

At twilight, she saw a white face,
She sat, unshapely and alone;
Her milestones numbered forty-eight,
No other pathway crossed her own.

No tender voice robbed age of gloom,
No smiling faces cheered her sight—
There only glided through the room
The phantom of a dead delight.

"How dim and drear the pathway seems,"
She said, "to me at forty-eight;
Long since I wakened from my dreams—
I seek for naught; for nothing wait.

"I am like one who blindly gropes
Toward fading sunsets in the West;
Behind me lie youths shattered hopes,
What can I ask for now but rest!"

"Some joys I sought with heart on fire
Would find me now but all too late—
I watched ambitions funeral pyre
Burn down ere I was forty-eight.

"With naught to hope, expect or win,
This lonely lot remains to me;
To count the wrecks of what has been,
And know that nothing more can be."

Too sad to weep, too tired to pray,
Alone she sat at forty-eight;
While sunset colors paled to gray—
How desolate, how desolate!

—Silla Wheeler Wilcox.

Mathias Sandorf.

—BY—

JULES VERNE.

AUTHOR OF "JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE
OF THE EARTH," "TRIP TO THE MOON,"
"AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY
DAYS," "MICHAEL STROGOFF,"
"TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES
UNDER THE SEA," ETC., ETC.

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CHAPTER IV.

TORONTAL'S BANK.

At Trieste "society" is nearly non-existent. Between different races as between castes, it is seldom found. The Austrian officials assume the highest position, and take precedence according to their respective ranks. Generally these men are distinguished, well educated and well meaning; but their pay is so small for their position that they are unable to enter into competition with the trading and banking classes. These latter, as entertainments are rare among the rich, and the parties given by the officials are nearly all unambitious, have taken to display most of their wealth in outside show—in the streets by their sumptuous carriages, and at the theatre by the extravagance of their dress and jewelry. Among these opulent families that of Silas Torontal held a distinguished place.

The head of the house, whose credit extended far beyond the limits of Austro-Hungary, was then in his thirty-seventh year. With Mme. Torontal, who was several years his junior, he occupied a mansion in the Acquedotto. He was supposed to be very rich—and he should have been. Bold and fortunate speculations on the Stock Exchange, a large business with the Austrian Lloyds and other extensive companies and the issuing of several important loans had, or ought to have, brought huge sums of money into his coffers. Hence his household was conducted on a scale of considerable splendor.

Nevertheless, as Sarcany had said to Zironne, there was a possibility that the affairs of Silas Torontal were slightly embarrassed—at least for a time. Seven years before, when the funds were shaken by the Franco-Italian war, he had received a severe blow, and more recently the disastrous campaign which ended at Sadova had sent down the prices on every Exchange in Europe, more especially on those of Austria-Hungary, and chiefly those of Vienna, Pesth and Trieste. The necessity of providing the large amounts then drawn out on the current accounts not improbably caused him serious inconvenience. But when the crisis had passed he doubtless recovered himself, and if what Sarcany had said was correct it must have been his recent speculations only which had led him into difficulties.

During the last few months a great change had come over Torontal. His whole look had altered without his knowledge. He was not, as formerly, master of himself. People had noticed that he no longer looked them in the face, as had been his custom, but rather eyed them askance. This had not escaped the notice of Mme. Torontal, a confirmed invalid, without energy, and submissiveness itself, who knew very little about his business matters.

And if some disaster did menace Torontal, it must be admitted that he would get very little sympathy. He had many customers, but few friends. The high opinion he held about his position, his native vanity, the airs he gave himself on all occasions, had not done him any good. And above all the people of Trieste looked upon him as a foreigner because he was born at Ragusa, and hence was a Dalmatian. No family ties attached him to the town to which he had come fifteen years before to lay the foundation of his fortune.

Such, then, was the position of Torontal's bank. Although Sarcany had his suspicions, nothing had occurred to give rise to a rumor that it was in difficulties. Its credit remained unshaken. And Count Sandorf, after realizing his investments, had deposited with it a considerable sum—on condition that it should always be available at twenty-four hours' notice.

It may seem surprising that a connection of any sort should have been formed between a bank of such high reputation and such a very dubious character as Sarcany. It had existed, nevertheless, for two or three years. Torontal had had a good deal of business with the Regency of Tripoli, and Sarcany had been employed as a kind of broker and general confidential agent,

entrusted with the disposal of certain wine and other gifts under circumstances in which it was not always desirable that the Trieste banker should appear in person. Having been engaged in these and other rather suspicious schemes, Sarcany got his foot, or rather his hand, into the bank; and continued to carry on a sort of system of extortion on Torontal, who was not, however, quite at his mercy; inasmuch as no material proof existed of their mutual dealings. But a banker's position is one of extreme delicacy. A word may ruin him. And Sarcany knew how to take advantage of this.

But Torontal knew what he was about. He had parted with certain sums, which had been dissipated in the gambling houses with the recklessness of an adventurer who takes no thought of the future, and then Sarcany becoming too unfortunate, the banker suddenly drew his purse-strings and refused further credit. Sarcany threatened; Torontal remained firm. And he was safe in doing so, after all, for Sarcany had no proofs, and no one would believe him.

This was the reason that Sarcany and his comrade, Zironne, found themselves at the end of their resources, and without even the wherewithal to leave the town and seek their fortune elsewhere. And we know how Torontal came to their help with sufficient funds to enable them to return to Sicily, where Zironne belonged to one of the secret societies. The banker thus hoped to get rid of the Tripoli man, and hoped never to see or hear of him again. He was doomed to disappointment in this, as in most other matters.

It was on the evening of the 18th of May that the 200 florins had reached the adventurers at their hotel.

Six days afterwards, on the 24th of the same month, Sarcany presented himself at the bank and demanded to see Silas Torontal, and so much did he insist that he was at length received.

The banker was in his private office, and Sarcany carefully closed the door as soon as he had been introduced.

"You again!" exclaimed Torontal. "What are you doing here? I sent you, and for the last time, quite enough to help you to leave Trieste! You will get nothing more from me, whatever you may say or do! Why have you not gone? I'll take steps to put a stopper on you for the future! What do you want?"

Sarcany received the broadside very coolly. He was quite prepared for it. His attitude was what it had always been of late in his visits to the banker—insolent and provoking.

Not only was he master of himself, but he was quite serious. He had stepped up to a chair, without being invited to sit down, and waited until the banker's bad temper had evaporated before he replied.

"Well, why don't you speak?" continued Torontal, who, after hurriedly striding to and fro, had sat down.

"I'm waiting till you are calm," replied Sarcany, very quietly; "and I'll wait as long as is necessary."

"What does it matter whether I am calm? For the last time, what do you want?"

"Silas Torontal," answered Sarcany, "I have a little business to propose to you."

"I do not want to talk business to you!" exclaimed the banker. "There is nothing in common between you and me, and I only expect to hear that you are off from Trieste to-day forever."

"I expect to leave Trieste," answered Sarcany, "but I do not like to go until I have repaid you what I owe!"

"You repay me?—you?"

"Yes, repay you interest, capital, without saying anything of the—"

Torontal shrugged his shoulders at this unexpected proposition.

"The sums I have advanced," he said, "are charged to profit and loss and are written off! I consider we are clear. I want nothing from you, and I am above such trifles."

"And if it pleases me to remain your debtor?"

"And if it pleases me to remain your creditor?"

Then Torontal and Sarcany looked at each other, and then Sarcany with a shrug of his shoulders continued:

"These are only phrases, and there is nothing in phrases. I repeat, I come to bring you some very important business."

"And suspicious business, too, I dare say."

"Well, it is not the first time that you have come to me—"

"Words, nothing but words," said the banker.

"Listen," said Sarcany. "I will be brief."

"And you had better."

"If what I am going to tell you does not suit you, say so, and I'll go."

"From here or from Trieste?"

"To-morrow?"

"This evening?"

"Well, then, this is it," said Sarcany.

"But," added he, looking around, "you are sure no one can hear us?"

"You would like our interview to be secret, then?" asked the banker ironically.

"Yes, Silas Torontal, for you and I hold in our hands the lives of important personages."

"You do, perhaps. I do not!"

"Well, then, see. I am on the track of a conspiracy. What its object is I do not yet know. But after what has happened on the plains of Lombardy, after the business at Sadova, all that is not Austrian is against Austria. And I have some reason to think that a movement is on foot in favor of Hungary by which we can profit."

Torontal, as his only reply, contented himself with saying:

"I have nothing to get out of your conspiracy."

"Carrier pigeon, of the intercepted message—of which he had taken a fac-simile—and of how he had found out the bird's destination. He added that for five days he and Zironne had been watching the house; how the same people met there every night, not without great precautions; of other pigeons that had gone away, and others that had come; of how the house was guarded by an old servant, who carefully inspected all who approached; of how Sarcany and his companion had been obliged to act with circumspection to evade the attention of this old man, and of how, during the last few days, he had raised suspicions."

Torontal began to listen more attentively to what Sarcany told him. He asked himself if it were true, and what gain he could get out of it. When the story was told, when Sarcany for the last time affirmed that there was a conspiracy against the State and that something could be made out of revealing its existence, the banker asked the following questions:

"Where is the house?"

"No. 89 Avenue de Acquedotto."

"To whom does it belong?"

"To a Hungarian gentleman."

"What is the Hungarian gentleman's name?"

"Count Ladislas Zathmar."

"And who are the people that visit him?"

"Two chiefly; two of Hungarian birth."

"One is——?"

"A professor of this town. His name is Stephen Bathory."

"The other is——?"

"Count Mathias Sandorf."

Torontal made a start of surprise, which did not escape Sarcany. He had easily found the three names by following Bathory to the Corso Stadion and Sandorf to the Hotel Delorme.

"You see, Torontal," continued Sarcany, "these are the names I have no hesitation in giving you. You see I am not playing with you."

"All that is very vague!" replied the banker, who evidently wished to know more before committing himself.

"Vague?" said Sarcany.

"Yes! To begin with, you have no material proof."

"And what is this then?"

The copy of the message was placed in Torontal's hands. The banker examined it, not without curiosity. But its cryptographic words gave no sign of sense to him, and there was nothing to prove that they were of the importance that Sarcany asserted. If he had any interest in the affair it was merely so far as it affected his customer, Count Sandorf, and with him nothing could occur to make him uneasy, unless it came to pass that he desired to draw out at short notice the funds deposited in the bank.

"Well," said he at length, "my opinion still is that it is very vague."

"Nothing seems clearer to me, on the contrary," answered Sarcany, whom the banker's attitude in no way dismayed.

"Have you been able to decipher this letter?"

"No, but I know how to do so when the time comes."

"And how?"

"I have had something to do with such matters before," said Sarcany, "and a good many ciphered despatches have passed through my hands. From a careful examination of that one I see that its key does not depend on a number or a conventional alphabet which attributes to a letter a different meaning to its real meaning. In this letter an *a* is an *a*, a *p* is a *p*; but the letters are arranged in a certain order, which order can be discovered by a grating."

Sarcany, as we know, was right. That was the system that had been used for the correspondence. We also know that it was the most indecipherable one that could be found.

"Be it so," said the banker, "I do not deny that what you are right; but without the grating you cannot read the message."

"Evidently."

"And how will you get the grating?"

"I do not know yet," answered Sarcany; "but rest assured I shall get it."

"Really! Well, if I were in your place, Sarcany, I should give myself a good deal of trouble to do so."

"I shall take the trouble that is necessary."

"To what end? I should content myself with going to the police and handing them the message."

"I will do so," replied Sarcany, coldly, "but not with these simple presumptions. What I want before I speak are material, undeniable proofs. I intend to become master of this conspiracy—yes! absolute master of it, to gain advantages from which I ask you to share! And who knows even if it may not be better to join the conspirators instead of taking part against them?"

Such language did not astonish Torontal. He well knew of what Sarcany was capable. But if Sarcany did not hesitate to speak in this way, it was because he, too, knew of what Torontal was capable. His conscience was elastic enough for anything. Sarcany knew him of old, and suspected that the bank had been in difficulties for some time, so that this conspiracy, surprised, betrayed and made use of, might come to its aid. Such was Sarcany's idea.

Torontal, on the other hand, was seeking to join in with his old broker. That there did exist some conspiracy against the Austrian Government, and that Sarcany had discovered the conspirators, he was inclined to admit. This house of Ladislas Zathmar, with the secret meetings, this ciphered correspondence, the enormous sum held at call by Sandorf—all began to look very suspicious. Very likely Sarcany was right. But the banker was anxious to do the best he could for himself and sound the matter to the bottom and would not yet give in. So he contented himself with saying:

"And when you have deciphered the letter—if you ever do—you will find it only refers to private affairs of no importance, and consequently there will be no profit for you—or me!"

"No!" said Sarcany, in a tone of the deepest conviction. "No! I am on the track of a serious conspiracy, conducted by men of high rank, and I add, Silas

Torontal, that you doubt it no more than I do."

"Well, what do you want?" asked the banker.

Sarcany rose, and, in a lower tone, looking straight at Torontal, replied:

"What I want is this: I want admission to Count Zathmar's house, on some pretext yet to be found, so that I can gain his confidence. Once there, where nobody knows me, I shall get hold of the grating and decipher this despatch, which I can then make use of to further our interests."

"Our interests?—why do you want to mix me up in the affair?"

"Because it is well worth the trouble, and you will gain something out of it."

"And could not you do that by yourself?"

"No! I have need of your help."

"Explain."

"To attain my end I want time, and while I am waiting I want money. I have none."

"Your credit is exhausted here, you know?"

"Well, you will open another."

"What good will that do to me?"

"This. Of the three men I have spoken to you about, two are poor—Zathmar and Professor Bathory—but the third is immensely rich. His possessions in Transylvania are considerable. You know that if he is arrested as a conspirator and found guilty his goods will be confiscated and the greatest part of them will go to those who discovered and denounced the conspiracy! You and I, Silas Torontal, we go shares!"

Sarcany was silent. The banker made no answer. He was thinking if it were worth while to join in the game. He was not the man to personally compromise himself in an affair of this nature; but he felt that his agent would be man enough to act for both. If he decided to join in the scheme he knew well how to make a treaty that would hold his man at his mercy and enable him to remain in the dark. He hesitated for all that. Good! To get all, what did he risk? He need not appear in this odious affair, and he would reap the profit—enormous profit, which would get the bank on a sound footing again.

"Well?" asked Sarcany.

"Well? No!" answered Torontal, frightened at having such an associate, or to use the proper word, such an accomplice.

"You refuse?"

"Yes—I refuse—besides I do not believe in the success of your schemes."

"Take care, Torontal," said Sarcany in a threatening tone, which he could not restrain.

"Take care? And of what, if you please?"

"Of what I know of certain transactions—"

"Clear out!" answered Torontal.

"I shall know how to compel you—"

"Go!"

At that moment there came a gentle knock at the door. As Sarcany quickly stepped to the window the door opened, and the messenger said in a loud voice:

"Count Sandorf will be glad if Mr. Torontal will give him a few moments' conversation."

Then he retired.

"Count Sandorf?" exclaimed Sarcany. The banker was anything but pleased for Sarcany to know of this visit. And he also foresaw that considerable difficulties would result from the Count's unexpected arrival.

"And what does Count Sandorf do here?" asked Sarcany, ironically. "You, then, have something to do with the conspirators at Count Zathmar's? In fact, I have been talking to one of them!"

"Again, I tell you to go."

"I shall not go, Torontal, and I shall find out why Count Sandorf comes to your banking house!"

And he stepped into a cupboard leading out of the office and slant the door.

Torontal was about to call and have him turned out, but he thought better of it.

"No!" he muttered; "after all, it is better Sarcany should hear all that goes on!"

The banker rang for the messenger and requested him to admit the Count.

Sandorf entered the office, replied coldly, as was his wont, to the obsequious inquiries of the banker and seated himself in a chair which Torontal brought forward.

"I did not know, Count, that you were in Trieste, so that you call unexpectedly; but it is always an honor for the bank to receive a visit from you."

"Sir," replied the Count, "I am one of your least important customers, and I never have much business, as you know. But I have to thank you for having taken charge of the money that I have with you."

"Count," observed Torontal, "I would remind you that that money is on current account here, and that you are losing all interest for it."

"I know," replied Sandorf. "But I do not wish to make an investment with your house; it is left simply on deposit."

"Quite so, Count, but money is dear just now, and it does not seem right that your should remain unproductive. A financial crisis threatens to extend over the whole country. The position is not an easy one in the interior. Business is paralyzed. Many important failures have shaken public credit, and I am afraid others are coming—"

"But your house, sir, is safe enough," said Sandorf, "and on very good authority I know that it has been but little affected by these failures."

"Oh, very little," answered Torontal, with the greatest calmness. "The Adriatic trade keeps us going with a constant flood of maritime business that is wanting to the Pesh and Vienna houses, and we have only been very slightly touched by the crisis. We have nothing to complain of, Count, and we do not complain."

"I can only congratulate you, sir," answered Sandorf. "By-the-by, with regard to this crisis, is there any talk of political complications in the interior?"

Although Sandorf had asked the question without appearing to attach any importance to it, Torontal regarded it with rather more attention. It agreed so well in fact, with what he had just heard from Sarcany.

"I do not know of anything," said the banker. "And I have not heard that the Austrian Government has any apprehension on the subject. Have you, Count, any reason to suppose that something is—?"

"Not at all," replied Sandorf, "but in banking circles things are frequently known which the public does not hear of till afterwards. That is why I asked you the question, leaving it to you to answer or not as you felt inclined."

"I have heard nothing in that way," said Torontal, and besides with a customer like you, Count, I should not think it right to remain silent if I knew anything, as your interests might suffer."

"I am much obliged to you," answered Sandorf; and, like you, I do not think there is much to fear either in home or foreign matters. I am soon going to leave Trieste on urgent private affairs for Transylvania."

"Oh, you are away?" asked Torontal quickly.

"Yes, in a fortnight, or perhaps later."

"And you will return to Trieste?"

"I do not think so," answered Sandorf. "But before I go I want to get my accounts in order referring to the Castle of Ardenak, which are standing over. I have received from my steward a quantity of notes, farm rents and forest revenues and I have not time to check them. Do you know of any accountant, or could you spare one of your clerks, to do it for me?"

"Nothing easier."

"I should be much obliged."

"When shall I send him to you, Count?"

"As soon as possible."

"To what address?"

"To my friend's, Count Zathmar, whose house is 89, on the Acquedotto."

"It shall be done, Count."

"It will take ten days or more, I should think; and when the accounts are in order I will leave for Ardenak. I shall be glad, therefore, if you will have the money ready, so that I can draw."

Torontal at this request could not restrain a slight movement, which, however, was unnoticed by Sandorf.

"What date do you wish to draw?"

"The eighth of next month."

"The money shall be ready."

And Count Sandorf rose, and the banker accompanied him to the door of the ante-room.

When Torontal re-entered his office he found Sarcany, who greeted him with:

"Before two days are over it is necessary that I get admission to Count Zathmar's house in the character of this accountant."

And Torontal answered:

"It is indeed necessary."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

"Economy Is Wealth."

Several traveling men were stopping at a hotel in Colorado recently, and one morning at breakfast one of them thought he recognized an old friend in the piece of beefsteak brought him—a friend "though lost to sight to memory dear;" in other words he surmised that for economy's sake the Boniface was a repeater, and returned the same pieces of succulent ox that were sent back to the kitchen sometimes for being too rare or too well done, as the case might be. Communicating his suspicions to his companions, they resolved to make a practical test; so one of them fired his piece of steak well with red pepper and sent it back by a waiter, as being altogether too well done. "Bring me a piece of steak rare done, with no gravy," said he, "and don't be all day about it."

Presently a freight conductor came in and took a seat at the same table. His order was "beefsteak well done with plenty of gravy, no seasoning, and hurry up your stumps." The traveling men nudged each other when the engineer's breakfast promptly appeared, for the steak looked suspiciously like the "doctored" piece, and so proved to be. The conductor sawed off a section, placed it in his mouth and set his masticating machinery in motion. Presently a look of alarm overspread his features, tears came in his eyes, he lowered his head, and vigorously fired the mouthful under the table, then rinsed his mouth and exclaimed: "By the Great Horn Spoons! what kind of a cook have they got at this shebang?" And seeing the saffron-colored face of the Chinese griddle-greaser at the chuck-hole, he stabbed the section of leathery and highly seasoned meat with his fork and threw it with considerable precision at the aforesaid face and yelled: "Here, you heathen, take that and save it for hash. And if you critters in there don't send me out a good, juicy piece, well done, no seasoning, inside of five minutes I'll run into you with a full head of steam on and throttle wide open. You hear me?" Then the commercial tourists roared and explained their little game, and when all had received what they wanted and harmony reigned, they adjourned to the bar and the conductor told them to "nominate their pizen."

—Peele's Sun.