But the finest of the twelve hangings composing the set, the most uncommon because the subject had not been treated by Queen Matilda, was the one which Arsène Lupin had stolen and which had been so fortunately recovered. It portrayed Edith Swan-Neck on the battlefield of Hastings, seeking among the dead for the body of her sweetheart Harold, last of the Saxon kings.

The guests were lost in enthusiasm over this tapestry, over the unsophisticated beauty of the design, over the faded colors, over the lifelike grouping of the figures and the pitiful sadness of the scene. Poor Edith Swan-Neck stood drooping like an overweighted lily. Her white gown revealed the lines of her languid figure. Her long, tapering hands were outstretched in a gesture of terror and entreaty. And nothing could be more mournful than her profile, over which flickered the most dejected and despairing of smiles.

"A harrowing smile," remarked one of the critics, to whom the others listened with deference. "A very charming smile, besides; and it reminds me, Colonel, of the smile of Mme. Sparmiento."

And seeing that the observation seemed to meet with approval, he enlarged upon his idea:

"There are other points of resemblance that struck me at once, such as the very graceful curve of the neck and the delicacy of the hands . . . and also something about the figure, about the general attitude . . ."

"What you say is so true," said the colonel, "that I confess that it was this likeness that decided me to buy the hangings. And there was another reason, which was that, by a really curious chance, my wife's name happens to be Edith: I have called her Edith Swan-Neck ever since."

He found Ganimard perched on the top of a ladder

And the colonel added, with a laugh: "I hope that the coincidence will stop at this and that my dear Edith will never have to go in search of her true love's body, like her prototype."

He laughed as he uttered these words, but his laugh met with no echo; and we find the same impression of awkward silence in all the accounts of the evening that appeared during the next few days. The people standing near him did not know what to say. One of them tried to jest:

"Your name is n't Harold, Colonel?"

"No, thank you," he declared, with continued merriment. "No, that 's not my name; nor am I in the least like the Saxon king."

All have since agreed in stating that, at that moment, as the colonel finished speaking, the first alarm rang from the windows — the right or the middle window: opinions differ on this point — rang short and shrill on a single note. The peal of the alarm-bell was followed by an exclamation of terror uttered by Mme. Sparmiento, who caught hold of her husband's arm. He cried:

"What 's the matter? What does this mean?"

The guests stood motionless, with their eyes staring at the windows. The colonel repeated:

"What does it mean? I don't understand. No one but myself knows where that bell is fixed . . ."

And, at that moment, came sudden, absolute darkness, followed immediately by the maddening din of all the bells and all the gongs, from top to bottom of the house, in every room and at every window.

FOR a few seconds, a stupid disorder, an insane terror reigned. The women screamed. The men banged with their fists on the closed doors. They hustled and fought. People fell to the floor and were trampled under foot. And, above the uproar, rose the colonel's voice, shouting:

"Silence! . . . Don't move! . . . It 's all right! . . . The switch is over there, in the corner . . . Wait a bit . . . Here!"

He had pushed his way through his guests and reached a corner of the gallery; and, all at once, the electric light blazed up again, while the pandemonium of bells stopped.

Two ladies had fainted. Mme. Sparmiento, hanging to her husband's arm, with her knees dragging on the floor, and livid in the face, appeared half dead. The men, pale, with their neckties awry, looked as if they had all been in an insane ward.

"The tapestries are there!" cried some one.

There was great surprise, as if the disappearance of those hangings ought to have been the natural result and the only plausible explanation of the incident. But nothing had been moved. A few valuable pictures, hanging on the walls, were there still. And, though the same din had reverberated all over the house, though all the rooms had been thrown into darkness, the detectives were sure they had seen no one entering or trying to enter.

"Besides," said the colonel, "it 's only the windows of the gallery that have alarms. Nobody but myself understands how they work; and I had not set them yet."

People laughed loudly at the way in which they had been frightened; but they laughed without conviction, and in a more or less shamefaced fashion. They had but one thought, to get out of that house where, say what you would, the atmosphere was one of agonizing anxiety.

Two journalists stayed behind, however; and the colonel joined them, after handing Edith over to her maids. The three of them, together with the detectives, made a search that did not lead to the discovery of anything of the least interest. Then, the colonel sent for some champagne; and the result was that it was not until a quarter to three in the morning that the journalists took their leave, the colonel retired to his quarters and the detectives withdrew to their room on the ground floor.

Watch was scrupulously kept that night, except between five and seven in the morning, when sleep gained the mastery and the men ceased to go their rounds. But it was broad daylight out of doors, and if there had been the least sound of bells, would they not have awakened?

Nevertheless, when one of them, at twenty minutes past seven, opened the door of the gallery and flung back the shutters, he saw that the twelve tapestries were gone.

This man and the others were blamed afterward for not giving the alarm at once, and for starting their own investigations before informing the proper authorities. The colonel was not told until half-past eight. He was dressed and ready to go out. The news did not seem to upset him beyond measure; at least, he succeeded in controlling his emotion. But the effort must have been too much for him; for he suddenly dropped into a chair and, for some moments, gave way to a fit of despair and anguish, most painful to behold in a man of his resolute appearance.

Recovering and mastering himself, he went to the gallery, stared at the bare walls and then sat down at a table and hastily scribbled a letter, which he put into an envelope and sealed.

"There," he said. "I 'm in a hurry . . . I have an important engagement . . . Here is a letter for the commissary of police."

He left the house at a run, with excited gestures which the detectives were subsequently to remember.

A few minutes later, the commissary of police arrived. He was handed the letter, which contained the following words:

"I am at the end of my tether. The theft of those tapestries completes the crash that I have been trying to conceal for the past year. I bought them as a speculation and was hoping to get a million francs for them, thanks to the fuss that was made about them. As it was, an American offered me six hundred thousand. It meant my salvation. This means utter ruin. I hope that my dear wife will forgive the sorrow that I am going to bring upon her. Her name will be on my lips at the last moment."

Mme. Sparmiento was informed. She remained aghast, while inquiries were instituted and attempts made to trace the colonel's movements.

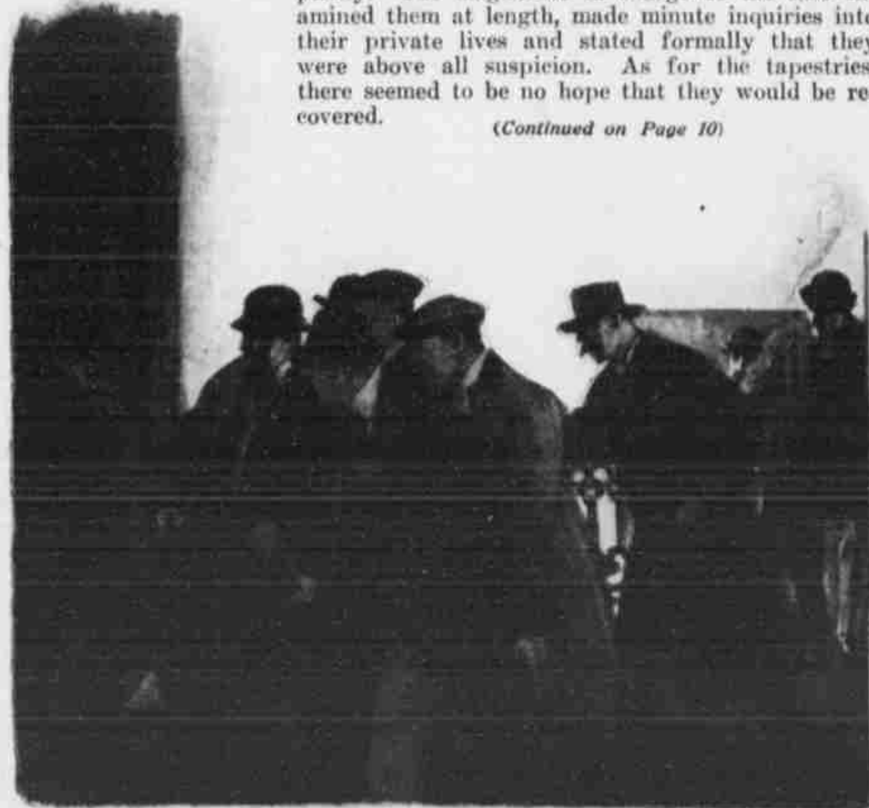
LATE in the afternoon, a telephone-message came from Ville d'Avray. A gang of railroad-men had found a man's body lying at the entrance to a tunnel after a train had passed. The body was terribly mutilated; the face had lost all resemblance to anything human. There were no papers in the pockets. But the description answered to that of the colonel.

Mme. Sparmiento arrived at Ville d'Avray, by automobile, at seven o'clock in the evening. She was taken to a room at the railroad-station. When the sheet that covered it was removed, she recognized her husband's body.

In these circumstances, Lupin did not receive his usual good notices in the press; and yet the public could not withhold its admiration of the extraordinary skill with which the theft had been effected. The police explained it, after a fashion. The detectives had noticed from the first, and subsequently stated, that one of the three windows of the gallery was wide open. There could be no doubt that Lupin and his confederates had entered through this window. It seemed a very plausible suggestion. Still, in that case, how were they able, first, to climb the garden-railings, in coming and going, without being seen; secondly, to cross the garden and put up a ladder on the flower-border, without leaving the least trace behind; thirdly, to open the shutters and the window, without starting the bells and switching on the lights in the house?

The police accused the three detectives of complicity. The magistrate in charge of the case examined them at length, made minute inquiries into their private lives and stated formally that they were above all suspicion. As for the tapestries, there seemed to be no hope that they would be recovered.

(Continued on Page 10)



A policeman smashed in the door with his shoulder