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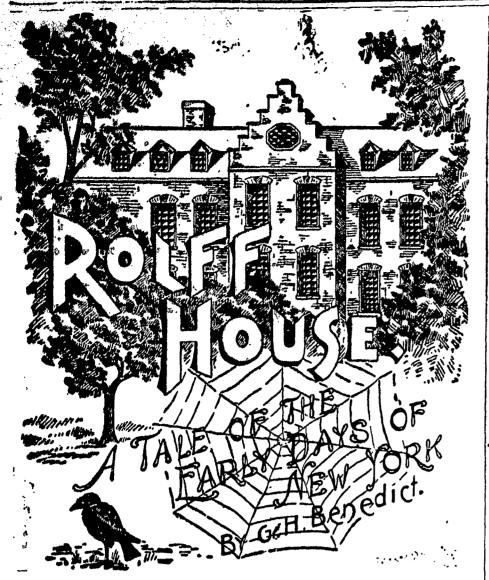
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CHAPTER XV.

Obedient to his instructions, old Carl Crum had taken his departure from the venerable roof that had sheltered his head so long, and for which he felt an almost romantic attachment, and domiciled himself in a tenant house on the Rolff place near the ferry that had for so many years been the scene of his labors. What the old fellow thought on the subject of his disgrace from the confidence he had enjoyed in Roiff House for so many years, nobody had an opportunity to know precisely, for he maintained a dignified silence, and went about his duties with his usual tactiturn industry.

But if old Carl viewed his displacement by the vagabond Leb. Sackett with seeming indifference, his faithful companion in the service of Rolff House, old Margaret, did not. The advent of Mr. Sackett, which took place the very day of Carl's departure. aroused the spirit of the worthy dame in quite an unlooked-for manner, and led to a volubility of indignant expression of her feelings rather surprising to that individual.

Leb. affected to treat it all with easy indifference, however, and at once made himself at home in his new position. "It is quite needless for you to rail at

me, fair and amiable Margaret," he replied, to one of the old woman's out bursts: "the powers that be have put me here, and here I mean to stay. You will like my company better after you get better acquainted with me"-and his lips parted in a satirical smile that showed his yellow fangs in a not very agreeable manner.

"Like a wolf." snapped old Margaret. her faded blue eyes fairly blazing her hatred and indignation. "A pretty nead you are for Rolff House, indeed, you thief and vagabond, as your father and mother were before you. What have you come here to steal? Oh, I'll watch you—I'll watch you." And watch him she did. Leb. soon

found that it would have been impossible to have put a more vigilant and unrelenting detective on his actions than this faithful old domestic. She would steal around the house after him in the most tireless and noiseless way, and the constant fear of being under her observation rather interrupted the pleasure he had promised himself in exploring the nooks and crannies of the strange old mansion. Whenever he betook himself to a new field of investigation, he was pretty sure soon to be greeted with the picture of old Margaret's grey head and wrinkled features framed in the shadow of a doorway or window, with all-observing eyes fixed fearlessly and suspiciously upon him.

But Leb. was not the kind of a man to be easily discouraged. He resolved mentally "to fix the old lady." and, pending his reflections on the matter. he took occasion to report her attitude to his employer.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to get rid of her in some way," suggested the amiable Mr. Saybrook. "I might drop her in the old well, or

look her up in one of the old collars and leave her there," responded Mr. Sackett. "Nobody would ever take the trouble to incuire about her, I reckon." "No, no; that wouldn't do," answered

the lawyer. "You must think of some other plan. I don't want her hurt. It might make trouble." "Well," continued Leb., "I'll try and

fix it in some way. I feel a big interest in having her out of the way, but 1 have a good deal bigger interest in keeping myself out of trouble. So I ain't likely to do anything very wicked. Hang her, though, I'd enjoy the little job of wringing her weazened old reck But I suppose I will have to put up with her awhile yet. I'll see what can be done."

No further reference was made to the subject, and two or three weeks dipped by without any change of atfairs in Rolf House. Old Margaret, in the meantime, did not become a bit reconciled to the presence of Leb. Sackett, and that worthy found her watcafuiness and vigorous enmity to be anything but agreeable to him in his new

But gradually rumors began to be whispered about of strange occurrences at Rolf House. Lights had been seen moving about the house by those passing at night. Some one had seen spark, and flames proceeding from the great south chimney at midnight, and it was surmised that the Evil One had been on one of his periodical visits to the old

Leb Backett was of course interrogated at these occurrences; but he denied any knowledge as to their cause lithough he admitted that there were er things' going on in the house. Wheeli you what the said to a group conficted to come to very one conficted to come to com

nights i never heard the like. Rats No. it ain't rats, I tell you. Rats don't open and bang doors, raise and let down windows, flash lights about the house, and utter the most awful groans and shrieks. Rats don't carry the furniture about from one room to another during the night, and pull a fellow out of bed all in a heap, as I was the other night. There's old Margaret-it's just the queerest thing how those ghosts persecute her. She's regularly scared, and says it all a judgment because ! was put in the house. Well, it's my opinion that this ain't the first time, the devil has been to pay in Rolff House, though there's never been ally body there before to own up to the facts of the case. The spooks have beer

to make up for lost time." "Ain't you afraid, Leb?" asked one "But why?" he made naste to unge.
"Most truly, I have seen no reason to of the listeners, whose own teeth fairly chattered at the ghostly details he had incline me to believe that your attitude heard.

ghosts down there sometimes. I don't you' want to say much: I can stand the about that cellar."

Leb. was now the hero of the hour. house at nights, and never failed to en- and devotion " tertain their cronies on their return Tears sprang to the eyes of the young had witnessed.

or three weeks. Rolf House was en- planation. joying a reputation it had never before in the matter were suddenlyy greatly it. increased by the flight of old Margaret from the house to the abode of a niece, replied Ralph, showing no sign of disa married woman of middle age, living comfiture, "I do not see how it entirely in the village, where she arrived smit-shuts me out from hope. I had reason, ten with moral terror, and at once took perhaps, to suspect such a fact, but I to-bed with serious illness in conse- also had reason to believe that it was quence of the nervous excitement she not an objection that would prove in had undergone.

each night brought new and more mysimpression upon her mind and partially shattered her well-worn faculties.

It was noticed, too, by those most inthe house. He asserted that there were Rosa, kindly but earnestly, that all not ghosts enough in Christendom to others save only yourself, perhaps, have scare him, and that he would stay in regarded his attentions to you as lackthe old house as long as he was wanted ing in real sincerity. I know that such

there. One evening, however, he did not put sume to indulge a hope of becoming in an appearance at Ronk's tavern, your suitor without first declaring my Another evening passed, and he was intentions to him, and learning that he still absent, Still a third and a fourth did not regard my character and hopes found him missing from his accustomed unfavorably; and I was given to unplace and public excitement began to derstand by him that not only was be aroused in regard to his safety. It your hand free so far as he knew, but was believed that he had come to some that even if an engagement did exist harm at the hands of the evil spirits with Mr. Rolff, it could never receive that bewitched the old house. None his consent. He regards, as I assure were so bold as to go and investigate you others regard, the ambition of that the matter, however. And so the mys- young man as of a kind that will never terious disappearance of Leb. Sackett adapt itself to the circumstances of our added to the excitement in regard to quiet little community and peaceful the ghostly doings at Rolff House.

CHAPTER XVI.

Ralph Saybrook was not a young me even the one fond lover's privilege man to take leave of his characteristic of hope for one who I am assured has shrewdness even in such a delicate mat- aiready proved false to you." ter as love-making. Having resolved to win Rosa Bruyn, he knew the best leve it," replied Rosa hastily, and with plan to lead to ultimate success was to a sudden spirit that seemed to indiboldly and persistently lay seige to her heart. He was well aware that he would be rebuffed at first, and that it would require great address and per- I cannot believe ill of him till I have sistency for him to achieve ultimate better evidence than I have yet seen." success, and all his plans were laid for conducting a long and difficult suit the evidence," replied Raiph, who with as much precision and method as Mit were a law case instead of a matrimonial project he had in hand. it was greatly to Ross's disadvantage myself as his actions would seem to door. Yes, and here is where he has

of heart and modesty of nature precluded her repulsing his advances tr.til he had gained the advantage of actually declaring his love for her. She took every possible precaution to avoid his society, it was true, but as he was not at all backward in obtruding himself upon her company, and was a frequent welcome guest of her father at his house, it was impossible for her to avoid his company entirely. Thus Raiph was offered his own opportunity to de- , Saybrook," she said hurriedly, "I canclare himself, and the occasion was well chosen. It was a beautiful early spring day, and Rosa had been to the village on some errand, when, on her way home, she was joined by the young house. lawyer. He proceeded home with her, exerting himself to be lively and entertaining, and, detaining her at the gate. managed shrewdly to engage her in an animated conversation on the appropriate subject of flora culture, which, at the reception his declaration had rebeing a topic she took a deep interest; in, she was unconsciously led out of her usual mood of studied reticence in his company, and even awakened into j some life and enthusiasm in expressing her views on a subject in which she took such a deep interest. Ralph was a young man of quite general reading, and, as is sometimes the case with tho: of the coldest and most selfish nature. had quite a passion for flowers, and wa well informed on their cultivation and capable of displaying enthusiasm and erudition in discussing the subject. So he managed to lead the guileless girl from one point to another, until at last they were holding an animated discourse on the language of flowers, and it was not long ere he had taken advantage of so favorable a turn of the conversation to introduce a subject of love and declare his attachment for

"Yes, dear Rosa," he said, in his most beguiling tones, as she stood surprised and confused in consequence of his unexpected declaration, "I love you with my whole heart. You are, to my eye, the chiefest flower in all Nature's parterre of beauty, which, to win and wear on this faithful breast I may well desire to make the ruling ambition of my life.

In reply to this ardent language, Rosa could only stammer:

"Really Mr Saybrook, I cannot listen to you You but do wrong to yourself to address me so It is my error if I have given you the slightest reason to indulge a hope that I could look favorably on your addresses. I most truly cannot. I would wrong you to leave you under the slightest delusion. Believe me, it is impossible.

Ralph was quick to catch the implied having a rest, I suppose, since the old admission of the generous-hearted girl lady's death, and now they are tryin that she might have unconsciously led him to hope for her favor.

toward me was such as to shut cut "Afraid" Yes, I am kind o' afraid." hope And even if it were, I could not replied Leb, in a matter of fact way the less admire and love you, and "but you see I have always had a sort, sherish the fond hope to win you. But of liking for ghosts, and then I ain't I will not, I cannot, indulge so terrible paid for running a way from the house a belief as that you will deliberately heven w there is something worse that not in time become more agreeable to, made a grave mistake.

yourself with such a hope."

Every day added to the burden of his thought of love may be new to "ou, dear' will I ever get this door open?" ghostly tales, of the doings at Rolff but, my dear girl, you are now of an The lawyer had been fumbling with House. There were very few in the lit. age to excite admiration and attract! unsteady hands with the lock of the tle village who were not superstitious suitors, and why should I not seek to door, but at last the wards flew back enough to put at least some faith in be among the number of your faithful and the door was opened. They hasten these stories, while the great majority worshippers? I could not expect to be ed into the house. It had flashed across received them with eager credence. without rivals, but, knowing my own Anthony Saybrook that perhaps Leb. Some whose curiosity overcome their heart. I can well indulge the hope of might have taken advantage of the opfear would watch in the vicinity of the being able to surpass all in faithfulness

with thrilling accounts of what they girl The situation was becoming very embarrassing for her, and she deter-Matters went on in this way for two mined to cut it short by a candid ex-

"Let me be frank with you, Mr Say fully borne as an abode of mischevous brook," she said. "My faith is already spirits, when the gossip and interest pledged to another, and I cannot break

"Unwelcome as the news is to me, any way insuperable Indeed. I did not From her confused statements, it know but that your relations in that was gathered that she had at first put direction had been broken off. Of no faith in the reality of the ghostly course, you allude to Claude Roiff. manifestations, attributing them solely Much as I respect and admire him as to the wicked pranks of Leb. Sackett: a friend, I cannot believe but that he but, as day after day passed by, and has lacked the sincerity and earnestness of a true manly character in his terious occurrences, her courage had attentions to you. In fact without gradually given way, till at last an breaking confidence. I think I may say event had occurred that had completely that he himself looked upon his departerrified her and caused her to fiee the ture abroad as a practical sundering of house. What this terrifying occurrence all ties that bound him to his native was she could not be induced to state. land, and that he confessed as much. but it had evidently left a most serious and I have also reason to believe that he has since formed new ties in the place of his present residence which would preclude the idea that he regardterested, that Leb. Sackett no longer ed any pledges he might lightly have wore his usual jaunty air, but seemed made to you as binding. No, no: I canunusually grave and pre-occupied in not consider that his claims should all his actions. Yet he did, not leave shut out mine. Let me assure you.

is your father's opinion. I did not preways, and that his leaving us is a practical sundering of all designs or probability of ever returning here. It would be but cruelty. Rosa, to deny

"I cannot believe it-I will not be cate that her feelings were much moved. "You all slander him; you all seem conspired together to deceive me. "Possibly you are right as regards shrewdly saw that it would not do to press the point at present. "" confess

can hardly believe so ill of Claude

in the matter that her natural goodness warrant. It is a point that perhaps a

little lapse of time will settle clearly. All I ask, my dear girl, is that you will not forbid me to indulge a hope that your hand will yet be free for me to sue for with all the ardor and deep love that is in my heart."

This request was humble enough but Rosa was scare listening. She was deeply agitated, and felt a hasty impulse to break away from the disa greeable interview.

You must excuse me now, Mr not listen to you longer. I have duties awaiting me in the house. Good day.' Turning almost abruptly, she proceeded with hasty steps toward the

The young man watched her disappear, and then turned to retrace his steps toward the village. He whistled to himself lightly as he walked along and he evidently was not disappointed ceived. His only object had been to establish himself as a declared suitor for the maiden's hand, and in that object he had been perfectly successful He was resolved that not one rebuild nor a hundred, should discourage him He meant to win by persistency, address and opportunity, and time and fortune, he well knew, were in his fa-

CHAPTER XVII.

The excitement caused by the disappearance of Leb. Sackett, and the public surmises in regard to the reasons drew easier breaths therefor, naturally came to the ears of lawyer Saybrook and his son.

"Leb seems to have managed that little job of getting old Margaret out of there again for a thousand dollars." the house very reatly," remarked Ralpi as they were discussing the matter.

said he'd try to fix it, and he has suc- bie, and it's lucky I did not break my ceeded very finely. But I am puzzled neck. I've got some good bruises as to know why he keeps himself so quiet it is." since the old lady left. Perhaps he is only trying to keep up the mystery but I have my suspicions somewhat aroused. To tell the truth, I haven't any us ill luck. I suspect it is the devil's too much confidence in Leb. He's just a trifle too smart to be trustworthy It is now four days since he has report. ed Suppose after dinner we walk over fold more gossip in regard to the old and see what is up."

Ralph assented; and, dinner being over, they proceeded to visit Rolff

As they drew near the old place, looked as silent and deserted as if is had not had an inhabitant in years They approached the great front door and the elder Saybrook placed his hand on the heavy from knocker and sound. ed an alarm vigorous enough to have waked the soundest sleeper It was soms seconds before the echoes ceased reverberating through the vacant halls and rooms

They waited, but there was no an-The summons was repeated Still no answer Again and again did Anthony Saybrook repeat the knocking in the loudest possible manner, but no response came save the muffled echoes from within.

"This is strange," he muttered, testily "What can it mean? Is it possi-The ghosts havn't hurt me, and I don't decline to listen to my suit, and at least le that Leb. has been up to some tion, or if some are superstitious enough think they will. But, I tell you, boys, not give yourself time and opportunity knavish prank, and left the place? I keep mighty clear of that old cellar to ascertain whether my attentions may Dear me' I'm afraid -I'm afraid we've "It is needless, believe me, Mr. Say- key with me. There were lots of things ghosts; but I don't feel exactly safe brook" she replied "Do not wrong in the house that were worth the steal-"Ah but Rosa, I cannot help it. The a man I knew to be a scamp? Oh,

portunity afforded him to break into the old vault, rob it of any valuables it. contained, and make good his escape. Hence his sudden agitation.

They made a hasty search of the rooms off from the old hall, and called loudly for Leb. but there was no responce.

"Let us go down into the cellar " exclaimed the elder Saybrook, who was plainly very much dismayed and discomfited by the mysterious disappearance of Leb. "I'll warrant we'll find his traces there. Yes, yes; I know his game, the d-d rascal. But we must have a light. Where can we get a

"Let us look around," interposed Ralph, who was of a less excitable nature than his father, but equally intent upon solving the mystery of Leb.'s strange actions.

After considerable search, they discovered a tinder box and the same old lantern with which Carl Crum had guided the lawyer down to the lower regions of the house on a previous occasion. The lantern had in it a piece of candle. Managing to light it, they proceeded cautiously through the dark passages and stairways down to the old cellar. The door was open, and a kev in it.

They entered, and stood for a moment in a sort of trepidation, vainly casting their eyes about in an effort to pierce the darkness of that subterranean dungeon, which the feeble flame of the

candle only made more visible. Then they advanced slowly and with extreme caution in the direction of the old vault. A sudden chill of dread had struck to their hearts, inspired by the mysterious gloom of the old cellar and the reaction from the eager excitement that had led them to penetrate its depths. As they approached the vault. carefully throwing the light of the lantern ahead of them, a sight was suddenly presented to their eyes that caused them both to start back with an exclamation of horror. The form of a man was lying on the damp cellar-floor, buried beneath the weight of a huge stone that had fallen from above upon him. Summoning courage to investigate more closely, a glance showed that the form was that of Leb. Sackett. He was stone dead, and presented an had been crushed out at once.

with blank countenances.

to work trying to break through the

drilled, and fired his powder blast, onis to loosen the stones above, however and one has fallen upon him as he ap proached to see the effect of his operations, and crushed him to death. Strange and fatal reward of his knavery! What a spectacle! It leads one to think of the stories they tell of the Evil One keeping guard over the vault I'm not superstitious. Ralph, but this thing unmans me. Let us get out of this. We can learn nothing further now. We must touch nothing till we notify the proper legal authorities It's a strange tragedy. It sickens me. Let us get out."

They turned to go, when the feeble

flame of the candle grew suddenly faint and then expired, leaving them in total darkness. The situation was one that might well inspire terror in the hearts of braver men. Already horrified as they were, the sudden quenching of the light threw them into a panic of fear. They scrambled for the cellar door, as though the Evil One himself were ready to seize them, tumbling over each other and failing sprawling on the cellar bottom. Fear added to their confusion, and they were some time in finding the door. But they at last succeeded in doing so, and hastened up the narrow stairs into the dark hall above. Here again they were in trouble, and some moments of fearful suspense were passed ere they discovered the stairway that led to the upper hall. They finally succeeded in gaining the door by which they had entered, and "Whew!" exclaimed Anthony Say-

brook, "that is the worst scrape that ever I got into. I wouldn't be down "No, nor for ten thousand," added Ralph. "I never was so scared in my Yes," responded the other. "He life—I'll own to that. I'm all in a trem-

"And I, too," added the elder, with rueful countenance. "Curse the old house; I'm afraid it is bound to bring property after all. But let us get home. We must have this matter attended to. Of course, this event will arouse tenplace. The superstitious will be more assured than ever that it is haunted by evil spirits. I confess that Leb's strange death staggers me for the moment. I must have time to get over my fright before I can think clearly about it.'

"One thing is certain," interposed Ralph, who had somewhat recovered his coolness by this time, the gate of the yard being passed. "Leb has been folled in his game of robbery, and the old vault is safe. It is good luck, after

Well, perhaps so," responded the other "But I hate terribly to be taken in by any one in such a manner. Still, as you say, it is good luck t'at the vault is safe, but what it contains I confess I don't know, though I suspect there is something valuable in it. This affair will make a big talk, but of course it will be seen at once that as many no doubt will, it can make no door is locked. Luckily I brought a difficulty now to get some one to put; in Leb.'s place, but even if we have to lock the old house up, this event will inspire such dread that I do not believe any one will be so bold as to molest it hereafter."

Thus discussing the matter, they soon reached home, and, after a short rest and consultation, the proper authorities were notified of the tragic accident that had happened in Rolff House.

The officers of the law and a few assistants soon made ready and proceeded to the scene of the strange occurreace. They were well provided with lights, and, on investigation, the hurried surmises of Anthony Saybrook in regard to the cause of Leb.'s death vere fully confirmed. He had evidently made an attempt to break in the old vault, but, failing in his first efforts, had drilled holes in the massive door and attempted to blow it out with a blast of powder. The only result had been to jar the heavy masonry, and loosen a huge stone that rested as a sort of projecting cap above the door of the vault, and, as he had approached and was probably occupied in observing the effects of the blast, the stone had given way from its position and fallen upon him, forcing him backward and crushing him beneath its weight.

The corpse was carried away, an inquest held upon it, resulting in the usual verdict of accidental death. So the would-be robber had been caught in his own trap.

To the general public, however, Leb.'s tragic ending was proof positive that Rolff' House was "possessed" by evil spirits, and that the tradition that the old vault was protected by the Evil One was the sober truth. His recklessness in risking himself in such a foolhardy contest with the powers of evil was commented on with many sober shakes of the head, and all the old, well-worn stories in regard to strange occurrences at the old mansion were revived and retailed with impressive earnestness to groups of interested listeners.

As he had surmised. Anthony Saybrook could secure no one to take the place made vacant by the death of Leb. Sackett. He would not have old Carl Crum: so, trusting in the protection which the popular belief that the house was the abode of evil spirits would afford, he had it carefully closed up and left to only such occasional inspection as he and Ralph should together make.

CHAPTER XVIII. Events drifted along a few weeks without any event to startle the com-

munity in regard to Rolff House. The old place remained locked up and deserted, but it was better protectappearance well calculated to excite ed by the superstitious dread in which horror even if it had been witnessed it was held than it if had a score of under less terrifying circumstances, guards. Mr. Saybrook had sent off The stone was across his breast, as he letters to Claude explaining and in Europe, and, by the time he is affordlay stretched upon his back; his face smoothing over the late events, and alwas twisted back and turned toward so taking occasion to drop him certain a thousand things may have happened them; his glassy eyes protruded; and hints that would lead him to infer that to take him out of our way. The longblood had flowed from his mouth and old Mr. Bruyn's dislike to him continued er he is away, the better for us, of nostrils. It was evident that his life and that he had used his influence to course; but, in any event, as soon as prejudice Rosa against him. He did we are in full possession of the prop-The two men glanced at each other not say this directly; in fact, he was erty I am ready to take the chance of careful not to let Claude suspect that he "Ralph, this is horrible," said the took any interest whatever in his love elder Saybrook, as soon as he could affairs; but he deftly managed to weave compose bimself to speak. "I did not certain facts and hints in his letter, I'm in favoring a bold course. When expect any such result as this. Let us as if by the merest inadvertance, which will you reconst the deeds?" look about. Yes, yes, I see; he had the young man could not well help inbeen making an attempt to get intel terpreting so as to arouse his suspicthe vault. See here where he has beer ions that Rosa's lore for him was ai-

ment by affecting coolness and reserve himself. He knew that he must be anxious by this time on account of the neglect with which his letters had been treated, and full of fancies as to the reasons for it; and, by skillfully misleading him, he hoped to so arouse his sense of injured pride as to incline him to dismiss all thought of Rosa from his mind. Amid the novelty and excitement of his new life, he inferred that Claude. like most young men, would easily forget past impressions, and that could his thoughts and feelings be turned into a new channel, his passion for the old farmer's daughte. would soon be so far erased from his mind that Raiph would be left a clear field to woo and win her, no matter what turn events might take.

But Anthony Saybrook had no opportunity to learn the effect of his letter upon Claude, or whether, in fact, the young man received it at all. It was a period when the mail service between this country and Europe was particularly irregular and slow. The world was being shaken by the throes of the gigantic contest between England and the France of Napoleon, which had involved nearly all Europe, and the consequences of which were slowly but inevitably dragging the young New World republic into war. The seas were harried by the hostile fleets of the belligerents, and commerce was practically interdicted by the decrees the proud hostile nations hurled at each other, commanding the world to cease from commercial intercourse with their enemies under threat of the capture and confiscation of all ships venturing to do so. The spirit of the aspiring young Western nation illy brooked this arrogant dictation, which was destroying its growing commerce; and it had long been evident to careful observers that the outrages committed against American commerce particularly by British cruisers would sooner or later result in hostilities. In fact, the spirit of the people was already aroused to the highest pitch, and was pushing a peace-loving administration forward to the bold course of recommending the young republic to unsheath its sword as the champion of the rights of commerce. We have seen that Anthony Saybrook

had anticipated the outbreak of war. So certain was he of it, that his plans and schemes for months past had been almost entirely governed by the anticipation of its speedy occurrence. Politically, he belonged to the party that opposed such an extreme course as war, and sneered at its advocates as "French sympathizers." Personally, however, Mr Saybrook was not a man to let his political prejudices interfere with his interests in any way. With the young heir of Rolff House away in Europe. and himself holding mortgages on portions of the estate, and with fraudulent deeds in his hands covering the most valuable parts of the property, a war would furnish an opportunity to carry out his schemes at his leisure and with the utmost chance of safety Therefore, though in his public utterances, and in his letters to Claude, the lawyer had deprecated war and affected to doubt its probability, at heart he was to attribute it to supernatural means, eager to have it occur, and strongly convinced that its outbreak was inevi-

> So joy was brought to the household of the Saybrooks, when, with the early days of summer, the tardy mail brought the news of the actual declaration of war against England.

"You see, Ralph," remarked the elder Saybrook, after they had carefully read every word referring to the all-important topic contained in the modest news letter which brought the good news, "that my throw has been a subcessful one, even if it was risky, and we have won our game Ah, my dear boy. I never did a finer piece of work in my life. This news clears every obstacle from our path, and the extent to which we shall take advantage of our opportunity rests entirely within our own discretion. The war the administration has plunged into will not be a short one, I opine. There is no doubt that it will be continued till the country is pretty well exhausted and the war spirit of the people has evaporated, and that means three or four years, in my opinion, at the least. Look at our chance. Claude is in Europe, and there is no possible chance of his either getting back to this country or communicating with it in any way while the war lasts. The mortgages are so drawn that they can be closed up at the end of a year; and I have the deeds, you know, covering the homestead and adjoining property, all regularly drawn and signed, and nobody to question their validity while he is absent. What is to prevent our taking advantage of our good fortune, and coming into possession of the Rolff property? Nothing, that I see, unless it is our own timidity. And why should we be timid? It is not likely that Fortune will ever offer us another such a chance. The risk is comparatively small. I am in favor of taking the fullest advantage of our position, and of acting prompt-

"But what if he should come back?" asked Ralph.

"Well," replied the parent, "I don't think he is very likely to come back at all. Still, the question is a fair one, and will bear consideration. Suppose the war ends in a year or two, and he comes back to find us in possession of Rolff House. He can bring suit, of course, but what can he prove? The mortgages will have matured, and we shall be the purchasers. As for the deeds, there is no possible ground to challenge their regularity. His only course would be a suit to dispossess on the ground of fraud: but with what chance of success? Our defence would be that the deeds were given as collateral security for money furnished, and he has absolutely no testimony to offer against us but his own. Don't you see how beautifully all my plans have been arranged? I can see no possible chance for failure. The probabilities all are that Claude will soon be left penniless ed a chance to return to this country. our keeping it."

"I quite see the weight of your arguments," replied Ralph, "and, of course,

[To be continued,]

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