'What makes you think so?' at length demanded Chloe.

'I'm not giving ye any wild talk, Chloe; I know he'd do it. I've seen what he's done to others more innocent than ye are, by a long sight.'

'What has he done, Pintard? Tell me all about it. Was it a woman scrape?'

'No; 'tweren't a woman scrape at all. In that case he might have been excused, fur when a feller's got a gal and he can't get rid of her, he's either got to run away or smash her.'

'What was it then? Come, fill up your glass again and tell me.'

'Yer mighty liberal, Chloe. I'll fill it up, but I ain't goin' to tell ye till I know how ye stand with him. There's a good chance to get a whack at him if ye wanter.'

'Well, Pintard, I don't love him as I once did, to tell you the truth.'

'Is he keepin' ye here?'

'Yes; but he wouldn't if he didn't have to.'

'Ye've got suthin' on him, hev ye? Wal, I hope ye'll stick it to him till ye bust him.'

'Well, now that you know my sentiments what have you to say?'

Pintard drained the contents of his glass, replenished it, and commenced: 'Chloe, ye know Coulter's got a pretty good job, don't ye?'

Chloe nodded assent.

'And he makes lots of money gamblin' an' speculatin', don't he?'

'I presume so,' said Chloe, 'he always seems to have plenty about him; but you are not planning to rob him?'

'No; not exactly, though I'd just as soon put a jimmy under his winder as any one I know of. Hev ye any means of findin' out what he's got?'

'You mean what he is worth?'

'Exactly, Mam'sell, that's what I mean.'

'No; I can't find out; he keeps every thing to himself; he never tells me anything.'

'He's pretty shrewd, but I think we're a match fur him. Now Chloe, my scheme is just this. I know suthin on him that would send him up fur life, an' I'll tell ye what it is, providin' ye'll put him on the rack and go me halves; what d'ye say to it?'

Chloe sat in a musing way for some minutes without venturing a reply. She was considering the advisability of having anything to do with such a desperate character as she knew Pintard to be; but still she was curious to find out what he knew against Coulter Naturally enough, she thought of the Mancel Tewkes affair, but Pintard was as deeply concerned in that as he. 'I will wait a little while,' she thought, 'perhaps I can get it out of him without making any promises.'

Pintard had become so occupied with his cup that he scarcely noticed Chloe's silence. Draining it, and placing it before him on the table, he leaned back in his chair, whereupon Chloe, reaching over, seized the bottle, exclaiming: 'Why, Pintard, you are no drinker; why don't you fill it up?' and pouring the remainder into his glass she pushed it toward him.

Pintard was now becoming quite mellow from the wine, and Chloe surmised that one more glass would have the desired effect.

Taking the glass in his hand Pintard held it up, while the broad grin which animated his features, and the glitter of his eyes, told of the happy effect of his indulgence.

'Chloe, here's to the new scheme'——

'Well, you ought to have drunk to that with the first and not have waited till the last,' said Chloe, affecting a jolly manner.

'Wal, darn it, that's what's the matter—but—wal, I hadn't got the thing started yet; ye commenced on me so quick, ye know.'

'All right, Pintard, go ahead.'

'But ain't ye goin' to drink with me?'

'Yes, certainly,' and Chloe lifted the glass from which she had but slightly partaken, and held it up for Pintard to touch. As the glasses jingled together, she burst forth into a merry Bacchanalian song, as follows:

Come, tip your glasses, boys and wed
Your spirits to the wine cup's red;
For there is joy and life anew,
In every sparkling drop for you.
Come, drink and drain,
And fill again;
Drink and be merry
Of the precious Maderia,
For wine is a solace to pain.

Let care go out and joy come in;
'Tis time for revels to begin;
With wine and song, and dance, astir,
Wh would not be a reveller?

Come, drink and drain,
And fill again;
Drink and be merry
Of the precious Maderia,
For wine is a solace to pain.

Pintard held the glass motionless to his lips until Chloe had finished, then both quaffed together.

'Chloe, I allers liked that song. I used to hear you sing it at the Madame's. Them was jolly times, weren't they—before the fire.'

'Yes; and Jack used to set up the wine often for us then.'

'But he had an object in doin' it though. That fellar's got a cunning head. He don't do anything without a purpose, mind ye.'

'Why, what purpose could he have had, other than to have a good time?'

'Oh, he wanted a little job done, ye see. It was a kinder nasty one and he didn't want to do it hisself. He made us think there was big money in it, but we got nothin' out of it.'

'Then you did it for him, did you?'

Although Pintard's mind did not now possess its normal perspicacity, still he seemed to see that he had made a mistake, and he attempted to correct himself. 'Wal, I mean—I was goin' to say—ye see — that Coulter wanted us to do that job, but we couldn't see any money in it.'

'Oh, that's it,' said Chloe indifferently. 'I didn't know but that was what you were going to tell me in reference to your scheme.

'No; it's suthin' else that happened about the time I was jugged. Ye see, Chloe, I told ye that Coulter 'ud do anything when he gets in a pinch. Wal, ye see there was a fellar that stood in his way, and'—

'Was it Mancel Tewkes?'

'No; it wasn't him, but how did ye know anything about Mancel Tewkes?'

'Why, Pintard, don't you remember that when they tried Edgcumb for the murder of Mancel Tewkes, that Coulter asked me to cut off my hair disguise myself as a man, and go and testify that I was somebody's roommate.'

'Yes; James Kye, that's the fellar I'm gettin' at.'

'Yes; James Kye; that was his name. I thought it was strange at the time that Coulter had anything to do with it, and that is why I asked just now if it was Mancel Tewkes who stood in his way.'

'No, no; Mancel Tewkes was the man we'—

Pintard stopped short again, seeing that he was near compromising himself; and Chloe, to relieve him of his embarrassment, feigned not to understand him, saying: 'Yes, yes; you mean that Mancel Tewkes was the man Edgcumb killed. I understand you, go ahead. What about Kye? You say he stood in Coulters way.'

'Yes, Chloe, yer head's clearer'n mine. Ye ain't drunk so much wine, ye know. Well, Kye stood in his way, or he was afraid he might give him some trouble, so one night he and Vitellius drove to his room and took him off.'

'You mean abducted him.'

'Yes, that's what they call it, I b'lieve. They chloroformed him; then they brought him to "French Anne's," an' put him in the tunnel under the house, where they kept him chained for a long time. When the fire came Vitellius was away. The Madame wanted to get rid of Kye by poison long before, but Coulter kept her from it. Then when she had so good a chance she left him to his fate, an' the fire burned 'im up.'

'My God, did Jack Coulter do that? That accounts for the strange noises I used to sometimes hear when I went into the little room where you all disappeared so suddenly one night when the police raided the house.'

There was a look of horror in Chloe's face as she spoke. The thought of having lived so long in a house underneath which a human being was imprisoned in a horrible dungeon the thought of the fire coming upon them, and their rushing away, leaving the man to such a fate—was horrible to her in the extreme. Pintard had become too much confused by the wine by this time to notice her agitation, and placing his arms upon the table dropped his head forward upon them, and in a moment was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DUKE OF ARCANUM.

Early in the spring of 1873 the Board of Trade and financial circles of Chicago evinced considerable interest in a mysterious individual who had recently arrived and plunged into speculations of uncommon magnitude in grain. He had presented large drafts upon different banks, which had been duly honoured. It being inferred from this that he was a man of vast wealth and resources, his movements were watched with unusual interest. No one, however, seemed to know who he was or whence he came. His general appearance and the fashion of his garments were decidedly English. There were some who declared that he was an English nobleman, sojourning incognito for a short time; while others, who had passed a few words with him, asserted that the voice, language and manners of the stranger were those of an American. His manner was so reserved, and his bearing so dignified, that none felt that he could be approached upon terms of sufficient intimacy to enable one to learn anything in regard to his history or antecedents. His magnificent equipage, drawn by a pair of cream-coloured horses — creatures of remarkable limb and beauty—was the marvel of all as they dashed through the streets, and their origin was as mysterious as their owner.

At a regular hour every morning the carriage drew up before the entrance to the Chamber of Commerce; the stranger alighted and walked up the stairs into the exchange where he was seen to watch the course of the markets for a few moments, study the columns of statistics which were posted on the bulletin boards, open cable dispatches which were usually awaiting him, talk confidentially but briefly with his brokers, and then retire from the chamber as quietly as he had entered.

The stranger was known to be in telegraphic correspondence with the Marquis of Follansbee, of London, and, as the Marquis was renowned for his speculative ventures, it was surmised that there was an understanding between them to operate in the grain market upon a large scale. He seemed at once, without any effort, to unconsciously obtain great prestige, while his name and intentions inspired the keenest interest and occasioned the liveliest gossip upon the floor of the exchange.

Jasper Morton had, in due course of time, obtained his letters-patent, made the necessary assignment to the Marquis of Follansbee, received the hundred thousand pounds, and, with bills of exchange on New York, sailed from Liverpool for America. He had determined to go on to Chicago and enter that city with a boldness which would disarm suspicion. His sojourn of a year and a half abroad had wrought a wonderful change in him. It would, indeed, have been a difficult matter to have recognised in Jasper Morton, when he returned to the earlier scenes of his career, the Stanley Edgcumb who had escaped the clutches of the law in such a miraculous way. The smooth face of other days was now covered with a thick growth of beard, while the upper portion was covered with scars, which evidenced the ravages of small-pox. His manner had undergone a great change also. The weight of troubles which had oppressed him so long and the reticence which he found it necessary to maintain had sobered his character, so that the amiable, light-hearted disposition of former days had given place to icy reserve and unapproachable hauteur and dignity. His travel abroad and his associations with people of culture and refinement had given him a polish and elegance of manners, while his affluence tended to give him assurance, thus rendering impossible a recognition of his former self in the man of '73.

Morton fully appreciated the danger in returning to his old haunts, but there was a combination of circumstances which he felt would carry him safely through. Chicago was too busily occupied with her rejuvenescence to remember the poor telegrapher who had been convicted of murder, even if she did not think him dead. The fire also had wrought mighty changes. New faces had appeared, and old ones disappeared. Old Chicago was no more; and Morton thought that amidst the busy scenes of the new city, in his metamorphosis from a threadbare prisoner to a man of opulence, that none would attempt to trace a resemblance between them, and that he would be altogether free from suspicion. The very boldness of the act and the display of wealth in a judicious manner, together with a reserve and dignity which would repel the inquisitive, he felt assured would afford him ample opportunities to carry out his plans. He feared but one man—Jarmyn. He knew the cruft and cunning of the detective, but still hoped to also mislead him.

First in his thoughts were Imogen and the children; and foremost among the objects which prompted his return was the discovery of their whereabouts and the purpose to make them comfortable. He longed to see them and tell them of his success. Life without them, even with wealth at his command, was deprived of its greatest blessing; and life without the knowledge of their whereabouts, whether living or dead, was simply unbearable. He had returned to learn all at whatever cost or sacrifice to himself.

It will be remembered at the time of his escape Edgcumb had charged himself with the performance of a double mission—the completion of his invention and the conviction of Coulter. When he had taken upon himself this mission, he was a refugee, hiding in out-of-the-way places, hungry and penniless, save the few dollars which were given him by the kind-hearted brewer. Then it seemed an insuperable task, and nothing could have looked more dismal than the future. But a series of circumstances had since enabled him to accomplish one part of his mission, and it was to perform the other that he found to be an equally strong inducement to return. He could not rest in disgrace. The world might never know that he was Stanley Edgcumb. He might perhaps live out the full measure of his days under the deception; but still there was the consciousness of deception and a sting to his pride at being deprived of that which was rightfully his—a fair name. No; he was determined to make every effort and to use every means to restore honour to his family and himself by delivering the true murderer into the hands of justice. He well understood the advantages which a position of respect in the community would afford in the work to which he had consecrated himself. Hampered by suspicion he could accomplish nothing, and he fully realised that only by a bold stroke could he place himself above its level where success would attend his efforts.

Morton could have chosen no better field for his operations than the speculative, which Chicago offered at this time, for it was upon the eve of development into one of the greatest speculative centres in the world. He shrewdly discerned the opportunities and probabilities, the environments and developments which were slowly but surely working in that direction. There was need of a powerful and daring hand to shape the plastic and venturesome spirit of the West—a spirit which the war had largely engendered; and he felt that he was the man for the emergency. Actuated by these views, he entered into a series of operations in the market, which resulted so successfully that he became at once the lion of the hour, and was followed with the keenest interest wherever he went.

The speculation as to who the mysterious stranger really was, which had been rife since his first appearance, soon became greatly intensified. The man was so exclusive in his manner, so noble in his bearing, so secret in his methods, and so mysterious in all, that he was dubbed with the sobriquet of the 'Duke of Arcanum,' and by this title was invariably known thereafter.

Morton seemed to have a predilection for his occupation, for he conducted his deals so skilfully and secretly that he baffled the wisest heads in their efforts to forecast his intentions. There was a train of followers ever on the qui vive to gain some information of his transactions in order to turn it to their own account; but he was so fertile in devices for confusing them that he managed to keep them in a constant state of dubitation as to his real intentions. Everything about the man and his methods had an air of mystery so deep and unfathomable that his person became invested with a sort of romantic interest and charm.

In the course of six months Morton had added a million more to his fortune. About this time he purchased a magnificent mansion on one of the South Side avenues and furnished it luxuriously. Immediately there was a flutter in society, whose devotees supposed that they were about to obtain a glimpse of the inner life of this