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THE

COUNTERSTROKE

By AMBROSE PRATT

Author of "Vigorous Daunt, Billionaire."

(Continued.)

At the sight, Cressingham was thrilled with a feeling of deep exultation that made him catch his breath. He alone, of all the world, had by a stroke of fate at last succeeded in witnessing the council of the three infernal heads of Nihilism. "Surely," he thought to himself, "Providence has not allowed such happening without purpose! Surely God will not desert me now?"

The first words that came to him were uttered in the French tongue by the Turk, a narrow-faced man whose deep-set eyes and eagle nose spoke of strength of mind and penetration, but whose oily smile and facile, mask-like visage denoted craftiness and abnormal powers of dissimulation and deceit.

"My master," he observed quietly, "is dissatisfied, your Highness, and I must say I personally share in some way his opinion. Enormous sums of his money have during the past three years found their way here——"

"Of which you have had your share," cried the Count, interrupting angrily.

"Quite so, but the bulk has always been entrusted to your charge, and for a certain purpose which has not yet been fulfilled, and which will need to be brought about very soon if not too late to work my master any good. To speak frankly, if the Czar or the Kaiser, or even the Queen of England, had been removed during the Armenian disturbances, we should have had a free hand to do what we pleased without fearing the interference of any cursed foreign meddlers. As it was ——" (he shrugged his shoulders).

The Count d'Attala drummed with his fingers on the table. "What you say is quite true, my friend, but we did our best, we did our best. Not a copper have I retained in my own interests, all and more has been spent in the cause. But after all I cannot control fate. Many attempts have failed through the watchfulness of the police, more through the cursed cunning of that mysterious feroat Perigord. (Would that I had the fiend in my hands). But what could be done was done. Faure only narrowly escaped a dynamite bomb. Wilhelm saved his life through an attack of cold which prevented him from going to the stag-hunt at Haunn, where all was prepared for his removal. The Czar is so surrounded that open attack is hopeless. Twice have my most trusted agents, including my own daughter, done their utmost to reach him by poison and each time his life has been snatched from us by a miracle. It is not only you, my dear Yussef who are dissatisfied. I myself am bitterly chagrined. Why, since Carnot's death we have accomplished nothing except the ambassador Lavalovski (ad, bah! his death helped your master, if I mistake not) and Elizabeth of Austria. And this is not my only worry. I am constantly harassed with applications, prayers and all manner of thinly-veiled threats. Our people become each day more discontented. The fools grow impatient and resentful. Each lodge has a different requirement; France wishes anarchy restored, Italy a republic, Russia sighs for an impossibly speedy reform of the constitution on English standards, Austria demands the Emperor's death, only Germany and England give me any peace. But all, with no exception, cry for a victim; well, a victim they must have. They require a sacrifice in order to keep them quiet and put them in a better humor. Money comes in very sparingly, however and to move we require a great sum. I must confess that that my store is almost depleted. Gods, to think that in my old age I see beggary staring me in the face."

The Turk smiled sardonically. "Money can be had, your Excellency, money and to spare, but the Sultan requires a guarantee."

"He shall have one," cried the Count. "A bloody guarantee; but something must be paid down"

"I have only five thousand with me."

"'Twill suffice, so that it be gold."

"It is. My servants have orders to bring the parcel here by midnight, less of course my share."

Here Prince Carlos woke up. "What of my share?" he demanded.

"I shall pay you here!" said the Count. "Understand," said Jibaloff quietly, "there must be no mistake this time. My master wishes a guarantee—well and good—but the death of a king, no petty princeling, mind."

"I shall satisfy him—and afterwards?"

"Afterwards I shall bring you myself one hundred thousand ounces of Russian gold; the remainder he will not part with until you have carried out your promise and England is publicly embroiled with Russia, for only then may the Sultan be at liberty to entirely crush these rich Armenian dogs to whom he looks to reimburse him for the vast sums he has so far fruitlessly expended."

"My plans are already almost ripe," replied the Count with a grim laugh; "it is more easy to embroil nations than to kill kings. One of my servants commands a Russian warship, now on its ways to Chinese waters. He has amongst his officers one brother, amongst his sailors seventeen. On receipt of my message he is prepared to run amuck in the English fleet, and taking them by surprise he should sink three ships at least before he is himself destroyed. Do you not imagine that such a course might embroil England with Russia, taking into consideration the bitter rivalry that now exists between them with regard to Eastern boundaries?"

He spoke with such calm and brutal cynicism that Cressingham felt a cold shudder run through all his veins.

The Turk nodded and smiled his approval. "It is a good plan, your Excellency, and should precipitate war, for the English admiral commanding in Chinese waters, has, I believe, discretionary powers, and he would undoubtedly retaliate and assail the remainder of the Russian fleet before awaiting orders from his government. Yes, your Highness, it is indeed a good plan and masterfully conceived."

The Count allowed his face to assume an expression of gratified vanity. "For the rest," he said, "watch the papers for your guarantee. Let me see, this is July 20, I said five days just now, but give me nine, so as to allow for all contingencies. By the twenty-ninth, at latest, Humbert of Italy will have departed on a journey to the Lake of Tartarus. Gentlemen, charge your glasses; it is only fitting that we should drink his health and wish him bon voyage."

The three immediately filled their glasses from the flasks before them and got slowly to their feet—the Count saying in a thin piping voice as he arose: "Note the wine, my brothers, is it not meetly designated for our gentle toast 'Lachrymae Christi'—Tears of Christ? I thought it better than champagne, and more appropriate. Ha! ha! ha!"

The others echoed his frightful laughter, the grim jest moving the Prince almost to tears. They clinked glasses and repeated one after another this formula: "To Humbert! To Death! A pleasant journey!" They drained their tumblers to the dregs and resumed their seats.

Suddenly the Prince cleared his throat and spoke, his voice nervous and quavering. "It is time, I think, my brothers, that a little of your attention should be devoted to my requirements. My nephew lives on, in spite of your repeated assurances that he should be removed. I dwell in daily terror that a male heir will be born to him."

The Count d'ttala interrupted angrily: "You have already had my last word on this score, Prince, and Katherin has my oath. Openly acknowledge your wife, procure your nephew's ratification of the marriage and the week afterwards you shall stand in your nephew's shoes."

The Prince shook like a leaf with passion. "How is that possible while Perigord lives?" he demanded. "He has already damned her reputation; do you wish me to flaunt a murderess as my wife before the courts of Europe? I tell you I shall see you——!"

"Softly, Prince, softly!" said the Count quietly but with a frown of menace.

"Bah!" cried the Prince, making a violent effort at self-control, but failing lamentably. "You cannot frighten me; let me tell you I am not quite the fool or dupe you think me. Twice has my life been attempted. I have been saved each time by Perigord. True, it was agreed between us that such a comedy should be played out in order that I might the better gain his confidence. But each time the farce turned almost into tragedy, nor was I am ly warned beforehand of what I might expect. At one time it might—it might, I say — have suited you to kill me. Do you hear me, sir?"

"Ay, and heed!" replied the Count. "You are mad, Prince, to bring against me such an accusation. Mad! mad! What could I gain by your death, or ever have gained?"

"Repose of mind," snapped the Prince, his eyes glaring like two lambent coals of fire, his face livid with rage.

"Ah, bah!" replied the Count, with a shrug and smile, each marvellously expressive of contempt. "If I had ever doubted you, you would be now rotting in the grave. If I could bring myself to doubt you now, you would not leave this room alive."

"You refuse to aid me, then?"

"You know my terms, your Highness. I never change my mind once it is made. On this matter I am firmly resolved. I would be a bad father if I assisted my daughter's husband to neglect my daughter's interests. Ha, ha, ha! What say you, Yussef?"

The Turk regarded for a moment the Prince, whose flaming temper had been reduced to smouldering ashes by the Count d'Attala's covert threat. He smiled, and answered satirically: "Your Highness has always been a tender parent!" and the two men laughed together as at some brilliant bon mot.

(To Be Continued.)

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ENGINEER BARBOUR SAYS FREDERICTON SEWERAGE SYSTEM IS A MODERN ONE

Fredericton, N. B., Dec. 6—The sewage appeal case was continued this afternoon before the governor-in-council, and Engineer Barbour and A. E. Hanson testified on behalf of the city, after which an adjournment was made until Jan. 9, to hear argument of counsel.

Mr. Hazen complained because Mr. Barbour had not been called earlier in the inquiry, and strongly objected to his giving more than rebuttal testimony.

Mr. Skinner explained that he had withheld Mr. Barbour to accommodate witnesses who wanted to get away.

There were several brushes between counsel, which lent spice to the proceedings. Mr. Hazen objected to Mr. Barbour giving evidence in regard to sterilization of the bottles in which the water was forwarded to Montreal by the Sunbury people for analysis, his objection being made on the ground that Mr. Barbour was not an expert in such matters, but a majority of the council decided to admit the evidence subject to objection. Mr. Barbour claimed that the bottles had not been properly sterilized, and were without glass stoppers, therefore the analysis was of no value.

Mr. Barbour quoted several authorities to show that natural ice was not a vehicle for the transmission of typhoid fever. His opinion on this point differed from that expressed by Dr. Starkey. He estimated that sewage disposal works for this city would cost $75,000, and the cost of operating would be close to $5,000 per year. Capitalized at four per cent., the total cost would be in the neighborhood of $175,000, or about double the cost of the sewage system. The entire outlay for a purification plant and sewerage system would be $250,000.

Regarding Prof. Starkey's statement that the Fredericton system was not modern, Mr. Barbour quoted statistics to show that of the 28,000,000 people in the United States who had the benefit of sewerage systems, that of 21,000,000 was discharged into rivers and lakes; that of 6,000,000 into harbors, while the sewage of only 1,100,000 was purified.

Of the 110 sewage disposal plants he knew of only three which were put in to protect water supplies, the object of the remainder being to prevent nuisances in small streams.

No attempt had ever been made to place a purification plant on a river of any size.

Under cross-examination, Mr. Barbour told of sewage disposal plants in operation in Marlboro, South Framingham, and Westboro (Mass.) The plant at Marlboro had cost $2,446 per acre, or a total of $31,000; that at South Framingham, $503 per acre, and that at Westboro $4,672 per acre. The cost depended on local conditions and the accessibility of clean sand. While there is no odor from sewage beds, their presence in a neighborhood is apt to depreciate the value of property for residential purposes.

A. E. Hanson testified that he had visited Marysville, on behalf of the city, and had learned that sewage from the cotton mill, which employed from 400 to 600 hands, was discharged into the Nashwaak river, a tributary of the St. John.

Mr. Hazen objected to Mr. Hanson's evidence, but the attorney-general said he would admit it, but would reserve to Mr. Hazen the right to submit a statement in rebuttal.

The argument of counsel will be heard on Jan. 9, and the premier intimated that it might take place at St. John.

Branch 133, C. M. B. A., has elected: President, T. Morrissey; first vice-president, James O'Brien; second vice-president, Wm. Fitzgerald; recording secretary, J. Frank Owens; financial secretary, M. A. Morrissey; treasurer, James Butler; marshall, John Ward; trustees, Thomas Fitzgerald, John Lyons, J. F. Owens and James McDonald; guard, John Pratt. John Lyons is chancellor, and Rev. J. J. O'Donovan spiritual adviser.

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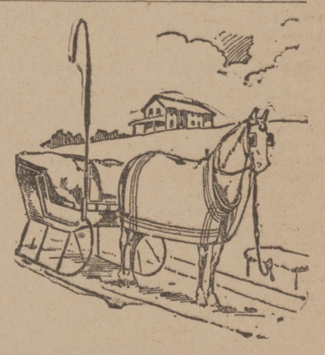
A very pleasing entertainment, arranged by the ladies of St. Stephen's church, was given in the Seamen's Institute for the pleasure of the sailors last evening. There were songs by Miss Meemichael, Miss Blizzard, Miss Ethel Scott and Miss McQuarrie; piano duet, by Misses Macmichael and Ogilvie; readings by Mrs. Lester and A. W. Baird, an address by Rev. Gordon Dickie and songs by Messrs Gilbert, Thomas and Saunders, seamen. The evening was greatly enjoyed.

C. F. Crandall returned from Ottawa yesterday.

The Merry Jingle



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