The Roupell Mystery

By Austyn Granville

CHAPTER XIV.

The Vicomte de Vallar was seated alone in his private room in the office of the Mutual Credit and Trust Company. It was a luxuriously furnished apartment. The chairs were deep, roomy and soft. They seemed made on purpose to lull one into feelings of security. It was about ten o'clock in the morning. The vicomte's private secretary had just retired loaded down with papers and instructions. His employer sat at the table, a pile of documents on either side, and before him a single sheet, upon which an astonishing array of figures appeared.

Minute after minute passed, and still the calculations went on. At last he threw down his pencil, and walked over to the window. Partly concealed by the curtains, he looked out on the throng of people which passed up and down the street. But he hardly noticed anybody. He was really lost in his reflections.

He had, indeed, good reason to be thoughtful. A gigantic scheme, the floating of which would insure him very large returns, had that very morning been put by him before a syndicate of capitalists. It was no less a one than the consolidation of the docking interests of a great French seaport. The plan was to bring all the owners together and form a trust on what is known as the American plan, and then raise the dock tolls. With the existing keen competition and the low charges resulting therefrom, that property at present yielded but a small return for the capital invested.

The idea was a brilliant one. It would net the Mutual Credit and Trust Company, if successful, three million francs, and the Mutual Credit and Trust Company virtually meant the Vicomte de Vallar. He had already enlisted considerable financial aid in support of the scheme. He was that morning expecting an addition to his forces in the person of M. D'Auburon, the friend of that very useful M. Chabot, who had introduced him to the vicomte but a few days previously.

To sell this young man a big block of shares in the new enterprise, would, the vicomte thought, not be a very difficult task. He had entertained him at his house only an evening or two ago. The splendor of that occasion could not have failed to properly impress him.

Then his wife, the vicomtesse, had so ably seconded his efforts to make D'Auburon feel that he was in good hands. She had talked glibly of their country place, a magnificent establishment on the outskirts of the famous forest of Fontainbleau, of woodland rides, of moonlit waters, and the felicities of rural life far away from the roar and din of Paris. Those marvelous eyes of hers had looked into his very soul and enthralled his senses.

De Vallar smiled as he thought how few who had come within their influence had gotten away unscathed. A knock at the door aroused him.

"Come in," he cried out, and Jules Chabot entered the room.

"Where is your friend D'Auburon?" was de Vallar's first question.

M. Chabot did not immediately reply. He sank into a chair. He seemed anxious and worried, and out of sorts.

"What on earth's the matter with you? You're not ill, are you?" ejaculated the banker.

"It's my nerves, I think. They're not so strong as they used to be."

"You haven't been yourself for some time, ever since that ugly affair at Villeneuve," remarked de Vallar, sympathetically.

Chabot shuddered, and hid his face in his hands as if to shut out some horrible sight.

"Don't speak of it," he almost whispered, so faint was his voice. "Yes, it was enough to upset anybody."

"It was a peculiar hardship on you, Jules, just as you were on the point of succeeding as you say with—let me see, what's her name—Mademoiselle Emily, wasn't it?"

"Let's change the subject. I came to tell you something about D'Auburon. I have discovered, on inquiry, that he is even better fixed than I expected. How big a block of stock had you put apart for him in the United Dock Company?"

"A thousand shares I thought would be ample. You know Colbert-Remplin brings us a large following, and there are Bompard and the rest. Still, some subscribers will doubtless fail us at the last moment. Why do you ask?"

"It is not enough. He has some very wealthy friends. Only last night he was speaking of one, who, he says, follows his lead implicitly. He is a Swiss. He pays periodical visits to Paris, and it is said invests very largely in anything that strikes his fancy."

"That's not bad news. What is this Croesus' name?"

"He did not tell me," replied Chabot. "He simply said if he thought well enough of the venture to put his own money in, that he would advise his friend to do likewise, if we needed additional capital. What are shares to him?"

"Par—of course. It is easier to sell at par than at fifteen francs on the one hundred. The one inspires confidence in a scheme, the other simply excites suspicion. In fact, I'm not sure but we will put some premium on these Dock Company shares. A little premium always makes them more attractive."

"But there are seven millions of water in it."

"A proof concern like this dock trust will stand a good deal of water," replied the financier. "After all, what does it matter? All these people will have a chance to sell out at a profit when we declare our first quarterly dividend. Those whom we want to make use of in the future can be given a hint when to unload their holdings."

"But ultimately the loss falls on somebody."

"And that somebody is the public who cares for us—well—about as much as we care for them."

M. Chabot remained closeted with the banker for nearly an hour, settling the remaining details of the dock scheme. A printed draft of the prospectus had to be gone over; the first directors of the company had to be chosen, care being taken to place upon the board the names of such capitalists as would inspire the public with confidence.

"Let me see," said the banker, running his eyes rapidly over a list which he held in his hand. "We have Liquelet, Bousent, of Bousent; the elder Paltois—he is good; and Max Baumont says he is with us in case we get to an issue. The remainder of the board must be given to the dock people. They will, of course, expect some representation."

"To be sure," acquiesced Chabot, "but we must contrive to have with us only those who are open to arguments."

"Yes, that is it, my friend; open to arguments," echoed the vicomte.

"Of your usually persuasive kind," added Chabot. "Every man has his price, to be sure, nowadays."

"And always did have. In these times, commercial enterprises, my dear fellow, assume proportions of which our ancestors never dreamed. They were just as dishonest then, if you call manipulation dishonesty, which I candidly confess I don't—but their ideas were smaller. Hence the difference. Besides," he added, laying his hand impressively upon the other's sleeve, "this thing must go through. I think you, above all others, are aware of the necessity. The fact is, my dear Chabot, there have been many heavy pulls on the Mutual Credit bank lately. One cannot offer eight per cent on special deposits and always be sure of making more by using the depositors' money. Then there was the dividend on the Ardennes Charcoal and Peat Company. You know it was never earned; but we decided that it would be best to pay one."

"Well, the consequence was you placed the bonds at par, didn't you?"

"At par to the public, of course, but Herr Goldstein's commission took the gilt off the gingerbread. However, he took them all at eighty-five. I could not have placed them to such good advantage."

"The interest comes due on the sixteenth. I suppose it is useless to cross that bridge until we come to it."

"Before the sixteenth this dock company will be floated. The bank's profit on that will more than meet the interest of the Charcoal and Peat Company bonds."

"And if it isn't floated?" hazarded Chabot.

"If it isn't floated the inevitable crash will begin, or it can be averted in another way, my dear Chabot, about which I cannot talk at present. But we will not anticipate evil. Come, you must accompany me to the Bourse this morning. I have a heavy deal pending, and shall need your assistance."

As the Vicomte de Vallar and Jules Chabot left the office of the Mutual Credit and Trust Company a small-sized man issued from a cafe on the opposite side of the street and walked in an apparently careless and preoccupied manner in the same direction. He followed them until they turned into a broker's office. Presently they came forth again, and in company with a third person continued to walk in the direction of the Bourse.

This third person was Herr Max Goldstein, one of the shrewdest dealers in securities in the whole of Paris. He was the broker to whom the vicomte had entrusted the sale of the first mortgage bonds of the Ardennes Charcoal and Peat Company. He was a heavy, thickset fellow, with little, cunning eyes, which had been set together as closely as nature would allow; had not an enormous nose grown between them, he would perhaps have had only one large eye in the center. He had a habit of cocking up his head when in conversation, and of listening with his mouth wide open. He had commenced life in Berlin as a bootblack with a second-hand outfit. At the conclusion of the first day's work he had accumulated enough to buy the best outfit in the city. In a week he had concluded that open air work was not to his liking, and took his business off the street into a basement, where he thrived apace.

Then the brilliant idea struck him of buying and selling theater tickets at cut rates. From this he gravitated into lotteries; from lotteries into small curbstone speculations. Hardly able to write his own name, the trading instinct was so strongly developed in him that in ten years he had accumulated a very considerable fortune.

Why Herr Goldstein had not continued his uninterrupted career of prosperity in Berlin was a mystery to his friends in Paris. As he seemed to have plenty of money, however, none of them had ever dreamed of inquiring why he preferred the French to the German capital as a base for his financial operations. After all, was it any of their business?

Herr Goldstein was about forty-five years of age, but looked considerably older. Constant fighting with all sorts and conditions of men had left deep furrows across his forehead. Ladies said that without doubt he was a very unprepossessing man. He seemed to have some extraordinary influence with the vicomte, and people were lost in conjecture as to what that could be.

The small followed de Vallar, M. Chabot and Herr Goldstein to the very entrance of the Bourse. Unable to obtain admission to the floor, he had recourse to the gallery. It was nearly empty. An old lady and a young couple from the country, evidently on their honeymoon trip, were its sole occupants. He sat in the gallery for upward of an hour, his gaze constantly on the floor of the exchange, where the vicomte, the broker ever at his elbow, moved restlessly from group to group, manipulating his deals.

When Herr Goldstein left the Bourse twenty minutes later unaccompanied by his companions, the small man tapped him on the elbow. The broker started violently; the creases in his face grew stronger; a perceptible flush overspread his features.

"Gaillard!" he gasped. "I'm glad to see you!"

"As good a hand at a lie as ever, ain't you, Kaufman?" sneered the small man.

"Hush, don't breathe that name here," whispered the broker, looking around him nervously. "That belongs to the past. Come with me. Come to my office, where we can be alone. How long have you been in Paris?"

"About six months."

"During which time——"

"During which time I have been working—for whom do you think?"

"I don't know. You have got into business, perhaps for yourself—or you would, if you had sufficient capital. If a good friend—if I, for instance, showed you how you could make some money it would suit you, would it not?"

"No, I have a pretty good berth, thank you."

"It is a perfect gold mine for you; if you will only hold your tongue."

The small man only smiled significantly. The two walked on side by side until the broker's office was reached.

"Come in," said the broker, in a coaxing voice, "and tell me what you want."

The small man passed in through the open door and went into the broker's office.

"See that under no circumstances am I disturbed," was the instruction Herr Max gave to his clerk. "I have important business with this gentleman."

Four o'clock came, and Herr Goldstein came out and sent the clerk home. It was an hour earlier than usual, but the clerk was glad to get away. He lived in a small flat and had a wife and four children to support. He could take his time now and walk home instead of paying for a seat in an omnibus. The hours went by. It was past midnight when the two men came out of the inner office and into the street.

"I live on the other side. Student quarters," said Goldstein. "Come with me. I'll put you up for the night. We must cross by the Pont Neuf."

"You must make it fifty thousand," said the small man, as they went along. "That's cheap enough. Old friends shouldn't be hard on each other."

A fearful expression came over the other's face as they neared the bridge. Fifty thousand francs. An enormous sum. And if he paid it—what then? He had but this fellow's word that he would keep silence.

They stopped for a moment in the center of the bridge and sat down unsteadily on one of the embrasures. It was two o'clock. The lights flashed along the river. Behind and in front of them arose the dull roar of Paris which ceases not by night nor by day. Looking over the low parapet they could see the dark waters of the river as they swirled below.

"You will make it fifty thousand, will you not?" urged the small man.

He uttered no cry as the hand of the broker closed upon his throat with an iron grasp; but for a moment or two he struggled desperately as he realized the other's purpose. But the broker seemed to have become suddenly sober. The small man was like a child in his terrible clutches. He raised him to the top of the low parapet and whispered hoarsely:

"I will send you where you won't need the money."

Then he flung the blackmailer from him with the force of a catapult. The waters received the detective and closed over his head. He had not time to utter a cry.

The broker passed quickly from the bridge and, plunging into a narrow street which diverged from the main thoroughfare, soon gained his apartments. Arrived there, he threw himself, dressed as he was, upon the sofa, and slept soundly till daylight.

Three days passed; some workmen on a brick barge drew from the black and slimy river the body of a man which bore upon its throat the marks of fingers. At the morgue Victor Lablanche, the prefect of police, recognized in the murdered man the detective he had put on the track of M. Chabot.

"Poor fellow!" he exclaimed, as he examined the finger marks at his throat. "A tiger must have seized him. He was first strangled and then thrown into the river."

And the sole clue he had was this: The murderer must have had enormous hands.

(To be continued.)

Story of Sojourner Truth.

The late Theodore Tilton, who boasted that he had never had a pipe, cigar or cigarette in his mouth, used to declare that the most inveterate smoker he ever knew was Sojourner Truth, the famous freedwoman reformer and lecturer. He was wont to tell how one day, when the venerable dame, then about 90 years old, was on a visit to his house, she sat smoking her pipe by the chimney corner, when George W. Bungay, the author of several eloquent anti-tobacco tracts, called to see her.

"Aunt Sojourner," he said, "I revere your character, but I deplore your smoking, for it will keep you forever out of heaven."

"Lawkes, honey, how so?" she asked.

"Because, Aunty," he rejoined, "you know that, according to the Good Book, nothing entereth there that defileth. Now, how do you expect to get into heaven with your breath defiled by tobacco?"

"Lawkes, honey," answered the old negress, "when I go to heaven I 'spect to leave my breff behind me!"

Took Exception.

"Remember, brothers," shouted the orator of the strenuous life, "I haven't any use for mollycoddles."

The very old gentleman who was sitting in the last row removed his pipe and retorted.

"Wal, by heck, mister, even if you haven't any use for Molly Coddles yeou needn't stand thar and talk behind her back, seein' that she is not present to defend herself."

Cause for Thanks.

Church—"There's one thing to be said in favor of the phonograph."

Gotham—"I'd just like to know what it is?"

"Well, they haven't succeeded in making a record reproducing all the noise one hears on the Fourth of July."—Yonkers Statesman.

Just Possible.

Her—What is meant by "going from bad to worse?"

Him—Getting a divorce and marrying again, I believe

NEW CURRENCY PLAN

Congressman Fowler Offers System for Bank Circulation.

SECURED BY ASSETS OF BANKS

Banks to Deposit Money With Government to Guarantee Both Notes and Deposits.

Washington, Jan. 9.—The sub-committee of the house committee on banking and currency, to which was entrusted the framing of a bill to increase the elasticity of the currency, reached a conclusion yesterday and will report favorably to the full committee a bill drawn in the main by Chairman Fowler, of the committee. The bill will be introduced by Fowler and referred to his committee, where it will form the working basis for the framing of a bill of possibly the same scope and tenor.

The bill provides for the complete retirement of all outstanding national bank bond secured currency and authorizes in lieu thereof a currency based upon general assets of the banks, to be worked out in this way:

The controller of the currency will designate throughout the country certain redemption cities, so that there shall be a redemption city within at least 24 hours' reach of every national bank. The national banks will indicate to the controller of the currency to what redemption city they wish to be joined. The controller will then select a time and place within each redemption district for the organizing of that district in the following manner:

Each national bank in that district, regardless of its capital stock, will be entitled to one vote. Representatives of the banks will meet at a time and place designated and elect a board of managers to consist of seven members. The seven will elect a chairman, who will become a deputy controller of currency and assume control of his redemption district, except that he shall not have charge of the enforcement of the criminal statutes.

Each national bank is authorized to present to the secretary of the treasury national bank notes and lawful money in lieu of other national bank bond secured outstanding notes. Then, if the bank's application therefor is indorsed by the board of managers of the redemption district to which it belongs, the bank will receive guaranteed credit notes to the amount of its capital stock. These notes will be subject to a tax of 2 per cent per annum. Each bank will be required to deposit as a guarantee fund with the treasurer of the United States 5 per cent of its average deposits for the preceding 12 months and 5 per cent of the credit notes which it takes out. The revenue thus obtained is to create and support a national guarantee fund of $500,000,000 for the guarantee of both the deposits and the outstanding banknotes of every national bank. Eighty per cent of this fund is to be invested in United States bonds drawing 2 per cent interest, while the remaining 20 per cent is to be deposited in banks of the various redemption cities for the purpose of redeeming the guaranteed credit notes of the banks of the various redemption districts.

When the national guarantee fund reaches $25,000,000, which would be almost simultaneous with the birth of the new law, the government is required to return to the banks the United States bonds now held as security for Federal deposits, the object being to enable the banks to get control of the bonds, so that the government can invest the 80 per cent of the guaranteed fund in 2 per cent bonds and regain control. In buying these bonds the banks holding them shall be paid their original purchase price, providing their exact purchase price can be proven.

It is Fowler's idea, as embodied in the bill, to have the new credit notes printed on a green background in differentiation from the yellow background of the gold notes and white background of the silver certificates.

Both Make Concessions.

New York, Jan. 9.—The gloom among the rent strikers was turned to joy when the large number of evictions threatened by the landlords seemed to dwindle materially. It was difficult to get marshals to handle those that were issued. They said they were busy with other things. Many landlords, too, settled with their tenants rather than pay the cost of their eviction, and many tenants, frightened by the action of the court, agreed to accept smaller reductions than those first demanded. Many cases were thus compromised.

Will Try Land Thieves.

Helena, Mont., Jan. 9. — United States Judge William H. Hunt will leave Helena on Saturday for Portland, Or., where he has just been ordered by the Department of Justice to preside in the land fraud cases, which will be brought up the first of next week. Francis J. Heney will prosecute the cases. Judge Dietrich, of the Idaho district, will come to Helena to preside over the Federal court here during Judge Hunt's absence.

Battleships Off Brazil.

Pernambuco, Brazil, Jan. 9.—The American battleship fleet under command of Rear Admiral Evans, was sighted passing this port yesterday at noon on its way to Rio Janeiro.

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