



By T. C. DE LEON

Illustrations by Stephen J. Ferris

QUITE a congenial sextette of us met nightly, at the transpontine *table d'hôte*, during my last autumn in Paris.

I was painting arduously in La Batte's *atelier*, and, like many another, had my brain full of grand ideas, each one of which would make me famous—if developed.

There was an American in our party named Ward Livingstone, a New Yorker who had passed some years in Rhodesia, employed by mining syndicates.

A born talker, he had aided his lingual attribute by travel, albeit clarity of observation had been somewhat lacking; but he never confessed ignorance of place or subject. In his favourite phrase, he "knew it all." Moreover, he declined—though courteously ever—to let others know any of "it;" and his wont was to monopolize table-talk, in serene innocence of the fact that conversation can never be a monologue.

Handsome, frank, manly and well

groomed, Livingstone was a really good fellow, despite his being the butt of at least two of his messmates. These were Hon. Herbert Alton-Hume Cholmondeley Savile, ex-attaché to His Majesty's legation at Vienna, who had been granted indefinite *congé* for the health of his morals, and naturally chose Paris as their sanitarium—and Baron Strelitz de Rhadon. The latter was a small, keen-eyed, and introspective Russian, but singularly winning and magnetic in manner—when he chose. He rarely had much to say, but, on one subject, he did talk—forcibly and well. Plainly the baron had lived almost everywhere; and, as plainly, he had tested many modern fads, one of them being theosophy and occult science.

On their first meeting, he had made Savile's baby-blue eyes roll in their sockets, by reading his career from his palm and declaring blandly that he would, one day, speak on terms of perfect equality with the Czar of Russia.

On another occasion, he bade a severe and persistent cramp leave my right arm: it vanished at the touch of his firm, white hand, never to return. But theosophy was the baron's hobby; and, at flippant allusions to that most occult of all the cults, he was *à cheval* in an instant. Still, he was never long at the charge; for, somehow, his scimitar of logic and his mace of facts ever laid a rash assailant flat on his back, with heels in air. Then the magnanimous victor would promptly dismount, cast aside his arms, and throw out the white flag of deep and continuous reverie.

One evening De Rhadon was late at dinner. As he came in, Savile and I were discussing the ultimate trend of scientific research. I held that, "in the hands of men entirely great," vast preventive and remedial results slept under what laymen knew only by the cant name of charlatanism.

"Perhaps," the Englishman retorted doggedly. "But wouldn't you as lief be cured by a pill, really, as by something between a black Voodoo and Lourdes? You can at least see the pill, but you can't reach any point of the other thing, you know."

"That's right! Your head's dead level, Savile," Livingstone broke in. "Why, I've seen dead loads of that sort o' thing myself. Out among those niggers at the mines, there were Hoodoos who could give cards and spades to any Gumbo on a Louisiana plantation; but those ignoramuses worshipped 'em, as our Indians do their Manitou." The Russian entered in his usual velvet-shod fashion, but the New Yorker went on: "They're fakirs, all of 'em; and there's nothing in it, unless the patient has more nerves than brains. Why, man! I'll get more results out of a grain of calomel and a seidlitz powder, than the fakirs can out of all their hypnotism, palmistry and——"

"I don't know quite about palmistry, really," Savile deprecated. "A fellow

often has deuced odd things on his hands, you know."

"Assuredly," I assented. "And my arm was cured, after all the doctors, by one touch of De Rhadon's. Feeling 'is believing,' as much as seeing proverbially is."

"Thank you for the personal part; but Science needs no champion," the Russian said quietly. He spoke to me, but his keen grey eyes were fixed on Livingstone; and for once he made no reply. In fact, he continued singularly silent and introspective throughout the whole dinner, which was a triumph for the *chef*, and a very merry meal.

"Deuced clever Chianti this, really!" Savile exclaimed suddenly. He, too, had been silent some time; but now leaned back *un homme diné*, and held his glass to the light, after sipping. "But I rather prefer the pale to the red. Purer wine, isn't it, Baschiotti?"

"They are the same precisely, save for the colour of the grape," answered our Italian messmate—a vintner and expert.

"Did you ever taste the Green Chianti?" De Rhadon asked.

"There is no such wine," Baschiotti replied, staring. "In all Tuscany, from Siena to Arezzo, there are but the red and the white."

"Perhaps; it is very rare now," the Russian persisted, suavely. "A century or two ago it was a favourite wine. I believe the Borgia and Rimini families used it, for some peculiar qualities it alone seemed to possess."

"I have drunk it!" Livingstone spoke abruptly, and for the first time since his soup. "It is a very strange wine—very strange."

The German and the Englishman exchanged knowing glances; the Italian stared blankly at the speaker.

"But, Signor Leevingstone——"

"It is—a very strange wine!" the American cut him off definitively, and then relapsed into his unusual silence.

"Who is for the opera to-night?" Baron de Rhadon asked.

"For nothing would I miss it!" Baschiotti cried. "Calvaletta will create 'The Persian,' in Bulfinchinito's new opera."

"I am invited to the legation box," Savile said, rising.

"I shall go myself," the German muttered; "but it will be light—all trill and scream, to crack the voice and the ear at once. It will not be as Wagner."

"I will join you, Baron," I said, as all rose; and, without one word, Livingstone took the Russian's arm, while Baschiotti and I followed.

I had read of "The Persian" for weeks, and had longed for the opening night of the world-famous contralto. Yet—just as we turned into the Boulevard des Italiens—a sudden and dominant craze seized me to rush home and paint. A grand grouping for my picture—"Before the Terror"—suddenly rushed clear and sharp to my brain. I had vainly groped for some of its details for many weeks; now the whole was clear, and blotted out every other desire.

With some mumbled excuse—and an invitation to drop in and smoke after the opera—I dropped Baschiotti's arm and rushed to my studio, taking the steep flight *au quatrième* three steps at a bound.

Where was my key? Not in the outer coat pocket that always held it. Search of all others failed; so, yelling for the *concierge*, I finally got in, sprung the night-latch behind me, and seized my crayon. Soon I was lost in architecture, faces and costumes, that crowded the canvas so fast, and in such naturalness, as to make me stare at my own prowess. At last I stepped back, smiling at a really remarkable and life-like composition; lit my Turkish pipe, and lay back to admire it, in my easiest chair.

My figures seemed to glide across the polished floor, that reflected every shimmer of silk and gem; the candelabra to flare, and the *frou-frou* of brocades to soothe the ear.

"A great picture!" I cried aloud. "'Before the Terror' is fame and fortune at one great stroke!"

* * * * *

How long I had slept I know not, when a hot and heavy hand touched my own, and I saw Livingstone standing before me. His face was not the smug, complacent one familiar to our mess, but deadly pale, with blood-shot eyes and matted hair pushed back from a furrowed and beaded forehead.

"I have had one!" he said, in cold, metallic tone.

"One what?" I queried, staring in his face.

"One glass of that—Green Chianti! I lied at dinner to-night. I had never even heard of the cursed thing before! And if I ever touch another—why, man, I'd sooner drink vitriol!"

I still stared at him. He evidently had "had one," but not of Chianti—green or other coloured. But then I recalled his great physique and his exceptional prowess as "a holder," and his speech was clear and deliberate.

Suddenly I glanced at the door, which was still closed.

"Did my *concierge* let you in?"

"I tell you that wine is bewitched!" He ignored my query and dropped heavily into a chair. "It changed everything so suddenly, so horribly that—God! she was a beauty: such arms and neck! And the music of her voice. I shall never see her again—never!"

"Why not? Come, brace up, man!"

I marvelled, naturally, at this strange effect of a new opera and a new tipple, for Calvaletta was to sing thrice weekly.

"Such eyes, and such a bust! No wonder those artists raved to paint her! And at her age, too! She must be over ninety!"

Now I began to understand: my friend was drunk—probably absinthe. He rose, taking the floor with firm, steady strides, but noting neither my questions, nor my surprise, as he went

on, in that dull monotone. And this, in brief, was his story :—

When the Russian, Livingstone, and Baschiotti had reached the Place de l'Opéra, the American fell a pace behind the others, to make way for a lady. Then he felt a light touch on his sleeve, from a taper, but firm, hand that flashed with gems. The face, as he caught it in the dim street, was marvellously beautiful, with a something in its wonderful eyes that held his own and penetrated his whole being. The figure was wrapped in a long, trailing cloak of rich but peculiar brocade, the hood concealing all the woman's head, save the high, patrician features. And the man noted that the white satin slippers, peeping from the folds of the cloak, were wholly unsmirched by mire of the streets.

With no word spoken, the little hand reached to his lapel and deftly inserted a fresh and delicate *fleur-de-lis*. Then its finger moved to the straight, red lips ; and—her seductive eyes still burning into his—the woman turned and moved swiftly down the Place toward the Boulevard des Capucins.

Livingstone was young, adventurous, and an American. Without saying, it goes that he followed close behind the gliding mystery in brocade ; all thought of his companions lost in his determination to solve the puzzle set for him. For—curious, eager and excited as he was—no doubt arose that his strange guide was a lady of position. Her pose of head, her sinuous grace of movement, the still tingling command in her touch upon his arm, all proclaimed this.

But what could mean her wordless accost—the strange decoration that fluttered on his coat in the night breeze ?

And whither—and for what—was she leading him ? For they had passed the street of the Capucins—the Rue de la Paix, and were skirting the garden of the Tuilleries, the gliding guide not halting at the *Pont Neuf*. From that, the man merely glanced away at the Louvre ; but a vague surprise struck

him at its thousands of brilliant, coloured lights—as though some grand regal function were enacting within it.

Gradually the way grew narrower and more twisted ; the antique building more imposing, but more grey. Livingstone—familiar as he was with Paris—felt himself in a strange city ; yet he knew that he must be in the very heart of that former home of the high *noblesse*, the Faubourg St. Germain.

The leading motion of the woman ceased under the ponderous stone shield of an antique *porte-cochère*. For one instant the full glory of her face was turned, tingling him to his finger tips, as her head revealed the crown of ruddy hair upon her regal head. But again the slim finger went to her lip, in warning, as she whispered :—

“ Here ! This door to the right. Your flower will pass the *concierge*.”

How she had vanished he knew not, but Livingstone was standing alone—bareheaded in the now driving mist.

Was he really awake ?

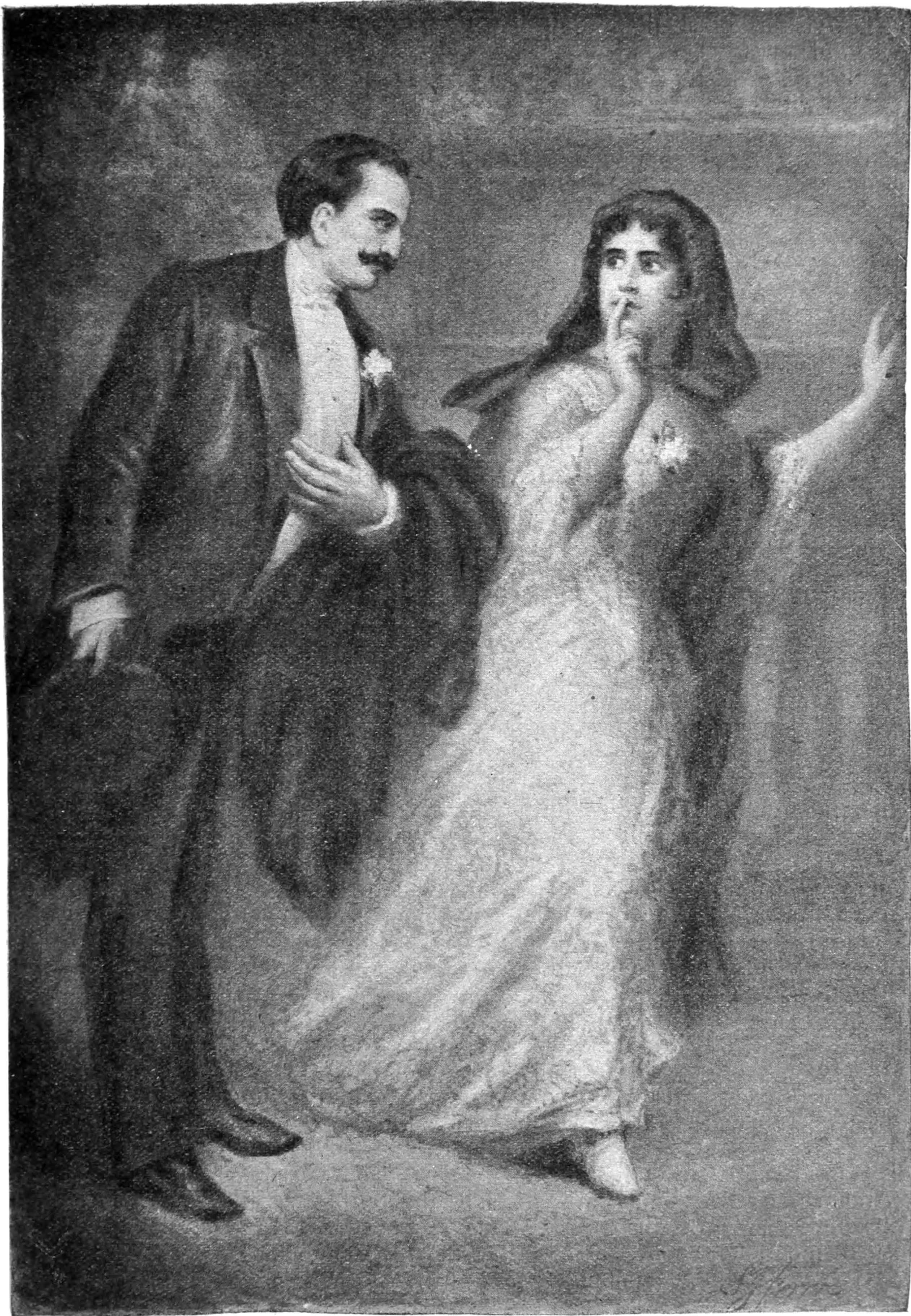
He glanced at the flower on his lapel, then at the solid old door. Its plate of battered old brass bore no name, only the number—13 !

For one instant only, superstition halted him. The next the ponderous door swung wide ; a grey and stately but richly liveried lackey bowed low, in welcome, and the American strode into a lofty and spacious vestibule, where mighty candelabra shed equal light and hot wax upon the floor.

The subdued hum of many voices floated from the *portière* of an apartment beyond. Next instant it was drawn aside, as the ancient servitor announced :

“ Monsieur le Prince Varde de Livingstone, de l'Empire des Etats Unis ! ”

Through the arch of the drawn curtain the New Yorker beheld a great domed salon, with superb frescoes that glowed under hundreds of wax candles in silver sconces. These showed also the rich, but strange, costumes of a



"HERE, THIS DOOR TO THE RIGHT. YOUR FLOWER WILL PASS THE CONCIERGE."

goodly company, the ladies gowned in long-trailing robes of costly fabrics.

The visitor pinched himself, then rubbed his eyes. That enticing array of sculptured arms and gleaming necks, sparkled with countless wealth of jewel and gem; but the costumes were all of another age—even the men wearing powdered wigs and silken hose, and jewelled garter and buckle.

The strangely bidden guest stood dazed and bewildered beneath the *portière*, trying to comprehend. Plainly this was a fancy ball, but of no ordinary class. Yet, why was he invited—unknown, and a foreigner; not even speaking their tongue?

Pshaw! His beautiful guide would soon explain her courtly jest. But none of the patched, rouged faces before him recalled her pure and classic one; and further search was checked by a soft voice of a stately dame, who approached him, in a blaze of rubies and opals. It answered his thought—how he had been selected for such compliment, and if his name were known, for the lady said, most graciously, in purest French:—

“Monsieur le Prince needs no introducer among us, since his great-grand-sire was here with Monsieur Franklin, and his grandsire was aide to M. le Général de Lafayette. An instant, Monsieur le Duc, permit me to present you to le Prince de Livingstone, grand descendant of an old intimate of your own! Now, Monsieur, I present to you le Marquis le Beauteemps! Comte, I introduce you to our American prince, who represents—to us—the youngest of the empires! Ah! Monsieur le Prince, this is Madame la Vicomtesse de Nulle—and this la Princess de Bellegarde! Monsieur!”—she curtsied low before a fleshy gentleman, with heavy mouth and a Roman nose—“he has come; this is le Prince Livingstone!”

And so, leading him through the glittering and gracious throng, his hostess mentioned many names that, somehow, seemed strangely familiar to

his ears. Yet it never troubled Livingstone that all the conversation was in French.

Each introduction was received with a wide-sweeping curtesy, or a deep and stately inclination of the back; but the guest noticed—with some annoyance—that never once did the eyes of man or woman leave his own, and that every salutation left the head stiffly erect, as though most sedulously balanced.

Little adept as he was in the language of courts and of Racine, the American's national and personal assurance rose to the occasion, and he smiled at himself approvingly, on hearing his own voice in accent and idiom, that had graced the court of *le grand monarque*! But ever his furtive eyes sought that pair which had lured him hither. And suddenly she stood before him—her face grave, but tender, her lily-broidered gown but accentuating the curves of the most perfect form the man had ever beheld.

But what struck him as so marvellous was the satin of the woman's skin—generously displayed by her gown, and the chiselled curves of wrist and arm and shoulder—slim but soft, and just suggesting dimples. And her hair, massed about a perfect head in sleek and gleaming coils, crowned her facile queen of all the titled throng about her.

Young, lissome, but regal, the girl wore but one jewel: a *fleur-de-lis* in blue enamel, with a great diamond as its dewdrop. This hung from a band of bright crimson velvet, close clasping her slender throat. And then, for the first time, Livingstone noted that the gems of all the ladies—the world-famed orders and crosses of all the men—fell from similar necklets—all of the same bright hue.

Instinctively his hand went to his own stiff collar to feel if this badge of membership had come to him, unknown, as the hostess paused before the girl and said:—

“Last, though far from least, Monsieur le Prince, I present you to my niece,

sole heiress of our house, Mademoiselle Victoire de la Bèrgerois. She must replace me, called by duties elsewhere. But, Monsieur, Henriette de la Bèrgerois again assures of welcome beneath her roof, one who is, who must be, with us!"

Comprehending the words, but not the meaning of her speech, Livingstone made no reply, but the strange events that led him to his present strange surroundings, fused into something yet more seductive in the wonderful glow that went straight to his heart from the eyes of the younger woman. Even his assurance fled, leaving him as bashful and palpitant as any village bumpkin; and he realised only the thrill of her touch upon his sleeve, and the velvety purr of the voice that said:—

"The heat and the perfumes are oppressive here. Let me show you my aunt's pride—her conservatory."

Presently the pair were beneath a nodding palm that made twilight about the richly carved garden seat, upon the very edge of which the American balanced himself, although Mademoiselle de la Bèrgerois left ample space beside her. But she looked, not at him, but straight before her into space, as she said:—

"Perhaps you have not divined the joy—the ecstasy!—it gives me that you came, Mr. Livingstone," and oddly enough she was now speaking pure English, and with no accent. "Your great-grandfather and Mr. Silas Deane were both suitors for Aunt Henriette's hand; and General Livingstone made such a pet of me! Ah! what a difference it had made if aunt had married an American!"

Slowly and sadly her hand toyed with the *fleur-de-lis* at her throat,



"DRINK, TOO, OF THE GREEN CHIANTI, AND BE WITH US—FOR EVER!"

and its diamond dewdrop flashed blinding into the hearer's eyes—as her words on his brain. But he only stammered:—

"Marry—ah—um—an American?"

"Yes—perhaps. But who can tell? Well, we two were not exactly strangers, were we? And, oh, I admire your country so much! It is so vast, so far-reaching, and so tenacious! Its latest government more than delights us; it means everything to us and to our cause!"

"Our—cause?" the man stammered, parrot-like.

"Yes; for it is—ours! The new empire of the United North America shall

never see the sun set on that flag, which no man will ever dare to tear down! And—you are—with us!"

"With you? Why, Miss Bèrgerois, ain't I a man—an American? You seem to know my family—even a little better than I do myself, so you can't believe I'd disgrace their record! 'With you?' Why, I'd just feel it heaven to be with you—for ever!"

"For ever!" The girl's eyes were again strained before her, as a somnambulist's. She spoke as though to herself, and the shadow of her thought—whatever it might be—swept her grand face and made of it a glory. "For ever!—and for life—and death!"

"For life—and for death! For ever!" the man repeated eagerly, and he edged a trifle nearer the still form beside him.

"I knew you would," she murmured absently. Then she was silent until the stillness bore down and oppressed the man, who could not think of words to say. More than once he saw her lips form words he could not hear, until, at last, pent-up thought found vent in one great, tremulous sigh.

It made the man start with some nameless dread; it made the *fleur-de-lis* upon that fairest bosom rise and fall as a yacht upon a troubled sea; it shook the ruddy masses of shining hair until they rustled. Then, in spasmodic anxiety, Victoire de la Bèrgerois raised both hands and pressed her temples firmly. And there was piteous obsecration in the eyes she fixed on space, as she murmured low:—

"Not yet! Oh! not yet!"

"'Not yet'? Why not? The grinding motto of my people is: 'No time like the present.' Ah! Miss Victoire, you yourself said it was happiness to you for me to be near—to be with you! Say you will let me be with you—always! This is sudden, I know; and somehow I don't quite understand it myself; but we Americans all learn pretty quickly. Come, let's go to your aunt, and any reference she wants——"

As he spoke he clasped the little hand hanging listless by her side. It was satiny, but cold to his hot palm. The girl made no motion to withdraw it, her eyes still fixed on the unseen something straight before them. But a little spasm of pain crossed her face as she once more murmured:—

"Not—oh, not yet!"

And as she spoke the aged servitor stood before them. The dim light of the conservatory made him look thinner and his hair more sparse and grey. His features seemed wrinkled and pinched, and the brave laces of his faded livery ravelled and rusty. On a massive silver salver he bore a quaint and gold-encrusted wine-glass.

Again the girl pressed her palms firmly to her blue-veined temples. Then they dropped softly to her lap, as she resumed her quiet tone and said:—

"So soon, Antoine? Is it indeed the hour for the Green Chianti?"

"Indeed, yes, Mademoiselle," the servitor answered in quavering voice. "Madame's clock points to the third minute before twelve!"

As a queen, the girl arose. Equal courtesy and command were in the voice that said—again in English:—

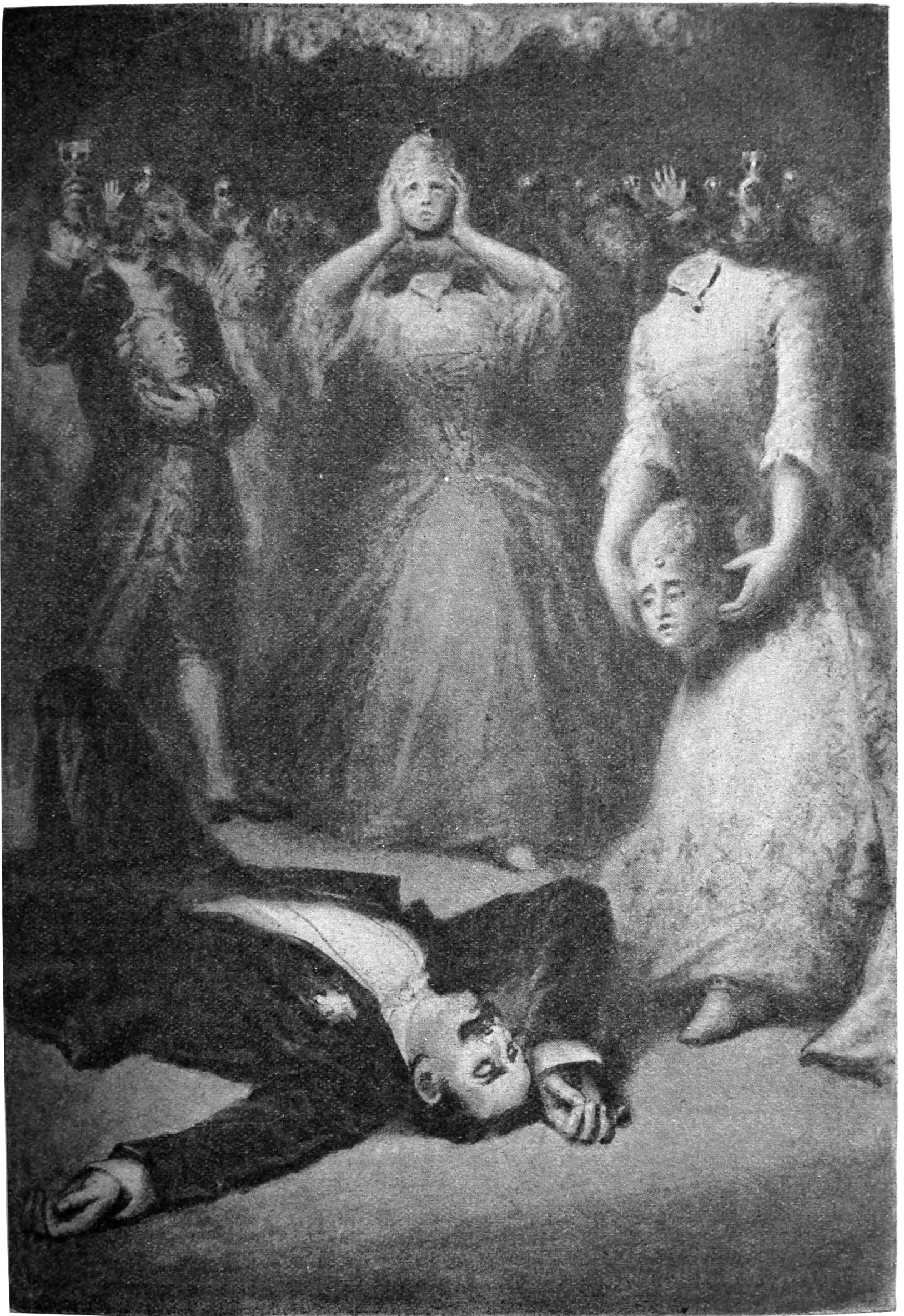
"Monsieur le Prince de Livingstone, I pledge the past! I drink to our pact! Drink, too, of the Green Chianti, and be with us—for ever!"

"Were it poison!" the youth cried; and seizing the glass which she barely touched to her lips and proffered, he drained it in one breath.

Through every nerve and vein and artery the strange potency of the green fluid coursed. His brain throbbed, his heart beat audibly, his muscles grew tense. A roaring, as of surf, in his ears almost drowned her now shrill cry:—

"Hasten! Only two minutes, new found one, before we two must part—for to-night!"

The little hand that clasped his seemed endowed with electric power. It hurried



"A SA MAJESTÉ, LE ROI!"

him resistlessly through the now dark conservatory—under dim arches—to the entrance *portière*.

The grand salon was misty and damp; the wax candles all burned down, and guttering in their sconces. Under the *portière* stood Madame de la Bèrgerois, grand and grave; a glass of Green Chianti in her hand. Around the walls were ranged the late glittering throng; all their drawn faces turned to her; in each right hand a glass of deep green wine. The soft, sweet chime of the great clock told the first stroke of twelve.

At the tenth chime, the hostess raised her glass; every other hand following hers—every voice, in hollow chorus, echoing her pledge:—

"A sa majesté, le Roi!"

At first tremor of the twelfth stroke every candle went out in its socket; but, in their dying glimmer, Livingstone saw all that goodly company raise careful hands.

Each one removed his head—placed it gracefully beneath his left arm—and, with the curtsy of a queen, Madame removed her own!

Aghast—the blood in his veins ice—his tongue palsied—the man glanced toward his charmer. She was making him the grand curtsy—her head in her hands!

From the great diamond, on its crimson band, an icy ray shot to his heart. He fell lifeless to the floor; his last recollection, the pressure of a hand upon

his brow—the thundering crash upon his brain of one word:—

"Remember!"

* * * * *

The measured monotone of my visitor ceased.

He dropped again into his chair; his eyes seeking my composition—"Before the Terror."

Mine followed them, and rooted there. Was I, too, mad—stark, staring mad?

Quick feet sounded without: the Russian entered, followed by Baschiotto.

"Too late for the promised cigar," De Rhadon said quietly; "but I stepped in to return your key, which Livingstone there abstracted from your pocket, and then left in your latch outside."

"I—remember!" the accused party said, gravely.

I only stared from one to the other, so De Rhadon went on:—

"Show Baschiotti your design for 'After the Terror.' Clever conception that, is it not? The costumes and faces—the salon and even the candelabra, all exact. But, *mon ami*, you manage to keep their heads on, in spite of the Guillotine!"

"And you know——?" I began.

"Certainly; all about it. So does Baschiotti. I told him while we supped at Beaujolais'. Livingstone left us after the opera. He came to tell you that I had hypnotised you both! He will never call Science a 'fakir' again, after his first—and only—glass of Green Chianti!"

