

The Stratagem

By Aleister Crowley

THE fellow-travellers climbed down on to 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 neighbourhood compare unfavourably 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 civilisation," 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 civilisation 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 letter on the subject, and I'm damned if they didn't refuse to print it. Of course, our independent press, etc.; 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 hurling forth of two trunks like rocks from a