

THE STRATAGEM

By Aleister Crowley

THE fellow travelers climbed down on the fiery sand of the platform. It was a junction, a junction of that kind where there is no town for miles, and where the resources of the railway and its neighborhood compare unfavorably with those of the average quarantine station. The first to descend was a man unmistakably English. He was complaining of the management even while he extracted his hand baggage from the carriage with the assistance of his companion.

"It is positively a disgrace to civilization," he was saying, "that there should be no connection at such a station as this, an important station, sir; let me tell you, the pivot—if I may use the metaphor—of the branch which serves practically the whole of Muckshire south of the Tream. And we have certainly one hour to wait, and Heaven knows it's more likely to be two, and perhaps three. And, of course, there's not as much as a bar nearer than Fatloam; and if we got there we should find no drinkable whiskey. I say, sir, the matter is a positive and actual disgrace to the railway that allows it, to the country that tolerates it, to the civilization that permits that such things should be. The same thing happened to me here last year, sir, though luckily on that occasion I had but half-an-hour to wait. But I wrote to *The Times* a strong half-column on the subject, and I'm damned if they didn't refuse to print it. Of course they daren't offend their advertisers, I might have known. I tell you, sir, this country is run by a ring, a dirty ring, a gang of Jews, Scotsmen,

Irish, Welsh—where's the good old jolly True Blue Englishman? In the cart, sir, in the cart!"

The train gave a convulsive backward jerk, and lumbered off in imitation of the solitary porter who, stationed opposite the guard's van, had witnessed without emotion the lurching forth of two trunks like rocks from a volcano, and after a moment's contemplation had, with screwed mouth, mooched along the platform to his grub, which he would find in an isolated cottage some three hundred yards away.

In strong contrast to the Englishman with his moustache a-foresting a whitish face, marked with deep red rings on neck and forehead, his impending paunchiness and his full suit of armour, was the small, active man with the pointed beard, whom fate had thrown first into the same compartment and then into the same hour of exile from all their fellows.

His eyes were astonishingly black and fierce; his beard was grizzled and his face heavily lined and obviously burnt by tropical suns; but that face also expressed intelligence, strength and resourcefulness in a degree which would have made him an ideal comrade in a forlorn hope or the defence of a deserted village. Across the back of his left hand was a thick and heavy scar. In spite of all this, he was dressed with singular neatness and correctness; which circumstance, although his English was purer than that of his companion in distress, made the latter secretly inclined to suspect him of being a Frenchman. In spite of the quietness of his dress and the