

CHAPTER XIII

AS the result of much thinking Buddy found himself the next evening at the Prince of Wales's Hotel, Southport, Lancs, with a resigned Tonio in attendance, and the steel despatch-case, a Latin Testament, a Latin dictionary, and a typewriter as important articles of travel. The books were easily discoverable on the library shelves. The preliminaries of the journey were fraught with irritating difficulties.

The web of thirty years' growth that had enmeshed his trivial private life—or rather the life of Atherton—with Bronson's, had to be tactfully broken. Bronson expected to know where he was going, to take tickets, accompany him to the station, wire ahead for hotel accommodation, to follow the immutable routine of the perfect manservant's life. Buddy's mastering idea was to escape from Bronson, to disappear for a time, at any rate, from Bronson's ken, so that he should not be disturbed by the dreadful Greek, Andrea Chrysolos. He was aware also that Bronson's nerves had been giving way under the strain of continuous mendacity. Selous, friend and physician, had tried Bronson almost to breaking-point. To subject Bronson to sudden shock would be unwise.

The other was Westover, the chauffeur, intolerable though unsuspecting spy on his actions. As a man of dignity he found it impossible to ignore his faithful servitors. It seemed easy enough to bid Bronson

pack, say a fortnight's necessaries, call a taxi, and drive whithersoever he cared, with no regard for anybody. But Bronson and Westover would surely meet and shake their heads and discuss their master's unprecedented behaviour, which had been eccentric enough already.

Wherefore Buddy, after a careful examination of railway time-tables, informed Bronson that Professor Gaffarelli and himself were going to the mild climate of Torquay to work at a new book—Bronson was very proud of Atherton's books—but whether he would stay with Lord Ellerby, the famous scholar, or at the Imperial Hotel he couldn't know until Lord Ellerby met him at the station." A wire would inform Bronson. Bronson, zealous and happy, made all arrangements. Westover drove his master to Waterloo. A porter took charge of the luggage. Buddy, with a few hours to spare, had the luggage put in the cloak-room, and laughed the happy laugh of the free man. He crossed the bridge, walked along the Embankment—it was a morning of pale sunshine and east wind which Buddy found exhilarating—paused to look through the railings at the grey enchantment of the Temple, went on, entered the City and had an early and joyous luncheon of oysters, steak and stout.

Retrieving his luggage at Waterloo, he joined Tonio at Euston and was carried, a lost baronet, to Southport. At the hotel he sank his baronetcy, registering as "A. Drake"—the letters "A.D." being boldly printed on his suit-cases.

When they were shown into their comfortable sitting-room—which Tonio had been secretly instructed to order—Buddy flung out his hands.

"Thank God we're out of prison!"

Tonio said humbly:

"To me one place is very like another. But could

you tell me why we have come to this strange, far-away town?"

"It's a million to one chance of anybody knowing me here. It's the home of rich Manchester and Liverpool business men among whom I don't think I have a single acquaintance. I've also heard it has more sun in winter than any other spot in England."

After dinner Buddy put the mangled steel despatch-box on the table, and drew from it the Latin Testament and dictionary and the cipher letter which he had received from Chrysolos. Also a pad of manuscript paper, a fountain-pen and a pencil. Tonio, the typewriter in front of him, sat opposite with the patience of a man whom no eccentricity on the part of his employer could surprise.

Buddy had a confused memory that the Lord's Prayer occurred somewhere at the end of the fifth chapter of St. Matthew. He found it in the sixth.

"I want you to copy that out."

Tonio looked at it and shrugged. "That is the Paternoster. Why, I know it by heart."

"It's the spelling that's important," said Buddy. "Leave an inch space between each line."

Whereupon Tonio began to type, and Buddy watched the crippled yet deft fingers working out the first steps to a great discovery.

He had not slept since he had crawled into the Mansions the night before, having arrived there by long and devious routes so as to throw Chrysolos, possible spy and tracker, off the scent. He had at once searched the bookshelves for some volume that would give him the text of the Paternoster, but after half an hour he grew tired. So many of the shelves were in gloom. He had postponed the search till the morning light, and meanwhile he had to continue to think—to make plans for the further outwitting of

Chrysolos, who apparently held Atherton at his mercy. In the morning, there was the Latin Testament staring at him from the top shelf. But time was precious. Many things must be done before starting for the Torquay train: instructions to Tonio; bamboozling of servants; obtaining a large sum of ready money from the bank. He had deliberately to put off testing the cipher till they arrived at their secure destination. But all the day curious anxiety had gnawed him, and now, as he watched Tonio's fingers, the anxiety became a torment.

Tonio handed him the typescript sheet. With fingers that shook he pencilled what he remembered of Chrysolos's rapid explanation. This was the result:

I2345	I23456	I23	I2	I2	I23456	I23456789	10	11	I2	I3
Pater	noster	qui	es	in	coelis	sanctific	e	t	u	r
1	2	3	4	5	6				7	

I2345	I234	I2345678	I23456	I234	I234	I2345678
nomen	tuum	adveniat	regnum	tuum	fiat	voluntas
8	9	10	11	12	13	14

I23	I2345	I2	I2345	I2	I2	I2345	I2345	I234567
tua	sicut	in	coelo	et	in	terra	Panem	nostrum
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23

I23456789	10	11	I2	I2345	I2345	I2	I234567	I2345
quotidian	u	m	da	nobis	hodie	et	dimitte	nobis
	24		25	26	27	28	29	30

I23456	I23456	I2345	I2	I23	I23456789	10
debita	nostra	sicut	et	nos	dimittimu	s
31	32	33	34	35	36	

I23456789	10	11	I234567	I2	I2	I23	I234567	I2
debitorib	u	s	nostris	et	ne	nos	inducas	in
	37		38	39	40	41	42	43

I23456789	10	11	I23	I23456	I23	1	I234	I ² 34
tentation	e	m	sed	libera	nos	a	malo	Amen
	44		45	46	47	48	49	50

There was the key to the cipher, one to be preserved only in the memory of men, its preservation in written code being obviously imbecile; defying the cipher experts of the world. They might guess that it depended on a text. But there were myriads of texts familiar to man's memory: "Mary had a little lamb . . .", "Allons, enfants de la patrie . . ." Nay, any conceivable set of words that could be memorized by the users of the code. It was expert proof. The

letter "t", for instance. It could be $\frac{3}{1}$ or $\frac{1}{12}$ or $\frac{4}{24}$ or $\frac{5}{31}$. . . and so on with other letters. Simplicity itself.

He regarded the page fascinated. There were just fifty words. The idea struck him that the choice of text was a scholar's cunning. He looked for letters. From the English alphabet the only missing ones were J.K.W.X.Y.Z. He had enough common sense to know that they would have got over the difficulty somehow. His school memories suggested that in Latin "J" and "I" were interchangeable; that "C" is always hard and might take the place of "K" at a pinch; that "W" might easily be represented by a double "U." The letter "Y"—funny it should not appear in the Paternoster. The things hammered into his careless brain at Eton reappeared through the palimpsest of overlying memories. The letter "Y" was only used in transliteration from the Greek—chiefly in proper names. . . .

He caught sight of himself, a grubby, chubby boy in a big collar, sitting in a form-room among twenty or thirty of his disgusted peers, half listening, one June day—the lovely sunlight streaming through old windows—to a perfectly futile Ass in gown and white tie telling them that *lachrima* could be spelt with a "y" or an "i." There was a lazy fly crawling up his desk. He bet with himself that the fly wouldn't crawl

up to the edge. He held his breath. He lost. He turned his attention to the Ass. The Ass's name was John Young. He slipped his neighbour a scribbled slip: "Iohn Ioung." The Ass's hawk eye had seen the passing and had called for the paper. . . . "You'll do me 500 lines: *sunt lachrimæ rerum*. It may teach you scholarship, philosophy, and perhaps the avoidance of personal flippancy." The unmitigated Ass! How he loathed him. And yet now—the Ass suddenly came in useful. And yet again—why had he forgotten?—on practically his last day at Eton the Ass had come up to him, swaggering youngster, jauntily bearing the burden of athletic honours, yet, in his boyish heart, not far from tears at the thought of leaving, and put his hand on his shoulder and said: "Look here, old chap, if there's anything I can ever possibly do for you, do let me know." And the Ass got himself gallantly killed in the War. *Sunt lachrimæ rerum!* My God! "Y" or "I," what did it matter? The eyes of Buddy, for the moment forgetful of cipher, were blurred with the tears of human things.

Buddy looked over at Tonio and bade him make another copy. And while Tonio obediently clicked, he prepared to decipher the last letter of Chrysolos.

The text started:

$$\frac{6}{10}, \frac{7}{87}, \frac{3}{91}, \frac{3}{24}, \frac{2}{26}, \frac{2}{13}, \frac{4}{6}, \frac{1}{946}, \frac{6}{10}$$

He looked. Sixth letter of tenth word was "I." The seventh letter of the eighty-seventh word . . . ? But there were only fifty words in the Paternoster. There was a catch somewhere. The seventh letter of the eighth word? But there were only five letters in the eighth word "*nomen*." But the seventh letter of the seventh word was "f." The first two fractions therefore gave him the very sound word "if." And so,

carrying on experimentally, he found, with no great exercise of intelligence, that as the denominator represented the numerical place of the word, and as the number of words were only fifty, any initial six, seven, eight or nine, unless a solitary digit, could be disregarded—a grace note, as it were, flung in to make the thing more difficult—and that attention must be paid to the second digit. The same reasoning applied to superfluous digits in the numerators. The fraction $\frac{29}{13}$ could in itself represent nothing, as there was no word with twenty-nine letters. But $\frac{2}{13}$ was again the letter “i.”

Thus, in unaccustomed concentration of brain, he worked out the sequence of letters which he pencilled in capitals:

IFTOOIL

“Good God, Tonio!” he cried, in excitement. “I’ve got it. Take this down: ‘If too ill.’”

And so in great excitement he deciphered the whole letter.

“If too ill to attend to payments I must insist on alternative already discussed, namely the payment of capital sum of twenty thousand pounds, before the end of the year. Indeed, in view of your precarious health this seems the only reasonable solution. You must transfer me amount in bearer bonds for obvious reasons. We have relied on each other’s honour in the past. You can rely on mine in the future if you accede. But if you play false I must reluctantly use my weapon. I have earned my share. A. C.”

But where A. C.—obviously Andrea Chrysolos—lived, the letter heading gave no indication. There

was only the date. And the letter contained no reference to the mysterious Lothbury banking account or to the name under which Atherton held that account in order to supply Mr. Andrea Chrysolos with his secret subsidy.

Tonio, after taking down the letter word by word dictated from Buddy's pencil deciphering, read it aloud and passed the typescript across the table.

"That is blackmail, Buddy," said he.

"Unashamed," said Buddy.

"But why does he—A. C.—think that you are going to die?"

"I nearly died once in Chicago, didn't I? And if it hadn't been for you I shouldn't be alive now."

Tonio sighed. "You were so simple then. You are complicated now."

"All this"—he waved towards the box—"is my heritage. My heritage from my brother, my twin brother. Once I was just Buddy Drake, the bum actor. Now I am Sir Atherton Drake, the title is hereditary—collateral, next-of-kin anyway—and all the damned papers are my late brother's. That's why I was so anxious to break open the despatch-box."

"But why—tell me, for I can't understand," said Tonio in his quiet, puzzled way. "Why did the letter come addressed to you, Sir Atherton Drake?"

"That's the name I go by."

"But it was meant for the man who is being blackmailed."

"Naturally. I'm being blackmailed—on my brother's account. Can't you see?" said Buddy rather sharply. "Let us get on with it."

Tonio, with a duplicate key to the cipher and Buddy's supplementary explanations, set to work on a typescript which Buddy had drawn haphazard from the box. Buddy set to work on another. Decoding to

the non-expert is a tedious business, especially when there are no spaces between words. It was only after much puzzling that they discovered that a zero in the numerator of a fraction corresponded with the word "stop" in a telegram.

"I can make no sense," said Tonio, after a long and concentrated struggle.

"Neither can I," said Buddy, looking up over the typewriter, across the table. "As far as I can make out, it's in Latin."

"Mine isn't," said Tonio. "I know a few Latin words. I sang in the choir when I was a boy in a little church down by Hoboken."

"Let's look at it."

Tonio passed the painfully decoded array of pencilled capital letters across to Buddy, who stared at it until his eyes grew blinded, and his head reeled. There could be nothing wrong with the cipher. The decoding of the letter had been a matter of comparative simplicity. It could only be a question of language. Then, after much staring, there appeared an assemblage of letters: NICHT and further on another WIEVIEL.

"Good God!" cried Buddy. "It's in German, and I don't know more than a dozen words in the beastly language. Do you?"

"How should I know German?" asked Tonio.

"And this," said Buddy, trying his hand on his own typescript, "is in Latin, and all I've remembered about Latin is—well, it has gone into the dust of the stars."

Tonio pricked up his ears.

"You say? What you say?"

Buddy, Britannically self-conscious, grew confused and replied:

"All gone into star-dust."

"That's very beautiful," said Tonio.

"Just came into my head," said Buddy. "We must try something else."

By four o'clock in the morning they had deciphered or rather had turned pages and pages of fractions into a welter of alphabetical letters which, from here and there a gleam of a known world such as "*nicht*" or "*sunt*," proclaimed themselves to be records either in German or Latin. They tried sheet after sheet, selected haphazard, of the pinned-together typescript and manuscript. In never a one did they find a trace of the English language.

They were tired out. Further effort seemed hopeless. They went to bed.

The next morning before lunch they strolled down Lord Street, Southport's thoroughfare of pride, the spacious boulevard of gay shops. It was a brisk sunny day. The pavements were crowded with a multitude of pretty women, their bright fresh faces issuing from collars of furs. A row of shiny cars lined the kerb. Little groups—two or three at a time—of women stood and prattled for a moment and vanished into the shops on errands of housewifery or vanity. The poulterer's, spotless, enticing, a kind of heaven for all kinds of clean and plump birds of paradise—fowls, turkeys, pheasants, woodcock, snipe—was as much thronged with the fur-clad, scented and kindly-faced women as the draper's next door. Women, happy, well-clad women; women bent on women's happy and serious duties. That was Buddy's sensitive impression. But where were the men? Here and there, of course, an elderly fellow, fur-coated and gloved, pursued down Lord Street the even tenor of his daily way. There were brisk young fellows, too, who threaded their way along the pavement, obviously on business bent. But they were not, as Buddy

rightly surmised, the partners or associates of the gentle throng in the shops. They belonged to a lower social stratum.

It took him a day or two—after cheerful converse with the manager of the hotel, and wandering through the mazes of residential roads—to realize the unique character of this sun-filled, gay northern town. It has no industries. It makes nothing, and is proud of it. As a seaside town it is further from a fathom of sea water than any coast town in the world. Silly summer visitors if they want to bathe must do so in an artificial tank surrounded by scenic railways and water-chutes and other traps for the many-headed. But Southport regards summer tourists as either non-existent, or as a plague of flies. Southport is self-contained. Taking it house by house, it contributes far more to the Exchequer by way of income-tax than any town of its population in the United Kingdom. And why?

Every house in Southport disgorges every morning a prosperous looking man who takes train to Liverpool or Manchester, and every house, between the hours of five and seven in the afternoon, receives him after his day's money-making toil. The men depart in thousands in the morning leaving the womenfolk; and in thousands in the evening to rejoin their womenfolk do they return. It is almost patriarchal in its stern sociological inevitableness. And the women must accept the inevitable. They do so gaily, playing their dignified parts in the butchers' and bakers' and fishmongers' shops in Lord Street.

"All this," said Buddy, explaining England to Tonio, "is damned interesting."

"But in America the wives of business men do just the same thing," said Tonio, not greatly impressed.

Buddy thought; threw his mind back to the rare

glimpses of sweet American life which had been allowed him in his foolish vagabondage.

"I suppose you're right, Tonio. The decent savage man goes out and gets food for his family. The decent savage woman stays at home and prepares the previous day's kill for the good chap to eat. We can't get away from the elemental. If you strip 'em naked and cover them with skin and beads, all these women are just squaws. But, Tonio," he clapped the little man on the shoulder, "look at the spirituality, the infinite web of intellectuality and emotionalism—God knows what—they've developed! That's what knocks me. Look at that woman. A goddess——"

She was, indeed, a stately Junoesque woman whom, idly, they had observed ordering cabbages or what not in a greengrocer's shop.

"Look at her. Doing squaw's work. And, I'd bet my life, all for the sake of a beefy son of a bitch of a husband who'd only use his tomahawk in the dark when no one was looking."

Tonio looked slyly up. "Since when have you become a feminist, Buddy?"

"Since I came into this beastly life," replied Buddy cryptically.

After lunch Tonio suggested a return to work over the typescript. But Buddy pleaded the need of relaxation. They must proceed with the daily practice in conjuring. He took a childish delight in these lessons. His fingers were apt, his mind was quick, and his patience as a learner equalled that of Tonio as a teacher. Already he could make the pass, the flicking of a card from front to back of the hand, the basis of all prestidigitation. He must do it, said his professor, until he didn't know that he was doing it, that being the only way for his audience not to know he was doing it. He could also produce wooden eggs

from his mouth and half-crowns from the air. Tonio also was initiating him into the secrets of mechanical magic dependent on trick appliances.

"We'll go over to Manchester to-morrow and get an outfit," said Buddy.

And that, for their absurd sojourn in Southport, was the simple history of their lives. They walked up and down Lord Street in the morning, sometimes strolling along the parade with its deserted array of chutes and railings and whirligig spirals that looked, in winter-time, like giant skeletons of things that in summer must be blooming in gay foliage. They found the cosy oyster-bar where the *cognoscenti* of Southport whet their appetites for luncheon on what the late George Augustus Sala—or his contemporary co-Daily Telegraphists, with their now despised but really immortal sense of word-values—called "succulent bivalves", and champagne of true vintage. In the afternoon they conjured. In the evenings they deciphered fractions into streams of alphabetical letters, unseparated words, unpunctuated sentences, which they knew were important documents couched in Latin or German, neither of which they could read.

Yet, by degrees, Buddy could space off here and there a few Latin words. A bright idea occurred to him. Manchester was a University town. The University could supply scholarship to anyone who needed it. He had but to get into touch with a young classical lecturer—the University would surely issue a Calendar, procurable in Manchester—who for a fee would undertake the task of further deciphering and translation. The same, too, with regard to the German. The University must be teeming with brainy linguists.

They went by the quick and comfortable train to Manchester. They found a shop where they could buy their elementary conjuring apparatus, and

an educational bookshop where they bought the annual publication of the Victoria University of Manchester. He had already settled upon two names—names of lecturers—he thought professors would be too high and mighty to bother with such trivial matters as translations, and had already drafted letters, which, in Tonio's typescript, lay before him for signature, when a word or two crystallized themselves out of a page of unintelligible letters.

He had dismissed Tonio for the night. He himself, tired and worried, was about to go to bed. But a still blazing fire and a remaining shot of whisky in the bottle had lured him to continued investigation.

In pencil he traced the recognizable words :

"*Dic instantanter quant . . . vigint mil sat . . . exempl. fœderis. . . .*"

This, at any rate, was simple. The writer said : "Say instantly how much . . ."—the Latin was obviously abbreviated—"Twenty thousand pounds enough . . . copy of treaty."

Buddy's schoolboy Latin had faded from his mind. But *fœdus*, *fœderis*, a treaty, like *exercitus*, an army, or *tria millia passuum*, three thousand yards, must be imbedded in the memory of every man who, as a small boy, has been bored to drivelling imbecility by the dullest and least inspired book that generations of educational idiots have ever given a small boy to read—Cæsar's *De Bello Gallico*.

Fœderis? A copy of a Treaty would be a big order. But the word might equally mean an agreement. And he went on through the page and picked out *Italor* and *Ruman* . . . and *corpus exercit* . . . *num centum quat* . . . and a hundred other isolated and mutilated words which, set together even with dots between, conveyed to his brain a paralysing conviction of awful iniquity.

Twenty thousand pounds offered—almost obviously haggled over—for the betrayal of some Italian and Rumanian agreement entered into during the War.

With trembling fingers he tore into small pieces the two letters so light-heartedly dictated to Tonio. The secrets that these pages of unseparated alphabetical letters contained could not be entrusted to young men of the Victoria University of Manchester. They must lie for ever unrevealed to man. He took the clump of typescript, the result of a week's work, together with the two numbered Paternoster keys, into his bedroom and, a very frightened man, locked the door.

He had, as far as memory served, never locked his bedroom door during the course of his careless life. But here he was carrying with him a secret that, if known, as the blackmailer, Andrea Chrysolos, had hinted, to the Foreign Office or to Scotland Yard, would wither into dust all that remained of the eminent scholar, late Minister of the Crown, Sir Atherton Drake, Baronet.

