By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM,

A MAKER

HISTORY

Author of "The Master Mummer." "A Prince of Sinners," "Mysterious Mr. Sabin," "Anna the Adventuress," Etc.

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[CONTINUED.]

"You have sent for Sir George Duacombe to come and see you."

Spencer was slient for a moment. His own servant. It was not possible, "Well?"

"Even you," the baron continued, "have not yet solved the mystery of l'affaire Poynton. But you know more than Sir George. Let me recommend that you do not share your knowledge with him "

"Why not?"

OF

"If you do, Sir George will at once share your indisposition."

"I begin to understand," Spencer said.

"How otherwise? Send Sir George home. You see the delicacy of our position. It is not so much that we fear Sir George Duncombe's interference,

but he, again, is followed and watched over by our enemies, who would easily possess themselves of any information which he might gain."

Spencer nodded.

"It is good reasoning," he admitted. "Listen?" M. Louis continued. "I

speak now on behalf of my friends. You know whom I mean. You have solved the mystery of our existence. We are omnipotent. The police and the secret service police and the government itself are with us. We have license throughout the city. We may do what others may not. For us there is no crime. I kill you now perliaps. The police arrive. I am before the commissioner. I give him the sign-it is l'affaire Poynton. I go free. It is a certain thing."

"Granted!" Spencer said. "Proceed with your killing or your argument."

"With the latter, if you please," M. Louis answered. "I do not choose to kill. L'affaire Poynton, then. Harm is not meant to either of these young people. That I assure you upon my honor. In three weeks, or, say, a month, we have finished. They may return to their homes if they will. We have no further interest in them. For those three weeks you must remain as you are-you and, if you have influence over him, Sir George Duncombe. The other two fools we have no care for. If they blunder into knowledge-well, they must pay. They are not our concern, yours and mine. For you I bring in offer, M. Spencer.

from the tangle, to know truth when you meet it, even in unlikely places. I doff my hat to you, M. Spencer, If you permit I will send my own physician to you. You will be yourself in a week."

"You know the antidote?" Spencer remarked grimly.

"Naturally! Accidents will happen. You wish that I should send him?"

"Without doubt," Spencer answered. "I am weary of this couch."

"You shall leave it in a week." monsieur promised as he left the room.

Spencer closed his eyes. Aiready he felt coming on the daily headache, which, with the terrible weakness, were part of his symptoms. But there was no rest for him yet. M. Louis had scarcely been gone five minutes when Duncombe arrived.

Duncombe had had no word of his friend's illness. He stood over his couch in shocked surprise.

"My dear fellow," he exclaimed, "I had no idea that you were ill. This is why I have not heard from you, then." Spencer smiled as he held out his hand, and Duncombe, who seemed to catch some meaning in the upraised eyebrows of his friend, was.shocked. "You mean?" he exclaimed.

Spencer nodded.

"L'affaire Poynton." he said gently. 'A very subtle dose of poison indeed, my friend. I shall not die, but I have had my little lesson. Here the individual has little chance. We fight against forces that are too many for us. I told you so at the start."

"Yet I," Duncombe answered, "have not suffered."



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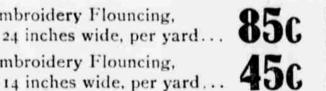
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"Timeo Danaos dona ferentes!" Spencer murmured.

M. Louis smiled.

"My gift," he answered, "will not terrify you. You are a journalist. I offer to make the fortune of your paper. You shall be the first to announce an affair of the greatest international importance since the war between Russia and Japan was declared. No; I will go further than that. It is the greatest event since Waterloo."

"L'affaire Poynton strikes so deep?" Spencer remarked.

"So deep," the baron answered. "It is the fools who grope their way into great places. So did the boy Poynton. You, my friend, shall be the one brilliant exception. You shall make yourself the king of journalists, and you shall be quoted down the century as having achieved the greatest journalistic feat of modern days."

Spencer turned his drawn, haggard face toward his visitor. A slight flush of color stained his cheek.

"You fascinate me," he said slowly. "I admit it. You have found the weak spot in my armor. Proceed! For whom do you speak ?"

M. Louis abandoned his somewhat lounging attitude. He stood by Spencer's side and, leaning down, whispered in his ear. Spencer's eyes grew bright.

"M. Louis," he said, "you play at a great game.'

The baron shrugged his shoulders. "Me?" he answered. "I am but a pawn. I do what I am told."

"To return for a moment to l'affaire Poynton," Spencer said, "I am in the humor to trust you. Have I then your assurance that the boy and girl do not suffer?"

"Upon my own honor and the honor of the company to whom I belong," he answered, with some show of dignity, "It is a pledge which I have never yet broken."

"I am a bribed man," Spencer answered.

M. Louis threw away his second cigarette. He cast a look almost of admiration upon the man who still lay stretched upon the couch.

"You are the only Englishman I ever met, M. Spencer," he said, "who was not pigheaded. You have the tenacity of your countrymen, but you have the genius to pick out the right thread

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rmitted," he asked gently, "te introduce myself?

"My friend," Spencer answered. "it is because I am the more dangerous." "You have discovered something?" Duncombe exclaimed.

"I came near discovering a great deal," Spencer answered. "Perhaps it would have been better for my system if I had discovered a little less. As it is, I have finished with l'affaire Poynton for the present. You see how very nearly l'affaire Poynton finished me."

"It is not like you," Duncombe said thoughtfully, "to give anything up."

"We come face to face sometimes with unique experiences which destroy precedent," Spencer answered. "This is one of them."

"And what," Duncombe asked, "do you advise me to do?"

"Always the same advice," Spencer answered. "Leave Paris today. Go straight back to Norfolk, read the newspapers and await events."

"Well, I think that I shall do so," Duncombe answered slowly. "I have found out where Miss Poynton is, but she will not see me. I have made an enemy of my dearest friend, and I have, at any rate, interrupted your career and endangered your life. Yes; I will go back home."

"You may yet save your friend some -inconvenience," Spencer suggested. "Try and persuade him to go back with you.'

"He will not listen to me," Duncombe answered. "He has brought an English detective with him, and he is as obstinute as a mule. For myself, I leave at 9 o'clock."

"You are well advised-exceedingly well advised," Spencer said. '"Mind, I do not take the responsibility of sending you away without serious reasons.

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