ASHTON-KIRK SPECIAL DETECTIVE

JOHN T. McINTYRE

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

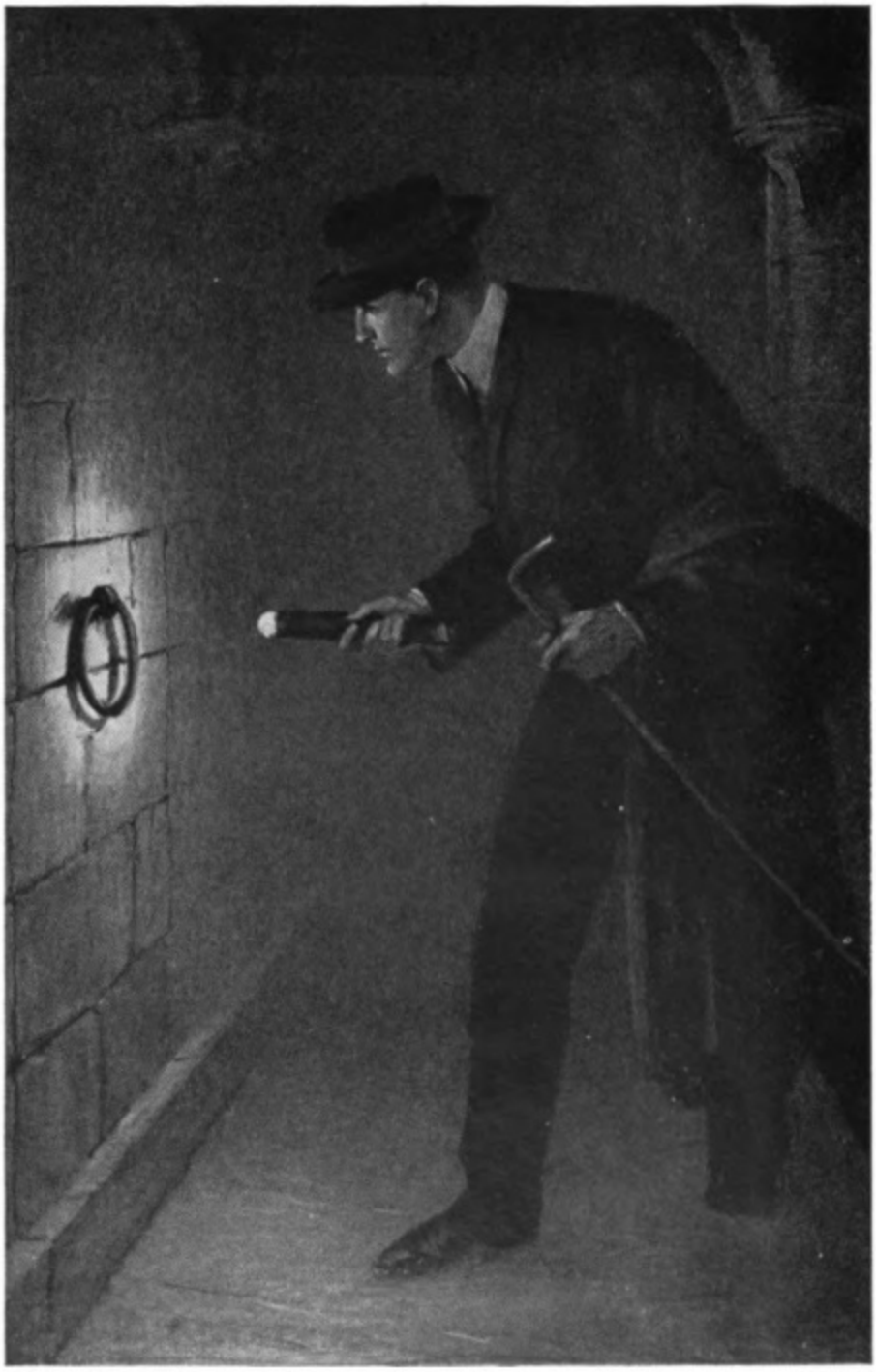
WILLIAM CHARVAT
American Fiction Collection
The Ohio State University Libraries

Digitized by Google
Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

4/77

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY



UP THE WALL CREPT THE SHAFT OF LIGHT

Digitized by Google
Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

shto
ecial D

John T.

ILLUSTRA

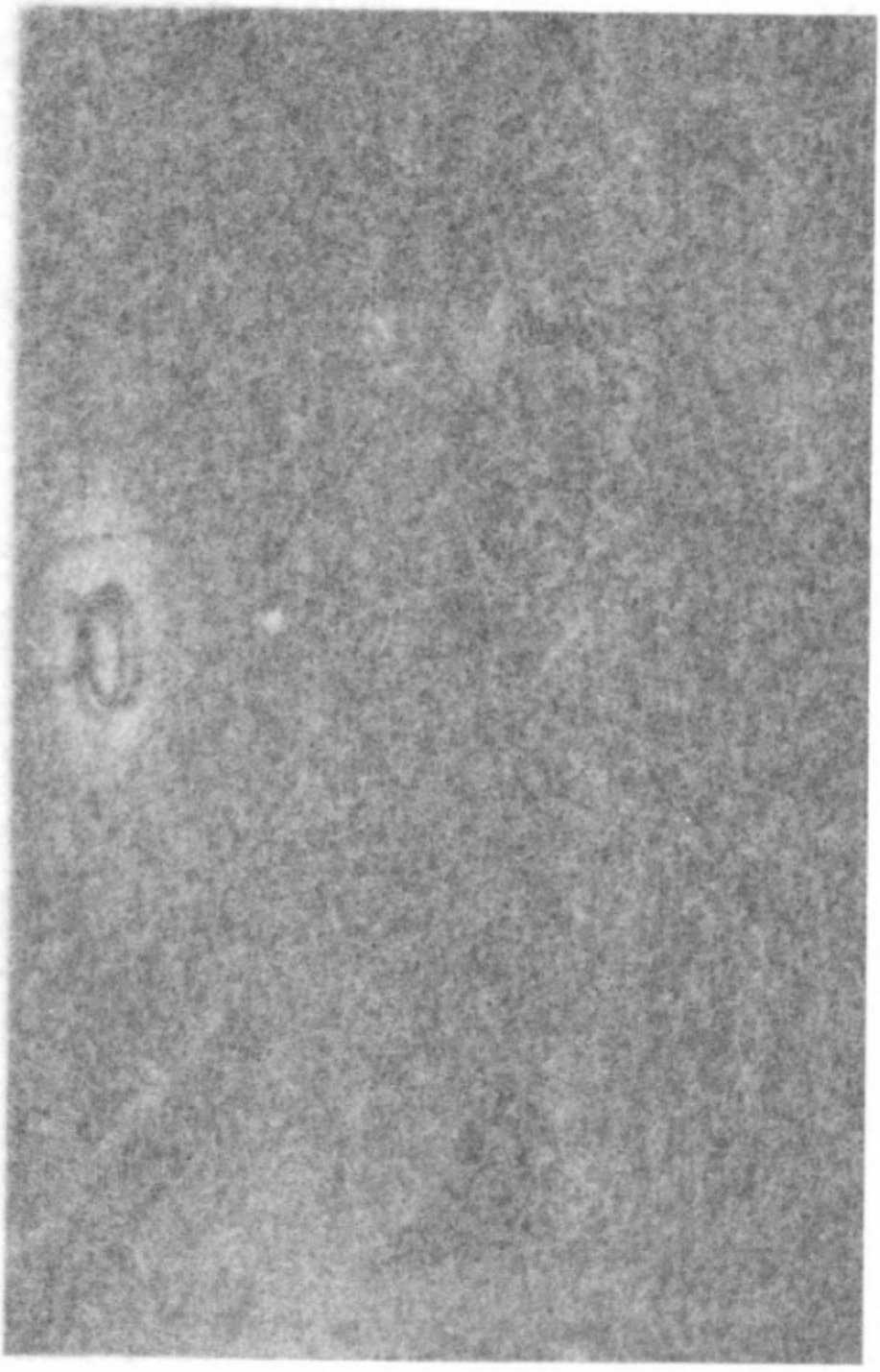
RALPH

THE PENN PUBLISHING
COMPANY PHILADELPHIA

1914

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY



'] 'HE WALL CREPT THE SHAFT OF LIGHT

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Ashton-Kirk Special Detective

BY

John T. McIntyre

Author of "Ashton-Kirk Investigator,"
"Ashton-Kirk Secret Agent," etc.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

RALPH L. BOYER

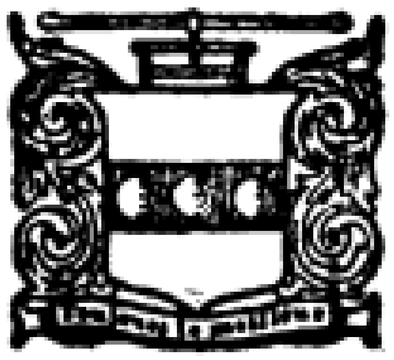
THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY PHILADELPHIA

1914

Digitized by Google

Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COPYRIGHT
1914 BY
THE PENN
PUBLISHING
COMPANY



Ashton-Kirk, Special Detective

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

To my friend

RALPH L. BOYER

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Introduction

ASHTON-KIRK is a young man of means and position. The unusual has a sort of fascination for him; his subtle perception, and keen, direct habit of mind cause him to delight in the investigation of those crimes which have proved too shadowy for the police.

In "Ashton-Kirk, Investigator," another book dealing with his experiences, he was concerned with the strange case of the murder of the numismatist, Hume. In "Ashton-Kirk, Secret Agent," he was involved in a crisis between two nations; and a great war was averted by his skill and ready courage.

In this, the third volume of his adventures, he is called upon by an ancient friend who has been plunged into an appalling series of circumstances of which he can make nothing, except that all concerned are in immediate and deadly peril. And it is here shown how the special detective's acute mind, deft manipulation and resourcefulness warded off a terrible danger.

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Mr. Scanlon Relates Some Peculiar Circumstances	11
II.	Shows How Matters Stood at Schwartzberg	21
III.	In Which the Special Detective Takes Up the Hunt . . .	35
IV.	Tells Something of the Man in the Rolling Chair	44
V.	Speaks of Ashton-Kirk's First Visit to Schwartzberg	57
VI.	In Which Ashton-Kirk Indicates Much but Says Little . . .	78
VII.	Shows How Mr. Scanlon Met the Man With the Soft Voice . .	100
VIII.	Tells How the Night Breeze Blew From the Northwest . . .	110
IX.	In Which Some Things Are Done and Some Others Are Said . . .	122
X.	Shows How Mrs. Kretz Spoke Her Mind	130
XI.	Tells Something of Two Gentlemen Who Were Encountered Unexpectedly	142
XII.	Speaks of the Manner in Which the Gates of Schwartzberg Were Opened	155

Digitized by Google

Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIII.	Deals With Some Happenings of the Next Day	162
XIV.	In Which Ashton-Kirk Hears Matters of Interest	182
XV.	Tells How Amazement Filled the Mind of Mr. Scanlon	192
XVI.	Shows How the Great Sword Was Missed from the Wall	206
XVII.	Speaks of a Harp Which Was Played In Silence	222
XVIII.	Deals Mainly With Some News from Mexico	238
XIX.	In Which Ashton-Kirk Pays His Second Visit to Schwartzberg	250
XX.	Tells How Ashton-Kirk Pointed Out Certain Matters of Interest	260
XXI.	Shows How the Great Sword Spoke to Scanlon	281
XXII.	In Which a Matter of Much Ingenuity is Considered	296
XXIII.	Conclusion	305

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Illustrations

	PAGE
UP THE WALL CREPT THE SHAFT OF LIGHT	*Frontispiece*
"HE SWUNG AROUND"	27
ONCE HE LAUGHED	125
"A GOOD BLADE"	293

Digitized by Google

Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Ashton-Kirk, Special Detective

CHAPTER I

MR. SCANLON RELATES SOME PECULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES

ASHTON-KIRK, student of crime, sat cross-legged upon a rug; thoughtfully he drew at the big Coblentz pipe; the wreaths of smoke drifted over the tottering tower of books with which he was surrounded, and eddied out at an open window.

"Fuller," said he, "get me the name Campe."

The nimble fingered assistant ran through the cards of a filing system.

"Campe—Mexico—financiers?" said he, at length, turning his head.

"Right," spoke Ashton-Kirk.

"Volume II," said Fuller, closing the drawer. "Shall I have it sent up?"

"Yes."

In a few moments, Stumph, gravest of men servants, entered, bearing a bulky folio which he placed before his employer.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"In a short time," said Ashton-Kirk, "Mr. Scanlon will call. Bring him up as soon as he arrives."

Stumph silently withdrew; the special dectective puffed at the Coblentz and nodded to Fuller.

"Let's see what we have about the Campes," requested he.

Fuller took the book, opened it at the index, and then turned over until he came to a certain page. He read:

"This family came, originally, from Bavaria, their forbears residing in the city of Munich. The name was then Von Campe. A Frederich Ernest Von Campe made a fortune as a brewer before the French Revolution. His three sons trebled this by lending it at a high rate of interest to the various needy German states during the Napoleonic wars.

"When Maximilian entered Mexico, the Von Campes helped to finance the venture. When he fell, they very cleverly managed to save their money by coming to an understanding with the succeeding republican government. For more than fifty years the family has been in Mexico, financing government and private enterprises.

"Some twenty-five years ago they dropped the 'Von,' becoming simply known as Campe."

Fuller then went on to read the doings of the Campes as contained in the record; it was merely

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

a series of "high spots" such as might be gathered about a family of the same consequence anywhere. When he had finished, Ashton-Kirk looked dissatisfied.

"I find, from time to time," said he, "that this record is badly kept. It is loaded with the usual, when, as a matter of fact, it is intended solely for the unusual." He drew at his pipe for a moment, and then added: "I want intimate information regarding this family—especially of their doings during the last few years."

"Very well," said Fuller, briskly. "I'll start with the Mexican-Pacific Bank. They ought to know a deal about the Campes because they did a lot of business with them, according to what we have here."

As Fuller opened the door to leave the study, Stumph appeared with a big, fresh-faced man who clutched a hard-rimmed hat in his nervous grip.

"Mr. Scanlon," said Stumph; and then he followed Fuller out of the room.

"Glad to see you, Kirk," said Mr. Scanlon, in a voice which suited his proportions. "I hope I haven't come smearing in."

"Not a bit of it," the crime student assured him. "Here, have a chair; also have a cigar."

Mr. Scanlon sat in the chair, and pinched the tip off the cigar. He had blue, good-natured eyes,

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

the sort accustomed to laugh; but now they were grave enough, and little troubled wrinkles showed at their corners.

"You look up to your ears in work," said he, his eyes upon the books.

Ashton-Kirk smiled.

"On the contrary, I've been resting," he answered, his gaze also upon the books, and filled with the mist which comes of deep plunges into the past, or into the annals of lands that never were. "When I'm overtaxed or too tightly strung there's nothing so relaxes me as the ancient romances; there's nothing near so quieting as the sayings of the wise old monks, spoken in the cool of the cloisters."

Mr. Scanlon nodded appreciatively.

"Personally, I'm very strong for all those old fellows," said he. "They had speed, control and change of pace."

"Their greatest charm is their simplicity," said Ashton-Kirk, as he refilled his pipe. "They believed things as children believe them. Their days were rare with faith; their nights with wonders. But," and there was regret in the speaker's voice, "the world has turned many times since then. There are no more wonders; and surprise, as they knew it, has ceased to exist."

Mr. Bat Scanlon, one time athlete, gambler and gun fighter, but now a handler of champions,

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

brushed the first short plume of ash from his cigar. He shook his head.

"Wrong!" stated he, confidently. "Altogether wrong. You get behind the scenes too much; you see the insides of things too often. Wonder is as thick as ever it was; and surprise is still on the job. If there's any falling off, it's in ourselves. We've grown cross-eyed looking at fakes; we haven't the vision to know a wonder when we see it."

A volume of Burton lay upon the table at his hand. He picked it up.

"Here's Bagdad," said he, riffling the pages, sharply. "Bagdad, a city stuffed with strangeness. But," and he looked at Ashton-Kirk, earnestly, "had it really anything on this town of ours? Were its nights deeper? its silences more mysterious? I think not. Let any man—with his eyes open—mind you—go out into one of our nights, and he'll meet with as many astonishments as Haroun Al Raschid, the best prowler of them all."

Ashton-Kirk smiled through the thickening smoke. It were as though he had convinced himself of something.

"Your defense of present day interest is so keen," said he, "that I'm inclined to hope this case you have holds some exceptional features."

Scanlon nodded.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"And yet," with a gesture, "I'm not so sure. I can't put my fingers on a single thing, or even give it a name."

"It has something to do with this young fellow Campe, I think you said."

"It has all to do with him," stated Mr. Scanlon. "And that's one of the things that makes it so queer. He's the last one I'd expected to get mixed up with anything of the kind; and he's a gone youngster if somebody with more stuff than I have don't step in and take a swing at it."

There was a short silence; the smoke from the cigar mingled with that of the pipe; eddying in the draught from the window they wove in and out intricately, finally mingled and drifted out into the big world.

"Suppose you go carefully over the affair as you know it," suggested Ashton-Kirk. "I got very little of it over the telephone."

Scanlon drew at the cigar and gazed at the opposite wall where there hung that Maxfield Parrish print of the wonder-stricken brown sailors, peering into the unknown from the bow of their ship.

"If this was my own matter," said he, "I could take every individual happening by the neck and shake the information right out of it. But as it stands, I've only got a good straight look at one thing that's at all plain to me."

"What's that?" asked Ashton-Kirk.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"Fear," replied Scanlon, in a low-pitched voice, his mouth twisting wrily as he shaped the word. "Stark, white-faced fear; the kind that turns a man sick just at the sight of it."

The big man frowned for a moment at the brown sailors peering out over their mystic sea. Then he resumed.

"As I said a few moments ago, I was surprised at a young fellow like Campe indulging in a recreation like being afraid; for in him we have a wide-awake chap, graduate of one of the big colleges, holder of a middle distance record and known for his pluck. And for such a one to lock himself up in a big country house and go to shaking at every sound he hears is not quite pleasant."

"Fear, when properly planted, sinks deep and lasts long," said Ashton-Kirk. "I've seen strong men quite like rabbits, in the grip of something they didn't understand."

"I got acquainted with young Campe a couple of years ago when he sprung a tendon and they thought a big race was lost for his college. They sent for me as old Doc Emergency and I tinkered him up enough to go the distance. After that he got friendly. When he graduated, every one expected he'd go back to Mexico. But he didn't. He went into a German importing house here—a kind of partner, I think.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"I'd always measured him for a kind of a cut-up; he never seemed to take things very seriously, and had a laugh that he kept constantly working. But about a year ago I noticed a change. He didn't talk so much; if he laughed at all it didn't have the old time color; and he got to sitting staring at the ground. When I'd talk, he'd listen for a while; then he'd sort of drift away. I could tell by his expression that he wasn't getting a thing I was saying. Finally he took to walking the floor, biting his nails and whispering to himself."

Ashton-Kirk shook his head.

"Pretty bad," said he.

"That's what I thought. And I mentioned the fact to him. But he tried to laugh—it was a complete failure—and said there was nothing wrong. He was a little nervous; and even that, so he said, would wear off after a while.

"The day I spoke to him in this way was the last I saw of him until about two weeks ago. Then I got a letter, asking me to pack a bag and run up to Marlowe Furnace for a visit. 'The shooting's right,' says he, 'and I've got a brace of dogs that'll make you show excitement.'

"'This,' says I, to myself, 'is just about the right thing. Nothing'd suit me better now than to fuss with a dog and a gun.'

"So I wrote him I'd come at once. Marlowe

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Furnace, if you don't know the place, is about twenty miles out, tucked away among the hills. It was quite a place in revolutionary times; they beat out sword blades and bayonets there, and cast cannon, and the round shot to stuff them with.

"There's only a few houses, with an inn for summer visitors; and there's a little covered bridge crosses the river, just like a picture on a plate. Campe was holding out at Schwartzberg, or Castle Schwartzberg, as the people of the town call it. The castle is a regular robber-baron kind of a place, with a wall around it, towers, battlements, little windows with heavy bars, and all the rest of the fixings."

"I know it," said Ashton-Kirk. "It was built by a German officer who came over with Baron Steuben during the Revolution. When peace came, he decided he liked the section well enough to stay. He was rich, and built Schwartzberg in the effort to get some of the color of the old land into the new."

"It was something like that," said Mr. Scanlon, nodding. "And the builder must have been related, in a way, to the Campes. Anyhow, they came into the castle some years ago. Well, to be invited to a place like that was not usual with me; and I felt a little swelled up about it.

"'You've been asked because of your qualities

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

as a sportsman and boon companion,' says I to myself; 'the discriminating always pick you for an ace.'

"But twenty-four hours later I had learned my true status," said Scanlon, his brows corrugating, and his thick forefinger tapping the table. "I had been asked to Schwartzberg to act as a body-guard, and for nothing else in the world."

"I see," said Ashton-Kirk.

"Mind you, the situation has never been put into plain words. In fact, it's never even been hinted at. But things happened, queer things, with no meanings attached, and so I gradually soaked the idea up. A body-guard I was; and my job was to protect young Campe from something out among the hills."

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II

SHOWS HOW MATTERS STOOD AT SCHWARTZBERG

SCANLON paused for a space; he examined a loose place in the wrapper of his cigar, while Ashton-Kirk sat waiting, upon his rug, his hands clasping his knees.

"When I first grabbed at this fact," said the big man at length, "I gave it a good looking over. But I kept still, mind you; I said no more than the folks at the castle—and they were saying nothing at all. I tackled the thing from every angle, but nothing came out of it. And yet, all the time, young Campe shivered; and, somehow, I felt that he had cause to do so. I could feel the thing, whatever it was, at every turn, in every shadow, in every sound."

"The condition of Campe probably had its effect upon you," said Ashton-Kirk. "He communicated his state of mind to you."

"In other words," said Mr. Scanlon, "I was stuck full of suggestion. Well, don't burden yourself with that notion any longer. I've had some brisk experiences of my own from time to time; and a man with a tobasco past don't fall for

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

mental influences, not even a little bit. But, be that as it may, I hadn't been at Schwartzberg five days before I, too, began to feel like putting out a hurry call for help. And now, in a little more than twice that time, I come knocking at your door and urging you to do something."

"I get a general atmosphere of fear—of an impending something—of an invisible danger," said Ashton-Kirk. "But there's nothing in what you've told me which permits of a hand-grip, so to speak."

"I told you," began Scanlon, "there isn't a single thing which——"

"I don't expect anything definite," said the special detective. "Give me the details of your stay at Schwartzberg. Perhaps we can draw something from those."

"Right," said Mr. Scanlon. "Well, as soon as I put my foot on the station platform at Marlowe Furnace, the thing began. The station man said to me:

"'You going to Schwartzberg?'

"'Yes,' says I.

"'A party's been asking about you,' says he.

"'One of Campe's people, I guess.'

"'No,' says he. 'I know all them. The party was a stranger.'

"I thought this a little queer, but I had my getting out to Campe's place to think of; and as it

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

was late and very dark, I said nothing more except to ask my way.

"'Take the road down to the river,' says the station man. 'Then cross the bridge and turn to your right. You'll see a lot of lights that look as if they were hanging away up in the air. That's the castle.'

"So, bag in hand, I starts off. It was a starry night; but there was no moon and starlight isn't much good on a road where the tree branches meet on either side. But I was headed right, and in a little while I made out the outlines of the covered bridge.

"'Like a Noah's Ark,' says I, as I started across. Footsteps inside covered bridges on a still, dark night are apt to stir up a lot of other sounds; so when I began to hear a kind of shuffling alongside of me, I wasn't surprised. 'An echo,' says I, and didn't even turn.

"But when an electric hand torch shot a little tunnel of light through the darkness and hit me in the ear, I came about, quick enough.

"'I ask your pardon,' says a smooth kind of a voice.

"'That I hand you, willingly,' says I. 'But, believe me, friend, you'll have to go some to get anything else.'

"The worst of an electric torch in a dark place," complained Mr. Scanlon, "is that the

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

party holding it has a good slant at you ; but all you can do to him is wink and look foolish. These being the conditions I didn't lash out at the party as I felt like doing, not knowing just how he was heeled ; so I waited for him to show what he had.

"'You are on your way to Schwartzberg, I think,' says the voice.

"'On my way is right,' says I, as confidently as I could. 'And, stranger, I figure on arriving there all safe and with everything standing.'

"The party with the torch appeared to be tickled at this ; for he began to chuckle.

"'I'm very fortunate in meeting you,' says he.

"'Fine,' says I. 'I always like to find people in luck. And now, if it's no trouble, suppose you come through with your reason for stopping me.'

"'Of course,' says he. 'To be sure. I've a small favor to ask of you,' he says. 'If you'll be so kind, I'll have you carry this to young Mr. Campe.'

"And like that," here Scanlon snapped his fingers, "the light went out, and I felt the party put something into my hand.

"'No explanation will be needed,' says the voice, if anything a little smoother than before. 'What I have given you will tell its own story.'

"Then I heard the pit-pit-pat of careful feet going back across the bridge. I waited for a little

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

to see if there was to be anything further; but as there wasn't I put the thing the stranger had given me into my pocket, and took up the journey once more. At the end of the bridge I looked up the river; there was a sort of mist lifting from the water, but high above this a battery of lights twinkled and blinked in the distance.

"'If that's Schwartzberg,' says I, 'Campe's got her well lit up.'

"I struck along a road which led over the hills; and in half an hour I was thumping at the gate of the castle.

"There was a little empty space after my knock," said Scanlon. "Then I heard footsteps and the sound of whispering. Suddenly I was flooded by a light from somewhere over the gate; I heard a man mention my name in a kind of a shout; then the gate opened, I was dragged in, and it swung shut after me, the bolts and things falling into place with a great racket. Young Campe had me by the hand and was shaking away for dear life.

"'I'm glad to see you, old chap!' says he. 'Glad as I can be. But I never expected you on a train as late as this!' He left off shaking my hand and took to slapping my back; it all seemed feverish to me; but like a boob, I took it all for just plain delight in seeing me. 'You see,' says he, 'it's a pretty quiet kind of a place out here;

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

and when you came a-knocking, we couldn't imagine who it could be.'

"After which," continued Mr. Scanlon, "I was led across a courtyard and through a high narrow doorway like a slit in the wall. A few steps down a stone paved corridor and we turned into a room that was a ringer for Weisebrode's Rathskellar. And while I was looking around at the place, Campe went on talking as if he'd never stop. This wasn't usual, and as I now had a good view of him under the light, I noticed that he was pinched looking; there were hollows in his face and neck that I'd never seen there before.

"'Well,' says he, 'here you are, old man, and there never was a person so welcome anywhere before. You see,' and his voice sank a little, 'there's been things about here that ——'

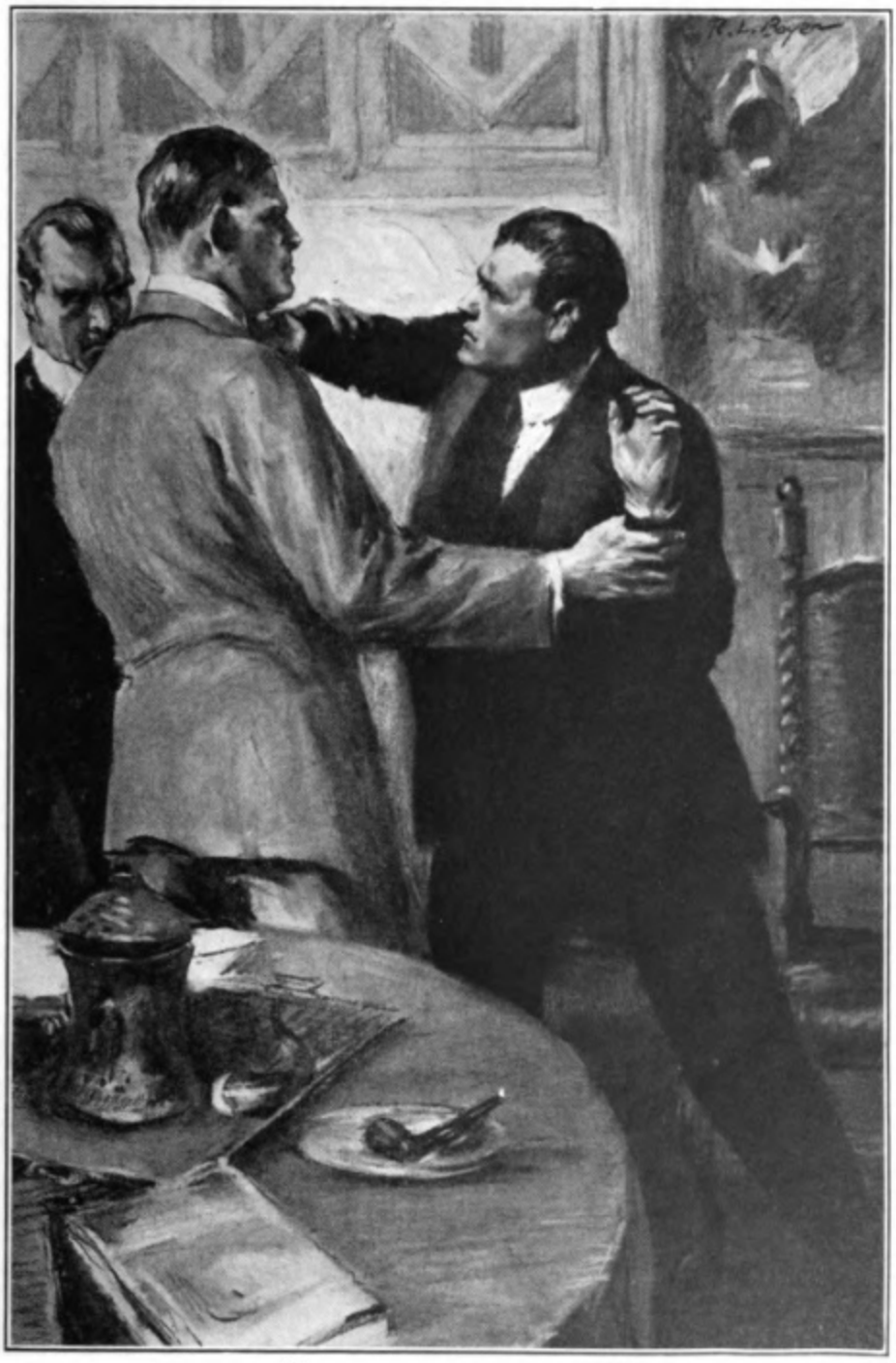
"'Take care,' says some one. And as I looked around I saw a short, blocky German standing beside us, his hand at a salute. He was sort of gray around the temples and he had as grim a face as I ever saw.

"Young Campe gave a sort of gulp. 'Quite right, sergeant,' says he. Then, to me, he goes on: 'This is Sergeant-Major Kretz, once of the Kaiser's army, and an old friend of my father's.'

"The sergeant-major salutes once more, but his face was like granite.

"'I will take your hat and coat,' says he; and

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY



"HE SWUNG AROUND"

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

in color, and with a humped up place on one side of it. I had no recollection of ever having seen it before, and I was puzzled about how it got into my pocket. But while I was puzzling, it flashed on me.

"'It's the thing that fellow gave me while I was crossing the bridge,' says I.

"'Let me up,' says young Campe to the German. There was something nearer sanity in his eyes than there had been a few moments before; so the sergeant-major let go of him.

"'What fellow?' says Campe.

"'I didn't know him; it was dark and I didn't even see him. He spoke to me on the bridge coming from the station. He gave me this thing for you. He said you'd ask no questions, but he didn't mention,' I couldn't help adding, 'the other things you'd do.'

"Campe grabbed my arm with both hands.

"'If you can,' says he, 'try and forget that I lost my head just now. If you knew what a bedeviled man I am, you'd only wonder why I don't go permanently mad.'

"Then he stands looking at the green stone, which the sergeant-major had put upon the table; his lips twitched, his face was white.

"'Oh, they are cunning,' says he. 'They know the nature and substance of fear. They play upon it with the expertness of devils. But,' and he

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

lifted one clenched fist, 'they'll never break my nerve; I'll hold out against them, no matter what they do.'"

"That was pretty direct," spoke Ashton-Kirk.

"What followed? Did he say anything more?"

"The German sergeant-major took him away before he could indulge in any further remarks; I didn't see him again until next morning; and then nothing at all was said about the doings of the night. A couple of times I was on the point of asking him to put me up in the reason for his goings on; but something in his manner and expression kept me back.

"In the late afternoon we all went out for a breather among the hills. But it was more like an expedition into the enemy's country than an exercise. They put a couple of Colt automatics in my pocket, and each of them took one. Also the sergeant-major carried a Mauser rifle with kick enough to have killed at a couple of miles.

"'Sometimes there are vagrants who get impudent,' said Campe. 'I've known them to attempt robbery; so we may as well be prepared.'

"Next day we took the dogs and guns and tried for some birds; at night we locked the place up like a prison. The days that followed were about the same; I never felt so thick a depression anywhere as there was in Schwartzberg. For hours no one would speak; our meals would go

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

through like a funeral rite; sometimes I'd catch myself chewing my food to the tune of a dead march. After dinner we'd have a gloomy game of cards; at about ten we'd all go off to bed, one by one, and seem glad to do it."

"Your first visit wasn't pleasant," said Ashton-Kirk.

"I got no fun out of it except the tramping around, and then only when I'd go off by myself. I'd packed and jumped out as soon as I'd sized matters up, but there were two things kept me back. First, I like young Campe, and I wanted to help him out; second, something was doing of a piquant nature, and I had a curiosity to know what it was.

"Several times, from my bedroom windows, I saw Kretz prowling about the courtyard or upon the wall. Once I fancied I caught the creeping of a couple of figures beyond the wall. I went out to look up the nature of the stunt, and almost got myself shot by what Campe afterward called prowling tramps. On the following night as I sat reading in my room, I heard a woman's scream—sudden and high with fear. There was a rush of feet along empty corridors, sharp voices and the slamming of doors. I grabbed up my automatic and, all in disarray, I broke for the scene of excitement. But half-way down a flight of stairs I came upon Sergeant-Major Kretz, quite calm, but look-

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

ing a little grimmer, if anything, than I'd ever seen him before.

"'It's nothing,' he tells me. 'The Fräulein was frightened. All is right. You need not bother.'"

"There's a woman, then, at Schwartzberg?" said Ashton-Kirk.

"Two of them, to be exact," returned Scanlon. "One's an aunt of Campe's; the other is a companion, or something of the kind. The girl I see often, but the aunt very rarely. But I never did more than nod to either of them until the night Campe was cut."

"Cut!"

"In the body," said Scanlon. "That was two nights ago. I had gone to bed rather later than usual and had, I think, been asleep only a few minutes when I was awakened by a sound. I sat up and listened. Then it came again. Far off, as though among the hills, came a roaring; it started like a murmur at first, and grew in volume until it rumbled like nothing I'd ever heard before. Then it died away, and only its echo remained, drifting above the hillsides.

"'Thunder,' says I.

"But the sky was filled with stars, and they shone as brilliantly as stars ever shone before. Once more came the roaring in the night; with my head thrust far out at the window, I listened. A door opening on the courtyard slapped to, sud-

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

denly; quick footsteps sounded and Campe's voice, high and angry, came to my ears. The gate opened before him; I could see him, a revolver in his hand and with all the appearance of madness, rush away in the direction of the great sound.

"I commenced jumping into my clothes, a garment at a jump; a brilliant tongue of light shot from the top of Schwartzberg, and began to sweep the country round about much like the search-light of a battle-ship.

"'They are strong on equipment,' says I to myself, as I grabbed my gun, and made for the door. This time I met no one on the stairs, nor in the courtyard, when I reached it, nor yet at the gate. Once outside I looked up; the light was streaming out over the hills from the tallest turret of the castle; and in the gloom beside the reflector I saw Kretz, his Mauser in his hands, his face turned as though he were grimly picking up each detail as the light brought it out.

"I had noted the direction which Campe had taken; so I struck after him. Two hundred yards away from the castle I heard his revolver begin to speak; then there came the eager straining breaths of men engaged in a struggle, the grinding of feet, and a heavy fall. I had all but reached the spot when the great ray swept round and held fast. I saw young Campe stretched out upon the ground; and over him stood the girl, all in white,

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

with her face upturned, her arms outstretched toward the high turret as though imploring the grim rifleman to hold his fire."

"Well?" asked Ashton-Kirk.

"She was a peach; and Campe was close to being all in. I backed him, and with my automatic held ready, and the girl trailing behind, I got back to the castle where I heard the gate closed and locked behind me with some thankfulness."

"Was Campe badly hurt?"

"He had a long, peculiar cut down his chest and stomach, not deep, but ugly looking. It was just as though some one had made a sweep at him with something big and heavy and keen, and he had pulled back in time to escape most of it. But he was about next day; he thanked me for going out after him, but sat tighter than ever on the explanation thing. It was after this that I tried to reason it out for the last time. But it's no use—the thing's beyond yours truly. So here I am."

The singular eyes of Ashton-Kirk were full of interest; he arose from his rug and took a couple of turns up and down the room; then he threw open a bulky railroad guide and his searching finger began to run in and out among the figures.

"There's a train for Marlowe Furnace at 8:04," said he.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Then he pressed one of a series of call bells in the wall, and, through a tube, said to some one below:

"Have dinner a half hour earlier. And set places for two."

"I didn't think you'd jump into the thing with any such speed as this," spoke Mr. Scanlon, highly gratified.

"It looks like a case which will admit of no delay," replied Ashton-Kirk. "Something of a deadly nature is lowering over Schwartzberg; that's plain enough. And that young Campe is so secretive about it is an indication that it's one of those things which cannot well be spoken of to the police."

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER III

In Which the Special Detective Takes up the Hunt

After dinner, Ashton-Kirk smoked a cigar with his friend; then he retired to dress for the journey to Marlowe Furnace. When he reappeared he wore a rough, well-fitting gray suit, a gray flannel shirt, a cloth cap and a pair of springy tan shoes. In his hand he held a heavy hickory stick, which he balanced like a swordsman.

"You look primed for work," approved Bat Scanlon, as he stood up and buttoned his coat across his big chest.

"Your story of the doings in and about Schwartzberg holds out a promise of entertainment," smiled Ashton-Kirk. "And I've noticed that things of that sort are always more appreciated if they are prepared for and met half-way."

"Good!" praised Mr. Scanlon, who was in high good humor at his success in gaining the interest of the specialist in the unusual. "Fine! That's the kind of talk I like to hear. It puts a man somewhere. Locking himself up and shivering never got anybody anything yet. And then going

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

mad and rushing out to have unseen parties chop at him is even worse. When I taught boxing to the boys out at Shaweegan College I used to hand them this advice: 'Always keep after your man—don't let him get set. And the best block for a blow is another blow—started sooner.'"

"Excellent," agreed Ashton-Kirk. "And it's a thousand pities you didn't impress it upon young Campe. If you had, he'd never have been in his present state of mind and body."

The huge shoulders of Scanlon shrugged in disbelief.

"Campe was past all reason when I got to him," maintained he. "To talk candidly would only have queered any chance I had of doing him a good turn."

The 8:04 was a dusty, ill-conditioned train which started and stopped with a series of jerks. After an hour on board of it, among a lot of uncomfortable, sour-looking passengers, the two got off at Marlowe Furnace. The station was a shed-like structure with a platform of hard-packed earth, and a brace of flaring oil lamps. An ancient, with a wisp of beard and thumbs tucked under a pair of suspenders, watched them get off.

"The station agent," said Scanlon.

The train went panting and glaring away into the darkness; it had disappeared around a bend when the station official nodded to Scanlon.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"Evening," greeted he.

"Hello," said Scanlon.

"Back again, I see."

"Yes—once more."

"Nobody asked for you to-night."

"That so?" said Scanlon, his glance going to Ashton-Kirk.

The detective dug carelessly at the hard-packed earth of the platform with the tip of the hickory stick.

"The person who asked for my friend the last time he stopped off here was a stranger to you, I understand."

The ancient official took one of the thumbs from under a suspender and raked it thoughtfully through the wisp of beard.

"Don't remember ever seeing him before," stated he.

"I suppose you couldn't recall what he looked like?"

The ancient looked injured.

"I'm sixty-seven year old," said he, "but I got good eyesight, and a better memory than most. That man I talked to that night was a stranger at the Furnace. If I'd ever set an eye on him before I'd remembered him. He was fat and white and soft looking. And he talked soft and walked soft. When he went away, I'd kind of a feeling that I'd been talking to a batter pudding."

Digitized by Google

Original from
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"Have you seen him since?" asked the crime student.

The old man shook his head.

"No. And I don't know how he got here, or went away—unless he drove or come in an automobile. He didn't use the trains."

The road down toward the river was steep, and lined with trees upon each side; their interwoven branches overhead, as Scanlon had explained, were dense enough to keep out most of the light.

"It's pretty much the same kind of a night as the one I used when I first came here," said Bat. "Stars, but no moon."

The wooden bridge, with a peaked roof over it, crossed the river at the foot of the road; the square openings upon either side showed the dark water flowing sullenly along.

"Look," and Bat Scanlon pointed out at one of the windows of the bridge. "There are the lights of Schwartzberg."

Some distance away—perhaps a mile—and high above the west bank of the river, hung a cluster of lights, So lonely were these, and so pale and cold that they might well have marked the retreat of some necromancer, in which he pored over his dark books of magic.

"It's a peculiar thing," said Ashton-Kirk, his eyes upon the far-off lights, "what various forms fear takes. Here is a man who, apparently, is in

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

constant terror of some one, or something, and yet we find him lodged stubbornly in a place where a secret blow might be leveled at him with the greatest ease."

"That struck me more than once," spoke Mr. Scanlon. "And I felt like putting it to him as a question shaped something like: 'Why stay here when there's places where there's more folks? Why stick around a spot where there's always some one cutting in with an unwelcome surprise, when you can get good house-room in places where there's a-plenty of burglar alarms, and lots of night sticks?'"

Their feet sounded drearily upon the loose planks of the bridge; and when they emerged at the far end they found themselves upon a narrow road which ran off into the darkness.

"On, over the hills, in and out, and up and down, until it lands you at Schwartzberg gate," said Scanlon.

They climbed to the top of a hill; the sky was thick with stars, and the light from them touched the high places with pale hands. But the hollows were black and deep looking; mystery followed the course of the slowly-running river.

"What is there about Campe's place?" asked the crime specialist. "Is this the only road that leads there? What are his neighbors like?"

"To the first of those questions," said Mr.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Scanlon, "I reply, fields—also hills—also woods. There are roads passing Schwartzberg upon either side. As to neighbors, there's a few farmers, and their help. And then there's the man who flags the bad crossing down by the river, and the inn."

"Ah, yes, you mentioned the inn before," said Ashton-Kirk.

"A big, old-fashioned place—built away back in the old times."

"With a wide hearth and a hearty old landlord, whose father and grandfather owned the house before him."

"Well, I guess that's how it ought to be, to be in the picture; but it happens that this landlord has been here for only about six months."

Scanlon heard the hickory stick slashing at a clump of dried brush; then the crime specialist spoke:

"How far away is it?"

"A couple of miles."

"Maybe it'd be as well if we went there and bespoke a bed, if they'll take us in," said Ashton-Kirk.

Scanlon seemed surprised.

"I guess they've got room," said he. "But I had it in my mind you were going to Schwartzberg."

"I will pay it a visit, if I'm permitted, when I've

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

had a chance to see something of its surroundings. Your story, you see, shows plainly that, whatever the nature of Campe's danger, it comes from the outside."

Scanlon seemed struck by this; then he nodded and said:

"I guess that's right. But don't you think a good chance to shake Campe down for some inside information would be better than anything else?"

"In its proper place, perhaps. But I want to look over the outside, uninfluenced. Five minutes' talk with a man in Campe's state of mind might color one's thoughts to such an extent that it would be difficult to see anything except with his eyes."

"That sounds like wise talk," agreed Bat. "And if there's anything in the world you don't want to get doing, it's seeing things as he sees them."

They followed the narrow road for some distance, and then the big man turned off into a path which led through a stretch of farm land.

"This is a short cut," said he. "I followed it frequently when I was out with the gun. It'll bring us to a road a bit beyond this timber; and the road leads on to the inn."

A hundred yards further on they topped the crest of a hill; before them loomed a dense

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

growth of trees which covered the slopes round about.

"It's a fine kind of a place in summer, I guess," said Scanlon, as they halted. "But of an autumn night when the air gets thin, the stars look far away, and there's a pretty well settled belief that some queer things are doing, it's got its weak side. When I was located in Canyon City, I swore in as a deputy one night and started out into the hills with the sheriff to look for two lads who'd fussed up a whole train load of Easterners, and got away with a bag full of dough. That country was some wilder than this, and was further away from anywhere; but," with a look at the gloomy wooded slopes, "believe me, it had nothing on it for that uncertain feeling."

As they stood gazing about, Ashton-Kirk's head suddenly went up. He bent forward in the attitude of listening.

"What is it?" asked the big man.

"Hark!"

Far away, among the hills to the north, came a deep muttering. Scanlon clutched the crime specialist's arm.

"That's it!" he cried. "Listen to it lift. It's the thing I heard roaring in the night."

Low, growling, ominous at first, the sound grew in volume. Then it pealed like a mighty voice, rolling and echoing from hill to hill, finally sub-

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

siding and dying in the muttering with which it began.

"According to the dope," spoke Scanlon, in an uneasy tone, "Campe is now due to take his gun in hand and dash for the gate. And, if he does, they'll do more than slash him. I've got a hunch they'll get him for the count, on the second try."

As he uttered the last word, a shaft of brilliant light shot from the tower of Schwartzberg, and flashed to and fro across the countryside.

Then came the quick, far-off pulsation of a rifle; in the widening beam of white light they saw a woman crouching down as though in fear; and then they caught the figure of a man, running as though for his life.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER IV

TELLS SOMETHING OF THE MAN IN THE ROLLING CHAIR

"CAMPE!" cried Bat Scanlon, his eyes upon the fleeing man, and his hand going, with the instinctive movement of an old gun fighter, to his hip. "And giving his little performance outside once more."

But the keen eyes of the crime specialist had picked up details which the other had missed. He shook his head.

"No," said he. "Campe is a young man, you say. This one is past middle life. And also he seems sadly out of condition, and does not run at all like a man who once took middle distance honors."

The searching column of light still clung to the running man; again and again came the light shocks of the distant rifle.

"The woman has faded out of the lime-light," observed Scanlon.

"And the man is trying his best to duplicate the feat. Look—there he goes!"

With a wild side leap, the fugitive vanished into

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

a shallow ravine, out of range of both the ray and the rifle. At this the search-light was snapped off and darkness once more settled over the hills.

"Your German sergeant-major is no surprising shot," commented Ashton-Kirk. "He had his man in full view and missed him repeatedly."

Scanlon shook his head.

"It must have been the light," said he. "Kretz can shoot. I've seen him at it."

They stood in silence for a few moments; the country road about seemed heavier with shadows than it had been before the appearance of the shifting beam of light; the stars looked fainter.

"That's the second time I've seen that girl out here in the night," continued the big man. "And each time the noise came, and things started doing. I wonder what's the idea?"

"I fancy it's a trifle early to venture an opinion upon anything having to do with this most interesting affair," said his companion. "But," quietly, "we may stumble upon an explanation as we go further into it."

"I hope so," said Scanlon, fervently. Then, in the tone of a man who had placed himself unreservedly in the hands of another, "What next?"

"I think we'd better go on to the inn."

If the other thought the crime specialist's desire would have been to take up their course in the direction of the recently enacted drama, he did

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

not say. He led the way along the narrow path, and through the gloomy growth of wood. They emerged after a space into a well-kept road, and holding to this, approached a rambling, many gabled old house which twinkled with lighted windows and gave out an atmosphere of cheer. A huge porch ran all around it; an immense barn stood upon one side; and a half dozen giant sycamores towered above all.

"There it is," said Scanlon. "And it looks as though it had been there for some time, eh?"

"A fine, cheery old place," commented Ashton-Kirk, his eyes upon the erratic gables, the twinkling windows and the welcoming porch. "Many a red fire has burned upon its snug hearths of a winter night; and many a savory dish has come out of its kitchen. Traveling in the old days was not nearly so comfortable as now; but it had its recompenses."

Their feet crunched upon the gravel walk, and then sounded hollowly in the empty spaces of the porch. Scanlon pushed open a heavy door which admitted them to a great room with a low ceiling, beamed massively, and colored as with smoke. The floor was sanded; a fire of pine logs roared up a wide throated chimney; brass lamps, fixed in sockets in the walls, threw a warm yellowish glow upon polished pewter tankards and painted china plates. The tables and chairs were of oak, scrubbed

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

white by much attentive labor ; prim half curtains were at the small paned windows.

A short man with a comfortable paunch, a white apron and a red face came forward to greet them.

"Good-evening, Mr. Scanlon," said he, cordially. "I'm pleased to see you, sir. I'd been told you'd given us up and gone off to the city."

"Just for a breather, that's all," Scanlon informed him, as he and the crime specialist sat at a table near to the blazing hearth. It was still autumn, but there had been a dampness and a chill in the night air which made the snugness of the inn very comfortable.

The red-faced landlord smiled genially.

"I might have known that, even if the shooting is none too good, the bracing air would bring you back."

Ashton-Kirk glanced about the public room. A small, cramped-looking man sat at a table with a draught board before him, studying a complex move of the pieces through a pair of thick lensed glasses. A polished crutch stood at one side of his chair, and a heavy walking stick at the other. Deeply absorbed in the problem and its working out was another man, younger, but drawn looking, who coughed and applied a handkerchief to his lips with great frequency.

The hearty looking landlord caught the glances of the crime specialist, and smiled.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"My customers are a fragile lot," said he in a low voice. "The inns get only that kind in the winter," as though in explanation, "and some of them are worse than these. It's the air that does it."

"Makes them ill?" smiled Ashton-Kirk.

"Bless you, no!" The landlord placed a broad hand to his mouth to restrain the great responsive laugh which seemed struggling in his chest. "The air does 'em good, so the doctors say. Well, anyway," his humorous eyes twinkling, "it does *me* good by getting me over the slim season. If it wasn't for them, I'd have to close up after September's done."

Scanlon ordered some cigars and coffee, and as the host moved away to procure these, he said:

"The doctors are a great lot, eh? Once they piled all the high colored drugs into you that you'd hold; and now they talk fresh air until you'd almost believe you could live on that alone. There's one old codger who's got a pet patient here—some sort of a rare and costly complaint, I believe—and he insists on fresh air at all stages of the game. The patient, it seems, likes an occasional change; but the doc is as deaf as a post to everything except the sighing of the wind."

The coffee was served, together with some cigars.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"Both black and strong," said Ashton-Kirk as he tested one after the other.

"The coffee, sir, as Mr. Scanlon knows, is made after my own recipe," stated the landlord. "I'd not recommend it to one of my invalid guests, sir, nor to a well one as a regular tipple. But it has the quality and the touch, if you know what I mean."

"White is to move and win," stated the cramped-looking man. He rubbed one side of his nose with a hand that shook, and there was complaint in the gaze with which he fixed the pieces. "But I can't see how it's going to do it."

"White is to move, and win in four other moves," said the drawn-looking man, coughing into the handkerchief.

"Which makes it all the more difficult," said the other. His palsied hand fumbled purposelessly with the pieces; and the look of complaint deepened. The man with the handkerchief coughed once more, and looked mildly triumphant.

"They seem to be constantly engaged in these mad diversions," said Scanlon, his eyes upon the two. "At times, when I've been here, I've seen the excitement rise to that degree that I've considered calling out the fire department."

Just then there came a strident voice from another apartment.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"Who the devil is it?" it demanded. "If matters of importance are to be interfered with in this way, it's time that something was done ——"

Here the man with the cough reached out and clapped to a door, shutting out the voice. The landlord looked discomfited.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Shaw," said he. "I know it's annoying to you; but Mr. Alva must be worse to-day, and so is very impatient."

The drawn-looking man coughed hollowly.

"I'm very sorry for the gentleman's condition," spoke he, huskily. "But he should remember that there are others here who are equally ill in their own way; and that his outbursts are not at all agreeable."

The strident voice was lifted once more, this time muffled by the door; then another voice was heard remonstrating and apparently advising. Then there followed a soft rolling sound, the door opened once more and an invalid's chair made its appearance, propelled by a squat, dark servant, whose flat nose and coarse straight hair gave him the look of an Indian.

Beside the chair hopped a peppery little man with white hair and eye-glasses from which hung a wide black string.

"It makes no difference who he is," declared the peppery little man, fixing the glasses more firmly upon his nose and speaking to the occu-

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

pant of the chair. "The facts remain as I have said. But, Mr. Alva, there seems to be very little use in advising you. In spite of all I can say you'll keep indoors. Suppose it is dark? The darkness can't hurt you. Suppose it is damp? You can protect yourself against that. Air is what you want—fresh air—billions of gallons of it."

The man in the chair was wasted and pale; his almost fleshless hands lay upon the chair arms—his limbs seemed shrunken to the bone.

Bat Scanlon looked at Ashton-Kirk and nodded.

"Whatever it is that's got *him* has got him for good," spoke he, in a low tone. "I never saw any man's body so close to death without being dead."

The eyes of Ashton-Kirk were fixed upon the sick man with singular interest.

"And yet," said he, in the same low pitched way, "his head is very much alive. It probably would not be too much to say that it is the most vital thing in the room."

Scanlon looked at the invalid with fresh interest. He saw a dark face, not at all that of a sick man, and a pair of burning, searching black eyes. There seemed to be something unusual about the upper part of the head, but the man was so muffled up, apparently about to be taken out, that the nature of this was not quite clear.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"Drugs," stated the peppery little man, "are useless; time has no effect. To reach a case of your kind, air must be supplied—clean air—air containing all the elements of life. If I am to make a well man of you where others have failed, you must do as I say."

"He's the fresh air crank I was telling you about a while ago," Scanlon informed the crime specialist, softly.

"If I must go out," spoke the invalid in a surprisingly strong voice, "wrap me up well. I feel the cold easily."

The little doctor began arranging the blankets about the shrunken limbs; and while he was doing so, Ashton-Kirk arose.

"Let me assist you," said he, with that calm assurance which is seldom denied.

Deftly he tucked in the coverlets upon the opposite side, and buttoned up the heavy coat. But when he reached for the muffling folds about the sick man's head, all the sureness seemed to leave his fingers; Scanlon was astonished to see him bungle the matter most disgracefully; instead of accomplishing what he set out to do, he succeeded in knocking the covering off altogether.

"Pardon me," he said, smoothly enough.

The invalid returned some commonplace answer; and the doctor set about repairing the result of the volunteer's awkwardness.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"Your intentions are the best in the world," smiled he, "but I can see that you have spent very little of your time about sick beds."

Then he opened the door, and signaled the Indian. The chair rolled out upon the porch, and a moment later could be heard crunching along the gravel walk.

Ashton-Kirk smoked his black cigar with much silent deliberation, and sipped at the strong coffee. Several times during the next half hour Scanlon attempted to bring him out of this state by remarks as to the inn and its population. But he received replies of the most discouraging nature, and so gave it up. When the cigar was done, the crime specialist arose and stretched his arms wide in a yawn.

"I think I'm for bed," said he.

Scanlon looked his astonishment, but said nothing. His imagination had pictured some hours of looking about among the darkened hills—just how, and what for he had little idea; and this announcement suddenly bringing the night to a close was not in the least what he had expected.

"All right," was his reply. "That'll do for me, too."

Rooms were assigned them, and each was provided with a candle in a copper candlestick; and so they went off up the wide staircase. From the adjoining room, Bat Scanlon heard the sound of

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

pacing feet for some time; after a little they stopped, but for all that he had no assurance that the special detective had gone to bed. So he stepped out and knocked at his door.

Entering, he found Ashton-Kirk, his hands deep in his trousers pockets, standing staring at the grotesque flare of the candle.

"Hello," said the big man, "I thought you were regularly sleepy."

"I am—a little. But a notion occurred to me down-stairs, and I've been trying to follow it out."

Once more he resumed his pacing, his hands behind him, his eyes upon the floor.

"Imagination is, perhaps, man's greatest gift," said he. "Without it there would be little accomplished in the world. But there are times when one is forced to put the brakes upon it, or it would lead one astray."

Scanlon looked at him curiously.

"What's set you off on that?" asked he.

Ashton-Kirk stopped in his pacing, and lifted his head.

"That object you had given you on the bridge upon the occasion of your first visit, and which afterward had such a startling effect upon young Campe—what did you say it was like?"

"It was a stone—not very big—dark green in color—and with a kind of a hump upon one side of it."

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

The crime student nodded; there was a look in the singular eyes which Bat Scanlon had seen there only upon rare occasions.

"I remembered it as being something like that," said Ashton-Kirk. He took up the interrupted pacing for a moment; then paused once more. "What do you make of that sound we heard out on the hills to-night?"

Scanlon shook his head.

"You've got me," said he. "That's one of the things I put up to you when I called you in as a consultant."

Ashton-Kirk stood looking at him, nodding his head.

"Ah, yes, to be sure. Well, we'll see what can be done. And now," with a look at his watch, "if you don't mind being turned out, I think I'll go to bed."

"You mean to have a try at the Schwartzberg folks in the morning?"

"Yes."

Scanlon turned and had his hand upon the door-knob when the crime specialist spoke again.

"Rather a peculiarly shaped head that man in the chair has."

"I noticed it," replied Scanlon. "It seems to slant back from just above the nose. Gives him an unusual look."

"Unusual—yes. I don't think I ever saw that

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

exact conformation except in ——" here he stopped short. "Well," with another nod, "good-night. See you in the morning."

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER V

SPEAKS OF ASHTON-KIRK'S FIRST VISIT TO SCHWARTZBERG

ON the following morning, Ashton-Kirk and Scanlon breakfasted at the inn; then they each smoked another of the black cigars. At about nine o'clock they paid their bill and left.

"This road," said Bat Scanlon, as they trudged along, "is rather direct; it leads on to an old mill built years ago, and now abandoned, and then down to the river."

"All things considered," spoke Ashton-Kirk, twirling his hickory stick, his keen eyes searching the ground, "we'd better get away from the roads and paths this morning, and head for Campe's place, across country."

Without any comment, Scanlon followed his lead. Down one slope and up another they went, skirting ravines and gulleys, but always keeping the towers of Schwartzberg in sight. The crime specialist seemed in excellent humor; he whistled little airs, and cut at the stubble and withered stalks with his stick. But always were the keen, observant eyes traveling here and there; once or

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

twice he left his companion and darted away; but he always returned in a very short time, smiling and shaking his head.

"An interesting place," said he. "There are many indications of enterprise and thought. I shall have to go over it carefully; it promises to repay even a great deal of labor."

"Look there," said Scanlon.

Ashton-Kirk's eyes followed the pointing finger. Upon the wall of Schwartzberg even at that distance could be seen a human figure.

"It's Campe," said Scanlon. "He's just noticed us."

As he spoke, the man on the wall drew out a field-glass and trained it upon them. Long and earnestly he looked; then without making a sign, he lowered the glass, turned and disappeared.

"Gone to tell Kretz that I've hove in sight and am bringing a stranger," said Scanlon.

As they approached the building its details became more distinct. The gray stone, the narrow windows, the massive wall, the towers, indeed, all about the edifice, called up memories of those old feudal keeps in the Rhine country.

"It wouldn't surprise me in the least to see the gates swing wide, and the Baron and his men, with bows and bills, ride forth to bid us stand," said Ashton-Kirk.

"Well, there goes the gate," said Scanlon, shad-

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

ing his eyes from the sun. "And here come Campe and the sergeant-major. I don't see any bows nor bills; but it wouldn't surprise me if both packed a perfectly competent 'gat' somewhere about his person, ready to bring into action should you demonstrate anything but friendship and good will."

"I shall be careful to put nothing else on display," smiled Ashton-Kirk. "And now," with seriousness, "one word before they get too near. I am simply a friend of yours. You saw me in the city, and as I professed an interest in Schwartzberg, you brought me out to put in an hour showing me over the place if the owner does not consider it too great a liberty."

"I get you," said Mr. Scanlon, briefly.

Here the two advancing men came up. Young Campe was a well-built fellow and of good height. But his face was pale; there was a wild look in his eyes, and his manner indicated extreme nervousness. Scanlon's description of the German sergeant-major was quite accurate; he was square built and grim faced; there was a thick grayish patch in the hair above each ear; and he carried himself with the stiff precision of a man trained in a European barrack.

"How are you?" cried Scanlon, shaking Campe by the hand. "Would have got here last night, but I had a friend with me, and we stopped at the

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

inn. Mr. Ashton-Kirk," nodding toward that gentleman, by way of introduction.

Campe shook hands with the specialist in crimes, and Kretz saluted after his military fashion.

"Mr. Ashton-Kirk listened to me tell about Schwartzberg until he felt that he couldn't live another day without taking it in," Scanlon informed them. "So he's come over this morning, hoping it wouldn't be asking too much."

Campe's haunted eyes searched Ashton-Kirk; it was on his lips to refuse the request, when the other stopped him by saying:

"I hope you'll pardon me; but the fact is, I am something of a student of the period in which your house was built, and its absolute following, line for line, of the ancient plan, is of great interest. The Count Hohenlo, builder of the place, was related to you, I understand."

"An ancestor of my mother's."

"Indeed. That's very charming. The Count's career in this country was a most romantic one. The part he played in the history of the republic in its infancy has been obscured by the fanfare made in behalf of men not nearly so notable. His duel with the Frenchman, De La Place, was an exquisite piece of knight errantry; and his defense of the ford below here, while the British occupied the city, was an act of daring which the historians do not make the most of."

Digitized by Google

Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

A faint flush came into the cheeks of young Campe.

"It's an unusual thing to come upon one who knows anything of the Count's life or doings," said he. "I agree with you that the historians do not make the most of the exploit of the ford, nor do they give him any of the credit that is his due in other matters. It is my intention to write his biography some day; and I hope in that way to give him, in some small part at least, the place among the great outlanders which is rightfully his."

"Splendid!" applauded the crime specialist, while Bat Scanlon stood by and looked and listened in amazement. "That's a fine idea. The romance of two periods, and of three countries is in your hands. Such things are done too seldom in this day; in our hurry and bustle we have no time for the heroes of the past."

Young Campe looked at Sergeant-Major Kretz. But the grim face of the German was turned away; it was as though he knew what was to be asked in the look, and so saved himself the mortification of giving advice which he felt would not be taken.

"I am living a more or less retired life just now, Mr. Ashton-Kirk," said Campe, "and make it a rule to receive no one. But," and here his gaze went to Scanlon, "since you are a friend of Mr.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Scanlon's, and are on the ground, it would hardly do," and here he smiled, though faintly, "to turn you away."

"Kirk," said Scanlon, "has been my friend for years. He's quite a fellow in his way and has been of service to many folks, who were ready to put up their hands and quit. Now, here's your little matter," eagerly: "he could take hold of that, and ——"

But the voice of Ashton-Kirk broke in on him swiftly, but with a smoothness that covered its haste.

"Our friend Scanlon," said he, smilingly, "is something of an enthusiast. He has too much confidence in my little array of historical incident. But," and his singular eyes looked steadily into those of Campe, "if I can be of any assistance to you in the memoirs which you mean to prepare, you may command me. I shall be only too glad."

"That's what I thought," stated Scanlon, blowing his nose and growing very red. "I know you've got this historical stuff piled in till it's over your ears; so what's more natural than that you should give Campe a lift?"

"It may be that at some future time, when I am in the frame of mind for quiet study, I shall avail myself of your knowledge, sir," said Campe, as they walked toward the castle. "But at the present time," and once more the smile, though

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

even fainter than before, showed itself, "I am much taken up with more active matters, and have not the leisure."

Kretz took a huge key from his pocket and unlocked the gate; then he stood aside and the others passed in. The gate was at once relocked.

"This," said Ashton-Kirk, as he looked about, "would resist a considerable force, even at this day."

The high gray wall towered above their heads; it was of great thickness and its strength was evident.

Young Campe looked up at it and shook his head.

"It's strong enough," said he. "But for all that, Mr. Ashton-Kirk, it cannot keep out thoughts; and thoughts, if they are strongly marked and along a definite line, are more to be feared than armies."

They crossed the flagged court of which Scanlon had spoken and entered by the high, narrow door. A gloomy passage brought them to a room, the same, evidently, in which Bat had been received, for it was furnished with heavy oaken tables and chairs of ancient design, had a vaulted ceiling and was ornamented with the heads of huge stags and boars, and with trophies of arms, all of a day far past.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

A girl stood at one side feeding a thrush through the bars of a basket cage; she was attired in a gown flowing and white, her hair was the color of yellow silk, parted in the center, and hanging down over her breast in two thick braids.

"Miss Knowles," said Campe, and the girl turned. "A friend of Mr. Scanlon," continued the young man, "Mr. Ashton-Kirk."

The girl was very beautiful; her skin was like velvet, and her color like roses. She was smiling as the crime specialist bowed to her; but upon the instant that his name was mentioned, the receptacle which held the grain she had been offering the bird fell to the stone floor and smashed; the delicate color left her cheeks; she stood staring, her blue eyes full of consternation.

"Grace!" cried Campe, in alarm.

But in a single instant she had recovered herself; the color rushed back to her face, the smile returned to the lips.

"It is nothing at all," she said. "That headache of which I complained yesterday seems not to have all gone. I've felt a little faint several times this morning."

"You should not be about," said Campe, anxiously. "And perhaps it would be best if a doctor saw you."

The girl smiled sweetly. Her teeth were magnificent; and her lips were scarlet.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

"Some stunner, eh?" whispered Bat Scanlon to Ashton-Kirk.

"To be about is the best thing I can do," said Miss Knowles. Then with a mischievous look, "Mr. Kirk will think I'm quite an invalid."

She was really a splendid creature, large and beautifully formed; her complexion, her eyes, the great crown of yellow hair and the flowing white gown gave her the appearance, backed as she was by the gray trophy-hung wall, of having stepped out of a medieval picture—the stately lady of some great baron, or the daughter of a belted earl.

"Invalids seem rather plenty hereabouts," said Ashton-Kirk with a quiet smile. "But none of them at all resembled you, Miss Knowles."

It seemed, to the eyes of Bat Scanlon, that a change came into the beautiful face—a subtle something, swift as the thought that occasioned it, and gone as quickly.

"You've been to the inn," she said with a gesture of dismay. "Poor things; isn't it dreadful? Some of them are really heart-breaking, they seem so helpless."

"You've visited the inn yourself, then?" and there was a mild note of inquiry in the pleasant voice.

"Oh, no; but I ride sometimes among the hills of a morning. It's a glorious place for that; and I meet them stalking slowly along, or being

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

wheeled in their chairs. Perhaps it is the contrast between the vigor of the season and their wretched state, but at any rate I feel very bad about it all."

"Mr. Kirk is a student of American history, and is interested in Schwartzberg and the builder," Campe informed the girl. "I am about to show him over the place. Will you go along?"

"Indeed, yes." Then to Ashton-Kirk, "I never get tired of the splendid old building; most of my time is spent in wandering about from room to room, imagining the history it does not possess," with a smile which once more showed her beautiful teeth. "Oh, if it were only as rich in romance as it seems to be! If the good Count Hohenlo had only performed some of his deeds here."

"Who knows," smiled Ashton-Kirk, "but that it has been left to a later time to give the old place the needed touch."

"But," said Miss Knowles, lightly, as they followed Campe out of the room and along a passage, "there are no strange knights to beat upon the portals with the handles of their swords; there are no arquebuseers to swarm over the wall."

"No; that's gone for good; but," and Bat Scanlon thought he detected an undercurrent of something in the crime specialist's voice, "as Mr. Campe suggested a while ago, high walls cannot keep out thoughts. Peril in these later days is not as candid as in feudal times—it has a seeping

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

quality—we can neither hear nor see it, at times, but it is there, nevertheless."

The girl looked at the speaker; and there was a smile in her blue eyes.

"And you think a place like Schwartzberg might get its romance in such a very modern manner! I'll not believe it. Nothing but the clash of arms will satisfy me!"

Young Campe laughed, but there was very little of mirth in the sound.

"Why," said he, "it may come to that in the end."

But Miss Knowles made a pretty gesture of protest.

"Please don't make game of me, Frederic," she said. "You mean the vagrants who have been giving you so much trouble. They make very poor substitutes for men in armor, and I refuse to consider them."

Room after room was visited and admired; each was in keeping, both in furnishing and decoration, with the period of the building's architecture.

"It is really tremendous," said Ashton-Kirk, "and must require a horde of servants to keep it in order."

"We have only two besides Kretz—and they are his wife and daughter."

"I should like to see the kitchen," said the

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

crime specialist. "Very different, I suppose, from our present compact institutions."

The kitchen was as huge as imagined; its bricked floor was scrubbed clean; its copper utensils gleamed upon the walls; the great fireplace held a turnspit upon which hung a goose, attended by a stolid-looking girl.

"The sergeant-major's daughter?" asked Ashton-Kirk.

"Yes, and here is her mother."

A heavy, vacant-looking woman entered the kitchen with some vegetables; she gave but a passing glance at the visitors, and tucking up her sleeves, proceeded indifferently about her duties.

As they reached the roof of Schwartzberg, Ashton-Kirk saw the search-light, which he had witnessed in operation the night before, mounted on one of the towers. It was a powerful affair, and seemed in perfect order. But as to its uses Campe said nothing; he passed it by as though it did not exist.

Away in every direction stretched the faded countryside; the hills swelled, the tops of the denuded trees waved starkly in the breeze.

"The prospect is sober at this time of the year," said Ashton-Kirk, as he gazed out over the hills. "But the summer at Schwartzberg, I should say, is very beautiful."

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Young Campe nodded.

"Yes," said he, "it is. I have not spent much time here before now; but the pleasant months would be well enough—if there were nothing else."

"Ah!" said Ashton-Kirk, "there are drawbacks, then. Nothing serious, I hope."

He looked at the young man with a smile.

"The plumbing, perhaps," said he. "It seldom is what it should be in houses like this."

But Campe shook his head, and made no reply. His eyes, still with the old haunted look lurking in them, went out over the country, and one hand stroked his chin.

There was very little conversation while they remained upon the roof. Descending, they were passing along a broad corridor when the sound of a harp, waveringly played, was heard and a voice singing a *lied*.

Ashton-Kirk, trailing observantly along in the rear, saw the girl start at this and pause. A strange look came into her face; her hand went to her lips as though to prevent the words she was already speaking.

"Surely," she said, sweetly, "Mr. Kirk should not go without a view of the tapestries."

Young Campe looked perplexed.

"You see," said he to Ashton-Kirk, "there are some rare hangings—some six or seven centuries

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

old, I understand. And they are quite well worth seeing. But my aunt is there," and he gestured toward a door, "and I'm not at all sure that she ——"

He hesitated; and the girl spoke quickly.

"She'll be pleased to see a visitor."

Then without waiting for a reply, she knocked upon the door and went in. In a moment she held the door wide and smiled out at the three men.

"You may come in," she said.

Upon entering the apartment Ashton-Kirk noted that it was much more elaborately furnished than the other portions of the castle. Various periods had been called upon for luxurious fittings; costly rugs were upon the floor; magnificent paintings covered the walls; small carvings, very miracles of workmanship, were many; and the tapestries, which hung against and covered the far wall, were gorgeous examples of that ancient mystery.

"My aunt, Miss Hohenlo," said Campe, "Mr. Ashton-Kirk."

"I hope you'll pardon the intrusion," said the crime specialist.

Miss Hohenlo smiled graciously. She was a small woman, and thin, with faded brown hair and dull gray eyes. She was elaborately dressed and rather showily; about her neck hung a string of splendid jewels. Her hands were remarkably

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

small and white and well kept; she fingered the strings of a gilt harp, and showed them delicately and to advantage.

"Indeed," said she, "it is no intrusion. Any friends of Frederic are my friends; I try to impress that upon him. The tapestries are, of course, wonderful, and that lovers of beauty should desire to see them is, of course, to be expected."

She had a mincing, artificial manner of speech, much after the way of a lady in a mid-Victorian novel; not once did she forget her hands; carefully she touched the strings of the harp; with many little turns and flourishes she showed their whiteness, their smallness, their delicacy.

She spoke of the tapestry and not of her hands, but it was plain to be seen which of the two she thought the more worthy of attention; so Ashton-Kirk conversed with her and admired the caresses she bestowed upon the strings.

"The harp," said Miss Hohenlo, "is a beautiful instrument; in fact, I will say it is the most graceful of instruments. The Romans and the Greeks, also, preferred it to the lyre and other forms of string arrangement."

"It is perhaps the most ancient of instruments," said Ashton-Kirk. "We trace it back to the Egyptians, and have no assurance that it was not known even before the time of that astonishing people. That the tight-drawn string of some war-

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

rior's bow first suggested the musical possibility of the form is more than likely true. Can you not imagine the earliest minstrel chanting his song of victory to the twanging of the bowstring which helped to bring that victory about?"

Never once since they entered the room had the golden-haired Miss Knowles taken her eyes from the face of the woman with the harp; and she wore a curiously expectant expression which Ashton-Kirk did not fail to note.

"Miss Hohenlo is devoted to her instrument," she said. "And such attachment is always charming."

Miss Hohenlo simpered, colorlessly.

"To me it is but a toy," she said.

Miss Knowles laughed. It was a light laugh, and had a musical sound; but there was something behind it which caused the crime specialist's eyes to narrow and grow eager.

"A toy," said Miss Knowles. "Oh, surely you don't mean that—after the nights you've shut yourself up with it in your hands."

The dull eyes of Miss Hohenlo, so it seemed, grew duller than ever; she looked into the beautiful face before her, and lifted one slim hand to her faded hair.

"My dear Grace," she said, "you are such an observant creature." The eyes turned upon Ashton-Kirk, and she went on: "And I had hoped

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

that my poor studies were unnoticed. One can never be sure of anything."

Here young Campe, who had been impatiently intent upon the tapestries, now turned to Ashton-Kirk.

"These are, perhaps, as early examples of Flemish weaving as one would be likely to find. They came into the possession of my family about the time of the French Revolution, a period when much that was rare and costly was kicking about, helter-skelter."

Ashton-Kirk examined the hangings with admiration.

"From the design," said he, "I'd venture that they came from the looms of either Bruges or Arras. The hand of Van Eyck—or a follower of Van Eyck, is unmistakable; and the greater part of their designs went to the weavers of those two cities."

Between two windows was a narrow strip of the tapestry and in examining this the attention of Ashton-Kirk was drawn to a huge, two-handed sword which hung against it.

"A rather competent looking weapon," said he; "and one which, no doubt, has seen excellent service."

Miss Knowles came nearer.

"And who can be sure that its days of service are over?" said she, with a smile.

Digitized by Google
Original from THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY