

a monster, isn't it? I should jolly well think it was. What's *Cracowie*, Uncle Peter?

'Oh,' said Lord Peter, greatly relieved, 'the Cracow monster?' A portrait of that distressing infant certainly argued a respectable antiquity. 'Let's have a look. Quite right, it's a very old book—Munster's *Cosmographia Universalis*. I'm glad you know good stuff when you see it, Gherkins. What's the *Cosmographia* doing out here, Mr Ffolliott, at five bob?'

'Well, my lord,' said the bookseller, who had followed his customers to the door, 'it's in a very bad state, you see; covers loose and nearly all the double-page maps missing. It came in a few weeks ago—dumped in with a collection we bought from a gentleman in Norfolk—you'll find his name in it—Dr Conyers of Yelsall Manor. Of course, we might keep it and try to make up a complete copy when we get another example. But it's rather out of our line, as you know, classical authors being our speciality. So we just put it out to go for what it would fetch in the *status quo*, as you might say.'

'Oh, look!' broke in Gherkins. 'Here's a picture of a man being chopped up in little bits. What does it say about it?'

'I thought you could read Latin.'

'Well, but it's all full of sort of pothooks. What do they mean?'

'They're just contractions,' said Lord Peter patiently. "'*Solent quoque huius insule cultores*'"—It is the custom of the dwellers in this island, when they see their parents stricken in years and of no further use, to take them down into the market-place and sell them to the cannibals, who kill them and eat them for food. This they do also with younger persons when they fall into any desperate sickness.'

'Ha, ha!' said Mr Ffolliott. 'Rather sharp practice on the poor cannibals. They never got anything but tough old joints or diseased meat, eh?'

'The inhabitants seem to have had thoroughly advanced notions of business,' agreed his lordship.

The viscount was enthralled.

'I do like this book,' he said; 'could I buy it out of my pocket-money, please?' 'Another problem for uncles,' thought Lord Peter, rapidly ransacking his recollections of the *Cosmographia* to determine whether any of its illustrations were indelicate; for he knew the duchess to be strait-laced. On consideration,

he could only remember one that was dubious, and there was a sporting chance that the duchess might fail to light upon it.

'Well,' he said judicially, 'in your place, Gherkins, I should be inclined to buy it. It's in a bad state, as Mr Ffolliott has honourably told you—otherwise, of course, it would be exceedingly valuable; but, apart from the lost pages, it's a very nice clean copy, and certainly worth five shillings to you, if you think of starting a collection.'

Till that moment, the viscount had obviously been more impressed by the cannibals than by the state of the margins, but the idea of figuring next term at Mr Bultridge's as a collector of rare editions had undeniable charm.

'None of the other fellows collect books,' he said; 'they collect stamps, mostly. I think stamps are rather ordinary, don't you, Uncle Peter? I was rather thinking of giving up stamps. Mr Porter, who takes us for history, has got a lot of books like yours, and he is a splendid man at footer.'

Rightly interpreting this reference to Mr Porter, Lord Peter gave it as his opinion that book-collecting could be a perfectly manly pursuit. Girls, he said, practically never took it up, because it meant so much learning about dates and type-faces and other technicalities which called for a masculine brain.

'Besides,' he added, 'it's a very interesting book in itself, you know. Well worth dipping into.'

'I'll take it, please,' said the viscount, blushing a little at transacting so important and expensive a piece of business; for the duchess did not encourage lavish spending by little boys, and was strict in the matter of allowances.

Mr Ffolliott bowed, and took the *Cosmographia* away to wrap it up.

'Are you all right for cash?' enquired Lord Peter discreetly. 'Or can I be of temporary assistance?'

'No, thank you, uncle; I've got Aunt Mary's half-crown and four shillings of my pocket-money, because, you see, with the measles happening, we didn't have our dormitory spread, and I was saving up for that.'

The business being settled in this gentlemanly manner, and the budding bibliophile taking personal and immediate charge of the stout, square volume, a taxi was chartered which, in due course of traffic delays, brought the *Cosmographia* to 110A Piccadilly.

'And who, Bunter, is Mr Wilberforce Pope?'

'I do not think we know the gentleman, my lord. He is asking to see your lordship for a few minutes on business.'

'He probably wants me to find a lost dog for his maiden aunt. What it is to have acquired a reputation as a sleuth! Show him in. Gherkins, if this good gentleman's business turns out to be private, you'd better retire into the dining-room.'

'Yes, Uncle Peter,' said the viscount dutifully. He was extended on his stomach on the library hearthrug, laboriously picking his way through the more exciting-looking bits of the *Cosmographia*, with the aid of Messrs. Lewis & Short, whose monumental compilation he had hitherto looked upon as a barbarous invention for the annoyance of upper forms.

Mr Wilberforce Pope turned out to be a rather plump, fair gentleman in the late thirties, with a prematurely bald forehead, horn-trimmed spectacles, and an engaging manner.

'You will excuse my intrusion, won't you?' he began. 'I'm sure you must think me a terrible nuisance. But I worried your name and address out of Mr Ffolliott. Not his fault, really. You won't blame him, will you? I positively badgered the poor man. Sat down on his doorstep and refused to go, though the boy was putting up the shutters. I'm afraid you will think me very silly when you know what it's all about. But you really mustn't hold poor Mr Ffolliott responsible, now, will you?'

'Not at all,' said his lordship. 'I mean, I'm charmed and all that sort of thing. Something I can do for you about books? You're a collector, perhaps? Will you have a drink or anything?'

'Well, no,' said Mr Pope, with a faint giggle. 'No, not exactly a collector. Thank you very much, just a spot—no, no, literally a spot. Thank you; no—he glanced round the bookshelves, with their rows of rich old leather bindings—certainly not a collector. But I happen to be er, interested—sentimentally interested—in a purchase you made yesterday. Really, such a very small matter. You will think it foolish. But I am told you are the present owner of a copy of Munster's *Cosmographia*, which used to belong to my uncle, Dr Conyers.'

Gherkins looked up suddenly, seeing that the conversation had a personal interest for him.

The Learned Adventure of the Dragon's Head

'UNCLE Peter!'

'Half a jiff, Gherkins. No, I don't think I'll take the Catullus, Mr Ffolliott. After all, thirteen guineas is a bit steep without either the title or the last folio, what? But you might send me round the Vitruvius and the Sasyricon when they come in, I'd like to have a look at them, anyhow. Well, old man, what is it?'

'Do come and look at these pictures, Uncle Peter. I'm sure it's an awfully old book.'

Lord Peter Wimsey sighed as he picked his way out of Mr Ffolliott's dark back shop, strewn with the flotsam and jetsam of many libraries. An unexpected outbreak of measles at Mr Bultridge's excellent preparatory school, coinciding with the absence of the Duke and Duchess of Denver on the Continent, had saddled his lordship with his ten-year-old nephew, Viscount St George, more commonly known as Young Jerry, Jerrykins, or Pickled Gherkins. Lord Peter was not one of those born uncles who delight old nurses by their fascinating 'way with' children. He succeeded, however, in earning tolerance on honourable terms by treating the young with the same scrupulous politeness which he extended to their elders. He therefore prepared to receive Gherkins's discovery with respect, though a child's taste was not to be trusted, and the book might quite well be some horror of woolly mezzotints or an inferior modern reprint adorned with leprous electros. Nothing much better was really to be expected from the 'cheap shelf' exposed to the dust of the street.

'Uncle! there's such a funny man here, with a great long nose and ears and a tail and dogs' heads all over his body. *Monstrum hoc Cracovie*—that's

'Well, that's not quite correct,' said Wimsey. 'I was there at the time, but the actual purchaser is my nephew. Gerald, Mr Pope is interested in your *Cosmographia*. My nephew, Lord St George.'

'How do you do, young man,' said Mr Pope affably. 'I see that the collecting spirit runs in the family. A great Latin scholar, too, I expect, eh? Ready to decline *iusjurandum* with the best of us? Ha, ha! And what are you going to do when you grow up? Be Lord Chancellor, eh? Now, I bet you think you'd rather be an engine-driver, what, what?'

'No, thank you,' said the viscount, with aloofness.

'What, not an engine-driver? Well, now, I want you to be a real business man this time. Put through a book deal, you know. Your uncle will see I offer you a fair price, what? Ha, ha! Now, you see, that picture-book of yours has a great value for me that it wouldn't have for anybody else. When I was a little boy of your age it was one of my very greatest joys. I used to have it to look at on Sundays. Ah, dear! the happy hours I used to spend with those quaint old engravings, and the funny old maps with the ships and salamanders and "*Hic dracones*"—you know what *that* means, I dare say. What does it mean?'

'Here are dragons,' said the viscount, unwillingly but still politely.

'Quite right. I *knew* you were a scholar.'

'It's a very attractive book,' said Lord Peter. 'My nephew was quite entranced by the famous Cracow monster.'

'Ah yes—a glorious monster, isn't it?' agreed Mr Pope, with enthusiasm. 'Many's the time I've fancied myself as Sir Lancelot or somebody on a white war horse, charging that monster, lance in rest, with the captive princess cheering me on. Ah! childhood! You're living the happiest days of your life, young man. You won't believe me, but you are.'

'Now what is it exactly you want my nephew to do?' enquired Lord Peter a little sharply.

'Quite right, quite right. Well now, you know, my uncle, Dr Conyers, sold his library a few months ago. I was abroad at the time, and it was only yesterday, when I went down to Yelsall on a visit, that I learnt the dear old book had gone with the rest. I can't tell you how distressed I was. I know it's not valuable—a great many pages missing and all that—but I can't bear to think of its being gone. So, purely from sentimental reasons, as I said, I hurried off to Ffolliott's to see if I could get it back. I was quite upset to find I was too late, and gave

poor Mr Ffolliott no peace till he told me the name of the purchaser. Now, you see, Lord St George, I'm here to make you an offer for the book. Come, now, double what you gave for it. That's a good offer, isn't it, Lord Peter? Ha, ha! And you will be doing me a very great kindness as well.'

Viscount St George looked rather distressed, and turned appealingly to his uncle.

'Well, Gerald,' said Lord Peter, 'it's your affair, you know. What do you say?'

The viscount stood first on one leg and then on the other. The career of a book-collector evidently had its problems, like other careers.

'If you please, Uncle Peter,' he said, with embarrassment, 'may I whisper?'

'It's not usually considered the thing to whisper, Gherkins, but you could ask Mr Pope for time to consider his offer. Or you could say you would prefer to consult me first. That would be quite in order.'

'Then, if you don't mind, Mr Pope, I should like to consult my uncle first.'

'Certainly, certainly; ha, ha!' said Mr Pope. 'Very prudent to consult a collector of greater experience, what? Ah! the younger generation, eh, Lord Peter? Regular little business men already.'

'Excuse us, then, for one moment,' said Lord Peter, and drew his nephew into the dining-room.

'I say, Uncle Peter,' said the collector breathlessly, when the door was shut, 'need I give him my book? I don't think he's a very nice man. I *hate* people who ask you to decline nouns for them.'

'Certainly you needn't, Gherkins, if you don't want to. The book is yours, and you've a right to it.'

'What would *you* do, uncle?'

Before replying, Lord Peter, in the most surprising manner, tiptoed gently to the door which communicated with the library and flung it suddenly open, in time to catch Mr Pope kneeling on the hearthrug intently turning over the pages of the covered volume, which lay as the owner had left it. He started to his feet in a flurried manner as the door opened.

'Do help yourself, Mr Pope, won't you?' cried Lord Peter hospitably, and closed the door again.

'What is it, Uncle Peter?'

'You—*you* are—' growled Peter I.

'Oh, my name is Bredon all right,' said the young man cheerfully. 'I loathe aliases. Like another fellow's clothes, you know—never seem quite to fit. Peter Death Bredon Wimsey—a bit lengthy and all that, but handy when taken in instalments. I've got a passport and all those things, too, but I didn't offer them, as their reputation here seems a little blown upon, so to speak. As regards the formula, I think I'd better give you my personal cheque for it—all sorts of people seem able to go about flourishing Bank of England notes. Personally, I think all this secret diplomacy work is a mistake, but that's the War Office's pigeon. I suppose we all brought similar credentials. Yes, I thought so. Some bright person seems to have sold himself very successfully in two places at once. But you two must have been having a lively time, each thinking the other was me.'

'My lord,' said the count heavily, 'these two men are, or were, Englishmen, I suppose. I do not care to know what Governments have purchased their treachery. But where they stand, I, alas! stand too. To our venal and corrupt Republic I, as a Royalist, acknowledge no allegiance. But it is in my heart that I have agreed to sell my country to England because of my poverty. Go back to your War Office and say I will not give you the formula. If war should come between our countries—which may God avert!—I will be found on the side of France. That, my lord, is my last word.'

Wimsey bowed.

'Sir,' said he, 'it appears that my mission has, after all, failed. I am glad of it. This trafficking in destruction is a dirty kind of business after all. Let us shut the door upon these two, who are neither flesh nor fowl, and finish the brandy in the library.'

'No,' he said, 'no. Genuine Imperial Tokay is beyond the opportunities of Grub Street, I fear. Though I agree with you that it is horribly overrated—with all due deference to yourself, monsieur le comte.'

'In that case,' said the count, 'we will pass at once to the liqueur. I admit that I had thought of puzzling these gentlemen with the local product, but, since one competitor seems to have scratched, it shall be brandy—the only fitting close to a good wine-list.'

In a slightly embarrassing silence the huge, round-bellied balloon glasses were set upon the table, and the few precious drops poured gently into each and set lightly swinging to release the bouquet.

'This,' said Peter I., charmed again into amiability, 'is, indeed, a wonderful old French brandy. Half a century old, I suppose.'

'Your lordship's praise lacks warmth,' replied Bredon. 'This is *the* brandy—the brandy of brandies—the superb—the incomparable—the true Napoleon. It should be honoured like the emperor it is.'

He rose to his feet, his napkin in his hand.

'Sir,' said the count, turning to him, 'I have on my right a most admirable judge of wine, but you are unique.' He motioned to Pierre, who solemnly brought forward the empty bottles, unwashed now, from the humble Chablis to the stately Napoleon, with the imperial seal blown in the glass. 'Every time you have been correct as to growth and year. There cannot be six men in the world with such a palate as yours, and I thought that but one of them was an Englishman. Will you not favour us, this time, with your real name?'

'It doesn't matter what his name is,' said Peter I. He rose. 'Put up your hands, all of you. Count, the formula!'

Bredon's hands came up with a jerk, still clutching the napkin. The white folds spurted flame as his shot struck the other's revolver cleanly between trigger and barrel, exploding the charge, to the extreme detriment of the glass chandelier. Peter I stood shaking his paralysed hand and cursing.

Bredon kept him covered while he cocked a wary eye at Peter II, who, his rosy visions scattered by the report, seemed struggling back to aggressiveness.

'Since the entertainment appears to be taking a lively turn,' observed Bredon, 'perhaps you would be so good, count, as to search these gentlemen for further firearms. Thank you. Now, why should we not all sit down again and pass the bottle round?'

'If you want my advice, Gchekins, I should be rather careful how you had any dealings with Mr Pope. I don't think he's telling the truth. He called those wood-cuts engravings—though, of course, that may be just his ignorance. But I can't believe that he spent all his childhood's Sunday afternoons studying those maps and picking out the dragons in them, because, as you may have noticed for yourself, old Munster put very few dragons into his maps. They're mostly just plain maps—a bit queer to our ideas of geography, but perfectly straight-forward. That was why I brought in the Cracow monster, and, you see, he thought it was some sort of dragon.'

'Oh, I say, uncle! So you said that on purpose!'

'If Mr Pope wants the *Cosmographia*, it's for some reason he doesn't want to tell us about. And, that being so, I wouldn't be in too big a hurry to sell, if the book were mine. See?'

'Do you mean there's something frightfully valuable about the book, which we don't know?'

'Possibly.'

'How exciting! It's just like a story in the *Boys' Friend Library*. What am I to say to him, uncle?'

'Well, in your place I wouldn't be dramatic or anything. I'd just say you've considered the matter, and you've taken a fancy to the book and have decided not to sell. You thank him for his offer, of course.'

'Yes—er, won't you say it for me, uncle?'

'I think it would look better if you did it yourself.'

'Yes, perhaps it would. Will he be very cross?'

'Possibly,' said Lord Peter, 'but, if he is, he won't let on. Ready?'

The consulting committee accordingly returned to the library. Mr Pope had prudently retired from the hearthrug and was examining a distant bookcase.

'Thank you very much for your offer, Mr Pope,' said the viscount, striding stoutly up to him, 'but I have considered it, and I have taken a—a—a fancy for the book and decided not to sell.'

'Sorry and all that,' put in Lord Peter, 'but my nephew's adamant about it. No, it isn't the price; he wants the book. Wish I could oblige you, but it isn't in my hands. Won't you take something else before you go? Really? Ring the bell, Gchekins. My man will see you to the lift. Good evening.'

When the visitor had gone, Lord Peter returned and thoughtfully picked up the book.

'We were awful idiots to leave him with it, Gherkins, even for a moment. Luckily, there's no harm done.'

'You don't think he found out anything while we were away, do you, uncle?'

gasped Gherkins, open-eyed.

'I'm sure he didn't.'

'Why?'

'He offered me fifty pounds for it on the way to the door. Gave the game away. H'm! Bunter.'

'My lord?'

'Put this book in the safe and bring me back the keys. And you'd better set all the burglar alarms when you lock up.'

'Oo—er!' said Viscount St George.

On the third morning after the visit of Mr Wilberforce Pope, the viscount was seated at a very late breakfast in his uncle's flat, after the most glorious and soul-satisfying night that ever boy experienced. He was almost too excited to eat the kidneys and bacon placed before him by Bunter, whose usual impeccable manner was not in the least impaired by a rapidly swelling and blackening eye.

It was about two in the morning that Gherkins—who had not slept very well, owing to too lavish and grown-up a dinner and theatre the evening before—became aware of a stealthy sound somewhere in the direction of the fire-escape. He had got out of bed and crept very softly into Lord Peter's room and woken him up. He had said: 'Uncle Peter, I'm sure there's burglars on the fire-escape.' And Uncle Peter, instead of saying, 'Nonsense, Gherkins, hurry up and get back to bed,' had sat up and listened and said: 'By Jove, Gherkins, I believe you're right.' And had sent Gherkins to call Bunter. And on his return, Gherkins, who had always regarded his uncle as a very top-hatted sort of person, actually saw him take from his handkerchief-drawer an undeniable automatic pistol.

It was at this point that Lord Peter was apotheosed from the state of Quite Decent Uncle to that of Glorified Uncle. He said:

'This,' said Peter I, 'is certainly hock, and the noblest hock I have ever tasted, but I must admit that for the moment I cannot precisely place it.'

'No?' said Bredon. His voice was like bean-honey now, sweet and harsh together. 'Nor the other gentleman? And yet I fancy I could place it within a couple of miles, though it is a wine I had hardly looked to find in a French cellar at this time. It is hock, as your lordship says, and at that it is Johannisberger. Not the plebeian cousin, but the *echter* Schloss Johannisberger from the castle vineyard itself. Your lordship must have missed it (to your great loss) during the war years. My father laid some down the year before he died, but it appears that the ducal cellars at Denver were less well furnished.'

'I must set about remedying the omission,' said the remaining Peter, with determination.

The *poulet* was served to the accompaniment of an argument over the Lafitre, his lordship placing it at 1878, Bredon maintaining it to be a relic of the glorious 'seventy-fives, slightly over-matured, but both agreeing as to its great age and noble pedigree.

As to the Clos-Vougeot, on the other hand, there was complete agreement; after a tentative suggestion of 1915, it was pronounced finally by Peter I to belong to the equally admirable though slightly lighter 1911 crop. The *pre-salé* was removed amid general applause, and the dessert was brought in.

'Is it necessary,' asked Peter I, with a slight smile in the direction of Peter II—now happily murmuring, 'Damn good wine, damn good dinner, damn good show'—'is it necessary to prolong this farce any further?'

'Your lordship will not, surely, refuse to proceed with the discussion?' cried the count.

'The point is sufficiently made, I fancy.'

'But no one will surely ever refuse to discuss wine,' said Bredon, 'least of all your lordship, who is so great an authority.'

'Not on this,' said the other. 'Frankly, it is a wine I do not care about. It is sweet and coarse, qualities that would damn any wine in the eyes—the mouth, rather—of a connoisseur. Did your excellent father have this laid down also, Mr Bredon?'

Bredon shook his head.

The count's face was a study as he slowly detached his fascinated gaze from Peter II to fix it on Peter I.

'If I had to be impersonated by somebody,' murmured the latter gently, 'it would have been more flattering to have had it undertaken by a person to whom all white wines were *not* alike. Well, now, sir, this admirable vintage is, of course, a Montrachet of—let me see—he rolled the wine delicately upon his tongue—'of 1911. And a very attractive wine it is, though, with all due deference to yourself, monsieur le comte, I feel that it is perhaps slightly too sweet to occupy its present place in the menu. True, with this excellent *consommé marmite*, a sweetish wine is not altogether out of place, but, in my own humble opinion, it would have shown to better advantage with the *confitures*.'

'There, now,' said Bredon innocently, 'it just shows how one may be misled. Had not I had the advantage of Lord Peter's expert opinion—for certainly nobody who could mistake Montrachet for Sauterne has any claim to the name of Winsey—I should have pronounced this to be, not the Montrachet-Ainé, but the Chevalier-Montrachet of the same year, which is a trifle sweeter. But no doubt, as your lordship says, drinking it with the soup has caused it to appear sweeter to me than it actually is.'

The count looked sharply at him, but made no comment.

'Have another olive,' said Peter I kindly. 'You can't judge wine if your mind is on other flavours.'

'Thanks frightfully,' said Bredon. 'And that reminds me—' He launched into a rather pointless story about olives, which lasted out the soup and bridged the interval to the entrance of an exquisitely cooked sole.

The count's eye followed the pale amber wine rather thoughtfully as it trilled into the glasses. Bredon raised his in the approved manner to his nostrils, and his face flushed a little. With the first sip he turned excitedly to his host.

'Good God, sir—' he began.

The lifted hand cautioned him to silence.

Peter I sipped, inhaled, sipped again, and his brows clouded. Peter II had by this time apparently abandoned his pretensions. He drank thirstily, with a beaming smile and a lessening hold upon reality.

'Eh bien, monsieur?' enquired the count gently.

'Look here, Gherkins, we don't know how many of these blighters there'll be, so you must be jolly smart and do anything I say sharp, on the word of command—even if I have to say 'Scoot.' Promise?'

Gherkins promised, with his heart thumping, and they sat waiting in the dark, till suddenly a little electric bell rang sharply just over the head of Lord Peter's bed and a green light shone out.

'The library window,' said his lordship, promptly silencing the bell by turning a switch. 'If they heard, they may think better of it. We'll give them a few minutes.'

They gave them five minutes, and then crept very quietly down the passage. 'Go round by the dining-room, Bunter,' said his lordship; 'they may bolt that way.'

With infinite precaution, he unlocked and opened the library door, and Gherkins noticed how silently the locks moved.

A circle of light from an electric torch was moving slowly along the bookshelves. The burglars had obviously heard nothing of the counter-attack. Indeed, they seemed to have troubles enough of their own to keep their attention occupied. As his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, Gherkins made out that one man was standing holding the torch, while the other took down and examined the books. It was fascinating to watch his apparently disembodied hands move along the shelves in the torch-light.

The men muttered discontentedly. Obviously the job was proving a harder one than they had bargained for. The habit of ancient authors of abbreviating the titles on the backs of their volumes, or leaving them completely untitled, made things extremely awkward. From time to time the man with the torch extended his hand into the light. It held a piece of paper, which they anxiously compared with the title-page of a book. Then the volume was replaced and the tedious search went on.

Suddenly some slight noise—Gherkins was sure *he* did not make it; it may have been Bunter in the dining-room—seemed to catch the ear of the kneeling man.

'Wot's that?' he gasped, and his startled face swung round into view.

'Hands up!' said Lord Peter, and switched the light on.

The second man made one leap for the dining-room door, where a smash and an oath proclaimed that he had encountered Bunter. The kneeling man shot his hands up like a marionette.

'Gherkins,' said Lord Peter, 'do you think you can go across to that gentleman by the bookcase and relieve him of the article which is so inelegantly disending the right-hand pocket of his coat? Wait a minute. Don't on any account get between him and my pistol, and mind you take the thing out *very* carefully. There's no hurry. That's splendid. Just point it at the floor while you bring it across, would you? Thanks. Bunter has managed for himself, I see. Now run into my bedroom, and in the bottom of my wardrobe you will find a bundle of stout cord. Oh! I beg your pardon; yes, put your hands down by all means. It must be very tiring exercise.'

The arms of the intruders being secured behind their backs with a neatness which Gherkins felt to be worthy of the best traditions of Sexton Blake, Lord Peter motioned his captives to sit down and despatched Bunter for whisky-and-soda.

'Before we send for the police,' said Lord Peter, 'you would do me a great personal favour by telling me what you were looking for, and who sent you. Ah! thanks, Bunter. As our guests are not at liberty to use their hands, perhaps you would be kind enough to assist them to a drink. Now then, say when.'

'Well, you're a gentleman, guv'nor,' said the First Burglar, wiping his mouth politely on his shoulder, the back of his hand not being available. 'If we'd a known wot a job this wos goin' ter be, blow me if we'd a touched it. The bloke said, ses 'e, "It's takin' candy from a baby," 'e ses. "The gentleman's a reg'lar sofie," 'e ses, "one o' these 'ere sersieriy toffs wiv a maggot fer old books," that's wot 'e ses, "an' ef yer can find this 'ere old book fer me," 'e ses, "there's a pony fer yer." Well! Sech a job! 'E didn't mention as 'ow there'd be five 'undred fousand bleedin' ole books all as alike as a regiment o' bleedin' dragons. Nor as 'ow yer kept a nice little machine-gun like that 'andy by the bedside, *now* yet as 'ow yer was so bleedin' good at tyin' knots in a bit o' string. No—'e didn't think ter mention them things.'

'Deuced unsporting of him,' said his lordship. 'Do you happen to know the gentleman's name?'

'No—that was another o' them things wot 'e didn't mention. 'E's a stout, fair party, wiv 'orn rims to 'is goggles and a bald 'ead. One o' these 'ere phil-

'Accident, and my butler, having placed you at my right hand, monsieur,' went on the count, addressing Peter I, 'I will ask you to begin by pronouncing, as accurately as may be, upon the wine which you have just drunk.'

'That is scarcely a searching ordeal,' said the other, with a smile. 'I can say definitely that it is a very pleasant and well-matured Chablis Moutonne; and, since ten years is an excellent age for a Chablis—a real Chablis—I should vote for 1916, which was perhaps the best of the war vintages in that district.'

'Have you anything to add to that opinion, monsieur?' enquired the count, deferentially, of Peter II.

'I wouldn't like to be dogmatic to a year or so,' said that gentleman critically, 'but if I must commit myself, don't you know, I should say 1915—decidedly 1915.'

The count bowed, and turned to Bredon.

'Perhaps you, too, monsieur, would be interested to give an opinion,' he suggested, with the exquisite courtesy always shown to the plain man in the society of experts.

'I'd rather not set a standard which I might not be able to live up to,' replied Bredon, a little maliciously. 'I know that it is 1915, for I happened to see the label.'

Peter II looked a little disconcerted.

'We will arrange matters better in future,' said the count. 'Pardon me.' He stepped apart for a few moments' conference with the butler, who presently advanced to remove the oysters and bring in the soup.

The next candidate for attention arrived swathed to the lip in damask.

'It is your turn to speak first, monsieur,' said the count to Peter II. 'Permit me to offer you an olive to cleanse the palate. No haste, I beg. Even for the most excellent political ends, good wine must not be used with disrespect.'

The rebuke was not unnecessary, for, after a preliminary sip, Peter II had taken a deep draught of the heady white richness. Under Peter I's quizzical eye he wilted quite visibly.

'It is—it is Sauterne,' he began, and stopped. Then, gathering encouragement from Bredon's smile, he said, with more aplomb, 'Château Yquem, 1911—ah! the queen of white wines, sir, as what's-his-name says.' He drained his glass defiantly.