

Wilkie Collins

Mad Monkton

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Аннотация

Mad Monkton is a bizarre ghost story. It is said that a strain of hereditary madness blights the Monkton family, heirs to the huge domain of Wincot Abbey. Rumours in the neighbourhood are that Alfred, the youngest scion, has inherited this insanity. His odd behaviour certainly points that way. Alfred is engaged to his childhood sweetheart, Ada Elmslie. But at the very moment when various obstacles to the match are overcome, Alfred suddenly departs for Italy, seeking the corpse of his disreputable uncle, who is believed to have been killed in a duel. What could have driven Alfred to do this?

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Mad Monkton

Chapter I

The Monktons of Wincot Abbey bore a sad character for want of sociability in our county. They never went to other people's houses, and, excepting my father, and a lady and her daughter living near them, never received anybody under their own roof.

Proud as they all certainly were, it was not pride, but dread, which kept them thus apart from their neighbors. The family had suffered for generations past from the horrible affliction of hereditary insanity, and the members of it shrank from exposing their calamity to others, as they must have exposed it if they had mingled with the busy little world around them. There is a frightful story of a crime committed in past times by two of the Monktons, near relatives, from which the first appearance of the insanity was always supposed to date, but it is needless for me to shock any one by repeating it. It is enough to say that at intervals almost every form of madness appeared in the family, monomania being the most frequent manifestation of the affliction among them. I have these particulars, and one or two yet to be related, from my father.

At the period of my youth but three of the Monktons were

left at the Abbey – Mr. and Mrs. Monkton and their only child Alfred, heir to the property. The one other member of this, the elder branch of the family, who was then alive, was Mr. Monkton's younger brother, Stephen. He was an unmarried man, possessing a fine estate in Scotland; but he lived almost entirely on the Continent, and bore the reputation of being a shameless profligate. The family at Wincot held almost as little communication with him as with their neighbors.

I have already mentioned my father, and a lady and her daughter, as the only privileged people who were admitted into Wincot Abbey.

My father had been an old school and college friend of Mr. Monkton, and accident had brought them so much together in later life that their continued intimacy at Wincot was quite intelligible. I am not so well able to account for the friendly terms on which Mrs. Elmslie (the lady to whom I have alluded) lived with the Monktons. Her late husband had been distantly related to Mrs. Monkton, and my father was her daughter's guardian. But even these claims to friendship and regard never seemed to me strong enough to explain the intimacy between Mrs. Elmslie and the inhabitants of the Abbey. Intimate, however, they certainly were, and one result of the constant interchange of visits between the two families in due time declared itself: Mr. Monkton's son and Mrs. Elmslie's daughter became attached to each other.

I had no opportunities of seeing much of the young lady; I only remember her at that time as a delicate, gentle, lovable girl, the

very opposite in appearance, and apparently in character also, to Alfred Monkton. But perhaps that was one reason why they fell in love with each other. The attachment was soon discovered, and was far from being disapproved by the parents on either side. In all essential points except that of wealth, the Elmslies were nearly the equals of the Monktons, and want of money in a bride was of no consequence to the heir of Wincot. Alfred, it was well known, would succeed to thirty thousand a year on his father's death.

Thus, though the parents on both sides thought the young people not old enough to be married at once, they saw no reason why Ada and Alfred should not be engaged to each other, with the understanding that they should be united when young Monkton came of age, in two years' time. The person to be consulted in the matter, after the parents, was my father, in his capacity of Ada's guardian. He knew that the family misery had shown itself many years ago in Mrs. Monkton, who was her husband's cousin. The *illness*, as it was significantly called, had been palliated by careful treatment, and was reported to have passed away. But my father was not to be deceived. He knew where the hereditary taint still lurked; he viewed with horror the bare possibility of its reappearing one day in the children of his friend's only daughter; and he positively refused his consent to the marriage engagement.

The result was that the doors of the Abbey and the doors of Mrs. Elmslie's house were closed to him. This suspension of friendly intercourse had lasted but a very short time when Mrs.

Monkton died. Her husband, who was fondly attached to her, caught a violent cold while attending her funeral. The cold was neglected, and settled on his lungs. In a few months' time he followed his wife to the grave, and Alfred was left master of the grand old Abbey and the fair lands that spread all around it.

At this period Mrs. Elmslie had the indelicacy to endeavor a second time to procure my father's consent to the marriage engagement. He refused it again more positively than before. More than a year passed away. The time was approaching fast when Alfred would be of age. I returned from college to spend the long vacation at home, and made some advances toward bettering my acquaintance with young Monkton. They were evaded – certainly with perfect politeness, but still in such a way as to prevent me from offering my friendship to him again. Any mortification I might have felt at this petty repulse under ordinary circumstances was dismissed from my mind by the occurrence of a real misfortune in our household. For some months past my father's health had been failing, and, just at the time of which I am now writing, his sons had to mourn the irreparable calamity of his death.

This event, through some informality or error in the late Mr. Elmslie's will, left the future of Ada's life entirely at her mother's disposal. The consequence was the immediate ratification of the marriage engagement to which my father had so steadily refused his consent. As soon as the fact was publicly announced, some of Mrs. Elmslie's more intimate friends, who were acquainted

with the reports affecting the Monkton family, ventured to mingle with their formal congratulations one or two significant references to the late Mrs. Monkton and some searching inquiries as to the disposition of her son.

Mrs. Elmslie always met these polite hints with one bold form of answer. She first admitted the existence of these reports about the Monktons which her friends were unwilling to specify distinctly, and then declared that they were infamous calumnies. The hereditary taint had died out of the family generations back. Alfred was the best, the kindest, the sanest of human beings. He loved study and retirement; Ada sympathized with his tastes, and had made her choice unbiased; if any more hints were dropped about sacrificing her by her marriage, those hints would be viewed as so many insults to her mother, whose affection for her it was monstrous to call in question. This way of talking silenced people, but did not convince them. They began to suspect, what was indeed the actual truth, that Mrs. Elmslie was a selfish, worldly, grasping woman, who wanted to get her daughter well married, and cared nothing for consequences as long as she saw Ada mistress of the greatest establishment in the whole county.

It seemed, however, as if there was some fatality at work to prevent the attainment of Mrs. Elmslie's great object in life. Hardly was one obstacle to the ill-omened marriage removed by my father's death before another succeeded it in the shape of anxieties and difficulties caused by the delicate state of Ada's health. Doctors were consulted in all directions, and the result

of their advice was that the marriage must be deferred, and that Miss Elmslie must leave England for a certain time, to reside in a warmer climate – the south of France, if I remember rightly. Thus it happened that just before Alfred came of age Ada and her mother departed for the Continent, and the union of the two young people was understood to be indefinitely postponed. Some curiosity was felt in the neighborhood as to what Alfred Monkton would do under these circumstances. Would he follow his lady-love? would he go yachting? would he throw open the doors of the old Abbey at last, and endeavor to forget the absence of Ada and the postponement of his marriage in a round of gayeties? He did none of these things. He simply remained at Wincot, living as suspiciously strange and solitary a life as his father had lived before him. Literally, there was now no companion for him at the Abbey but the old priest – the Monktons, I should have mentioned before, were Roman Catholics – who had held the office of tutor to Alfred from his earliest years. He came of age, and there was not even so much as a private dinner-party at Wincot to celebrate the event. Families in the neighborhood determined to forget the offense which his father's reserve had given them, and invited him to their houses. The invitations were politely declined. Civil visitors called resolutely at the Abbey, and were as resolutely bowed away from the doors as soon as they had left their cards. Under this combination of sinister and aggravating circumstances people in all directions took to shaking their heads mysteriously when the name of Mr. Alfred

Monkton was mentioned, hinting at the family calamity, and wondering peevishly or sadly, as their tempers inclined them, what he could possibly do to occupy himself month after month in the lonely old house.

The right answer to this question was not easy to find. It was quite useless, for example, to apply to the priest for it. He was a very quiet, polite old gentleman; his replies were always excessively ready and civil, and appeared at the time to convey an immense quantity of information; but when they came to be reflected on, it was universally observed that nothing tangible could ever be got out of them. The housekeeper, a weird old woman, with a very abrupt and repelling manner, was too fierce and taciturn to be safely approached. The few indoor servants had all been long enough in the family to have learned to hold their tongues in public as a regular habit. It was only from the farm-servants who supplied the table at the Abbey that any information could be obtained, and vague enough it was when they came to communicate it.

Some of them had observed the "young master" walking about the library with heaps of dusty papers in his hands. Others had heard odd noises in the uninhabited parts of the Abbey, had looked up, and had seen him forcing open the old windows, as if to let light and air into the rooms supposed to have been shut close for years and years, or had discovered him standing on the perilous summit of one of the crumbling turrets, never ascended before within their memories, and popularly considered to be

inhabited by the ghosts of the monks who had once possessed the building. The result of these observations and discoveries, when they were communicated to others, was of course to impress every one with a firm belief that “poor young Monkton was going the way that the rest of the family had gone before him,” which opinion always appeared to be immensely strengthened in the popular mind by a conviction – founded on no particle of evidence – that the priest was at the bottom of all the mischief.

Thus far I have spoken from hearsay evidence mostly. What I have next to tell will be the result of my own personal experience.

Chapter II

About five months after Alfred Monkton came of age I left college, and resolved to amuse and instruct myself a little by traveling abroad.

At the time when I quitted England young Monkton was still leading his secluded life at the Abbey, and was, in the opinion of everybody, sinking rapidly, if he had not already succumbed, under the hereditary curse of his family. As to the Elmslies, report said that Ada had benefited by her sojourn abroad, and that mother and daughter were on their way back to England to resume their old relations with the heir of Wincot. Before they returned I was away on my travels, and wandered half over Europe, hardly ever planning whither I should shape my course beforehand. Chance, which thus led me everywhere, led me at last to Naples. There I met with an old school friend, who was one of the *attaches* at the English embassy, and there began the extraordinary events in connection with Alfred Monkton which form the main interest of the story I am now relating.

I was idling away the time one morning with my friend the *attache* in the garden of the Villa Reale, when we were passed by a young man, walking alone, who exchanged bows with my friend.

I thought I recognized the dark, eager eyes, the colorless cheeks, the strangely-vigilant, anxious expression which I

remembered in past times as characteristic of Alfred Monkton's face, and was about to question my friend on the subject, when he gave me unasked the information of which I was in search.

"That is Alfred Monkton," said he; "he comes from your part of England. You ought to know him."

"I do know a little of him," I answered; "he was engaged to Miss Elmslie when I was last in the neighborhood of Wincot. Is he married to her yet?"

"No, and he never ought to be. He has gone the way of the rest of the family – or, in plainer words, he has gone mad."

"Mad! But I ought not to be surprised at hearing that, after the reports about him in England."

"I speak from no reports; I speak from what he has said and done before me, and before hundreds of other people. Surely you must have heard of it?"

"Never. I have been out of the way of news from Naples or England for months past."

"Then I have a very extraordinary story to tell you. You know, of course, that Alfred had an uncle, Stephen Monkton. Well, some time ago this uncle fought a duel in the Roman States with a Frenchman, who shot him dead. The seconds and the Frenchman (who was unhurt) took to flight in different directions, as it is supposed. We heard nothing here of the details of the duel till a month after it happened, when one of the French journals published an account of it, taken from the papers left by Monkton's second, who died at Paris of consumption. These

papers stated the manner in which the duel was fought, and how it terminated, but nothing more. The surviving second and the Frenchman have never been traced from that time to this. All that anybody knows, therefore, of the duel is that Stephen Monkton was shot; an event which nobody can regret, for a greater scoundrel never existed. The exact place where he died, and what was done with the body are still mysteries not to be penetrated.”

“But what has all this to do with Alfred?”

“Wait a moment, and you will hear. Soon after the news of his uncle’s death reached England, what do you think Alfred did? He actually put off his marriage with Miss Elmslie, which was then about to be celebrated, to come out here in search of the burial-place of his wretched scamp of an uncle; and no power on earth will now induce him to return to England and to Miss Elmslie until he has found the body, and can take it back with him, to be buried with all the other dead Monktons in the vault under Wincot Abbey Chapel. He has squandered his money, pestered the police, and exposed himself to the ridicule of the men and the indignation of the women for the last three months in trying to achieve his insane purpose, and is now as far from it as ever. He will not assign to anybody the smallest motive for his conduct. You can’t laugh him out of it or reason him out of it. When we met him just now, I happen to know that he was on his way to the office of the police minister, to send out fresh agents to search and inquire through the Roman States for the place where

his uncle was shot. And, mind, all this time he professes to be passionately in love with Miss Elmslie, and to be miserable at his separation from her. Just think of that! And then think of his self-imposed absence from her here, to hunt after the remains of a wretch who was a disgrace to the family, and whom he never saw but once or twice in his life. Of all the 'Mad Monktons,' as they used to call them in England, Alfred is the maddest. He is actually our principal excitement in this dull opera season; though, for my own part, when I think of the poor girl in England, I am a great deal more ready to despise him than to laugh at him."

"You know the Elmslies then?"

"Intimately. The other day my mother wrote to me from England, after having seen Ada. This escapade of Monkton's has outraged all her friends. They have been entreating her to break off the match, which it seems she could do if she liked. Even her mother, sordid and selfish as she is, has been obliged at last, in common decency, to side with the rest of the family; but the good, faithful girl won't give Monkton up. She humors his insanity; declares he gave her a good reason in secret for going away; says she could always make him happy when they were together in the old Abbey, and can make him still happier when they are married; in short, she loves him dearly, and will therefore believe in him to the last. Nothing shakes her. She has made up her mind to throw away her life on him, and she will do it."

"I hope not. Mad as his conduct looks to us, he may have some sensible reason for it that we cannot imagine. Does his mind seem

at all disordered when he talks on ordinary topics?"

"Not in the least. When you can get him to say anything, which is not often, he talks like a sensible, well-educated man. Keep silence about his precious errand here, and you would fancy him the gentlest and most temperate of human beings; but touch the subject of his vagabond of an uncle, and the Monkton madness comes out directly. The other night a lady asked him, jestingly of course, whether he had ever seen his uncle's ghost. He scowled at her like a perfect fiend, and said that he and his uncle would answer her question together some day, if they came from hell to do it. We laughed at his words, but the lady fainted at his looks, and we had a scene of hysterics and hartshorn in consequence. Any other man would have been kicked out of the room for nearly frightening a pretty woman to death in that way; but 'Mad Monkton,' as we have christened him, is a privileged lunatic in Neapolitan society, because he is English, good-looking, and worth thirty thousand a year. He goes out everywhere under the impression that he may meet with somebody who has been let into the secret of the place where the mysterious duel was fought. If you are introduced to him he is sure to ask you whether you know anything about it; but beware of following up the subject after you have answered him, unless you want to make sure that he is out of his senses. In that case, only talk of his uncle, and the result will rather more than satisfy you."

A day or two after this conversation with my friend the *attache*, I met Monkton at an evening party.

The moment he heard my name mentioned, his face flushed up; he drew me away into a corner, and referring to his cool reception of my advance years ago toward making his acquaintance, asked my pardon for what he termed his inexcusable ingratitude with an earnestness and an agitation which utterly astonished me. His next proceeding was to question me, as my friend had said he would, about the place of the mysterious duel.

An extraordinary change came over him while he interrogated me on this point. Instead of looking into my face as they had looked hitherto, his eyes wandered away, and fixed themselves intensely, almost fiercely, either on the perfectly empty wall at our side, or on the vacant space between the wall and ourselves, it was impossible to say which. I had come to Naples from Spain by sea, and briefly told him so, as the best way of satisfying him that I could not assist his inquiries. He pursued them no further; and, mindful of my friend's warning, I took care to lead the conversation to general topics. He looked back at me directly, and, as long as we stood in our corner, his eyes never wandered away again to the empty wall or the vacant space at our side.

Though more ready to listen than to speak, his conversation, when he did talk, had no trace of anything the least like insanity about it. He had evidently read, not generally only, but deeply as well, and could apply his reading with singular felicity to the illustration of almost any subject under discussion, neither obtruding his knowledge absurdly, nor concealing it affectedly.

His manner was in itself a standing protest against such a nickname as "Mad Monkton." He was so shy, so quiet, so composed and gentle in all his actions, that at times I should have been almost inclined to call him effeminate. We had a long talk together on the first evening of our meeting; we often saw each other afterward, and never lost a single opportunity of bettering our acquaintance. I felt that he had taken a liking to me, and, in spite of what I had heard about his behavior to Miss Elmslie, in spite of the suspicions which the history of his family and his own conduct had arrayed against him, I began to like "Mad Monkton" as much as he liked me. We took many a quiet ride together in the country, and sailed often along the shores of the Bay on either side. But for two eccentricities in his conduct, which I could not at all understand, I should soon have felt as much at my ease in his society as if he had been my own brother.

The first of these eccentricities consisted in the reappearance on several occasions of the odd expression in his eyes which I had first seen when he asked me whether I knew anything about the duel. No matter what we were talking about, or where we happened to be, there were times when he would suddenly look away from my face, now on one side of me, now on the other, but always where there was nothing to see, and always with the same intensity and fierceness in his eyes. This looked so like madness – or hypochondria at the least – that I felt afraid to ask him about it, and always pretended not to observe him.

The second peculiarity in his conduct was that he never

referred, while in my company, to the reports about his errand at Naples, and never once spoke of Miss Elmslie, or of his life at Wincot Abbey. This not only astonished me, but amazed those who had noticed our intimacy, and who had made sure that I must be the depository of all his secrets. But the time was near at hand when this mystery, and some other mysteries of which I had no suspicion at that period, were all to be revealed.

I met him one night at a large ball, given by a Russian nobleman, whose name I could not pronounce then, and cannot remember now. I had wandered away from reception-room, ballroom, and cardroom, to a small apartment at one extremity of the palace, which was half conservatory, half boudoir, and which had been prettily illuminated for the occasion with Chinese lanterns. Nobody was in the room when I got there. The view over the Mediterranean, bathed in the bright softness of Italian moonlight, was so lovely that I remained for a long time at the window, looking out, and listening to the dance-music which faintly reached me from the ballroom. My thoughts were far away with the relations I had left in England, when I was startled out of them by hearing my name softly pronounced.

I looked round directly, and saw Monkton standing in the room. A livid paleness overspread his face, and his eyes were turned away from me with the same extraordinary expression in them to which I have already alluded.

“Do you mind leaving the ball early to-night?” he asked, still not looking at me.

“Not at all,” said I. “Can I do anything for you? Are you ill?”

“No – at least nothing to speak of. Will you come to my rooms?”

“At once, if you like.”

“No, not at once. I must go home directly; but don’t you come to me for half an hour yet. You have not been at my rooms before, I know, but you will easily find them out; they are close by. There is a card with my address. I *must* speak to you to-night; my life depends on it. Pray come! for God’s sake, come when the half hour is up!”

I promised to be punctual, and he left me directly.

Most people will be easily able to imagine the state of nervous impatience and vague expectation in which I passed the allotted period of delay, after hearing such words as those Monkton had spoken to me. Before the half hour had quite expired I began to make my way out through the ballroom.

At the head of the staircase my friend, the *attache*, met me.

“What! going away already?” Said he.

“Yes; and on a very curious expedition. I am going to Monkton’s rooms, by his own invitation.”

“You don’t mean it! Upon my honor, you’re a bold fellow to trust yourself alone with ‘Mad Monkton’ when the moon is at the full.”

“He is ill, poor fellow. Besides, I don’t think him half as mad as you do.”

“We won’t dispute about that; but mark my words, he has not

asked you to go where no visitor has ever been admitted before without a special purpose. I predict that you will see or hear something to-night which you will remember for the rest of your life.”

We parted. When I knocked at the courtyard gate of the house where Monkton lived, my friend’s last words on the palace staircase recurred to me, and, though I had laughed at him when he spoke them, I began to suspect even then that his prediction would be fulfilled.

Chapter III

The porter who let me into the house where Monkton lived directed me to the floor on which his rooms were situated. On getting upstairs, I found his door on the landing ajar. He heard my footsteps, I suppose, for he called to me to come in before I could knock.

I entered, and found him sitting by the table, with some loose letters in his hand, which he was just tying together into a packet. I noticed, as he asked me to sit down, that his expression looked more composed, though the paleness had not yet left his face. He thanked me for coming; repeated that he had something very important to say to me; and then stopped short, apparently too much embarrassed to proceed. I tried to set him at his ease by assuring him that, if my assistance or advice could be of any use, I was ready to place myself and my time heartily and unreservedly at his service.

As I said this I saw his eyes beginning to wander away from my face – to wander slowly, inch by inch, as it were, until they stopped at a certain point, with the same fixed stare into vacancy which had so often startled me on former occasions. The whole expression of his face altered as I had never yet seen it alter; he sat before me looking like a man in a death-trance.

“You are very kind,” he said, slowly and faintly, speaking, not to me, but in the direction in which his eyes were still fixed. “I

know you can help me; but —”

He stopped; his face whitened horribly, and the perspiration broke out all over it. He tried to continue – said a word or two – then stopped again. Seriously alarmed about him, I rose from my chair with the intention of getting him some water from a jug which I saw standing on a side-table.

He sprang up at the same moment. All the suspicions I had ever heard whispered against his sanity flashed over my mind in an instant, and I involuntarily stepped back a pace or two.

“Stop,” he said, seating himself again; “don’t mind me; and don’t leave your chair. I want – I wish, if you please, to make a little alteration, before we say anything more. Do you mind sitting in a strong light?”

“Not in the least.”

I had hitherto been seated in the shade of his reading-lamp, the only light in the room.

As I answered him he rose again, and, going into another apartment, returned with a large lamp in his hand; then took two candles from the side-table, and two others from the chimney piece; placed them all, to my amazement, together, so as to stand exactly between us, and then tried to light them. His hand trembled so that he was obliged to give up the attempt, and allow me to come to his assistance. By his direction, I took the shade off the reading-lamp after I had lit the other lamp and the four candles. When we sat down again, with this concentration of light between us, his better and gentler manner began to return,

and while he now addressed me he spoke without the slightest hesitation.

“It is useless to ask whether you have heard the reports about me,” he said; “I know that you have. My purpose to-night is to give you some reasonable explanation of the conduct which has produced those reports. My secret has been hitherto confided to one person only; I am now about to trust it to your keeping, with a special object which will appear as I go on. First, however, I must begin by telling you exactly what the great difficulty is which obliges me to be still absent from England. I want your advice and your help; and, to conceal nothing from you, I want also to test your forbearance and your friendly sympathy, before I can venture on thrusting my miserable secret into your keeping. Will you pardon this apparent distrust of your frank and open character – this apparent ingratitude for your kindness toward me ever since we first met?”

I begged him not to speak of these things, but to go on.

“You know,” he proceeded, “that I am here to recover the body of my Uncle Stephen, and to carry it back with me to our family burial-place in England, and you must also be aware that I have not yet succeeded in discovering his remains. Try to pass over, for the present, whatever may seem extraordinary and incomprehensible in such a purpose as mine is, and read this newspaper article where the ink-line is traced. It is the only evidence hitherto obtained on the subject of the fatal duel in which my uncle fell, and I want to hear what course of proceeding

the perusal of it may suggest to you as likely to be best on my part.”

He handed me an old French newspaper. The substance of what I read there is still so firmly impressed on my memory that I am certain of being able to repeat correctly at this distance of time all the facts which it is necessary for me to communicate to the reader.

The article began, I remember, with editorial remarks on the great curiosity then felt in regard to the fatal duel between the Count St. Lo and Mr. Stephen Monkton, an English gentleman. The writer proceeded to dwell at great length on the extraordinary secrecy in which the whole affair had been involved from first to last, and to express a hope that the publication of a certain manuscript, to which his introductory observations referred, might lead to the production of fresh evidence from other and better-informed quarters. The manuscript had been found among the papers of Monsieur Foulon, Mr. Monkton's second, who had died at Paris of a rapid decline shortly after returning to his home in that city from the scene of the duel. The document was unfinished, having been left incomplete at the very place where the reader would most wish to find it continued. No reason could be discovered for this, and no second manuscript bearing on the all-important subject had been found, after the strictest search among the papers left by the deceased.

The document itself then followed.

It purported to be an agreement privately drawn up between Mr. Monkton's second, Monsieur Foulon, and the Count St. Lo's second, Monsieur Dalville, and contained a statement of all the arrangements for conducting the duel. The paper was dated "Naples, February 22d," and was divided into some seven or eight clauses. The first clause described the origin and nature of the quarrel – a very disgraceful affair on both sides, worth neither remembering nor repeating. The second clause stated that, the challenged man having chosen the pistol as his weapon, and the challenger (an excellent swordsman), having, on his side, thereupon insisted that the duel should be fought in such a manner as to make the first fire decisive in its results, the seconds, seeing that fatal consequences must inevitably follow the hostile meeting, determined, first of all, that the duel should be kept a profound secret from everybody, and that the place where it was to be fought should not be made known beforehand, even to the principals themselves. It was added that this excess of precaution had been rendered absolutely necessary in consequence of a recent address from the Pope to the ruling powers in Italy commenting on the scandalous frequency of the practice of dueling, and urgently desiring that the laws against duelists should be enforced for the future with the utmost rigor.

The third clause detailed the manner in which it had been arranged that the duel should be fought.

The pistols having been loaded by the seconds on the ground, the combatants were to be placed thirty paces apart, and were to

toss up for the first fire. The man who won was to advance ten paces marked out for him beforehand – and was then to discharge his pistol. If he missed, or failed to disable his opponent, the latter was free to advance, if he chose, the whole remaining twenty paces before he fired in his turn. This arrangement insured the decisive termination of the duel at the first discharge of the pistols, and both principals and seconds pledged themselves on either side to abide by it.

The fourth clause stated that the seconds had agreed that the duel should be fought out of the Neapolitan States, but left themselves to be guided by circumstances as to the exact locality in which it should take place. The remaining clauses, so far as I remember them, were devoted to detailing the different precautions to be adopted for avoiding discovery. The duelists and their seconds were to leave Naples in separate parties; were to change carriages several times; were to meet at a certain town, or, failing that, at a certain post-house on the high road from Naples to Rome; were to carry drawing-books, color boxes, and camp-stools, as if they had been artists out on a sketching-tour; and were to proceed to the place of the duel on foot, employing no guides, for fear of treachery. Such general arrangements as these, and others for facilitating the flight of the survivors after the affair was over, formed the conclusion of this extraordinary document, which was signed, in initials only, by both the seconds.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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