

THE SUICIDE CLUB

NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS TALE OF MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE

By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

Princess Florise and Master of Horses, Col. Geraldine, set out one night in London in search of adventure. They are in an open car when a young man, followed by two men, approaches bearing large dishes of cream tarts, whom the prince, who explains that he is closing a career of play in this silly fashion, the Prince and the Colonel partake of the pastries. When the second stranger finishes the last tart, he throws his purse into the street and goes to supper with his new found companion. He tells them of having recently met a young lady to whom his heart responded, only to come to the conclusion that he could not afford to fall in love on a capital of £400. The Prince enters into the spirit of the evening fare by throwing his purse into the fire, declaring that he and the Colonel are also ruined men. The Colonel adds that they, like the young man, have had enough of life and are ready to die. Therewith the two men drive to the headquarters of the club, a dismal looking house in another part of town. Here the two candidates are duly presented to the President, the middle aged man of crafty appearance. After some parading the visitors are accepted and subscribe to a form of oath. Then they are led into the smoking room, where they find sixteen men smoking and drinking champagne. All of them are discussing serious. The Colonel, who has taken the name of Blamere-Smith, engages in conversation a greatly looking individual. This human wreck is Mr. Mathews, a member of long standing. For two years he had swayed his fate. All the members pass into another room and sit at a long green table, where the President deals a pack of cards. The ace of spades means death to the person who gets it, and the ace of clubs designates the monster in whose hands the fate of the victim is left. Mr. Mathews turns up the fatal card. The young man of the cream tarts finds himself with the ace of clubs, which means him as the executioner. The next morning Prince Florise and Col. Geraldine read in a newspaper of the death of Mr. Mathews, who, it is stated, fell from the upper part of Trafalgar Square while on his way home from a party. A friend, it appeared, was looking for a cab at the time of the accident. The prince is horrified, but he determines to return to the Suicide Club and interest himself in the fate of the young man who was convicted by Mr. Mathews. He declares, too, that he will bring to account the President of the club. He finds that the man is a scoundrel. On his second visit the Prince is told the ace of spades. He is instructed to wait along the strand until he meets the member who is to kill him. At the corner of Box Court, however, Prince Florise is snatched upon by three men and thrust into a carriage. He then realizes that he has been rescued by the Colonel. Geraldine requests that his younger brother be permitted to fight a duel with the President, and the Prince reluctantly consents. Meanwhile the Prince breaks up the Suicide Club.

The History of the Physician and the Saratoga Trunk.

I KNOW the lad too well to interfere," replied Col. Geraldine, "and well enough not to be alarmed. He is more cautious than you fancy, and of an indomitable spirit. If it had been a woman I should not say so much, but I trust the president to him and the two valets without an instant's apprehension. "I am gratified to hear you say so," replied the prince; "but my mind is not at rest. These servants are well-trained spies, and already has not this miscreant succeeded three times in eluding their observation and spending several hours on end in private, and most likely, dangerous affairs? An amateur might have lost him by accident, but if Rudolph and Jerome were thrown off the scent, it must have been on purpose, and by a man who had a cogent reason and exceptional resources. "I believe the question is now one whether my brother and myself," replied Geraldine, with a shade of offense in his tone. "I permit it to be so, Col. Geraldine," returned Prince Florise. "Forbids for that very reason, you should be all the more ready to accept my counsels. But enough. That girl in yellow dances well. "And the talk veered into the ordinary topics of a Paris ball-room in the Carnival.

A Mysterious Woman.

SILAS remembered where he was, and that the hour was already near at hand when he ought to be upon the scene of his assignation. The more he reflected the less he liked the prospect, and as at that moment an eddy in the crowd began to draw him in the direction of the door, he suffered it to carry him away without resistance. The eddy stranded him in a corner under the gallery, where his ear was immediately struck with the voice of Mme. Zephyrine. She was speaking in French with the young man of the blond locks who had been pointed out by the strange Britisher not half an hour before. "I have a character at stake," she said, "or I would put no other condition than my heart recommends. But you have only to say so much to the porter and he will let you go by without a word. "But why this talk of debt?" objected her companion. "Heavens!" said she, "do you think I do not understand my own hotel? And she went by clinging affec-

tionately to her companion's arm. This put Silas in mind of his billet. "Ten minutes hence," thought he, "and I may be walking with a beautiful woman as that and even better dressed—perhaps a real lady, possibly a woman of title." And then he remembered the spelling and was a little downcast. "But it may have been written by her maid," he imagined. The clock was only a few minutes from the hour, and this immediate proximity set his heart beating at a curious and rather disagreeable speed. He reflected with relief that he was in no way bound to put in an appearance. Virtue and cowardice were together, and he made once more for the door, but this time of his own accord and battling against the stream of people which was now moving in a contrary direction. Perhaps this prolonged resistance wearied him, or perhaps he was in that frame of mind when merely to continue in the same direction for a certain number of minutes produces a reaction and a different purpose. Certainly, at least, he wheeled about for a third time, and did not stop until he had found a place of concealment within a few yards of the appointed place. Here he went through an agony of spirit, in which he several times prayed to God for help, for Silas had been devoutly educated. He had now not the least inclination for the meeting; nothing kept him from flight but a silly fear lest he should be thought unmanly, but this was so powerful that it kept head against all other motives, and although it could not decide him to advance, prevented him from definitely running away. At last the clock indicated ten minutes past the hour. Young Scuddamore's spirit began to rise; he peered round the corner and saw no one at the place of meeting; doubtless his unknown correspondent had wearied and gone away. He became as bold as he had formerly been timid. It seemed to him that if he came at all to the appointment, however late, he was clear from the charge of cowardice. Nay, now he began to suspect a hoax, and actually complimented himself on his shrewdness in having suspected and outmaneuvered his mystifiers. So very idle a thing is a boy's mind! Armed with these reflections, he advanced boldly from his corner, but he had not taken above a couple of steps before a hand was laid upon his arm. He turned and beheld a lady cast in a very large mold and with somewhat stately features, but bearing no mark of severity in her looks. "I see that you are a very self-confident lady killer," said she; "for you make yourself expected. But I was determined to meet you. When a woman has once so far forgotten herself as to make the first advance, she has long ago left behind her all considerations of petty pride." Silas was overwhelmed by the size and attractions of his correspondent and the suddenness with which she had fallen upon him. But she soon set him at his ease. She was very towards and lenient in her behavior; she led him on to make pleasantries, and then applauded him to the echo, and in a very short time, between blandishments and a liberal exhibition of warm brandy, she had not only induced him to fancy himself in love, but to declare his passion with the greatest vehemence. "Alas!" she said; "I do not know whether I ought not to deplore this moment, great as is the pleasure you give me by your words. Hitherto I was alone to suffer; now poor boy there will be two. I am not my own mistress. I dare not ask you to visit me at my own house, for I am watched by jealous eyes. Let me see," she added; "I am older than you, although so much weaker; and while I trust in your courage and determination, I must employ my own knowledge of the world for our mutual benefit. Where do you live?" He told her that he lodged in a furnished hotel, and named the street and number. She seemed to reflect for some minutes, with an effort of mind. "I see," she said at last. "You will be faithful and obedient, will you not?" "Silas assured her of his fidelity. "To-morrow, then," she continued, with an encouraging smile, "you must remain at home all the evening, and if any friends should visit you, dismiss them at once on any pretext that most readily presents itself. Your door is probably shut by 10?" she asked. "By 11," answered Silas. "At a quarter-past 11," pursued the lady, "leave the house. Merely cry for the door to be opened, and be sure you fall into no talk with the porter, as that might ruin everything. Go straight to the corner where the Luxembourg Gardens join the Boulevard; there you will find me waiting for you. I trust you will follow my advice from point to point, and remember if you fall me in only one particular you will bring the sharpest trouble on a woman whose only fault is to have seen and loved you."

the Boulevard and made a complete circuit of the garden railings; but there was no beautiful countess to treat me as a master," she cried, tapping him with her fan upon the arm. "Patience, patience! that should come in time. A woman loves to be obeyed at first, although afterward she finds her pleasure in obeying. Do as I ask you, for Heaven's sake, or I will answer for nothing. Indeed, now I think of it," she added, with the manner of one who has just seen further into a difficulty, "I find a better plan of keeping importunate visitors away. Tell the porter to admit no one for you except a person who may come that night to claim a debt; and speak with some feeling, as though you feared the interview, so that he may take your words in earnest. "He? Whom do you mean?" asked Silas, somewhat sharply, for he was irritated by his disappointment. "I did not notice him go out," continued the porter, "but I trust you paid him. We do not care, in this house, to have lodgers who cannot meet their liabilities. "What the devil do you mean?" demanded Silas, rudely. "I cannot understand a word of this farago." "The short blond young man who came for his debt," returned the other. "He is I, I mean. Who else should it be, when I had your orders to admit no one else?" "Why, good God, of course he never came," retorted Silas. "I believe what I believe," returned the porter, putting his tongue into the crack with a most reckless air. "You are an insolent scoundrel," cried Silas, and feeling that he had used a ridiculous exhibition of asperity, and at the same time bewildered by a dozen alarms, he turned and began to run upstairs. "Do you not want a light then?" cried the porter. But Silas only hurried the faster, and did not pause until he had reached the seventh landing and stood in front of his own door. There he waited a moment to recover his breath, assailed by the worst forebodings and almost dreading to enter the room. When at last he did so he was relieved to find it dark, and, to all appearance, untenanted. He drew a long breath. Here he was, home again in safety, and this should be his last folly as certainly as it had been his first. The matches stood on a little table by the bed, and he began to grope his way in that direction. As he moved, his apprehensions grew upon him once more, and he was pleased, when his foot encountered an obstacle, to find it nothing more alarming than a chair. At last he touched curtains. From the position of the window, which was faintly visible, he knew he must be at the foot of the bed, and had only to feel his way along it in order to reach the table in question.

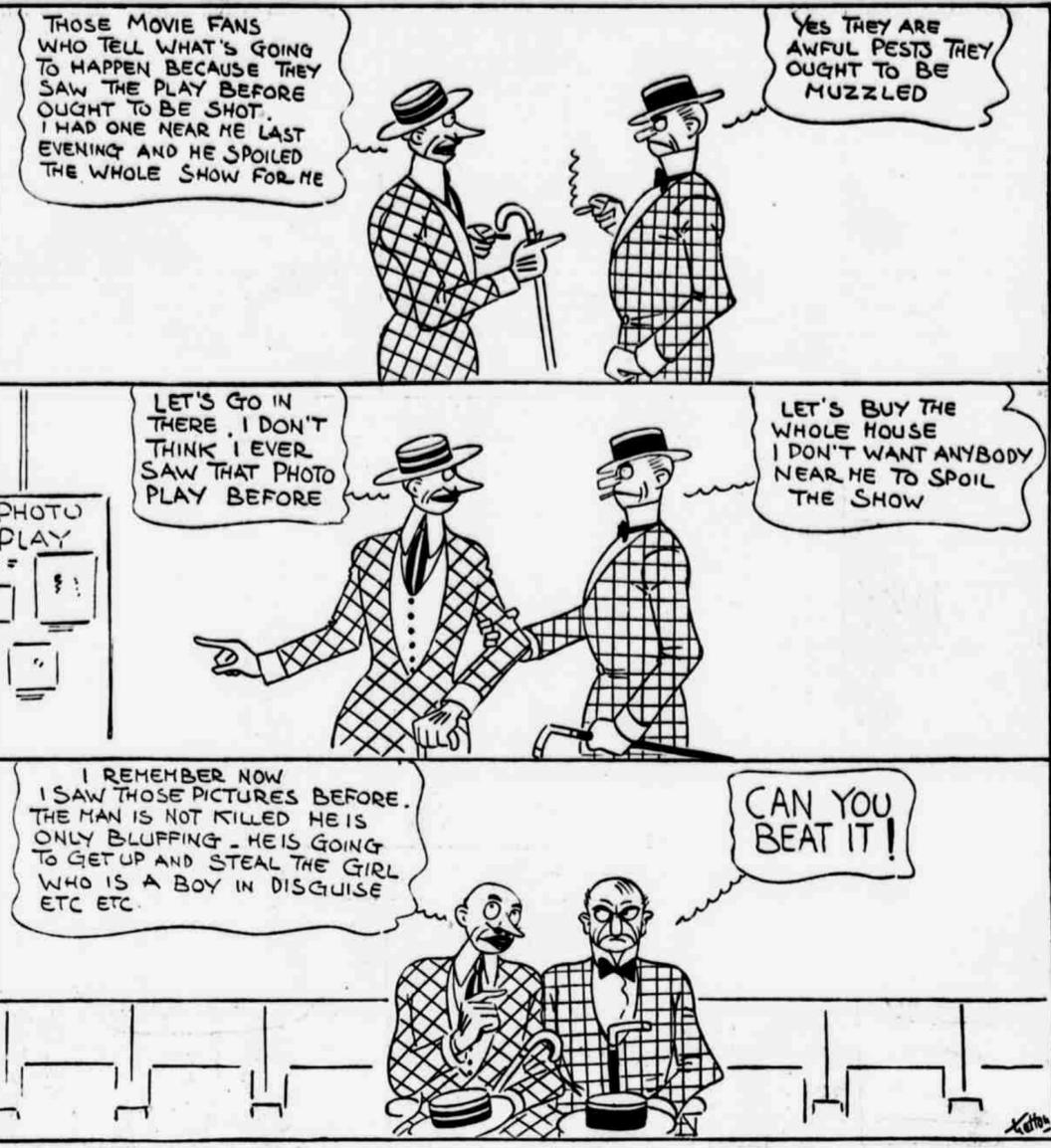
"I cannot see the use of all these instructions," said Silas. "I believe you are already beginning to treat me as a master," she cried, tapping him with her fan upon the arm. "Patience, patience! that should come in time. A woman loves to be obeyed at first, although afterward she finds her pleasure in obeying. Do as I ask you, for Heaven's sake, or I will answer for nothing. Indeed, now I think of it," she added, with the manner of one who has just seen further into a difficulty, "I find a better plan of keeping importunate visitors away. Tell the porter to admit no one for you except a person who may come that night to claim a debt; and speak with some feeling, as though you feared the interview, so that he may take your words in earnest. "He? Whom do you mean?" asked Silas, somewhat sharply, for he was irritated by his disappointment. "I did not notice him go out," continued the porter, "but I trust you paid him. We do not care, in this house, to have lodgers who cannot meet their liabilities. "What the devil do you mean?" demanded Silas, rudely. "I cannot understand a word of this farago." "The short blond young man who came for his debt," returned the other. "He is I, I mean. Who else should it be, when I had your orders to admit no one else?" "Why, good God, of course he never came," retorted Silas. "I believe what I believe," returned the porter, putting his tongue into the crack with a most reckless air. "You are an insolent scoundrel," cried Silas, and feeling that he had used a ridiculous exhibition of asperity, and at the same time bewildered by a dozen alarms, he turned and began to run upstairs. "Do you not want a light then?" cried the porter. But Silas only hurried the faster, and did not pause until he had reached the seventh landing and stood in front of his own door. There he waited a moment to recover his breath, assailed by the worst forebodings and almost dreading to enter the room. When at last he did so he was relieved to find it dark, and, to all appearance, untenanted. He drew a long breath. Here he was, home again in safety, and this should be his last folly as certainly as it had been his first. The matches stood on a little table by the bed, and he began to grope his way in that direction. As he moved, his apprehensions grew upon him once more, and he was pleased, when his foot encountered an obstacle, to find it nothing more alarming than a chair. At last he touched curtains. From the position of the window, which was faintly visible, he knew he must be at the foot of the bed, and had only to feel his way along it in order to reach the table in question.

the strain on the young American's nerves had become too great for endurance. He avoided the doctor with a febrile movement, and, throwing himself upon the floor, burst into a flood of weeping. Dr. Noel offered help. As soon as Dr. Noel perceived the dead man in the bed his face darkened, and hurrying back to the door which he had left ajar he hastily closed and double locked it. "Up!" he cried, addressing Silas in strident tones, "this is no time for weeping. What have you done? How came this body in your room? Speak freely to one who may be helpful. Do you imagine I would ruin you? Do you think this piece of dead flesh on your pillow can alter in any degree the sympathy with which you have inspired me? Credulous youth, the horror with which blind and unjust law regards an action never attaches to the doer in the eyes of those who love him, and if I saw the friend of my heart return to me out of seas of blood he would be in no way changed in my affection. Raise yourself!" he said, "good and ill are a chimera; there is naught in life except destiny, and however you may be circumstanced there is one at your side who will help you to the last." Thus encouraged Silas gathered himself together and in a broken voice, and helped out by the doctor's interrogations, contrived at last to put him in possession of the facts. But the conversation between the prince and Geraldine he altogether omitted, as he had understood little of its purport, and had no idea that it was in any way related to his own misadventure. "Alas!" cried Dr. Noel, "I am much abused, or you have fallen innocently into the most dangerous hands in Europe. Poor boy, what a pit has been dug for your simplicity! Into what deadly peril have you unwary feet been conducted? This man," he said, "this Englishman, whom you twice saw, and whom I suspect to be the soul of contrivance, can you describe him? Was he young or old? tall or short?" But Silas, who, for all his curiosity, had not a seeing eye in his head, was unable to supply nothing but meagre generalities, which it was impossible to recognize. "I would have it a piece of education in all schools!" cried the doctor, angrily. "Where is the use of eyesight and articulate speech if a man cannot observe and recollect the features of his enemy? I, who know all the gangs of Europe, might have identified him, and gained new weapons for your defense. Cultivate this art in future, my poor boy; you may find it of momentous service." "The future!" repeated Silas. "What

Silas Made a Dupe. THE whole of the next day Silas was filled with a sense of great importance; he was now sure she was a countess, and when evening came he minutely obeyed her orders and was at the corner of the Luxembourg Gardens by the hour appointed. No one was there. He waited nearly half an hour, looking in the faces of every one who passed or loitered near the spot; he even visited the neighboring corners of

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future is there left for me except the gallows? "Youth is but a cowardly season," returned the doctor, "and a man's own troubles look blacker than they are. I am old, and yet I never despair." "Can I tell such a story to the police?" demanded Silas. "Assuredly not," replied the doctor. "From what I see already of the machination in which you have been involved, your case is desperate upon that side, and for the narrow eye of the authorities you are infallibly the guilty person. And remember that we only know a portion of the plot, and the same infamous contrivers have doubtless arranged many other circumstances which would be elicited by a police inquiry, and help to fix the guilt more certainly upon your innocence." "I am then lost indeed!" cried Silas. "I have not said so," answered Dr. Noel, "for I am a cautious man." "But look at this," objected Silas, pointing to the body. "Here is this object in my bed; not to be explained, not to be disposed of, not to be regarded without horror." "Horror?" replied the doctor. "No. When this sort of clock has run down, it is no more to me than an ingenious piece of mechanism, to be investigated with the bistoury. When blood is once cold and stagnant it is no longer human blood; when flesh is once dead it is no longer the flesh which we desire in our lovers, and respect in our friends. The grace, the attraction, the terror, have all gone from it with the animating spirit. Accustom yourself to look upon it with composure, for if my scheme is practicable you will have to live some days in constant proximity to that which now so greatly horrifies you." "Your scheme?" cried Silas. "What is that? Tell me speedily, doctor, for I have scarcely courage enough to continue to exist." Without replying, Dr. Noel turned toward the bed and proceeded to examine the corpse. "Quite dead," he murmured. "Yes, as I had supposed, the pockets empty, yes, and the name cut off the shirt. Their work has been done thoroughly and well. Fortunately he is of small stature." Silas followed these words with an extreme anxiety. At last the doctor, his autopsy completed, took a chair and addressed the young American with a smile. "Since I came into your room," said he, "although my ears and my tongue have been so busy, I have not suffered my eyes to remain idle. I have noted a little while ago that you have there in the corner one of those monstrous constructions which your fellow countrymen carry with them into all quarters of the globe—in a word, a Saratoga trunk. Until this moment I have never been able to conceive the utility of these erections; but when I began to have a glimmer. Whether it was for convenience in the slave trade, or to obviate the results of too ready an employment of the bowie knife I cannot bring myself to decide. But one thing I see plainly—the object of such a box is to contain a human body." "Surely," cried Silas, "surely this is not a time for jesting." "Although I may express myself with some degree of pleasantries," replied the doctor, "the purport of my words is entirely serious. And the first thing we have to do, my young friend, is to empty your coffer of all that it contains." Silas obeying the authority of Dr. Noel, put himself at his disposition. The Saratoga trunk was soon gutted of its contents, which made a considerable litter on the floor, and then—Silas taking the heels and the doctor supporting the shoulders—the body of the murdered man was carried from the bed, and after some difficulty, doubled up and inserted whole into the empty box. With an effort on the part of both, the lid was forced down upon this unusual baggage, and the trunk was locked and corded by the doctor's own hand, while Silas disposed of what had been taken out between the closet and a chest of drawers. "Now," said the doctor, "the first step has been taken on the way to your deliverance. To-morrow, or rather to-day, it must be your task to allay the suspicions of your porter, paying him all that you owe, while you may trust me to make the arrangements necessary to a safe conclusion. Meantime, follow me to my room, where I shall give you a safe and powerful opiate, for, whatever you do, you must have rest." The next day was the longest in Silas's memory; it seemed as if it would never be done. He denied himself to his friends, and sat in a corner with his eyes fixed upon the Saratoga trunk in dismal contemplation. His own former indiscretions were now returned upon him in kind;

for the observatory had once more opened, and he was conscious of an almost continual study from Mme. Zephyrine's apartment. So distressing did this become that he was at last obliged to block up the spy-hole from his own side, and when he was thus secured from observation he spent a considerable portion of his time in contrite tears and prayer. Late in the evening Dr. Noel entered the room carrying in his hand a pair of sealed envelopes without address, one somewhat bulky, and the other so slim as to seem without enclosure. "A Plan of Escape." "SILAS," he said, seating himself at the table, "the time has now come for me to explain my plan for your salvation. To-morrow morning, at an early hour, Prince Florise of Bohemia returns to London, after having diverted himself for a few days with the Parisian Carnival. It was my fortune, a good while ago, to do Col. Geraldine, his Master of the Horse, one of those services so common in my profession, which are never forgotten upon either side. I have no need to explain to you the nature of the obligation under which he was laid; suffice it to say that I know him ready to serve me in any practicable manner. Now, it was necessary for you to gain London with your trunk unopened. To this the custom house seemed to oppose a fatal difficulty; but I bethought me that the baggage of so considerable a person as the prince is, as a matter of courtesy, passed without examination by the officers of customs. I applied to Col. Geraldine, and succeeded in obtaining a favorable answer. To-morrow, if you go before 6 to the hotel where the prince lodges, your baggage will be passed over as a part of his, and you yourself will make the journey as a member of his suite. "It seems to me, as you speak, that I have already seen both the prince and Col. Geraldine; I even overheard some of their conversation the other evening at the Bullier ball." "It is probable enough, for the prince loves to mix with all societies," replied the doctor. "Once arrived in London," he pursued, "your task is nearly ended. In this more bulky envelope I have given you a letter which I dare not address; but in the folder you will find the destination of the house to which you must carry it along with your box, which will there be taken from you and not trouble you any more." "Alas!" said Silas, "I have every wish to believe you, but how is it possible? You open up to me a bright prospect, but I ask you, is my mind capable of receiving so unlikely a solution? Be more generous and let me further understand your meaning." The doctor seemed painfully impressed. "Boy," he answered, "you do not know how hard a thing you ask of me. But be it so. I am now inured to humiliation, and it would be strange if I refused you this, after having granted you so much. Know, then, that, although I now make so quiet an appearance—frugal, solitary, addicted to study—when I was younger, my name was once a rallying cry among the most astute and dangerous spirits of London, and while I was outwardly an object for respect and consideration, my true power resided in the most secret, terrible and criminal relations. It is to one of the persons who then obeyed me that I now address myself to deliver you from your burden. They were men of many different nations and dexterities, all bound together by a formidable oath, and working to the same purposes; the trade of the association was in murder, and I who speak to you, innocent as I appear, was the chieftain of this redoubtable crew." "What?" cried Silas. "A murderer? And one with whom murder was a trade? Can I take your hand? Ought I so much as accept your services? Dark and criminal old man, would you make an accomplice of my youth and my distress?" The doctor laughed bitterly. "You are difficult to please, Mr. Scuddamore," said he; "but I now offer you your choice of company between the murdered man and the murderer. If your conscience is too nice to accept my aid, say so, and I will immediately leave you. Thenceforward you can deal with your trunk and its belongings as best suits your upright conscience." (To Be Continued)