts the outside of this prison; a lady in black, and my chief warder tells me singularly beautiful."

"Ah, the woman," said Manfred, and his face clouded. "I had hoped she had gone."

He sat thinking.

"If she is a friend of yours, an interview would not be difficult to obtain," said the governor.

"No, no, no," said Manfred hastily, "there must be no interview—at any rate here."

The governor thought that the interview "here" was very unlikely, for the Government had plans for the disposal of their prisoner, which he did not feel his duty to the State allowed him to communicate. He need not, had he known, have made a mystery of the scheme.

Manfred kicked off the clumsy shoes the prison authorities had provided him with—he had changed into convict dress on his return to the gaol—and laid himself down dressed as he was, pulling a blanket over him.

One of the watching warders suggested curtly that he should undress.

"It is hardly worth while," he said, "for so brief a time."

They thought he was referring again to the escape, and marvelled a little at his madness. Three hours later when the governor came to the cell, they were dumbfounded at his knowledge.

"Sorry to disturb you," said the Major, "but you're to be transferred to another prison—why, you aren't undressed!"

"No," said Manfred, lazily kicking off the cover, "but I thought the transfer would be earlier."

"How did you know?"

"About the transfer—oh, a little bird told me," said the prisoner, stretching himself. "Where is it to be—Pentonville?"

The governor looked at him a little strangely.

"No," he said.

"Reading?"

"No," said the governor shortly.

Manfred frowned.

"Wherever it is, I'm ready," he said.

He nodded to the attendant warder as he left and took an informal but cheery farewell of the governor on the deserted railway station where a solitary engine with brake van attached stood waiting.

"A special, I perceive," he said.

"Good-bye, Manfred," said the governor and offered his hand.

Manfred did not take it—and the Major flushed in the dark.

"I cannot take your hand," said Manfred, "for two reasons. The first is that your excellent chief warder has handcuffed me, behind——"

"Never mind about the other reason," said the governor with a little laugh, and then as he squeezed the prisoner's arm he added, "I don't wish the other man any harm, but if by chance that wonderful escape of yours materializes, I know a respected officer in the Prison Service who will not be heart-broken."

Manfred nodded, and as he stepped into the train he said:

"That lady—if you see her, tell her I am gone."

"I will—but I'm afraid I may not tell her where."

"That is at your discretion," said Manfred as the train moved off. The warders drew down the blinds, and Manfred composed himself to sleep.

He woke with the chief warder's hand on his arm and stepped out on to the platform as the day was breaking. His quick eye searched the advertisement boards on the station. He would have done this ordinarily, because they would tell him where he was, supposing for some reason the authorities had wished to keep his destination a secret from him. But he had a particular interest in advertising just then. The station was smothered with the bills of a travelling cheap jack—an unusual class of advertisement for the austere notice boards of a railway station. Huge flaming posters that said "Everything is Right," and in smaller type underneath "Up to-date." Little bills that said, "Write to your cousin in London . . . and tell her that Gipsy Jack's bargain," etc. "Go by the book!" said another. Marching down the stairs he observed opposite the station yet further evidence of this extravagant cheap jack's caprice, for there were big illuminated signs in evidence, all to the same effect. In the shuttered darkness of the cab, Manfred smiled broadly. There was really no limit to the ingenuity of Leon Gonsalez. Next morning when the governor of Chelmsford Gaol visited him, Manfred expressed his intention of writing a letter to his cousin—in London.

"Did you see him?" asked Poiccart.

"Just a glimpse," said Leon. He walked over to the window of the room and looked out. Right in front of him rose the grim façade of the gaol. He walked back to the table and poured himself out a cup of tea. It was not yet six o'clock, but he had been up the greater part of the night.

"The Home Secretary," he said between gasps as he drank the scalding hot liquid, "is indiscreet in his correspondence and is generally a most careless man."

It was à propos of Manfred's coming.

"I have made two visits to the right honourable gentleman's house in this past fortnight, and I am bursting with startling intelligence. Do you know that Willington, the President of the Board of Trade, has had an 'affair,' and that a junior Lord of the Admiralty drinks like a sponge, and the Chancellor hates the War Secretary, who will talk all the time, and——"

"Keeps a diary?" asked Poiccart, and the other nodded.

"A diary full of thousands of pounds' worth of gossip, locked with a sixpenny-ha'penny lock. His house is fitted with the Magno-Sellie system of burglar alarms, and he keeps three servants."

"You are almost encyclopædic," said Poiccart.

"My dear Poiccart," said Leon resentfully, "you have got a trick of accepting the most wonderful information from me without paying me the due of adopting the following flattering attitudes: primary, incredulous surprise; secondary, ecstatic wonder; tertiary, admiration blended with awe."

Poiccart laughed outright: an unusual circumstance.

"I have ceased to wonder at your cleverness, illustrious," he said, speaking in Spanish, the language these two men invariably used when alone.

"All these things are beyond me," Poiccart went on, "yet no man can say for all my slow brain that I am a sluggard in action."

Leon smiled.

The work of the last few weeks had fallen heavily on them both. It was no light task, the preparation of *Three Months in Morocco*. The first word of every seventh paragraph formed the message that he had to convey to Manfred—and it was a long message. There was the task of printing it, arranging the immediate publication, the placing of the book in the list, and generally thrusting it under the noses of an unappreciative public. As sailors store lifebelts for possible contingencies, so, in every country had the Four Just Men stored the equipment of rescue against their need. Poiccart, paying many flying visits to the Midlands, brought back with him from time to time strange parts of machinery. The lighter he carried with his luggage, the heavier parts he smuggled into Chelmsford in a strongly-built motor-car.

The detached house facing the prison was fortunately for sale, and the agent who conducted the rapid negotiations that resulted in its transfer had let fall the information that the clients hoped to establish a garage on the Colchester Road that would secure a sensible proportion of the Essex motor traffic. The arrival of two rough-painted chassis supported this view of the new owners' business. They were enterprising people, these new arrivals, and it was an open secret "on the road," that Gipsy Jack, whose caravan was under distress, and in the hands of the bailiff, had found financial support at their hands. Albeit Jack protested vigorously at the ridiculous suggestion that he should open in Chelmsford at an unpropitious season, and sniffed contemptuously at the extravagant billing of the town. Nor did he approve of the wording of the posters, which struck him as being milder than the hilarious character of his business-entertainment called for.

"Them Heckfords are going to make a failure," said Mr. Peter Sweeney in the bosom of his family. He occupied "Faith Home," an ornate villa on the Colchester Road. Before his momentous conception of the "Rational Faithers," it had borne the more imposing title of "Palace Lodge," this by the way.

"They've got no business ability, and they're a bit gone on the sherbet." For a high-priest of a new cult, Peter's language was neither pure nor refined. "And they haven't got the common politeness of pigs," he added ambiguously. "I took the petition there to-day," Peter

went on indignantly, “and the chap that come to the door! Oh, what a sight! Looked as if he’d been up all night, eyes red, face white, and all of a shake.”

“ ‘Good mornin’, Mr. Heckford,’ says I, ‘I’ve come about the petition.’

“ ‘What petition?’ says he.

“ ‘The petition for the poor creature now lyin’ in Chelmsford,’ says I, ‘under sentence of death—which is legal murder,’ I says.

“ ‘Go to the devil!’ he says; they were his exact words, ‘Go to the devil.’ I was that upset that I walked straight away from the door—he didn’t even ask me in—an’ just as I got to the bottom of the front garden, he shouts, ‘What do you want him reprieved for—hasn’t he left you a pot of money’?”

Mr. Peter Sweeney was very much agitated as he repeated this callous piece of cynicism.

“That idea,” said Peter solemnly and impressively, “Must Not be Allowed to Grow.”

It was to give the lie to the wicked suggestion that Peter arranged his daily demonstration, from twelve to two. There had been such functions before, “Mass” meetings with brass bands at the very prison gates, but they were feeble mothers’ meetings compared to these demonstrations on behalf of Manfred.

The memory of the daily “service” is too fresh in the minds of the public, and particularly the Chelmsford public, to need any description here. Crowds of three thousand people were the rule, and Peter’s band blared incessantly, whilst Peter himself grew hoarse from the effect of railing his denunciation of the barbarous methods of a mediæval system.

Heckford Brothers, the new motor-car firm, protested against the injury these daily paraders were inflicting on their business. That same dissipated man, looking more dissipated than ever, who had been so rude to him, called upon Peter and threatened him with injunctions. This merely had the effect of stiffening Peter Sweeney’s back, and next day the meeting lasted three hours.

In the prison, the pandemonium that went on outside penetrated even to the seclusion of Manfred’s cell, and he was satisfied.

The local police were loath to interfere and reopen the desperate quarrel that had centred around such demonstrations before.

So Peter triumphed, and the crowd of idlers that flocked to the midday gathering grew in proportion as the interest in the condemned man’s fate arose.

And the augmented band blared and the big drum boomed the louder and Rational Faith gained many new converts.

A sightseer, attracted by curiosity, was standing on the fringe of the crowd one day. He could not see the band from where he stood but he made a remarkable observation; it was nothing less than a gross reflection upon a valued member of the orchestra.

“That chap,” said this unknown critic, “is beating out of time—or else there’s two drums going.”

The man to whom he addressed his remarks listened attentively, and agreed.

The crowd had swayed back to the railings before the premises of the motor manufacturers, and as it dispersed—Peter’s party “processed” magnificently to the town before breaking up—one of the new tenants came to the door and stood, watching the melting crowd. He overheard this remark concerning the big drummer’s time, and it vexed him. When he came back to the sitting-room, where a pallid Poiccart lay supinely on a couch, he said:

“We must be careful,” and repeated the conversation.

Until six o'clock these men rested—as men must rest who have been working under a monstrous pressure of air—then they went to clear away the results of their working.

At midnight they ceased, and washed away the stains of their labours.

"Luckily," said Poiccart, "we have many rooms to fill yet; the drawing-room can hold little more, the dining-room we need, the morning-room is packed. We must start upstairs to-morrow."

As the work proceeded, the need for caution became more and more apparent; but no accident marred their progress, and three days before the date fixed for the execution, the two men, coming to their barely furnished living-room, looked at each other across the uncovered table that separated them, and sighed thankfully, for the work was almost finished.

"Those fellows," said Mr. Peter Sweeney, "are not so Bad as I thought they was. One of 'em come to me to-day and Apologized. He was lookin' better too, and offered to sign the petition." Peter always gave you the impression in speaking that he was using words that began with capital letters.

"Pa," said his son, who had a mind that dealt in material issues, "what are you going to do with Manfred's money?"

His parent looked at him sternly.

"I shall Devote it to the Cause," he said shortly.

"That's you, ain't it?" asserted the innocent child.

Peter disdained to answer.

"These young men," he went on, "might do worse than they have done. They are more business-like than I thought. Clarker, the town electrician, tells me that they had got a power current in their works, they have got a little gas-engine too, and from the way one of them was handling a big car to-day on the London road, it strikes me they know something about the business of motor-car running."

Gonsalez, coming back from a trial trip on his noisy car, had to report a disquieting circumstance.

"She's here," he said, as he was washing the grime from his hands.

Poiccart looked up from his work—he was heating something in a crucible over an electric stove.

"The Woman of Gratz?" he asked.

Leon nodded.

"That is natural," Poiccart said, and went on with his experiment.

"She saw me," said Leon calmly.

"Oh!" said the other, unconcerned. "Manfred said——"

"That she would betray no more—I believe that, and George asked us to be good to her, that is a command."

(There was a great deal more in Manfred's letter to "his cousin in London" than met the governor's eye.)

"She is an unhappy woman," said Gonsalez gravely; "it was pitiable to see her at Wandsworth, where she stood day after day with those tragic eyes of hers on the ugly gate of the prison; here, with the result of her work in sight, she must be suffering the tortures of the damned."

"Then tell her," said Poiccart.

"That——"

"That George will escape."

"I thought of that. I think George would wish it."

"The Red Hundred has repudiated her," Leon went on. "We were advised of that yesterday; I am not sure that she is not under sentence. You remember Herr Schmidt, he of the round face? It was he who denounced her."

Poiccart nodded and looked up thoughtfully.

"Schmidt—Schmidt," he puzzled. "Oh yes—there is something against him, a cold-blooded murder, was it not?"

"Yes," said Leon very quietly, and they did not speak again of Herr Schmidt of Prague. Poiccart was dipping thin glass rods into the seething, bubbling contents of the crucible, and Leon watched idly.

"Did she speak?" Poiccart asked after a long interval of silence.

"Yes."

Another silence, and then Leon resumed:

"She was not sure of me—but I made her the sign of the Red Hundred. I could not speak to her in the open street. Falmouth's people were in all probability watching her day and night. You know the old glove trick for giving the hour of assignation. Drawing on the glove slowly and stopping to admire the fit of one, two, or three fingers . . . so I signalled to her to meet me in three hours' time."

"Where?"

"At Wivenhoe—that was fairly simple too . . . imagine me leaning over the side of the car to demand of the willing bystanders how long it would take me to reach Wivenhoe—the last word loudly—would it take me three hours? Whilst they volunteered their counsel, I saw her signal of assent."

Poiccart hummed as he worked.

"Well—are you going?" he asked.

"I am," said the other, and looked at his watch.

After midnight, Poiccart, dozing in his chair, heard the splutter and the Gatling-gun explosions of the car as it turned into the extemporized garage.

"Well?" he asked as Leon entered.

"She's gone," said Gonsalez with a sigh of relief. "It was a difficult business, and I had to lie to her—we cannot afford the risk of betrayal. Like the remainder of the Red Hundred, she clings to the idea that we have thousands of people in our organization; she accepted my story of storming the prison with sheer brute force. She wanted to stay, but I told her that she would spoil everything—she leaves for the continent to-morrow."

"She has no money, of course," said Poiccart with a yawn.

"None—the Red Hundred has stopped supplies—but I gave her——"

"Naturally," said Poiccart.

"It was difficult to persuade her to take it; she was like a mad thing between her fear of George, her joy at the news I gave her—and remorse.

"I think," he went on seriously, "that she had an affection for George."

Poiccart looked at him.

"You surprise me," he said ironically, and went to bed.

Day found them working. There was machinery to be dismantled, a heavy open door to be fixed, new tires to be fitted to the big car. An hour before the midday demonstration came a knock at the outer door. Leon answered it and found a polite chauffeur. In the roadway stood a car with a solitary occupant.

The chauffeur wanted petrol; he had run himself dry. His master descended from the car and came forward to conduct the simple negotiation. He dismissed the mechanic with a word.

"There are one or two questions I would like to ask about my car," he said distinctly.

"Come inside, sir," said Leon, and ushered the man into the sitting-room.

He closed the door and turned on the fur-clad visitor.

"Why did you come?" he asked quickly; "it is terribly dangerous—for you."

"I know," said the other easily, "but I thought there might be something I could do—what is the plan?"

In a few words Leon told him, and the young man shivered.

"A gruesome experience for George," he said.

"It's the only way," replied Leon, "and George has nerves like ice."

"And after—you're leaving that to chance?"

"You mean where shall we make for—the sea, of course. There is a good road between here and Clacton, and the boat lies snug between there and Walton."

"I see," said the young man, and he made a suggestion.

"Excellent—but you?" said Leon.

"I shall be all right?" said the cheerful visitor.

"By the way, have you a telegraph map of this part of the world?"

Leon unlocked a drawer and took out a folded paper.

"If you would arrange that," he said, "I should be grateful."

The man who called himself Courtlander marked the plan with a pencil.

"I have men who may be trusted to the very end," he said. "The wires shall be cut at eight o'clock, and Chelmsford shall be isolated from the world."

Then, with a tin of petrol in his hand, he walked back to his car.

CHAPTER XVI
THE EXECUTION

If you pass through the little door that leads to the porter's lodge (the door will be locked and bolted behind you) your conductor will pass you through yet another door into a yard that is guarded by the ponderous doors of the prison at the one end and by a big steel gate at the other. Through this gate you reach another courtyard, and bearing to the right, you come to a flight of stone steps that bring you to the governor's tiny office. If you go straight along the narrow passage from which the office opens, descend a flight of stairs at the other end, through a well-guarded doorway, you come suddenly into the great hall of the prison. Here galleries run along both sides of the hall, and steel gangways and bridges span the width at intervals. Here, too, polished stairways criss-cross, and the white face of the two long walls of the hall are pitted with little black doors.

On the ground floor, the first cell on the right as you enter the hall from the governor's office is larger and more commodious than its fellows. There is, too, a suspicion of comfort in the strip of matting that covers the floor, in the naked gaslight which flares in its wire cage by day and night, in the table and chair, and the plain comfortable bed. This is the condemned cell. A dozen paces from its threshold is a door that leads to another part of the yard, and a dozen more paces along the flagged pathway brings you to a little unpretentious one-storeyed house without windows, and a doorway sufficiently wide to allow two men to pass abreast. There is a beam where a rope may be made fast, and a trapdoor, and a brick-lined pit, coloured with a salmon-pink distemper.

From his cell, Manfred was an interested listener, as day by day the uproar of the demonstration before the gates increased.

He found in the doctor who visited him daily a gentleman of some wit. In a sense, he replaced the governor of Wandsworth as an intellectual companion, for the master of Chelmsford was a reserved man, impregnated with the traditions of the system. To the doctor, Manfred confided his private opinion of the "Rational Faithers."

"But why on earth have you left them so much money?" asked the surprised medico.

"Because I dislike cranks and narrow, foolish people most intensely," was the cryptic reply.

"This Sweeney——" he went on.

"How did you hear of Sweeney?" asked the doctor.

"Oh, one hears," said Manfred carelessly. "Sweeney had an international reputation; besides," he added, not moving a muscle of his face, "I know about everybody."

"Me, for instance?" challenged the man of medicine.

"You," repeated Manfred wisely. "From the day you left Clifton to the day you married the youngest Miss Arbuckle of Chertsey."

"Good Lord!" gasped the doctor.

"It isn't surprising, is it," explained Manfred, "that for quite a long time I have taken an interest in the various staffs of the prisons within reach of London?"

"I suppose it isn't," said the other. None the less he was impressed.

Manfred's life in Chelmsford differed in a very little degree from his life in Wandsworth.

The routine of prison life remained the same: the daily exercises, the punctilious visits of governor, doctor and chaplain.

On one point Manfred was firm. He would receive no spiritual ministrations, he would attend no service. He made his position clear to the scandalized chaplain.

"You do not know to what sect I am attached," he said, "because I have refused to give any information upon that point. I feel sure you have no desire to proselytise or convert me from my established beliefs."

"What are your beliefs?" asked the chaplain.

"That," said Manfred, "is my own most secret knowledge, and which I do not intend sharing with any man."

"But you cannot die like a heathen," said the clergyman in horror.

"Point of view is everything," was the calm rejoinder, "and I am perfectly satisfied with the wholesomeness of my own; in addition to which," he added, "I am not going to die just yet, and being aware of this, I shrink from accepting from good men the sympathy and thought which I do not deserve."

To the doctor he was a constant source of wonder, letting fall surprising items of news mysteriously acquired.

"Where he gets his information from, puzzles me, sir," he confessed to the governor. "The men who are guarding him——"

"Are above suspicion," said the governor promptly.

"He gets no newspapers?"

"No, only the books he requires. He expressed a desire the other day for *Three Months in Morocco*, said he had half finished it when he was at Wandsworth, and wanted to read it again to 'make sure'—so I got it."

Three days before the date fixed for the execution, the governor had informed Manfred that, despite the presentation of a petition, the Home Secretary saw no reason for advising the remission of the sentence.

"I never expected a reprieve," he replied without emotion.

He spent much of his time chatting with the two warders. Strict sense of duty forced them to reply in monosyllables, but he interested them keenly with his talk of the strange places of the world. As far as they could, they helped him pass the time, and he appreciated their restricted tightness.

"You are named Perkins," he said one day.

"Yes," said the warder.

"And you're Franklin," he said to the other, and the man replied in the affirmative. Manfred nodded.

"When I am at liberty," he said, "I will make you some recompense for your exemplary patience."

At exercise on the Monday—Tuesday was the fatal day fixed by the High Sheriff—he saw a civilian walking in the yard and recognized him, and on his return to his cell he requested to see the governor.

"I would like to meet Mr. Jessen," he said when the officer came, and the governor demurred.

"Will you be good enough to refer my request to the Home Secretary by telegraph?" asked Manfred, and the governor promised that he would.

To his surprise, an immediate reply gave the necessary permission.

Jessen stepped into the cell and nodded pleasantly to the man who sat on the edge of the couch.

“I wanted to speak to you, Jessen,” Manfred said, and motioned him to a seat. “I wanted to put the business of Starque right, once and for all.” Jessen smiled.

“That was all right—it was an order signed by the Czar and addressed personally to me—I could do no less than hang him,” he said.

“Yet you may think,” Manfred went on, “that we took you for this work because——”

“I know why I was taken,” said the quiet Jessen. “Starque and François were within the law, condemned by the law, and you strike only at those the law has missed.”

Then Manfred inquired after the Guild, and Jessen brightened.

“The Guild is flourishing,” he said cheerfully. “I am now converting the luggage thieves—you know, the men who haunt railway stations.”

“Into——?” asked the other.

“The real thing—the porters they sometimes impersonate,” said the enthusiast, and added dolefully, “It’s terribly uphill business though, getting characters for the men who want to go straight and have only a ticket of leave to identify them.”

As he rose to go, Manfred shook hands.

“Don’t lose heart,” he said.

“I shall see you again,” said Jessen, and Manfred smiled.

Again, if you grow weary of that repetition “Manfred smiled,” remember that the two words best describe his attitude in those dreadful days in Chelmsford.

There was no trace of flippancy in his treatment of the oppressing situation. His demeanour on the occasions when he met the chaplain was one to which the most sensitive could take no exception, but the firmness was insuperable.

“It is impossible to do anything with him,” said the despairing minister. “I am the veriest child in his hands. He makes me feel like a lay preacher interviewing Socrates.”

There was no precedent for the remarkable condition of affairs, and finally, at Manfred’s request, it was decided to omit the ceremony of the religious service altogether.

In the afternoon, taking his exercise, he lifted his eyes skyward, and the warders, following his gaze, saw in the air a great yellow kite, bearing a banner that advertised some brand or other of motor tires.

“Yellow kite, all right,” he improvised, and hummed a tune as he marched round the stone circle.

That night, after he had retired to rest, they took away his prison clothes and returned the suit in which he had been arrested. He thought he heard the measured tramping of feet as he dozed, and wondered if the Government had increased the guard of the prison. Under his window the step of the sentry sounded brisker and heavier.

“Soldiers,” he guessed, and fell asleep.

He was accurate in his surmise. At the eleventh hour had arisen a fear of rescue, and half a battalion of guards had arrived by train in the night and held the prison.

The chaplain made his last effort, and received an unexpected rebuff, unexpected because of the startling warmth with which it was delivered.

“I refuse to see you,” stormed Manfred. It was the first exhibition of impatience he had shown.

“Have I not told you that I will not lend myself to the reduction of a sacred service to a farce? Can you not understand that I must have a very special reason for behaving as I do, or do you think I am a sullen boor rejecting your kindness out of pure perversity?”

“I did not know what to think,” said the chaplain sadly, and Manfred’s voice softened as he replied:

“Reserve your judgment for a few hours—then you will know.”

The published accounts of that memorable morning are to the effect that Manfred ate very little, but the truth is that he partook of a hearty breakfast, saying, “I have a long journey before me, and need my strength.”

At five minutes to eight a knot of journalists and warders assembled outside the cell door, a double line of warders formed across the yard, and the extended line of soldiers that circled the prison building stood to attention. At a minute to eight came Jessen with the straps of office in his hand. Then with the clock striking the hour, the governor beckoning Jessen, entered the cell.

Simultaneously and in a dozen different parts of the country, the telegraph wires which connect Chelmsford with the rest of the world were cut.

It was a tragic procession, robbed a little of its horror by the absence of the priest, but sufficiently dreadful. Manfred, with strapped hands, followed the governor, a warder at each arm, and Jessen walking behind. They guided him to the little house without windows and stood him on a trap and drew back, leaving the rest to Jessen. Then, as Jessen put his hand to his pocket, Manfred spoke.

“Stand away for a moment,” he said; “before the rope is on my neck I have something to say,” and Jessen stood back. “It is,” said Manfred slowly, “farewell!”

As he spoke he raised his voice, and Jessen stooped to pick up the coil of rope that dragged on the floor. Then without warning, before the rope was raised, or any man could touch him, the trap fell with a crash and Manfred shot out of sight.

Out of sight indeed, for from the pit poured up a dense volume of black smoke, that sent the men at the edge reeling and coughing backwards to the open air.

“What is it? What is it?” a frantic official struggled through the press at the door and shouted an order.

“Quick! the fire hose!”

The clanging of a bell sent the men to their stations. “He is in the pit,” somebody cried, but a man came with a smoke helmet and went down the side. He was a long time gone, and when he returned he told his story incoherently.

“The bottom of the pit’s been dug out—there’s a passage below and a door—the smoke—I stopped that, it’s a smoke cartridge!”

The chief warder whipped a revolver from his holster.

“This way,” he shouted, and went down the dangling rope hand over hand.

It was dark, but he felt his way; he slipped down the sharp declivity where the tunnel dipped beneath the prison wall and the men behind him sprawled after him. Then without warning he ran into an obstacle and went down bruised and shaken.

One of the last men down had brought a lamp, and the light of it came flickering along the uneven passage. The chief warder shouted for the man to hurry.

By the light he saw that what confronted him was a massive door made of unpainted deal and clamped with iron. A paper attracted his attention. It was fastened to the door, and he lifted the lantern to read it:

“The tunnel beyond this point is mined.”

That was all it said.

“Get back to the prison,” ordered the warder sharply. Mine or no mine, he would have gone on, but he saw that the door was well nigh impregnable.

He came back to the light stained with clay and sweating with his exertions.

“Gone!” he reported curtly; “if we can get the men out on the roads and surround the town ____”

“That has been done,” said the governor, “but there’s a crowd in front of the prison, and we’ve lost three minutes getting through.”

He had a grim sense of humour, this fierce silent old man, and he turned on the troubled chaplain.

“I should imagine that you know why he didn’t want the service now?”

“I know,” said the minister simply, “and knowing, I am grateful.”

Manfred felt himself caught in a net, deft hands loosened the straps at his wrists and lifted him to his feet. The place was filled with the pungent fumes of smoke.

“This way.”

Poiccart, going ahead, flashed the rays of his electric lamp over the floor. They took the slope with one flying leap, and stumbled forward as they landed; reaching the open door, they paused whilst Leon crashed it closed and slipped the steel bolts into their places.

Poiccart’s lamp showed the smoothly cut sides of the tunnel, and at the other end they had to climb the débris of dismantled machinery.

“Not bad,” said Manfred, viewing the work critically. “The ‘Rational Faithers’ were useful,” he added. Leon nodded.

“But for their band you could have heard the drills working in the prison,” he said breathlessly.

Up a ladder at the end they raced, into the earth strewn “dining-room” through the passage, inches thick with trodden clay.

Leon held the thick coat for him and he slipped into it. Poiccart started the motor.

“Right!” They were on the move thumping and jolting through a back lane that joined the main road five hundred yards below the prison.

Leon, looking back, saw the specks of scarlet struggling through the black crowds at the gates. “Soldiers to hold the roads,” he said; “we’re just in time—let her rip, Poiccart.”

It was not until they struck the open country that Poiccart obeyed, and then the great racer leapt forward, and the rush of wind buffeted the men’s faces with great soft blows.

Once in the loneliest part of the road they came upon telegraph wires that trailed in the hedge.

Leon’s eyes danced at the sight of it.

“If they’ve cut the others, the chase is over,” he said; “they’ll have cars out in half an hour and be following us; we are pretty sure to attract attention, and they’ll be able to trace us.”

Attract attention they certainly did, for leaving Colchester behind, they ran into a police trap, and a gesticulating constable signalled them to stop.

They left him behind in a thick cloud of dust. Keeping to the Clacton road, they had a clear run till they reached a deserted strip where a farm wagon had broken down and blocked all progress.

A grinning wagoner saw their embarrassment.

“You cairn’t pass here, mister,” he said gleefully, “and there ain’t another road for two miles back.”

"Where are your horses?" asked Leon quickly.

"Back to farm," grinned the man.

"Good," said Leon. He looked round, there was nobody in sight.

"Go back there with the car," he said, and signalled Poiccart to reverse the engine.

"What for?"

Leon was out of the car, walking with quick steps to the lumbering wreck in the road.

He stooped down, made a swift examination, and thrust something beneath the huge bulk. He lit a match, steadied the flame, and ran backward, clutching the slow-moving yokel and dragging him with him.

" 'Ere, wot's this?" demanded the man, but before he could reply there was a deafening crash, like a clap of thunder, and the air was filled with wreckage.

Leon made a second examination and called the car forward.

As he sprang into his seat he turned to the dazed rustic.

"Tell your master that I have taken the liberty of dynamiting his cart," he said; and then, as the man made a movement as if to clutch his arm, Leon gave him a push which sent him flying, and the car jolted over the remainder of the wagon.

The car turned now in the direction of Walton, and after a short run, turned sharply toward the sea.

Twenty minutes later two cars thundered along the same road, stopping here and there for the chief warder to ask the question of the chance-met pedestrian.

They too swung round to the sea and followed the cliff road.

"Look!" said a man.

Right ahead, drawn up by the side of the road, was a car. It was empty.

They sprang out as they reached it—half a dozen warders from each car. They raced across the green turf till they came to the sheer edge of the cliff.

There was no sign of the fugitive.

The serene blue of sea was unbroken, save where, three miles away, a beautiful white steam yacht was putting out to sea.

Attracted by the appearance of the warders, a little crowd came round them.

"Yes," said a wondering fisherman, "I seed 'em, three of 'em went out in one of they motor boats that go like lightenin'—they're out o' sight by now."

"What ship is that?" asked the chief warder quickly and pointed to the departing yacht.

The fisherman removed his pipe and answered: "That's the Royal Yacht."

"What Royal Yacht?"

"The Prince of the Escorials," said the fisherman impressively.

The chief warder groaned.

"Well, they can't be on *her*!" he said.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *The Four Just Men* by Edgar Wallace]