

The Ablest Man in the World

By Edward Page Mitchell

I

It may or may not be remembered that in 1878 General Ignatieff spent several weeks of July at the Badischer Hof in Baden. The public journals gave out that he visited the watering-place for the benefit of his health, said to be much broken by protracted anxiety and responsibility in the service of the Czar. But everybody knew that Ignatieff was just then out of favor at St. Petersburg, and that his absence from the centers of active statecraft at a time when the peace of Europe fluttered like a shuttlecock in the air, between Salisbury and Shouvaloff, was nothing more or less than politely disguised exile.

I am indebted for the following facts to my friend Fisher, of New York, who arrived at Baden on the day after Ignatieff, and was duly announced in the official list of strangers as "Herr Doctor Professor Fischer, mit Frau Gattin und Bed. Nordamerika."

The scarcity of titles among the traveling aristocracy of North America is a standing grievance with the ingenious person who compiles the official list. Professional pride and the instincts of hospitality alike impel him to supply the lack whenever he can. He distributes governor, major-general, and doctor professor with tolerable impartiality, according as the arriving Americans wear a distinguished, a martial, or a studious air. Fisher owed his title to his spectacles.

It was still early in the season. The theatre had not yet opened. The hotels were hardly half full, the concerts in the kiosk at the Conversationshaus were heard by scattering audiences, and the shopkeepers of the bazaar had no better business than to spend their time in bewailing the degeneracy of Baden Baden since an end was put to the play. Few excursionists disturbed the meditations of the shriveled old custodian of the tower on the Mercuriusberg. Fisher found the place very stupid—as stupid as Saratoga in June or Long Branch in September. He was impatient to get to Switzerland, but his wife had contracted a table d'hôte intimacy with a Polish countess, and she positively refused to take any step that would sever so advantageous a connection.

One afternoon Fisher was standing on one of the little bridges that span the gutterwide Oosbach, idly gazing into the water and wondering whether a good sized Rangely trout could swim the stream without personal inconvenience, when the porter of the Badischer Hof came to him on the run.

"Hen Doctor Professor!" cried the porter, touching his cap. "I pray you pardon, but the highborn the Baron Savitch out of Moscow, of the General Ignatieff's suite, suffers himself in a terrible fit, and appears to die."

In vain Fisher assured the porter that it was a mistake to consider him a medical expert; that he professed no science save that of draw poker; that if a false impression prevailed in the hotel it was through a blunder for which he was in no way responsible; and that, much as he regretted the unfortunate condition of the highborn the baron out of Moscow, he did not feel that his presence in the chamber of sickness would be of the slightest benefit. It was impossible to eradicate the idea that possessed the porter's mind. Finding himself fairly dragged toward the hotel, Fisher at length concluded to make a virtue of necessity and to render his explanations to the baron's friends.

The Russian's apartments were upon the second floor, not far from those occupied by Fisher. A French valet, almost beside himself with terror, came hurrying out of the room to meet the porter and the doctor professor. Fisher again attempted to explain, but to no purpose. The valet also had explanations to make, and the superior fluency of his French enabled him to monopolize the conversation. No, there was nobody there—nobody but himself, the faithful Auguste of the baron. His Excellency, the General Ignatieff, His Highness, the Prince Koloff, Dr. Rapperschwyll, all the suite, all the world, had driven out that morning to Gernsbach. The baron, meanwhile, had been seized by an effraying malady, and he, Auguste, was desolate with apprehension. He entreated Monsieur to lose no time in parley, but to hasten to the bedside of the baron, who was already in the agonies of dissolution.

Fisher followed Auguste into the inner room. The Baron, in his boots, lay upon the bed, his body bent almost double by the unrelenting gripe of a distressful pain. His teeth were tightly clenched, and the rigid muscles around the mouth distorted the natural expression of his face. Every few seconds a prolonged groan escaped him. His fine eyes rolled piteously. Anon, he would press both hands upon his abdomen and shiver in every limb in the intensity of his suffering.

Fisher forgot his explanations. Had he been a doctor professor in fact, he could not have watched the symptoms of the baron's malady with greater interest.

"Can Monsieur preserve him?" whispered the terrified Auguste.

"Perhaps," said Monsieur, dryly.

Fisher scribbled a note to his wife on the back of a card and dispatched it in the care of the hotel porter. That functionary returned with great promptness, bringing a black bottle and a glass. The bottle had come in Fisher's trunk to Baden all the way from Liverpool, had crossed the sea to Liverpool from New York, and had journeyed to New York direct from Bourbon County, Kentucky. Fisher seized it eagerly but reverently, and held it up against the light. There were still three inches or three inches and a half in the bottom. He uttered a grunt of pleasure.

"There is some hope of saving the Baron," he remarked to Auguste.

Fully one half of the precious liquid was poured into the glass and administered without delay to the groaning, writhing patient. In a few minutes Fisher had the satisfaction of seeing the baron sit up in bed. The muscles around his mouth relaxed, and the agonized expression was superseded by a look of placid contentment.

Fisher now had an opportunity to observe the personal characteristics of the Russian baron. He was a young man of about thirty-five, with exceedingly handsome and clear-cut features, but a peculiar head. The peculiarity of his head was that it seemed to be perfectly round on top—that is, its diameter from ear to ear appeared quite equal to its anterior and posterior diameter. The curious effect of this unusual conformation was rendered more striking by the absence of all hair. There was nothing on the baron's head but a tightly fitting skullcap of black silk. A very deceptive wig hung upon one of the bed posts.

Being sufficiently recovered to recognize the presence of a stranger, Savitch made a courteous bow.

"How do you find yourself now?" inquired Fisher, in bad French.

"Very much better, thanks to Monsieur," replied the baron, in excellent English, spoken in a charming voice. "Very much better, though I feel a certain dizziness here." And he pressed his hand to his forehead.

The valet withdrew at a sign from his master, and was followed by the porter. Fisher advanced to the bedside and took the baron's wrist. Even his unpractised touch told him that the pulse was

alarmingly high. He was much puzzled, and not a little uneasy at the turn which the affair had taken. "Have I got myself and the Russian into an infernal scrape?" he thought. "But no—he's well out of his teens, and half a tumbler of such whiskey as that ought not to go to a baby's head."

Nevertheless, the new symptoms developed themselves with a rapidity and poignancy that made Fisher feel uncommonly anxious. Savitch's face became as white as marble—its paleness rendered startling by the sharp contrast of the black skull cap. His form reeled as he sat on the bed, and he clasped his head convulsively with both hands, as if in terror lest it burst.

"I had better call your valet," said Fisher, nervously.

"No, no!" gasped the baron. "You are a medical man, and I shall have to trust you. There is something—wrong—here." With a spasmodic gesture he vaguely indicated the top of his head.

"But I am not—" stammered Fisher.

"No words!" exclaimed the Russian, imperiously. "Act at once—there must be no delay. Unscrew the top of my head!"

Savitch tore off his skullcap and flung it aside. Fisher has no words to describe the bewilderment with which he beheld the actual fabric of the baron's cranium. The skullcap had concealed the fact that the entire top of Savitch's head was a dome of polished silver.

"Unscrew it!" said Savitch again.

Fisher reluctantly placed both hands upon the silver skull and exerted a gentle pressure toward the left. The top yielded, turning easily and truly in its threads.

"Faster!" said the baron, faintly. "I tell you no time must be lost." Then he swooned.

At this instant there was a sound of voices in the outer room, and the door leading into the baron's bed-chamber was violently flung open and as violently closed. The newcomer was a short, spare man of middle age, with a keen visage and piercing, deep-set little gray eyes. He stood for a few seconds scrutinizing Fisher with a sharp, almost fiercely jealous regard.

The baron recovered his consciousness and opened his eyes.

"Dr. Rapperschwyll!" he exclaimed.

Dr. Rapperschwyll, with a few rapid strides, approached the bed and confronted Fisher and Fisher's patient. "What is all this?" he angrily demanded.

Without waiting for a reply he laid his hand rudely upon Fisher's arm and pulled him away from the baron. Fisher, more and more astonished, made no resistance, but suffered himself to be led, or pushed, toward the door. Dr. Rapperschwyll opened the door wide enough to give the American exit, and then closed it with a vicious slam. A quick click informed Fisher that the key had been turned in the lock.

II

The next morning Fisher met Savitch coming from the Trinkhalle. The baron bowed with cold politeness and passed on. Later in the day a valet de place handed to Fisher a small parcel, with the message: "Dr. Rapperschwyll supposes that this will be sufficient." The parcel contained two gold pieces of twenty marks.

Fisher gritted his teeth. "He shall have back his forty marks," he muttered to himself, "but I will have his confounded secret in return."

Then Fisher discovered that even a Polish countess has her uses in the social economy.

Mrs. Fisher's table d'hôte friend was amiability itself, when approached by Fisher (through Fisher's wife) on the subject of the Baron Savitch of Moscow. Know anything about the Baron

Savitch? Of course she did, and about everybody else worth knowing in Europe. Would she kindly communicate her knowledge? Of course she would, and be enchanted to gratify in the slightest degree the charming curiosity of her *Americaine*. It was quite refreshing for a *blasée* old woman, who had long since ceased to feel much interest in contemporary men, women, things and events, to encounter one so recently from the boundless prairies of the new world as to cherish a piquant inquisitiveness about the affairs of the grand monde. Ah! yes, she would very willingly communicate the history of the Baron Savitch of Moscow, if that would amuse her dear *Americaine*.

The Polish countess abundantly redeemed her promise, throwing in for good measure many choice bits of gossip and scandalous anecdotes about the Russian nobility, which are not relevant to the present narrative. Her story, as summarized by Fisher, was this:

The Baron Savitch was not of an old creation. There was a mystery about his origin that had never been satisfactorily solved in St. Petersburg or in Moscow. It was said by some that he was a foundling from the Vospitatelni Dom. Others believed him to be the unacknowledged son of a certain illustrious personage nearly related to the House of Romanoff. The latter theory was the more probable, since it accounted in a measure for the unexampled success of his career from the day that he was graduated at the University of Dorpat.

Rapid and brilliant beyond precedent this career had been. He entered the diplomatic service of the Czar, and for several years was attached to the legations at Vienna, London, and Paris. Created a Baron before his twenty-fifth birthday for the wonderful ability displayed in the conduct of negotiations of supreme importance and delicacy with the House of Hapsburg, he became a pet of Gortchakoff's, and was given every opportunity for the exercise of his genius in diplomacy. It was even said in well-informed circles at St. Petersburg that the guiding mind which directed Russia's course throughout the entire Eastern complication, which planned the campaign on the Danube, effected the combinations that gave victory to the Czar's soldiers, and which meanwhile held Austria aloof, neutralized the immense power of Germany, and exasperated England only to the point where wrath expends itself in harmless threats, was the brain of the young Baron Savitch. It was certain that he had been with Ignatieff at Constantinople when the trouble was first fomented, with Shouvaloff in England at the time of the secret conference agreement, with the Grand Duke Nicholas at Adrianople when the protocol of an armistice was signed, and would soon be in Berlin behind the scenes of the Congress, where it was expected that he would outwit the statesmen of all Europe, and play with Bismarck and Disraeli as a strong man plays with two kicking babies.

But the countess had concerned herself very little with this handsome young man's achievements in politics. She had been more particularly interested in his social career. His success in that field had been not less remarkable. Although no one knew with positive certainty his father's name, he had conquered an absolute supremacy in the most exclusive circles surrounding the imperial court. His influence with the Czar himself was supposed to be unbounded. Birth apart, he was considered the best *parti* in Russia. From poverty and by the sheer force of intellect he had won for himself a colossal fortune. Report gave him forty million roubles, and doubtless report did not exceed the fact. Every speculative enterprise which he undertook, and they were many and various, was carried to sure success by the same qualities of cool, unerring judgment, far-reaching sagacity, and apparently superhuman power of organizing, combining, and controlling, which had made him in politics the phenomenon of the age.

About Dr. Rapperschwyll? Yes, the countess knew him by reputation and by sight. He was the medical man in constant attendance upon the Baron Savitch, whose high-strung mental

organization rendered him susceptible to sudden and alarming attacks of illness. Dr. Rapperschwyll was a Swiss—had originally been a watchmaker or artisan of some kind, she had heard. For the rest, he was a commonplace little old man, devoted to his profession and to the baron, and evidently devoid of ambition, since he wholly neglected to turn the opportunities of his position and connections to the advancement of his personal fortunes.

Fortified with this information, Fisher felt better prepared to grapple with Rapperschwyll for the possession of the secret. For five days he lay in wait for the Swiss physician. On the sixth day the desired opportunity unexpectedly presented itself.

Half way up the Mercuriusberg, late in the afternoon, he encountered the custodian of the ruined tower, coming down. “No, the tower was not closed. A gentleman was up there, making observations of the country, and he, the custodian, would be back in an hour or two.” So Fisher kept on his way.

The upper part of this tower is in a dilapidated condition. The lack of a stairway to the summit is supplied by a temporary wooden ladder. Fisher’s head and shoulders were hardly through the trap that opens to the platform, before he discovered that the man already there was the man whom he sought. Dr. Rapperschwyll was studying the topography of the Black Forest through a pair of field glasses.

Fisher announced his arrival by an opportune stumble and a noisy effort to recover himself, at the same instant aiming a stealthy kick at the topmost round of the ladder, and scrambling ostentatiously over the edge of the trap. The ladder went down thirty or forty feet with a racket, clattering and banging against the walls of the tower.

Dr. Rapperschwyll at once appreciated the situation. He turned sharply around, and remarked with a sneer, “Monsieur is unaccountably awkward.” Then he scowled and showed his teeth, for he recognized Fisher.

“It *is* rather unfortunate,” said the New Yorker, with imperturbable coolness. “We shall be imprisoned here a couple of hours at the shortest. Let us congratulate ourselves that we each have intelligent company, besides a charming landscape to contemplate.”

The Swiss coldly bowed, and resumed his topographical studies. Fisher lighted a cigar.

“I also desire,” continued Fisher, puffing clouds of smoke in the direction of the Teufelmühle, “to avail myself of this opportunity to return forty marks of yours, which reached me, I presume, by a mistake.”

“If Monsieur the American physician was not satisfied with his fee,” rejoined Rapperschwyll, venomously, “he can without doubt have the affair adjusted by applying to the baron’s valet.”

Fisher paid no attention to this thrust, but calmly laid the gold pieces upon the parapet, directly under the nose of the Swiss. “I could not think of accepting any fee,” he said, with deliberate emphasis. “I was abundantly rewarded for my trifling services by the novelty and interest of the case.”

The Swiss scanned the American’s countenance long and steadily with his sharp little gray eyes. At length he said, carelessly:

“Monsieur is a man of science?”

“Yes,” replied Fisher, with a mental reservation in favor of all sciences save that which illuminates and dignifies our national game.

“Then,” continued Dr. Rapperschwyll, “Monsieur will perhaps acknowledge that a more beautiful or more extensive case of trephining has rarely come under his observation.”

Fisher slightly raised his eyebrows.

“And Monsieur will also understand, being a physician,” continued Dr. Rapperschwyll, “the sensitiveness of the baron himself, and of his friends upon the subject. He will therefore pardon my seeming rudeness at the time of his discovery.”

“He is smarter than I supposed,” thought Fisher. “He holds all the cards, while I have nothing—nothing, except a tolerably strong nerve when it comes to a game of bluff.”

“I deeply regret that sensitiveness,” he continued, aloud, “for it had occurred to me that an accurate account of what I saw, published in one of the scientific journals of England or America, would excite wide attention, and no doubt be received with interest on the Continent.”

“What you saw?” cried the Swiss, sharply. “It is false. You saw nothing—when I entered you had not even removed the—”

Here he stopped short and muttered to himself, as if cursing his own impetuosity. Fisher celebrated his advantage by tossing away his half-burned cigar and lighting a fresh one.

“Since you compel me to be frank,” Dr. Rapperschwyll went on, with visibly increasing nervousness, “I will inform you that the baron has assured me that you saw nothing. I interrupted you in the act of removing the silver cap.”

“I will be equally frank,” replied Fisher, stiffening his face for a final effort. “On that point, the baron is not a competent witness. He was in a state of unconsciousness for some time before you entered. Perhaps I was removing the silver cap when you interrupted me—”

Dr. Rapperschwyll turned pale.

“And, perhaps,” said Fisher, coolly, “I was replacing it.”

The suggestion of this possibility seemed to strike Rapperschwyll like a sudden thunderbolt from the clouds. His knees parted, and he almost sank to the floor. He put his hands before his eyes, and wept like a child, or, rather, like a broken old man.

“He will publish it! He will publish it to the court and to the world!” he cried, hysterically. “And at this crisis—”

Then, by a desperate effort, the Swiss appeared to recover to some extent his self-control. He paced the diameter of the platform for several minutes, with his head bent and his arms folded across the breast. Turning again to his companion, he said:

“If any sum you may name will—”

Fisher cut the proposition short with a laugh.

“Then,” said Rapperschwyll, “if—if I throw myself on your generosity—”

“Well?” demanded Fisher.

“And ask a promise, on your honor, of absolute silence concerning what you have seen?”

“Silence until such time as the Baron Savitch shall have ceased to exist?”

“That will suffice,” said Rapperschwyll. “For when he ceases to exist I die. And your conditions?”

“The whole story, here and now, and without reservation.”

“It is a terrible price to ask me,” said Rapperschwyll, “but larger interests than my pride are at stake. You shall hear the Story.”

“I was bred a watchmaker,” he continued, after a long pause, “in the Canton of Zurich. It is not a matter of vanity when I say that I achieved a marvellous degree of skill in the craft. I developed a faculty of invention that led me into a series of experiments regarding the capabilities of purely mechanical combinations. I studied and improved upon the best automata ever constructed by human ingenuity. Babbage’s calculating machine especially interested me. I saw in Babbage’s idea the germ of something infinitely more important to the world.”

“Then I threw up my business and went to Paris to study physiology. I spent three years at the Sorbonne and perfected myself in that branch of knowledge. Meanwhile, my pursuits had extended far beyond the purely physical sciences. Psychology engaged me for a time; and then I ascended into the domain of sociology, which, when adequately understood, is the summary and final application of all knowledge.

“It was after years of preparation, and as the outcome of all my studies, that the great idea of my life, which had vaguely haunted me ever since the Zurich days, assumed at last a well-defined and perfect form.”

The manner of Dr. Rapperschwyll had changed from distrustful reluctance to frank enthusiasm. The man himself seemed transformed. Fisher listened attentively and without interrupting the relation. He could not help fancying that the necessity of yielding the secret, so long and so jealously guarded by the physician, was not entirely distasteful to the enthusiast.

“Now, attend, Monsieur,” continued Dr. Rapperschwyll, “to several separate propositions which may seem at first to have no direct bearing on each other.

“My endeavors in mechanism had resulted in a machine which went far beyond Babbage’s in its powers of calculation. Given the data, there was no limit to the possibilities in this direction. Babbage’s cogwheels and pinions calculated logarithms, calculated an eclipse. It was fed with figures, and produced results in figures. Now, the relations of cause and effect are as fixed and unalterable as the laws of arithmetic. Logic is, or should be, as exact a science as mathematics. My new machine was fed with facts, and produced conclusions. In short, *it reasoned*; and the results of its reasoning were always true, while the results of human reasoning are often, if not always, false. The source of error in human logic is what the philosophers call the ‘personal equation.’ My machine eliminated the personal equation; it proceeded from cause to effect, from premise to conclusion, with steady precision. The human intellect is fallible; my machine was, and is, infallible in its processes.

“Again, physiology and anatomy had taught me the fallacy of the medical superstition which holds the gray matter of the brain and the vital principle to be inseparable. I had seen men living with pistol balls imbedded in the medulla oblongata. I had seen the hemispheres and the cerebellum removed from the crania of birds and small animals, and yet they did not die. I believed that, though the brain were to be removed from a human skull, the subject would not die, although he would certainly be divested of the intelligence which governed all save the purely involuntary actions of his body.

“Once more: a profound study of history from the sociological point of view, and a not inconsiderable practical experience of human nature, had convinced me that the greatest geniuses that ever existed were on a plane not so very far removed above the level of average intellect. The grandest peaks in my native country, those which all the world knows by name, tower only a few hundred feet above the countless unnamed peaks that surround them. Napoleon Bonaparte towered only a little over the ablest men around him. Yet that little was everything, and he overran Europe. A man who surpassed Napoleon, as Napoleon surpassed Murat, in the mental qualities which transmute thought into fact, would have made himself master of the whole world.

“Now, to fuse these three propositions into one: suppose that I take a man, and, by removing the brain that enshrines all the errors and failures of his ancestors away back to the origin of the race, remove all sources of weakness in his future career. Suppose, that in place of the fallible intellect which I have removed, I endow him with an artificial intellect that operates with the certainty of universal laws. Suppose that I launch this superior being, who reasons truly, into the

burly burly of his inferiors, who reason falsely, and await the inevitable result with the tranquillity of a philosopher.

“Monsieur, you have my secret. That is precisely what I have done. In Moscow, where my friend Dr. Duchat had charge of the new institution of St. Vasili for hopeless idiots, I found a boy of eleven whom they called Stépan Borovitch. Since he was born, he had not seen, heard, spoken or thought. Nature had granted him, it was believed, a fraction of the sense of smell, and perhaps a fraction of the sense of taste, but of even this there was no positive ascertainment Nature had walled in his soul most effectually. Occasional inarticulate murmurings, and an incessant knitting and kneading of the fingers were his only manifestations of energy. On bright days they would place him in a little rocking-chair, in some spot where the sun fell warm, and he would rock to and fro for hours, working his slender fingers and mumbling forth his satisfaction at the warmth in the plaintive and unvarying refrain of idiocy. The boy was thus situated when I first saw him.

“I begged Stépan Borovitch of my good friend Dr. Duchat. If that excellent man had not long since died he should have shared in my triumph. I took Stépan to my home and plied the saw and the knife. I could operate on that poor, worthless, useless, hopeless travesty of humanity as fearlessly and as recklessly as upon a dog bought or caught for vivisection. That was a little more than twenty years ago. To-day Stépan Borovitch wields more power than any other man on the face of the earth. In ten years he will be the autocrat of Europe, the master of the world. He never errs; for the machine that reasons beneath his silver skull never makes a mistake.”

Fisher pointed downward at the old custodian of the tower, who was seen toiling up the bill.

“Dreamers,” continued Dr. Rapperschwyll, “have speculated on the possibility of finding among the ruins of the older civilizations some brief inscription which shall change the foundations of human knowledge. Wiser men deride the dream, and laugh at the idea of scientific kabbala. The wiser men are fools. Suppose that Aristotle had discovered on a cuneiform-covered tablet at Nineveh the few words, ‘Survival of the Fittest.’ Philosophy would have gained twenty-two hundred years. I will give you, in almost as few words, a truth equally pregnant. *The ultimate evolution of the creature is into the creator.* Perhaps it will be twenty-two hundred years before the truth finds general acceptance, yet it is not the less a truth. The Baron Savitch is my creature, and I am his creator—creator of the ablest man in Europe, the ablest man in the world.

“Here is our ladder, Monsieur. I have fulfilled my part of the agreement. Remember yours.”

III

After a two months’ tour of Switzerland and the Italian lakes, the Fishers found themselves at the Hotel Splendide in Paris, surrounded by people from the States. It was a relief to Fisher, after his somewhat bewildering experience at Baden, followed by a surfeit of stupendous and ghostly snow peaks, to be once more among those who discriminated between a straight flush and a crooked straight, and whose bosoms thrilled responsive to his own at the sight of the star-spangled banner. It was particularly agreeable for him to find at the Hotel Splendide, in a party of Easterners who had come over to see the Exposition, Miss Bella Ward, of Portland, a pretty and bright girl, affianced to his best friend in New York.

With much less pleasure, Fisher learned that the Baron Savitch Was in Paris, fresh from the Berlin Congress, and that he was the lion of the hour with the select few who read between the written lines of politics and knew the dummies of diplomacy from the real players in the

tremendous game. Dr. Rapperschwyll was not with the baron. He was detained in Switzerland, at the deathbed of his aged mother.

This last piece of information was welcome to Fisher. The more he reflected upon the interview on the Mercuriusberg, the more strongly he felt it to be his intellectual duty to persuade himself that the whole affair was an illusion, not a reality. He would have been glad, even at the sacrifice of his confidence in his own astuteness, to believe that the Swiss doctor had been amusing himself at the expense of his credulity. But the remembrance of the scene in the baron's bedroom at the Badischer Hof was too vivid to leave the slightest ground for this theory. He was obliged to be content with the thought that he should soon place the broad Atlantic between himself and a creature so unnatural, so dangerous, so monstrously impossible as the Baron Savitch.

Hardly a week had passed before he was thrown again into the society of that impossible person.

The ladies of the American party met the Russian baron at a ball in the New Continental Hotel. They were charmed with his handsome face, his refinement of manner, his intelligence and wit. They met him again at the American Minister's, and, to Fisher's unspeakable consternation, the acquaintance thus established began to make rapid progress in the direction of intimacy. Baron Savitch became a frequent visitor at the Hotel Splendide.

Fisher does not like to dwell upon this period. For a month his peace of mind was rent alternately by apprehension and disgust. He is compelled to admit that the baron's demeanor toward himself was most friendly, although no allusion was made on either side to the incident at Baden. But the knowledge that no good could come to his friends from this association with a being in whom the moral principle had no doubt been supplanted by a system of cog-gear, kept him continually in a state of distraction. He would gladly have explained to his American friends the true character of the Russian, that he was not a man of healthy mental organization, but merely a marvel of mechanical ingenuity, constructed upon a principle subversive of all society as at present constituted—in short, a monster whose very existence must ever be revolting to right-minded persons with brains of honest gray and white. But the solemn promise to Dr. Rapperschwyll sealed his lips.

A trilling incident suddenly opened his eyes to the alarming character of the situation, and filled his heart with a new horror.

One evening, a few days before the date designated for the departure of the American party from Havre for home, Fisher happened to enter the private parlor which was, by common consent, the headquarters of his set. At first he thought that the room was unoccupied. Soon he perceived, in the recess of a window, and partly obscured by the drapery of the curtain, the forms of the Baron Savitch and Miss Ward of Portland. They did not observe his entrance. Miss Ward's hand was in the baron's hand, and she was looking up into his handsome face with an expression which Fisher could not misinterpret.

Fisher coughed, and going to another window, pretended to be interested in affairs on the Boulevard. The couple emerged from the recess. Miss Ward's face was ruddy with confusion, and she immediately withdrew. Not a sign of embarrassment was visible on the baron's countenance. He greeted Fisher with perfect self-possession, and began to talk of the great balloon in the Place du Carrousel.

Fisher pitied but could not blame the young lady. He believed her still loyal at heart to her New York engagement. He knew that her loyalty could not be shaken by the blandishments of any man on earth. He recognized the fact that she was under the spell of a power more than human.

Yet what would be the outcome? He could not tell her all; his promise bound him. It would be useless to appeal to the generosity of the baron; no human sentiments governed his exorable purposes. Must the affair drift on while he stood tied and helpless? Must this charming and innocent girl be sacrificed to the transient whim of an automaton? Allowing that the baron's intentions were of the most honorable character, was the situation any less horrible? Marry a Machine! His own loyalty to his friend in New York, his regard for Miss Ward, alike loudly called on him to act with promptness.

And, apart from all private interest, did he not owe a plain duty to society, to the liberties of the world? Was Savitch to be permitted to proceed in the career laid out for him by his creator, Dr. Rapperschwyll? He (Fisher) was the only man in the world in a position to thwart the ambitious programme. Was there ever greater need of a Brutus?

Between doubts and fears, the last days of Fisher's stay in Paris were wretched beyond description. On the morning of the steamer day he had almost made up his mind to act.

The train for Havre departed at noon, and at eleven o'clock the Baron Savitch made his appearance at the Hotel Splendide to bid farewell to his American friends. Fisher watched Miss Ward closely. There was a constraint in her manner which fortified his resolution. The baron incidentally remarked that he should make it his duty and pleasure to visit America within a very few months, and that he hoped then to renew the acquaintances now interrupted. As Savitch spoke, Fisher observed that his eyes met Miss Ward's, while the slightest possible blush colored her cheeks. Fisher knew that the case was desperate, and demanded a desperate remedy.

He now joined the ladies of the party in urging the baron to join them in the hasty lunch that was to precede the drive to the station. Savitch gladly accepted the cordial invitation. Wine he politely but firmly declined, pleading the absolute prohibition of his physician. Fisher left the room for an instant, and returned with the black bottle which had figured in the Baden episode.

"The Baron," he said, "has already expressed his approval of the noblest of our American products, and he knows that this beverage has good medical endorsement." So saying, he poured the remaining contents of the Kentucky bottle into a glass, and presented it to the Russian.

Savitch hesitated. His previous experience with the nectar was at the same time a temptation and a warning, yet he did not wish to seem discourteous. A chance remark from Miss Ward decided him.

"The baron," she said, with a smile, "will certainly not refuse to wish us *bon voyage* in the American fashion."

Savitch drained the glass and the conversation turned to other matters. The carriages were already below. The parting compliments were being made, when Savitch suddenly pressed his hands to his forehead and clutched at the back of a chair. The ladies gathered around him in alarm.

"It is nothing," he said faintly; "a temporary dizziness."

"There is no time to be lost," said Fisher, pressing forward. The train leaves in twenty minutes. Get ready at once, and I will meanwhile attend to our friend."

Fisher hurriedly led the baron to his own bedroom. Savitch fell back upon the bed. The Baden symptoms repeated themselves. In two minutes the Russian was unconscious.

Fisher looked at his watch. He had three minutes to spare. He turned the key in the lock of the door and touched the knob of the electric annunciator.

Then, gaining the mastery of his nerves by one supreme effort for self-control, Fisher pulled the deceptive wig and the black skullcap from the baron's head. "Heaven forgive me if I am making a fearful mistake!" he thought. But I believe it to be best for ourselves and for the

world.” Rapidly, but with a steady hand, he unscrewed the silver dome. The Mechanism lay exposed before his eyes. The baron groaned. Ruthlessly Fisher tore out the wondrous machine. He had no time and no inclination to examine it. He caught up a newspaper and hastily enfolded it. He thrust the bundle into his open traveling bag. Then he screwed the silver top firmly upon the baron’s head, and replaced the skullcap and the wig.

All this was done before the servant answered the bell. “The Baron Savitch is ill,” said Fisher to the attendant, when he came. There is no cause for alarm. Send at once to the Hotel de l’Athénée for his valet, Auguste.” In twenty seconds Fisher was in a cab, whirling toward the Station St. Lazare.

When the steamship Pereire was well out at sea, with Ushant five hundred miles in her wake, and countless fathoms of water beneath her keel, Fisher took a newspaper parcel from his traveling bag. His teeth were firm set and his lips rigid. He carried the heavy parcel to the side of the ship and dropped it into the Atlantic. It made a little eddy in the smooth water, and sank out of sight. Fisher fancied that he heard a wild, despairing cry, and put his hands to his ears to shut out the sound. A gull came circling over the steamer—the cry may have been the gull’s.

Fisher felt a light touch upon his arm. He turned quickly around. Miss Ward was standing at his side, close to the rail.

“Bless me, how white you are!” she said. “What in the world have you been doing?”

“I have been preserving the liberties of two continents,” slowly replied Fisher, “and perhaps saving your own peace of mind.”

“Indeed!” said she; “and how have you done that?”

“I have done it,” was Fisher’s grave answer, “by throwing overboard the Baron Savitch.”

Miss Ward burst into a ringing laugh. “You are sometimes too droll, Mr. Fisher,” she said.