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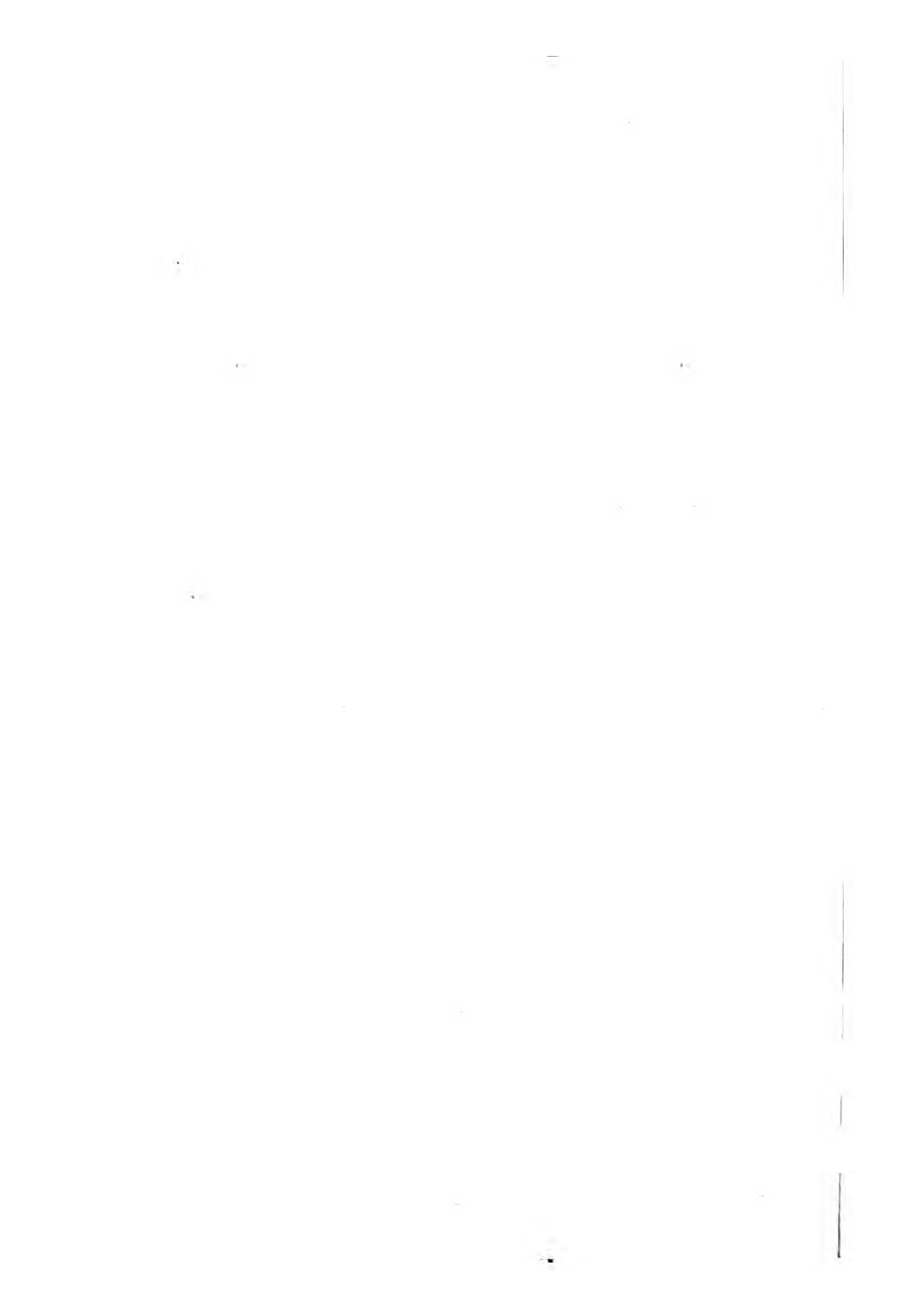


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**AND IT CAME TO PASS THAT
THE KING WAS DEAD**

WORKS BY
LEONID ANDREIEFF
Translated by Maurice Magnus

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“AND IT CAME TO PASS THAT THE KING WAS DEAD”

I

ON the square stood a great black tower with giant walls and tiny loophole windows. Built in a bygone age by robber knights, it served now partly as a prison for dangerous criminals, and partly as a dwelling. As time went on, wings had been added close in to the deep old walls, so that about the original rock rose an irregular forest of chimneys, towers and pointed roofs, forming a little city. When the sun sank and the lights twinkled out now here, now there—above, below—the dark masses of the heavy walls took on wonderful and fantastic outlines, as though the streets had ceased to be, and the boundless ocean poured its salt flood about the ancient pile. Then rose the thought of former days, long past and long forgotten.

In the tower hung an old clock whose huge faces showed from far and near, and whose works filled an entire wing. It was guarded by a one-eyed man, whose affliction had driven him to the trade of watchmaker, as it was a simple matter for him to use the microscope. And for

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years he had repaired little watches, till this great clock was entrusted to his care. He loved his service, and often by day or by night he hovered about among his cogs and levers which moved so serenely, watching the giant pendulum as it swung through the air in its wide, even orbit. At the top of its measure it seemed to say: "What was—will be!" then, falling, it rose again to a fresh beat, saying meanwhile: "What was—will be!" . . .

These are the words the one-eyed watchmaker had set to the mysterious monotone of the pendulum. Constant association with the great clock had made him a "philosopher"—as they used to say in those days.

Within the city with its ancient tower, and throughout all the realm, one man stood out prominent—a mysterious arbitrator over town and province. The sway of this one over millions was old as the world. He was known as King, and was called Twentieth, according to the number of his predecessors of that same name. But that explained nothing. . . . The origin of his strange power was as undefined as the origin of the city itself. From time immemorial this occult figure of One, the ruler over millions, had stood out against the silent past which stretched beyond the mind of man. But even here, mute records spoke, and the broken shaft of a column, or the storied stones of a ruined wall gave silent token that already in these far-distant times the One had dictated to

the Million. Titles, names and surnames changed, but the picture remained unaltered—immortal! The King came into the world and died like other men; even in his bodily presence, he seemed a man. Judged by the boundlessness of his sphere and might, it were easier to fancy him a god—all the more so, since man represented God in His own image without feeling that this belittled His Unfathomable Essence.

“The Twentieth” was King—that meant that he might cause the happiness or the unhappiness of any man. He could rob him of his goods, his health, his freedom, his very life! At his word, thousands went forth to slay or fall in battle. Right and wrong, good and evil, cruelty and mercy were practised in his name. His commands were no less imperious than the laws of God, but while the decrees of Heaven are unalterable, his statutes had this important difference, that he could reverse his decisions.

Far and near, he dominated humanity. When a man was born into the world he found Nature, Cities, Books—and over all, the King. When he died, he left behind him Nature, Cities, Books—and again, the King. History and legend show examples of great-hearted, good and law-abiding rulers; and albeit there were better men than they on earth, yet it was quite conceivable why they should have reigned. More often, though, the King was of the lowest of the earth: cruel, unrighteous, devoid of all virtue—demented, even. But yet he remained, “The

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Inviolable Ruler of the Millions," and his strength grew in proportion to his crimes. Hated and cursed by all, he dictated none the less to them who hated, and to those who cursed. And this weird Might became a problem, when to the fear of the Man was added the mystic dread of the Unknown.

Thus it came to pass that Wisdom, Virtue and Humanity weakened the royal power, while Tyranny, Infamy and Idiocy did but strengthen it. Even the mightiest of despots had no power to uplift or regenerate, while the weakest among them could shame the devil and all his crew for vice and devastation. . . . Life he might not give—this enigmatical dispenser of evil and delusion—Death he gave unceasingly. And as each fresh layer of human sacrifice was added to its foundations, the Throne rose higher. . . . Each nation had its ruler, and the origin of their power was lost in the beginnings of time. Now and again in some country the shadowy potentate would vanish for a space, but never in all history was the whole earth free of their sway.

Centuries passed, and again, one knew not whence, a new throne rose in the land; tenanted by a creature aloof, a strange mingling of helplessness and power. His mystic seclusion threw a spell over his people. . . . Many there were who loved him more than home or kindred—even above their own lives—accepting torture and a shameful death with uncomplaining humility, as though from the hand of God.

The Twentieth and his predecessors seldom showed themselves to the people, and few beheld their faces ; but they all loved to present their image to the folk : idealised, and hewn on stone, engraved on coins, or copied countless times on canvas. One saw it everywhere—this same foolish, perplexing likeness, that by repetition impressed itself on the mind, overwhelming the imagination, and gave the impression of the omnipresence and immortality of the “ One Elect.” Many who barely remembered their own grandfathers, and never knew their forefathers’ faces, were familiar with the countenance of the race that had ruled them for ages. No matter how commonplace the features, yet still the seal of a Sphinx-like secret lay upon them ; as the face of one dying takes on new meaning, when from the well-known mask grim Death looks forth with furtive might.

So, high above Life stood the King !

Men died, generations vanished from the earth, and he but changed his name as the serpent its skin. After the Eleventh, came the Twelfth, then the Fifteenth, and again the First, the Fifth, the Second . . . and in these cold figures rang the echo of that same Fate which sounded in the swing of the pendulum as it registered the minutes :

“ What was—will be ! ” . . . “ What was—will be ! ”

II

AND it came to pass, in the realm where the Twentieth held sway, that a Revolution arose. A revolt of the Millions, quite as inexplicable as the mysterious rule of the One. A strange change took place in the relation of the King to his people. They began to free themselves secretly, unnoticeably, silently—like a body freed by death, and awakened into a fuller sphere of labour and capacity. . . . The Palace still, and the Throne, and the same Twentieth King—but his power had imperceptibly died. No man knew the hour of its death, and all thought that it had but sickened—the Masses had merely learned to disobey. But suddenly arose single unimportant cases of rebellion that grew into a mighty, unconquerable movement, and with the lesson of disobedience came the knowledge of ancient grievances. Inflamed with the fury of centuries of hunger, unrighteousness and oppression, they shrieked aloud their woes, and demanded justice.

And suddenly the nation rose—rearing like Behemoth—striking to avenge itself in one moment of wrath, for all its years of oppression and torture. As before they had allowed themselves to be downtrodden without a general understanding, so now they rose without con-

certed action. Suddenly from all sides flowed in uprisings against the State.

Amazed at their own acts, and forgetting the steps which had led them there, the people pushed steadily nearer the Throne. Already they fingered its chiselled gold, already they peered into the Royal bed-chamber and tried the Royal chairs. The King bowed, the Queen smiled, and many in the mob were moved to tears at such close sight of the Twentieth. With careful fingers women smoothed the texture of the royal robes, the men with bluff good-nature played with the princely child. . . . The King bowed, the pale Queen smiled—and over the threshold, beneath a close-locked door, oozed out a dark red stream, the blood of a courtier who had killed himself in the ante-room, unable to endure the sight of dirty fingers on the mantle of the King! . . . And as the mob withdrew, they cried: “Long live the King!” Here and there indeed were frowns, but the general temper was so gay that a carnival spirit prevailed, and they shouted as though choosing a King of the Revels: “Long live the Twentieth!” They laughed, but by evening, faces grew more lowering, and suspicion dawned in their eyes. How was it possible to trust those who for thousands of years had deceived the good and credulous folk with their hellish craft? All is dark in the Palace. A false glow comes from the great windows—something sinister, as though plots were brooding. “Spells are at work! They are

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calling upon the powers of darkness, and conjuring up an axe for our necks. They are carefully wiping their mouths after their Judas kisses—and they are washing the child that the people have soiled by their touch. . . . And then, they may have vanished. . . . Perhaps the great dark court is empty.—They have fled! and the dead body of the courtier lies alone in the vacant hall! If there be one alive, let us call him out. . . . Shout: ‘Long live the King!’” The dull, restless evening sky looks down on white upturned faces. Huddled clouds push on overhead in hasty panic, and false, mysterious lights shine dim from the huge windows of the Palace.

“Long live the Twentieth!”

The guard is overpowered and thrown about by the mob. He has lost his weapons and smiles helplessly. The great iron key rasps in the lock. The tall iron grating seems to bear clusters of black fruit, convulsed bodies, and outstretched arms. The heavens are pale, and black the earth beneath. Hurrying clouds peer down. A cry! Someone has kindled a torch. The Palace windows reflect the ruddy glare, and seem to threaten the crowd! . . . Something has crawled up the walls, and disappears on the roof. The Palace is silent. The gates swarm with people. . . . Suddenly they are down! The place is free—the mob pushes in.

“. . . Long live the Twentieth!”

Pale lights flit hastily about behind the windows. A hideous face is pressed against the

pane, and vanishes. The Square grows light. Torches multiply, moving forward and back in procession — a strange dance. . . . Then the lights are massed and dip—the King and Queen appear upon the balcony. Behind them shines the light, but their faces are in the dark. “Perhaps it is not they at all. Light, Twentieth, light! We cannot see you!” Torches flare up on either side—their vague features stand out against the purple light of the smoky background. Cries from the ranks: “The King has fled! These are not they!” But the nearer ones quiet their fears with the glad shout: “Long live the Twentieth!” The faces in the balcony move slowly up and down, now glowing in the light, now melting into shadow. They bow before the people, and in that act bend the Nineteenth, and the Fourth, and the Second of their line. These impenetrable beings, with their inconceivable, almost God-like sight, stand bowing in the purple dusk; and behind them, indistinct in the twilight of the past, blend Murder, Devastation, Pomp and Terror! . . . “Let him speak, let us hear his voice! His silence is horrible, like a shade from the nether world! Speak, King, speak!” A singular gesture commanding silence — a strange imperative gesture, as old as Power itself—then comes a gentle, unfamiliar voice, uttering the old formula: “It gives me great pleasure to see all my good people. . . .”

“Nothing more? Is that all? It pleases

him. The Twentieth is pleased! Be gracious, Twentieth! . . . We love you, King—love us, too. If you don't love us we shall come into your palace again, your workroom, your dining-room where you eat, your bedroom where you sleep—and shall make you love us. Long live the Twentieth! Long live the King! Long live our lord!”

“ . . . Slaves!”

Who cried “Slaves”? . . . Torches die down—the mob disbands, the pale lights disappear in the background of the Palace, and the windows grow dim. Clouds rush past. The mob is searching for someone . . . “Was he here, or was that his ghost? We should have touched him—his clothes, his face. Handled him, even though he had screamed with pain or rage! . . .”

Silently they disappeared. A few separate cries are lost in the restless shuffle of their tread, as they pass, filled with dark memories, forebodings and terror. . . . And all through the night, hideous dreams hover over the city.

III

HE has already attempted to escape. Some he had bewitched; had put others to sleep, and had almost achieved his hellish freedom when a true patriot recognised him in his soiled workman's blouse, and not trusting his memory, compared his features with the face of a coin.

The bells sounded the alarm, and out from their houses rushed pale, frightened people. . . . "It is he!" Now they have him in the Tower—in the great black Tower with its thick walls and tiny loophole windows. There he is watched by Sons of the People, proof against corruption, flattery or sorcery. To keep up their spirits the guards drink and laugh and smoke in his face as he takes his accustomed walks with his family in the prison. They have boarded the windows heavily that he may not bewitch the passers-by, and have fenced in the roof of the Tower where he occasionally takes the air that none but the wondering clouds may behold his face. But yet his might remains. He transmutes free laughter into slavish tears. In spite of the thick walls, he sows treachery and perfidy which bloom black among the people and tarnish the golden robes of Freedom.

Traitors and enemies everywhere. In the

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provinces great lords assemble. . . . Crept down from off their thrones, they have placed themselves at the head of their wild hordes, and lead them on—deluded murderers, come to strangle their Mother—Liberty. In the houses, in the streets, in misty distance of wood and village, in the stately halls of the Assembly, everywhere, glides and hisses the black shadow of treason. . . . Woe to the people! . . . Those who first raised the standard of rebellion have betrayed them—and already the greedy earth has drunk their blood. Their cursed ashes have been scattered from their dishonoured graves. Woe to the nation! Betrayed by those to whom it entrusted its soul. Deceived by the chosen ones with their honest faces, their words of incorruptible purpose—and their pockets full of a stranger's gold.

The town was searched. All citizens were ordered to their homes at noon; and when at the given hour the bells pealed out, their hollow tones rang ominously down the deserted streets. Never has such stillness reigned since the town has stood! The market-place is empty, all shops are closed. Down the length of the streets not a soul in sight, not a cart. Close to the silent walls stray cats slink fearsomely, not knowing whether it is day or night. So still is it that you seem to hear the pad of their velvet feet as they hurry by. . . . Down the street sweeps the clang of a solitary bell; like a great black broom, invisibly clearing the town. Then even

the frightened cats crawl to cover. . . . Silence and emptiness!

Suddenly small groups of armed men appear in all the streets. Tramping along and talking loud they make more noise (though there are but few of them) than all the city with its thousands of men and carts. Each house in turn receives them, and they emerge accompanied by one or two fresh followers. Hands in their pockets, these straggle along—some white with wrath, others purple with rage; but none fearing death—in these strange days none did fear death, not even traitors . . . and they vanish into the black depths of the prisons. Ten thousand traitors they found, these true Sons of the People! Ten thousand conspirators against the State whom they threw into dungeons. . . . And now it is both reassuring and terrifying to see the prisons, filled to overflowing with treason. The walls can barely sustain their contents, and threaten to crumble.

That night joy reigned supreme throughout the town! Again the streets filled up; people poured from their houses, and the black endless mass swung and writhed in a strange mad dance of unbridled licence. From end to end of the town they danced, tossing high like leaping billows about the bright street lamps. All in a wild circle, breaking, changing, vanishing, far and near, surged the impenetrable mass. Now melting and parting, to meet again in frantic eddy and flow on in a mighty stream of tossing

arms, overheated, laughing faces and wide staring eyes. . . . From one of the lanterns dangled a traitor who had not been so fortunate as to reach his prison. . . . His outstretched legs, seeking for a foothold, touched the heads of the dancers, and he swung and leaped as though dancing himself, and Master of Ceremonies, calling out the figures for the mob! . . . Then they swept to the dark Tower, and with uplifted heads shrieked through the massive walls: "Death to the Twentieth—Death!" . . .

Red lights glowed in the windows. Patriots guarded the tyrant! Assured that he was there and could not escape, they shouted in jest (or to cause him panic): "Death to the Twentieth—Death!" and then passed on and made way for others who called anew. And again throughout the night, hideous dreams drifted over the city—and Tower and prisons seethed with crime and treachery, like bodies full of subtle poisons. . . .

They had begun the execution of the traitors. Swords, axes and scythes were sharpened, thick cudgels and heavy stones, were gathered, and unceasingly, for twice twenty-four hours they worked among the prisoners till they gave way from weariness. And there they slept; and there they ate and drank. The earth refused to soak in more thick blood, and straw was heaped about. . . . But this, too, was soon turned to a moist brown heap of dung. Seven thousand were slaughtered!—Seven thousand traitors were buried to purge the city, and give life to infant

Liberty. Again they went to the King to show him the severed heads and hearts torn bleeding from their breasts. . . . And he gazed at them! . . .

In the Assembly, however, panic and terror reigned. Fruitlessly they sought the one who had issued the order to kill—and yet, someone must have given the command. “Was it you—or you?” But what individual would dare to dictate when the Assembly held the power only as a unit! Some thought they seemed to know.

“Murderer!”

“No! We pity the nation while you pity the traitors.” Disturbances multiplied and treachery grew and penetrated to the nation’s heart.

So much pain endured, so much blood shed, and all in vain! The incarcerated monarch continued to sow treason and sorcery through the thick Tower walls. Alas for Liberty! From out the west came fearful news of disruption, battles and dissensions among the foolish people who had taken up arms against their Mother, Freedom. From the south came threatenings—from the north and east the fallen lords advanced with their wild followers. From every quarter the winds blew, steeped with rumours of foes and treachery. From every quarter the clouds gathered—from north and south, from east and west, bringing sounds of menace which echoed joyfully in the ears of those in the Tower, but clanged a death-knell to the citizens. Woe to the people! Woe to Liberty!

The moon shone lurid, as though gazing on a ruin. Portentous clouds, in vague and wondrous masses of hideous form, drifted about the sun; and clouds and sun set together in a dusky nebulous mass. When for a brief time the daylight struggled through, what a dismal shuddering light it was! Fleeting and in terror it glanced on the tops of the trees, the houses and the churches; gazed down with its great glaring terrible eye; grew dark, and vanished. The clouds like giant breakers from some distant ocean had risen and overwhelmed it. Woe to the people! Woe to Liberty!

Meantime the one-eyed watchmaker who used the microscope so well, went about among his countless wheels, his ropes and levers, and with his head askew, he watched the swing of the giant pendulum. "What was—will be!" . . . "What was—will be!" . . .

Once in his youth the works had been injured, and for two days the clock had stopped. How terrible that was! It seemed as though the endless mass of time were suddenly about to fall! But when the clock had been repaired, all again went well. Now time flows on through the great Finger, drop by drop, measured out in little portions and crumbling inch by inch. The great copper disc of the pendulum shines dim and flits like a yellow fleck past his squinted eye. Without, on the ledge, a dove is cooing. . . .

"What was—will be! . . . What was—will be!" . . .

IV

THE monarchy of ten centuries had fallen !
 . . . The question was not put to vote.
 The Assembly rose unanimous and stood
 as though rooted to earth. Even the old delegate
 who was brought in his invalid chair, arose,
 supported by his friends, stretched his crippled
 frame like a withered trunk upheld by saplings.

. . . “ The Republic is unanimously accepted ! ”

. . . With a ring of triumph in his voice that
 he vainly tried to suppress, a delegate makes
 this announcement. But still they stand ! . . .
 A moment passes, and yet another. Shouts of
 jubilee rise from the square where the people
 wait without. But within all is silent as in a
 church, a stern and solemn assemblage frozen
 into attitudes of lofty awe. . . . In whose
 presence do they stand ? There is no king !
 Even God no longer exists (that King and
 Tyrant of the heavens), even He has long since
 been dragged from His Throne on high ! . . .
 They stand in the presence of Liberty !

The old delegate whose grey head for many
 years has trembled with feebleness and age, now
 bears it proudly aloft, young and sure ! With
 a light gesture he waves his friends aside and
 stands alone. Freedom has worked its miracle.

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. . . Through long conflict with storm, riot and blood, men had forgotten to weep . . . now they shed tears. The proud eagle eyes that gazed unshrinking at the blood-red sun of the revolution, cannot endure the soft glance of Liberty, and they weep!

Silence in the hall—uproar without the gates. . . . Rising and spreading, its ruffled boom in rhythmic beats like the roar of the boundless ocean. . . . Now all these beings are free. Free the dying, free the babe unborn, free the living! . . . Fallen is the secret might of the One who for ages has held the Millions shackled. Fallen are the dark pillars of the dungeon, and heaven hangs bright over their heads. . . .

“Liberty!” whispers one softly and tenderly, as though it were a lover’s name.

“Liberty!” gasps another, beside himself with boundless joy, all energy and devotion.

“Liberty!” clanks the iron.

“Liberty!” sing the wires.

“Liberty!” thunders the many-voiced ocean.

. . . He is dead, the old delegate. His heart could not endure the strain of joy, and stopped! But its last beat was for Freedom. Happiest of men! Bearing with him to the shadowy realms of death an unending dream of budding liberty.

There was fear of licence in the city, but nothing of the kind occurred. The breath of liberty had ennobled the people, and they grew gentle, tender and pure as maidens in the ex-

pression of their joy. They did not even dance, and hardly sang. . . . They simply gazed at one another, and caressed each other, thoughtfully grasping hands. . . . It was so pleasant to caress a free man, and to gaze into his eyes. No one was hanged. . . . Once a poor idiot called aloud among the mob: "Long live the King!" Defiantly he stood twitching his moustache, prepared for short shrift and a long hard death at the hands of the grim multitude. But though some frowned, the others merely stared and, gathering about him, examined him in wonder; as sightseers in a port would gaze at a newly landed Brazilian ape. And they let him go free.

It was late that night when they bethought them of the King. A group of citizens who could not bear to part on this great day, and had resolved to celebrate till dawn, chanced to think of him, and made their way to the Tower. Its black outline almost melted into the heavens, and at the moment of their arrival a star set behind its turrets; a tiny, bright star, drawing near to the walls, blazed up and disappeared in the dark void. . . . A little below the street, shone out the warm glow of two small loopholes. There were the gardens!

V

IT had just struck two.

“Does he know it or not?” asked one of the new-comers, gazing into the massive shadow and striving to penetrate its depths. A shape was silhouetted against the wall, and a thin, weary voice answered: “He sleeps, citizens.”

“Who are you, citizen? How you frightened us—you slink like a cat.” . . . From all sides black shadows poured out and stood silent before the little group.

“Why don’t you answer? Are you ghosts? Vanish then, directly! The Assembly has abolished ghosts.” . . .

Languidly came the stranger’s answer: “We are guarding the tyrant!”

“Has the Commune appointed you?”

“No; we ourselves. There are thirty-six of us—thirty-seven there were, but one died. We are guarding the tyrant! For two months (or perhaps longer) we have lived in these walls. We are weary!”

“The Nation thanks you. Do you know what has happened to-day?”

“Yes; we have heard something. We are guarding the tyrant!”

. . . “That we have a republic now, and liberty?”

“ Yes, we are guarding the tyrant. We are weary ! ”

“ Brothers, let us embrace you ! ” Their cool lips touched the hot mouths languidly. . . .

“ We are weary. He is so crafty, and so dangerous ! By day and by night we watch at all the doors and windows. I am looking in now, you see, here at this window—you will not find him at present. . . . Liberty, you say ? That is good. . . . But we must go to our posts ! Go in peace, citizens. He sleeps. We have news every half hour. He sleeps. ”

The shadowy figures swayed, drew back and disappeared as though the walls had engulfed them.

The dark Tower loomed higher, and a monster cloud spread from its battlements out over the city. It was as though the Tower grew and stretched its arms. In the black depths of the walls a torch suddenly flared up and died. Was that a signal ? The cloud passed over the city and reflected the yellow glare of its lights. A fine rain began to fall. It was gruesomely still.

“ Is he really sleeping ? ”

Several days thus passed in the new and delightful sensation of Freedom ; then dark threads of suspicion and fear entered, and spread like black veins in white marble. The tyrant received the tidings of his dethronement with ominous quiet. Robbed of his sovereignty, how can a man remain so calm unless he is plotting some enormity ? . . . How can the people rest

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when in their midst still lives a being with secret magic powers of destruction? Fallen, he still is terrible! Captive, still he works his fiendish spells, whose power only increases by distance, as the earth, seen dark near by, yet shines in the blue depths of space a brilliant star. But even among his attendants tears are shed over his woes. A woman was seen to kiss his hand—a guard was known to wipe his eyes—a preacher discoursed on pity. As though even now he were not far happier than thousands of mortals who have never known the light, and whose daily lives are one long sacrifice! Who will answer for it that the nation will not return to-morrow to its former delusions—crawl on its knees to plead for pardon and restore the throne whose overthrow has cost much toil and pain? . . .

Frightened and enraged, the hydra-headed mob listened in the Assembly. Strange new terrors were awakened by the speeches. They talked of his inviolability. That one might not sentence him as others are sentenced—could not punish him as others are punished—dared not kill him—for he is King. . . . Then kings do still exist? Even those who in the same breath extol Liberty and the People must acknowledge this—men of probity, foes of tyranny. Some of the nation which has broken the grim and blasphemous might of these same kings. . . . Fatal blindness!

Already the majority inclines to mercy, as though the yellow mists drawing nearer from

the Tower were entering the sacred precincts of the Assembly, clouding their reason, blinding their clear vision and strangling infant Liberty. Doubts and fears creep into all hearts, many hands clutch their weapons. "'Twere better to die with Brutus than to live with Octavius!" . . . The last cry of scorn rings out: "Would you have but one *Man* in your nation and thirty-five million cattle?"

Yes, that is their decision. Silently they droop their eyes. They are tired of battle and strife, and in their weariness, their stretching and yawning, and their cool, indifferent words, the outline of a throne again dawns into view. A few cries, a few dull speeches, the blind silence of unanimous treachery — and Freedom lay dying! The white-wreathed bride, dead at the wedding feast!

But listen! One hears. . . . They are coming.

A sound like the roll of a thousand great drums. . . . Tramp, tramp, tramp! They are coming in from the outskirts—tramp, tramp, tramp!—to support the cause of Freedom—tramp, tramp, tramp! Woe to the apostates! Tramp, tramp, tramp! Woe to the renegades!

The citizens ask permission to march past the Assembly. Who can stay an avalanche, or dare bid the earthquake cease? "Thus far the world is thine—beyond, thou shalt not go."

Suddenly the doors burst in! There they are, the peasants! Grimy faces, bare breasts, parti-coloured rags, stormy cries of mad excitement.

Portentous harbingers of disorder! A marching chaos! Tramp, tramp, tramp!—flaming, glowing eyes, lances, scythes, pitchforks, pickets, men, women and children—tramp, tramp, tramp!

“Long live our deputies! Hurrah for Liberty! Death to the traitors!”

The Honourable Members smile deprecatingly, and bow politely. One loses one's head in this endless stream that passes like a swift current through a gorge. All faces look alike, all cries melt into one great roar. The sound of stamping feet is like the patter of heavy rain-drops on the roof, deafening, benumbing, overwhelming. . . . Gigantic drops on a giant roof—tramp, tramp, tramp!

They march for an hour, two hours, three. Night approaches; lights flare and smoke. The two great dark openings, the one through which the citizens pour in, and the other through which they disappear, are like two yawning chasms. Between them a black stream relieved with gleam of steel.

Before the weary eyes of the watchers they appear as a hallucination. An endless belt; then again, a monstrous bloated hairy worm. Those above feel as though they are standing on a bridge, and begin to swim. . . .

And amidst all this dawns the clear consciousness that, “This is the People!” And pride grows, and a sense of strength. A yearning for greatness and a yet untasted freedom. A great nation! What a joy! Tramp, tramp, tramp!

Eight hours they marched, and still no end. From both sides—from where they enter, and where they vanish—thunders the Hymn of the Revolution. The words are lost. Only the rhythm, the rise and fall, are clear—the sudden silence and the stormy outburst.

“To arms! March on, march on, and fear no foe! To victory or death!”

They march . . .

A vote is no longer necessary. Liberty has again been saved.

VI

THE great day of the King's trial dawned. Dim Dominion, old as time, must give its answer to the people, a thousand years enslaved—to the world it has so long outraged with its triumph—and madness. Robbed of his jester's bauble and the golden throne, robbed of his sounding titles, and stripped of all the strange symbols of authority, he must come before his people and give clear answer. . . . Whence was his might? Who gave him the right and the power in his one person to control the millions—to work evil unpunished, to use force, to suppress liberty, to deal out death and wounds! . . . The voice of the multitude has convicted him as a foregone conclusion. Clemency there is none—there can be none for him. “Yet before his execution let him open his shrouded soul. Let him lay bare to us not his deeds (those we all know), but the thoughts and the feelings of a king.” . . . The mythical dragon that devoured maidens and terrorised the land lies bound on the market-place—and soon the mob shall touch his scaly back, his forked tongue and his reeking jaws.

A vague uneasiness was brewing. As night fell, armed masses moved through the streets in all directions, flooding the squares and cross-

ings. Along the route of the King stood a forest of bayonets, a wall of forbidding faces, stern and awe-inspiring. Over the dark outline of peaked roof and spire hung a dusky yellow sky. The cold, cloudy sky of a city, as old as the houses themselves with their rusty; sooty gables. . . . The city slumbered in dismal foreboding of the great and fearful day. But down the streets marched orderly files of citizen-soldiers with quiet; muffled tread; then came cannon rumbling along, their muzzles to the ground, on each a bright red flare of fuse.

A desultory command to wake someone whose sleep is restless. Do they fear the King himself or fear for his safety? No one knows. But all know that the people were to muster in their full strength and hold themselves in readiness. The day refused to dawn. Huddled clouds, yellow and ragged, hung high over the churches, and as the King left the Tower the sun shone out through a rift overhead—a lucky omen for the People—an ominous warning to the Tyrant.

Thus they led him. Through the narrow lane of close-packed soldiers marched the armed guards, one, two, ten—one cannot count them. Then step by step, close ringed by sabre, gun and bayonet, a black coach, scarcely moving. Cannon follow, and guards again. And down the long and weary way, before the coach, behind, and round about, a deadly silence. . . . At one point of the square a few uncertain voices shouted: "Death to the Twentieth!"

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but the mob refusing to take up the cry, it died again like a bear-hunt where only the small dogs yap, while the great hounds silently husband their strength and save up their hate for the spring.

The instigators of this great movement are long since dead, scattered, and forgotten—forgotten too their thoughts, their hopes, their aspirations. The distant thunder of their words seems thin and childish pining. The mighty Liberty of their dreams lies in a tiny cradle, shielded from swarming flies and from the garish light by only a thin curtain. Strange little men they seem. Pigmies, undermining a mountain.

But these! Grown in the storm, and nourished in the blast, fond nurslings of those days of dread—days when bleeding heads were borne like pumpkins on a pike; days of leaping hearts whose blood poured out in mighty bursts of Titan eloquence—eloquence whose every word was sharper than a dagger, each thought more deadly than a bullet. These, knowing only the will of the people, have laid the shrouded ghost of Empire; but now, grown cool and worldly (trained automatons), like lawyers they chase a will-o'-the-wisp (the terror of the superstitious and the foolish); like surgeons they dissect the members to discover the black poisons of tyranny and treachery. . . . See! without the walls the noise subsides, and silence settles black and deep like a midnight sky. Hark! The cannons

boom near by and then are dumb. . . . A slight movement at the entrance. All take their places—they must receive this tyrant seated. They strive to appear indifferent. . . . Heavy tread throughout the building, of sentries posted, and a rattle of grounded guns. Thunder of cannon behind the walls—an iron ring, they surround the hall, with muzzles pointed against the world—north, south, east and west.

A tiny object has entered.

From the upper benches it seems a small round manikin, with hasty but uncertain movements. Closer, it appears a corpulent man of medium height, with a large nose reddened by cold; wrinkled cheeks, and small dull eyes; a mixture of good-nature, insignificance and stupidity. He turns his head from side to side, bowing slightly, not sure they are greeting him. Wavering he stands, with legs astraddle, uncertain whether to seat himself or not. All are dumb. But behind him stands a chair, evidently for him, and he takes his place—at first timidly, then more at ease, and finally with a lordly mien. He seems to have a cold—hastily pulls out his handkerchief and blows his nose repeatedly with a loud noise and visible satisfaction. Then he settles himself again, puts back the handkerchief and stiffens with a grandiloquent air. . . . He is ready.

. . . So that was the Twentieth!

VII

THEY had expected a king, and a fool had come. They awaited a dragon, and a snuffy old fellow with a handkerchief had arrived! It was laughable, and strange—and a little painful.

“But perhaps this is a substitute?”

“It is I—the King!” said the Twentieth.

Yes, it is he! How droll! Do kings look like that? . . . They smile and shrug; bite their lips and wink mockingly from side to side of the hall, as though to say: “Is he not lovely!”

The delegates are grave—most grave—pale, even. Doubtless responsibility weighs upon them. But the people are silent and happy. “How did they reach the hall?” They must have poured in at the windows like water—have seeped through in the cracks, perhaps through the keyhole. A motley crew of tatterdemalions, a hundred strong, but thoroughly friendly, they crowd about the delegates. “Do we disturb you, citizens?” They are most polite. In dark groups they perch like birds upon the window-sills, barring the light and signalling to friends below, amusing messages apparently.

But the delegates are grave, most grave—pale, even. They fix their bulging eyes like

telescopes upon the Twentieth, gazing at him long in wonder; then turn away with clouded brows. Some close their eyes—it evidently disgusts them to behold the tyrant.

“Citizen Representative,” whispers a polite ragamuffin to one of these with mock horror, “do you see how the eyes of the Tyrant glow?”

Without raising his downcast lids: “Yes.”

“Ah! but he has drunk his fill of our blood!”

“Yes.”

“You are not talkative, citizen.”

Silence. . . . Below, the Twentieth is murmuring something. “He cannot see why they accuse him. He has always loved his people, and the people have loved him—and even now he loves them, in spite of this outrage. And if they think a republic better suited to them—a republic they shall have. He has nothing against it.”

“Then why did you call on the other tyrants?”

“I did not call them. They came of themselves.”

A lying answer. They had found the hidden documents.

But he lied clumsily and stupidly, like any other poor rogue under accusation. He even feels himself injured, as he really has thought constantly of his people. “It is not true that he is pitiless; he has always been gracious when it was possible. It is not true that he has wrecked the State, for he has never spent more than any

well-to-do citizen. He has never been a prodigal. He loves his classics and his cabinet-work—all the furniture in his study is of his own making ! ”

Yes, this is true ! Observe him closely, and you will see only an ordinary citizen, one of such men (pot-bellied and with a monstrous nose) as you may find on any holiday along the river fishing aimlessly for hours—absurd, insignificant creatures with large noses.

And yet he was a king. How could that be ! In that case anyone might be a king. Then even a gorilla could be made absolute monarch of the universe, with a golden throne and godlike honours. Even he could dictate to the people : a hairy gorilla crawled from out his jungle. . . .

The early autumn twilight falls, and the mob becomes impatient. “ Why so much ceremony over this tyrant ! It will only end in fresh treason ! ”

The representatives who have left the hall meet in a quiet, dimly lighted ante-room. They recognise each other and bow in silence ; then turn and pace together, each warily holding himself aloof. . . . Finally, with a sudden grip of the other’s shoulder, the first one cries : “ Tell me, where is this tyrant ? ”

“ I do not know. I am ashamed to go in there.”

“ Ghastly thought. Can this insignificance be tyranny ? Can such a cipher be a tyrant ? ”

“ I do not know. I am ashamed.”

It was still in the ante-room, but from all

sides — from the Assembly, from the Square, thick-packed with people, came a loud simultaneous uproar. . . . Perchance the single words were low, but their burden swelled to elemental fury, like thunder of surf.

The walls were splotched with lurid red! They had kindled the torches below. Heavy steps drew near, and a dull clash of arms. They were changing the Watch. . . . “Whom were they guarding? *Him* perhaps?”

“He must be banished.”

“No. The nation would not permit that. He must be killed.”

“But that again would be treason!”

Lights stream out, and sullen shadows crawl and dance upon the walls, as though vague dreams of the bloody past, and the endless future were chasing by. On the Square the clamour swells. Single voices are heard.

“I have known my first Fear this day.”

“And I, Despair—and Shame!”

“Ah yes, Despair! Your hand, brother. . . . How cold it is! Here, in the presence of the unknown Fear, at this moment of our greatest ignominy, let us swear eternal faith to this unhappy Freedom. To-day I feel that we must fall, but dying, brother, let us shout: ‘Liberty! Liberty!’ till the world of slaves shall tremble with horror. Brother, your hand.”

Again it was still. Red lights flickered on the walls and silent shadows leaped and tangled. But from the Square the tumult grew as though

an ocean had risen from its vasty deeps. Snatches of song, howls, and above the chaos of sound, the sharp, jagged outline of a hideous cry: "Death! death to the Tyrant."

They rose, and hearkened, and pondered. . . . Time passed on, but still they stood immovable between the frenzied shadows on the walls as though they had thus stood for ages. Thousands of transparent years enwrapped them with the great and awful silence of eternity. Shadows groped among them, cries rose and fell, and leaped seething again to the windows. At times one clearly heard the ruffled rhythm of the waves, and headlong dash of the surf: "Death! death to the Tyrant!"

"Come, let us go."

"Yes, let us go. Fool that I was—I thought to-day would end our struggle with tyranny."

"Alas! It has only begun. Let us go."

Dark passages, stone steps, silent vault-like halls. Then suddenly a light advances, a glow as from a furnace. Confused voices like hundreds of parrots screaming at once—a low open door—and at their feet a giant cavern, dim and vaporous, set round with faces reddened by the torches' glare.

A voice from somewhere—loud applause—the speaker has just ended.

Far below in the cavern, between two jets of light is seen the figure of the Twentieth. He wipes his brow (How close it seems!), bends low over the table, and murmurs something

unintelligible. It is his first speech for the Defence! . . .

“Now then, Twentieth! You are king! Speak! Stand up for your rights!” . . .

No, he only mumbles something—the idiot! Poor tragic fool!”

VIII

MANY could see the execution of the King from the roofs, but even here there was not room for all, so some were not privileged to behold how monarchs are beheaded.

But the tall steep houses seemed alive with black fluttering hair in place of roofs, and open windows like dark glancing eyes. Behind the houses rose pointed spires, and looking close, one saw that each cross-beam was black and crawling. The people thronged to gaze, though nothing could be seen from there. From the roofs the scaffold appeared a tiny plaything, like a child's cart overthrown, with broken shafts. The crowd in the Square had melted into an indistinguishable ant-heap, only a few delegates visible about the platform. Up from the dense level of the swarm they toiled, and, laboriously climbing the unseen stairs, moved to and fro, like puny ants, erect. It seemed strange to think that beside one, on the roof, stood people with life-size heads, with noses, and with mouths.

Drums rolled.

A little close carriage moved toward the scaffold. For a long time one could distinguish nothing—then a small group slowly made its way up the invisible steps. It parted, and stood

aside. One sole, tiny figure remained in the centre.

Drums rolled, and hearts stood still!

With sudden crash the drum-beat ceased. The tiny figure raised its little hand, let it fall, raised it again. Surely he speaks, but no sound comes. What is he saying? The drums roll out, tearing the air in a thousand quivering tatters, making it impossible to hear. . . . Something moves on the scaffold. The little figure has disappeared. They are beheading it!

The drums crash, and again break off abrupt and hollow. Silence! . . . On the spot where a moment since the Twentieth had stood now appears another wee figure with outstretched hand. He holds something quite tiny—white on one side, dark on the other, like a pinhead painted in two colours. This was but now the head of the King. At last! . . .

Amid the jeers of the mob, and buffeting them off, they convey the bier with the trunk and the head of the King. It was feared that the wrath of the people would not spare even his remains, for the mob was terrible. Slaves of superstition, they doubted even yet that the invisible despot had laid his neck under the headsman's axe. In blind dread they pressed toward the scaffold. "Eyes can deceive, and ears can betray, and one must touch the knife, breathe in the fumes of the royal blood, and dip the arms to the elbow." They struggle—some fall shrieking. Something soft like a bundle of tatters lies under

foot—crushed to death—another—many such. . . . Arrived at the ruins of the scaffold, they break small pieces off, wrenching at the nails; then grasp whole beams in their eagerness, only to fall under their load a few steps further. The torrent closes over them, the beams give, reappear and sink again; nothing but a jagged end yet visible, which finally vanishes.

They find a fresh pool of blood where they dabble their clothes and their kerchiefs. Many touch it to their lips, and trace strange signs upon their foreheads. With the blood of the King they anoint the new majesty of Freedom.

Transported with joy, they writhe in wild and breathless dance. Without speaking or singing, they dash aimlessly about, shaking their bloody rags on high, and spread over the city with incoherent screams and strange, irrepressible laughter. They start a song, but its rhythm and flow seem tame, and again they break out in shrieks of laughter. They hurry off to thank the Assembly for freeing the nation from tyranny. On their way they stop to hang a traitor who has dared to cry: "The King is dead! Long live the King! Hurrah for the Twenty-first! . . ."

Many who had loved the King in secret could not endure the thought of his execution, and went mad; many cowards among them took their own lives. Till the last moment they had expected some unknown power to intervene and save him, in answer to their prayers. But as these were

answered by the headsman, despair overcame them, and they stabbed themselves, some in silent gloom, others with fierce blasphemies. . . . Some again, yearning for martyrdom, rushed out upon the streets and ran to meet the howling mob, crying in frenzy: "Long live the Twenty-first!"—and they met their end. . . .

The day waned, and night drew on—a gloomy night of justice, blind to all distinctions. Many lights still burned in the city, but the river under its arches was black and flowing soot. Only there on the bend, where the twilight still lingered behind the old Tower, the water shone dull with the cool reflection of polished metal. Two shapes stood on a bridge, and, leaning over the ledge, peered into the gloomy depths.

"Do you believe that Freedom has dawned to-day?" asked the first . . . and he spoke softly, for the light still burned in the city, while the river at their feet shone black.

"See, there goes a corpse!" said the other, speaking softly too; for the body was drawing near, its bluish face turned toward them. "So many of them are floating on the river—they are drifting out to sea."

"I do not trust their Liberty—they are over-much pleased at the death of this miserable wretch!"

Out of the city where the lights still burned came a babel of voices, laughter and song—they were merry there. . . .

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“ Authority must die! ” said the first.

“ Slavery must be done to death. There is no authority, there are only slaves. ”

Again a corpse went by—another—more and more, in countless numbers! Where do they come from? How suddenly they all dive under the bridge! . . .

“ But they all love Liberty? ”

“ No! They only dread the lash. When once they have learned to love Freedom, then they will be free. ”

“ Let us go! It sickens me to see these corpses. ”

They turn to leave. But suddenly while the city lights still burned, and the river flowed black as soot, something heavy and sullen rose in the west, born of the darkness and of the light! . . . Where the river lost itself in its black banks, and dusky shadows stirred as though alive, grew something monstrous—shapeless—blind. It rose and stood immovable. And though it had no eyes, it saw! Shapeless, it stretched its hands toward the city! Lifeless, yet it lived and breathed. . . . It was gruesome! . . .

“ That is mist from the river, ” said the one.

“ No, it is a cloud, ” said the other.

It was both mist and cloud.

“ It seems to see—— ”

It did see.

“ It seems to hear. ”

“It is coming this way.”

“No! it stood motionless. Monstrous—shapeless—blind——”

Red glowed the reflection of the city lights across the plain, while beyond, the dark river lost itself in its black banks, and the dusk stirred as though alive. . . . Wavering corpses drifted along and disappeared in the darkness. Others emerged, careered, and sank in silence—countless silent dead!—with dreams as cold and black as the waters which bore them.

But in the great Tower, where that morning they had led forth the King, the one-eyed watch-maker still slept beneath the pendulum. All day he had rejoiced in the quiet of his Tower. He had even sung—the one-eyed fellow sang—and wandered happily about among his cogs and levers until dark. He handled the ropes, sat on the stairs, drummed with heels, and hummed to himself—meanwhile not looking at the pendulum, for he pretended to be vexed with it. Now and again he glanced at it askance and laughed. Joyfully, the pendulum laughed back! Swinging hither and yon, its copper face a-grin, it whispered:

“What was—will be! . . . What was—will be!” . . .

“Come, come!” jeered the one-eyed man, shaking with laughter. . . .

“What was—will be! . . . What was—will be!”

When darkness came, he laid himself to rest

and slept profoundly : but the pendulum kept guard, and all night long it moved throughout its orbit, wafting strange dreams over his head.

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