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THAT TERRIBLE MAN.

By W. E. NORRIS.

AND

The Princess Dagomar of Poland.

By HEINRICH FELBERMANN.

· 17 TO 27 VANDEWATER ST
· NEW YORK ·

George Munro

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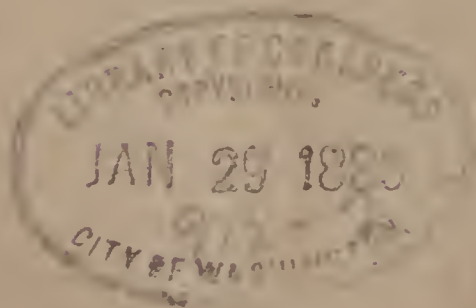
THAT TERRIBLE MAN.

BY W. E. NORRIS.

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THAT TERRIBLE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

ONE still, warm, evening in June three persons were seated in the drawing-room of a small house in Bayswater listening to a fourth, who was playing Schumann to them on a grand piano. They had been so sitting for a quarter of an hour or more, and during the whole of that time not one of them had spoken a word; which, it will be conceded, is a sufficiently remarkable circumstance to deserve mention.

In England, as every one knows, instrumental music is not generally held to be any obstacle to conversation; and this lack of good manners is accounted for in various ways by those who deplore it, some asserting that we are an unmusical nation, others that we are too self-conscious to enjoy silence, while others again declare that we have inherited a bad habit and cling to it, as we do to most habits, bad or good. There is a possible fourth explanation—too ungracious a one to be suggested by word of mouth, but which may perhaps be allowed to pass in the less personally offensive guise of print. It is only that most people play so very badly that they have no claims, except those of courtesy, upon anybody's undivided attention.

Of course, however, there are brilliant exceptions to this rule; and the performer with whom the present narrative is concerned was both exceptional and brilliant. She was brilliant in the sense in which every consummate possessor of an art may be said to be brilliant, although her playing was not of the kind ordinarily associated with that epithet: what was exceptional about her was her touch upon the keys. A celebrated riding-mistress is reported to have said, in answer to some criticisms upon one of her pupils, "I can teach any lady to ride; I can give her a seat, I can give her knowledge of horses, and I can train her to manage them; but neither I nor any one else can give her *hands*." Perhaps it is almost equally true that the best of music-masters cannot give touch. The long, shapely fingers of the young lady who was playing Schumann (and playing him with liberties as to time which the disciples of that composer might or might not have approved of) had a power of drawing sound out of the instrument which is not to be defined, and a power scarcely less rare of striking notes so softly, yet so clearly, that even in the most rapid passages there was no effect of slur.

In appearance, too, she was somewhat exceptional. That she should choose to wear her brown hair short and curling in little rings over her head was perhaps hardly to be called a peculiarity, since

many ladies have latterly adopted a fashion which is not in all cases quite so becoming as it was in this; but her wide-open gray eyes, her pale complexion and a certain pathetic look about her parted lips, made her unlike other girls of twenty. She was thin—too thin for beauty; and indeed her features were somewhat irregular; yet she had an attractiveness which can only be called the attractiveness of beauty, whether it goes with regular features or not. A physiognomist, watching her constant changes of expression and the brightness of her eyes, and listening to that wonderful playing of hers, would not improbably have pronounced her to be consumed by the fire of genius; and although he would have been wrong, he would have had very fair *primâ facie* grounds for his opinion.

As for her auditors, two at least of them did not present the aspect of persons whose breasts were likely to be soothed by the charms of music. The stout, middle-aged lady, who had dropped her tating on her knee and was heaving great sighs from time to time, looked as if it would have come more naturally to her to sigh over the misdemeanors of the cook or the housemaid than over any subtle harmonies and dissonances, and the young man with the uncomfortably high collar, who was sitting near her and caressing the neat little left foot which rested on his right knee, would, one might have fancied, have preferred the compositions of Offenbach and Lecoq to all others. However, they were both appreciative, or seemed to be so. The third auditor, a grave, soldierly-looking man, whose age might have been forty and was certainly over thirty, was a genuine lover of music. He had placed his chair some little distance away from the others and in a line with the key-board, he himself being seated at right angles with it. That his emotions were powerfully stirred by the melody and the rendering of it was evident enough; but it was not less evident, from the fixity of his gaze at the performer, what particular direction those emotions had taken or were likely to take.

The girl ceased playing rather abruptly; whereupon the young man changed his attitude with, it must be confessed, something of an air of relief, and said cheerfully to his neighbor: "Now, Mrs. Patterson, let's have that ghost story that you promised us."

The older man rose, walked slowly to the piano and dropped his elbows upon it, looking down upon the girl, who smiled at him. "Do you know," he murmured, "I would almost as soon hear you play as hear you talk. That is saying something, isn't it?"

She put her head on one side and considered of this speech. "It is certainly saying something," she answered presently, with a slight laugh; "but whether it is saying something civil or not I can't quite make out. I have noticed that your compliments are often rather ambiguous, Mr. Everard."

"Are they?" said Mr. Everard. "I suppose that is because they are always sincere. I just say what I think—and because I can't help saying it."

"What a good plan! Only perhaps a little embarrassing sometimes. Do you adopt it with everybody?"

"No; only with you."

There was a pause, during which the girl allowed her fingers to roam over the keys. By and by she dropped her hands into her lap

and looked up again at the man who was watching her so intently. "Is that another compliment, I wonder?"

"It is, if you consider it so," he said. "It is so in any case, I suppose. It shows, at least, that you exercise a very strong influence over one fellow-creature."

The words did not seem to please her. She frowned and made an impatient movement. "I don't like fellow-creatures who are easily influenced," she said. "What is the good of being a man and being strong and having plenty of common sense as you have, if one is to be influenced against one's will?"

"I did not say that it was against my will," observed the other, with a smile; "but I own that I doubt whether my will is strong enough to resist the sort of influence that I mean."

"That is nonsense!" cried the girl, sharply. "Your will is your own; you are nobody's slave." Then her mood suddenly changed and she broke into a laugh. "What a fuss about nothing!" she exclaimed, rising and shutting up the piano. "Let us talk of something else."

But Mr. Everard, who, to tell the truth, did not shine greatly as a conversationalist, could think of no fresh subject for the moment; and so the attention of both of them was drawn to the other couple.

"The facts are beyond the possibility of dispute," Mrs. Patterson was saying, impressively. "My friend has told me about it scores of times. She woke up in the middle of the night with a sort of cold shudder and a feeling that somebody or something was bending over her, and she roused her husband immediately and said, 'John, I am sure that grandmother is dead!' And of course he began grumbling and growling and told her not to bother; but she insisted upon his striking a light and looking at the clock. It was exactly five minutes past one. Within ten hours of that time she received a telegram to say, 'Grandmanma died at five minutes past one this morning.' Oh, it is all very well to smile, Mr. Fellowes, but you will hardly assert that my friend and her husband agreed to tell me an untruth."

"My dear Mrs. Patterson," said the young man, "I believe it all implicitly, and it gives me the most delightful jumps. Tell me another one."

"Well, there was the case of Admiral Gibbons. On three consecutive nights he dreamed that he had got aground off Cape Hatteras."

"And did he get aground off Cape Hatteras?"

"No; because that would have been impossible, as he was on his way home from the Mediterranean station at the time; but no sooner had he landed at Portsmouth than he heard that some money which he had invested in an American mine was lost."

"That is most remarkable. I think I like the gory anecdotes best, though. The figures dripping with blood and the murdered women with their heads under their arms, you know, and all that sort of thing."

"Mr. Fellowes," said Mrs. Patterson, "it is easy for a man to laugh at what he cannot understand; but will you try to explain these appearances and coincidences? Now I can give you an instance

of supernatural agency which is attested by no fewer than four witnesses, all of them quite above suspicion—”

“Hasn't he heard enough for one night, Aunt Sarah?” interrupted the young lady, with a touch of impatience. “What is it that you want to prove?”

“Only that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in Fellowes's philosophy,” said Everard, good-naturedly.

“But I thought everybody knew that!” cried the girl. Whereat both Everard and Fellowes laughed.

“Perhaps I had better go away now,” observed the latter humbly. “I don't know why you always snub me so, Miss Denham, because I really don't require it. If you would sometimes come down upon Everard, now, it might be good for him.”

“Oh, but indeed,” began the girl, with a look of distress, “I never thought of snubbing you. I only meant—”

“He knows what you meant well enough,” broke in Everard, “and he would have been very angry if he had suspected you of meaning to snub him. At any rate, he is quite right in saying that we ought to be going away; it is nearly half-past eleven.” He added in a somewhat lower voice, “May I call upon you again some day this week? I can't tell you what a pleasure it is to me to—to hear good music well played.”

Miss Denham looked amused. Very likely she thought that Mr. Everard's request might have been more flatteringly worded; but it is quite equally likely that she did not accept the motive assigned in a too literal sense. “Please come whenever you feel inclined,” she answered; “we are always at home between five and six o'clock. Or if you would care to dine with us quietly again, as you have done this evening, we should be delighted to see you.”

The two men walked away together in the moonlight. The younger laughed a little as he paused to light his cigar. “What funny people!” he said. “Did you ever meet anybody quite like them before?”

“I don't know that I ever did,” replied the other; “but they are none the worse for that, I suppose.”

“Oh, of course not; they are a good deal the better, in fact. I like funny people. That's why I go there, you know; because the musical part of the business is just a tiny wee bit over my head. I wonder why *you* go there, Everard.”

It was to be inferred from Mr. Fellowes's manner that this was only a way of speaking, and that he was not really in any doubt as to the nature of the attractions which drew his friend to Bayswater. As his remark failed to provoke a response, he went on presently: “I should never have supposed that a girl of that kind would have been in your line; she's too unconventional altogether. Fancy her asking you to drop in to dinner quietly any evening!”

“Why shouldn't she?”

“I can't think; I'm not Mrs. Grundy. I'm a guileless being, and I bow to the rules and regulations of society just as I bow to the Athanasian Creed, without understanding in the least what it is all about.”

He walked on in silence for a few minutes and then resumed pen-

sively: "I should like to hear that girl's history; it must be a queer one, I fancy."

"How queer? What do you mean by queer?" asked Everard, turning upon him with some asperity.

"I don't mean any harm; you needn't show your teeth at me in that savage way. I was only thinking that she must have passed through some strange experiences. You know who her father was, don't you?"

"No;—at least, I haven't heard much about him."

"Perhaps you would like to hear."

Everard made an inarticulate murmur which might be construed into an assent; so the young man proceeded:

"He was on the turf once upon a time; I have an aged relative who remembers him perfectly. He was a brother of the late Lord Denham and uncle of the present man. Well, he came to howling grief, went off to the Continent and never came back again. He used to be seen at Monaco and such places, I believe—the sort of individual who wears suits of a big check pattern, waxes his mustache, plays a very good game of billiards, and goes by the name of 'the Major,' don't you know? Married somebody in the course of his wanderings—goodness knows who—sister of the lovely and accomplished Patterson. I suppose she had a little money, and I suppose he spent it. As for the girl, he meant her to earn her living on the stage, and had her educated for that. She was to have come out at the Opera at Naples the year that he died."

"That's rather odd, considering that she has no voice."

"Oh, well, perhaps it wasn't the Opera; he may have intended her to play at concerts. Anyhow, he died just in the nick of time; and what was still better was that his brother died directly afterward and left the girl a small fortune. Thereupon she came and established herself in London with her aunt, as you know."

"I don't know that I am particularly concerned with Miss Denham's history," Everard remarked, after a pause. "You can call her unconventional if you choose; but she is a thorough lady in her manners and feelings."

"Who said she wasn't? I thought perhaps you might be interested in hearing about her late papa, that was all. Personally, I like her; and I like the old woman too. I can be happy with either. It will always give me pleasure to dine with them, and remember, old fellow, that when you want anybody to engage Aunt Sarah in psychical research you have only to apply to me. By-by." And with that Mr. Fellowes hailed a passing hansom and was driven off.

Everard pursued his way thoughtfully toward the Albany, where he lived. He had reached a time of life at which, if a man falls in love at all, he does so after a serious fashion; and indeed Mr. Everard had always been of a more or less serious temperament. He had left the army a few years before, because he had grown tired of loafing about garrison towns and had not had the luck to see any active service. He was now, like many other retired officers, engaged in the wine trade; for he had felt it necessary to have an occupation of some kind, and the selling of wine, if not exciting, might prove profitable. This girl, with whom he had only recently become acquainted, was to be his wife, if she would have him: as

to that he had made up his mind, and he did not much care whether her father had been disreputable or not. So that, if Mr. Fellowes had intended to caution his friend good-naturedly against forming an ill-considered alliance, the warning was thrown away. What preoccupied Everard was not a doubt as to the wisdom of his choice, but a very reasonable one as to whether so young, so charming, and so fastidious a girl as Miss Denham would be likely to care for a common-place middle-aged person like himself.

It might have been some relief to his mind could he have heard what Miss Denham was saying at that very moment in reply to certain disparaging comments uttered by her aunt.

"I like him just because he is what you call ordinary," she declared. "It rests me to talk to some one who is perfectly sane and reasonable, and has a clear, sober head on his shoulders."

"My dear, I hope you don't mean to imply that my head is not sober and clear."

"Oh, no; not yours—though I do wish, auntie dear, that you wouldn't recur so often to visions and dreams."

"But, my dear, if these things are true—"

"Well, what if they are? What do they prove?—what do they lead to? I hate such subjects—I hate the whole thing!" cried the girl, speaking with considerably greater vehemence than the occasion appeared to call for.

Mrs. Patterson perhaps understood more than the words expressed; for she did not seem surprised, but only, after a while, made the somewhat inconsequent rejoinder of: "Well, I hope we shall have peace now."

"Oh, I hope so!" sighed the girl. She was wandering up and down the room and twisting her fingers together nervously. "I hope so," she repeated—"but I don't know. And yet, why not? We have begun a new life; and we are happy together, you and I, aren't we, auntie? You would not think of letting—other people find out where we are?"

"God forbid!" ejaculated the old woman, rising and putting her arm round her niece's waist. "I won't tell any more ghost stories, as Mr. Fellowes calls them, if you would rather I didn't, dear," she added. "I am a foolish old creature, and I interest myself in matters which I should perhaps do better to leave alone. I'll try not to distress you in that way again. And now go to bed, Laura; you look tired out."

CHAPTER II.

EVERARD was not a man who took much pleasure in social gatherings, or was greatly in request amongst those who held them: for he was neither rich enough nor clever enough nor pushing enough to be remembered by the ladies who give balls and dinner parties. At musical afternoons, however, the humblest contribution in the shape of a bachelor is always thankfully received, and when he heard that Miss Denham was in the habit of frequenting these, he sought and obtained as many invitations to them as he wished.

She seemed pleased to see him at such times; her pale face, which, when in repose, had a rather sad expression, lighted up with the

brightest of smiles when she recognized him, and she would greet him with a little familiar nod which somehow made him feel as if he stood upon a rather different footing with her from that of her other acquaintances. As often as not these smiles and nods were all that he got for his pains. Miss Denham was becoming famous in a restricted sense; her playing was pronounced to be as original as it was perfect, and when she was not at the piano, she was commonly so surrounded by admirers of both sexes that it was no easy matter for a diffident man to approach her. Everard seldom attempted to do so. He knew that if he did get speech of her he would only be able to say commonplaces, and the utterance of agreeable commonplaces was not what he excelled in. So he contented himself with worshiping her from afar, and talking to Mrs. Patterson, whom nobody noticed, and who was ever ready to expatiate upon the topic which interested him above all others. She was ready, that is, to go into raptures over her niece's talents and amiability, but she was rather provokingly reticent as to her past and future.

"We have no plans," she said once. "We shall stay in London, I suppose, if Laura likes it, and if—if it seems desirable; but she has only taken our little house by the month and we may flit at any time."

"Do you like leaving things to chance in that way?" asked Everard in a dissatisfied tone.

"We don't leave things to chance," replied the old lady; "we leave them to fate. Everybody must do that, whether he likes it or not."

Everard did not think it worth while to dispute this proposition; but he determined that he would take an opportunity of finding out whether Miss Denham was as undecided as her aunt represented her to be. With this end in view, he drew near to her one day when she chanced to be sitting apart, and while three able-bodied amateurs were making a great noise with a piano, violin, and violoncello.

"Are you not going to play to us this afternoon?" he asked, by way of opening the conversation.

She shook her head. "It isn't one of my days. There are days when I can play and days when I can't."

"Do you mean that you are capricious?" inquired Everard, feeling his way.

"Oh, I suppose so," she answered, with a sort of impatience. "I have caprices and moods and sympathies and antipathies and pre-sentiments—all the things that you have not and that nobody ought to have. You would never dislike Dr. Fell without a good reason, would you? You would say to yourself, 'What has the doctor done? Is he practicing without a diploma? Has he killed any of his patients? Has he done me a personal injury? No. Very well, then, of course I can't dislike him, and I must have been mistaken in fancying that I did.'"

"Don't you think you are a little bit hard upon me?" suggested Everard.

"Hard upon you! Don't you understand that it is just because you are like that that I admire you, and—well, sympathize with you? People who feel differently can sympathize, can they not?"

"I hope so."

“And perhaps they may even sympathize the more because they differ. You have plenty of common sense, and I have none. You are—may I say that you are possibly just a trifle wanting in imagination?”

“You may say that I am totally deficient in it, if you like,” answered Everard.

“Whereas I have a superabundance of it; so that—”

“So that we are evidently made for one another.”

The girl colored very slightly, and then laughed. “What I mean is that two such people are sure to be friends, if they don’t quarrel at once,” she said. “There is a sort of satisfaction in being with somebody who has the qualities which are wanting in one’s own nature. It does seem to fill up the gaps after a fashion, don’t you think so?”

“Yes,” answered Everard; although it may be that he had not reasoned out his pleasure in Miss Denham’s society so closely. “But about your capriciousness,” he resumed; “does it extend to everything? To your mode of life, I mean, and your plans, and so on?”

Miss Denham did not catch the drift of the question. “Has any one been telling you that I once thought of playing professionally?” she asked. “It was not caprice exactly that made me give that up; it was—” She broke off, and added rather hurriedly, “Besides, it was no longer necessary. I don’t regret it. To play in public one should be sure of one’s self, and I am never quite sure of myself. Most likely I should have failed.”

“I was not thinking of that,” Everard said. “I am very glad that you have never appeared before a paying audience. What I really meant to ask you was, whether you intend to settle in London. Mrs. Patterson seemed to think that you were uncertain about it.”

“Everything is uncertain,” replied the girl. “‘Time and chance happen to all’—those are the only certain things. And why should I make plans when I can not possibly tell whether I shall be able to carry them out or not?”

“But surely,” objected Everard, “it is advisable at least to know what you want. When a man puts to sea he is aware that he may never reach the end of his voyage, but he shapes a course all the same; he doesn’t simply drift.”

“Not if he knows where he is going. But if one doesn’t know where one is going—if one has nowhere in particular to go to—well, then it is pleasant enough to drift.”

She did not look as if she found it pleasant. She was sitting beside an open window, and her great gray eyes were gazing out wistfully beyond the trees on the square beneath. Her brows were drawn together, and she was intertwining her long slim fingers in a nervous manner which was habitual to her. Everard was painfully struck by the contrast between her careworn face and her careless words. He could not help fancying that she was oppressed by some secret trouble or apprehension, and that it was not so much the uncertainty of all things, as the certainty of approaching evil that saddened her. But presently that common sense which she so admired in him came to the front. “After all,” he remarked, “we are only discussing whether you shall continue to rent your house by the month or not.”

The clouds lifted from Miss Denham's brow, and she began to smile again. "Yes," she agreed, "that is all, and I think I will take the house on. I like London; people have been kind to me here, and I would rather live here than anywhere else."

During the ten days that followed this conversation Everard neglected the interests of his business in a manner which would have been highly culpable had he not had an experienced partner who could get on very well without him. He saw Miss Denham, either at her own house or elsewhere, every day; and every day he fell more deeply in love. The fitfulness of her moods which, as she herself was wont to say, were "of all shades and colors," only made her the more winning in his eyes. He, at all events, knew what he wanted, if she did not, and sometimes he hoped that he would get it in the long run. It was something that he had no rival. The men whom Miss Dunham was in the habit of meeting were not, for the most part, young men, nor were their attentions to her of a kind that the most jealous of lovers could have objected to. She knew how to make herself agreeable to them; but Everard saw, or thought he saw, that she regarded them as nonentities. Her manner always changed a little when she addressed him. She often asked his advice about small matters, and nearly always took it.

"Laura leans a good deal upon you," Mrs. Patterson said to him casually, and he was pleased with the phrase.

He did not, of course, take advantage of the general invitation to dinner which had been given him; but when he was asked for a particular evening he accepted gladly, and on entering the drawing-room he found his friend, Fellowes, already seated there, listening with much interest to one of Mrs. Patterson's blood-curdling anecdotes.

"Buried beneath the very tree on which the butler had hanged himself," Everard heard her saying; "they found the body of the murdered page, with his poor little throat cut from ear to ear—exactly as my cousin had seen it in her dream. The housekeeper made a full confession, and—"

But at this moment Miss Denham came in, and the old lady checked herself abruptly. "That's all," she said; "and now I am not going to tell any more stories of that kind to-night, so please don't ask me, Mr. Fellowes."

The evening proved a very pleasant one, for Laura was in unusually high spirits. She would not play to them, saying that she was more inclined for conversation than music, and after dinner she talked cleverly and amusingly, as she was well able to do, when in the humor. Her impressions of her fellow-countrymen and countrywomen, of whom she had seen next to nothing until recently, diverted her hearers greatly. She had a talent for mimicry which had no ill-nature about it, and which indeed seemed to be half unconscious. They were all laughing at her description of a lady, who, having taken her for a professional, and inquired what she charged for her lessons, had overwhelmed her with abject and almost tearful apologies on discovering that she was the cousin of a viscount, when the door opened and the tall figure of a man, whom neither Everard nor Fellowes had ever seen before, advanced with noiseless steps into the room.

He had omitted to give his name, or the servant had failed to

catch it; for he was not announced, and he was standing close to the little group before Mrs. Patterson looked up and saw him. When she did so she uttered a faint cry, which seemed to betoken dismay quite as much as surprise. Everard glanced quickly at Laura, who did not appear to be either surprised or dismayed. Her expression had not changed, she was still smiling, but she remained motionless, and she was looking at the new-comer with a curious intentness, as though fascinated or paralyzed by his sudden appearance.

Everard, following the direction of her gaze, took stock of the stranger. He was a tall, powerfully built man, evidently not an Englishman, although there was nothing about him that gave an immediate clew to his nationality. His age seemed to be about thirty. He wore his light-brown hair closely cut, his features were regular and strongly marked, and he was perfectly clean shaven; so that anybody who had not happened to glance first at his eyes would have been struck by the massiveness of his jaw. Everard did glance at his eyes first, and stopped there. They were certainly peculiar eyes. At one moment they seemed very small; but the next they dilated, as a cat's eyes dilate in the dark, then contracted again, until they became mere glittering points. This curious phenomenon was repeated perhaps half a dozen times during the minute that Everard spent in scrutinizing him. The man was looking all the while at Laura, and he, too, had a faint smile upon his lips.

At the end of those long sixty seconds he turned abruptly away, and held out his hand to Mrs. Patterson, saying in a low musical voice, and with scarcely any trace of foreign accent, "So glad to have found you at home!"

"You in London!" gasped Mrs. Patterson. "How did you know that we were here? How did you find out our address?"

"You ask me that?" said the stranger, his smile increasing—"you ask me that?"

Mrs. Patterson shuddered, and fell back in her chair.

Then he shook hands with Laura, who had risen, and who said quite calmly, "How do you do? Let me introduce you to Mr. Everard and Mr. Fellowes—Count Souratkin."

"An old friend of Miss Denham's," added the count explanatory, "and always charmed to make acquaintance with her new ones."

The two men bowed, but did not speak, and the pause which followed might have been found embarrassing by the intruder had he been liable to embarrassment. But to all appearance that was not among his weaknesses. It is, to say the least of it, unusual to pay visits at ten o'clock at night, and in morning dress; yet he offered neither explanation nor apology, but sat down and waited quietly until Mrs. Patterson, recovering her self-possession, broke the silence, by saying, "we did not expect to see you in England, Count Souratkin."

The count shrugged his shoulders. "I am a little everywhere, as you know," he said. "Rather in England than elsewhere, if I might choose. In England one does not risk to be arrested at every turn. Gentlemen," he added, raising his voice and speaking in a slightly declamatory manner, "you are citizens of a free country, you

may be thankful for that, and pity those who are not. We Russians have a claim upon your sympathy, it seems to me."

"Every nation which does not possess a Habeas Corpus Act, two Houses of Palaver, and control over the supplies through its representatives has our heartfelt compassion," observed Fellowes.

"Why, then," asked the count, "are your newspapers never weary of condemning those who are trying to obtain a constitution for Russia?"

"We don't altogether approve of the means employed," said Everard, dryly.

"Oh, you don't approve of the means employed? Perhaps you will be so very kind as to suggest some other means that can be employed in a country where there is no right of public meeting, and no independent press. But we must not talk politics," said the count, seeming to recollect himself; "that is bad taste. Will not Miss Denham favor us with a little music instead?"

"I would rather not play this evening," said Laura.

"But you will not refuse an old friend. For the rest, I am sure that these gentlemen will join their entreaties to mine."

"I should not think of asking Miss Denham to do anything that she was not inclined to do," said Everard.

"Ah, then, I must beg alone."

A few seconds elapsed, during which nobody spoke, and then, to Everard's surprise, Laura got up and walked to the piano, which she opened. "What do you wish me to play?" she asked.

"Oh, that I will leave to you," replied the Russian. "What you like—whatever you like."

She sat down, and presently broke into one of the oddest compositions that Everard had ever listened to. There was no melody in it and next to no sequence. Probably only a practiced ear would have detected the recurrence of certain chords, which rose at intervals from the chaos of sound that swept them out of hearing and hurried them back, as straws are drawn beneath the surface and cast up again by an eddy. When it had come to an end Count Souratkin asked blandly:

"What do you think of that, now?"

Everard did not reply; but Fellowes said: "Well, I'm no judge of music, but I should call it diabolical."

"Thank you, sir," returned Souratkin, with a bow and a little smile; "you have found the word. Yes, that is the right word—diabolical. The piece is by me," he added modestly. "I call it *Le Délire*."

Everard had moved to the piano, before which Laura was still sitting. She looked up as he approached. Her face was pale and grave, and he fancied that there was a look of piteous appeal in her eyes. He did not know in the least what was the matter; but he was very sure that something was the matter, and if she had asked him to seize Count Souratkin and throw him neck and crop out of the window he would with the utmost cheerfulness have endeavored to obey her.

She did not make any such startling request, but merely inquired: "Did you like that piece?"

"No," he answered.

"I am glad of that," said she; "I do not like it either."

"Shall I tell you something else?" whispered Everard. "I don't like the composer. I think it must be Dr. Fell."

To this she made no rejoinder. She was looking down at her fingers, which she was turning and twisting as usual. After a while she asked, without raising her eyes, "What effect does he produce upon you?"

"He irritates me."

"Nothing more than that? You do not feel afraid of him?"

"Certainly not. Why should I be afraid of him?"

"I don't know; many people are. But you are not easily made afraid, I think." And as she said the last words her face brightened.

"I have no pretensions to be a hero," answered Everard; "but I don't suffer much from causeless timidity. At all events, your friend does not alarm me. What is he—a Nihilist?"

"Yes, I believe so; but I am not sure. If he is not, it suits him to pass for one. He is—" She paused and sighed. "He is what it pleases him to be," she added presently, and with that inconclusive definition, she rose and joined the others.

Fellowes was already saying good-night to Mrs. Patterson, and Everard could only follow his example, although he had a strong and rather unreasonable feeling of reluctance to leave Count Souratkin alone with the ladies. When he was out in the street he said to his friend:

"That is the most sinister-looking scoundrel I ever set eyes on."

"Mrs. Patterson would probably agree with you," observed Fellowes, laughing. "She sat clucking and fluttering before him like an old hen who sees a kite. I wonder whether she has dreamed that he is going to rob and murder her."

"I should like very much to find out who he is," muttered Everard.

"I can tell you. He is a man who knows some guilty secret about the late honorable and respectable Denham. Don't be agitated. He is nothing worse than a *chevalier d'industrie*, and I will venture to prophesy that you find both the ladies alive and well to-morrow, though I won't go so far as to promise that you won't find them a little poorer."

CHAPTER III.

EVERARD had exaggerated somewhat in declaring himself to be totally devoid of imagination. He had quite as much of that quality as was required to give him a very disturbed night, to torment him during the course of it with visions of Laura suffering all kinds of improbable cruelties at the hands of Count Souratkin, and to make him fancy more than once that he heard her calling to him for help. Daylight restored order to his ideas; but even after he had shaved, dressed, eaten his breakfast, and read the leading articles in the "Times," he did not find himself in as reasonable a frame of mind as he could have wished, nor was he able entirely to shake

off the misgivings with which the man with the cat's eyes had inspired him. Souratkin might be only a vulgar, impecunious bully; but he did not look like one, and in any case, the facts remained that he was able to frighten both Mrs. Patterson and Miss Denham, and that they had been left unprotected in his company at an advanced hour of the night.

If Everard had done as he felt inclined he would have been in Bayswater before eleven o'clock; but being five-and-thirty years of age he was guided only within certain limits by his inclinations, and it was not until the afternoon that he was shown into Miss Denham's drawing-room, bringing with him, by way of excuse for his visit, a piece of music which she had asked him to procure for her.

The two ladies were certainly alive and well. If, as Fellowes had hinted might probably be the case, they had recently been compelled to part with money, their spirits did not appear to be affected by the loss.

"I was hoping that perhaps you might look in," Laura said. "Aunt Sarah and I were just trying to persuade ourselves that it wasn't our duty to go out for a walk, and now it is evidently our duty to stay at home. You may read your book in peace, auntie. Mr. Everard and I are going to massacre Rubinstein."

With a sigh of relief Mrs. Patterson took up the volume which she had laid, face downward, upon the table (it was called "Unrecognized Forces," Everard noticed), while Laura, seating herself at the piano, opened her new piece of music and began to play it off at sight, with that extraordinary facility of hers which to one of her admirers always seemed little short of miraculous.

"Did your friend stay long after we had left, last night?" asked Everard, when she had struck the final chords.

"No, not long," she answered, a troubled look coming over her face. "If it is quite the same thing to you, I would rather not talk about him."

"You don't like him then?"

"I detest him with all my heart. I told you so last night."

"I think not."

"Didn't I? Well, you understood it, at all events, without being told."

"Not exactly. But why should you receive the man, if you have such a strong feeling of repugnance to him?"

"Can one refuse to receive anybody for such a reason? Even if one could there are people who won't be refused. He will come here just as often as he feels inclined; and when he is not here I shall try to forget his existence."

Everard frowned. "I can not understand why you should allow any one to persecute you," he said.

"I did not say that he persecuted me. Please let me put him out of my mind now. He is not at all likely to come here again to-day."

Hardly had she made this rash assertion when he was standing before her. He had come in unannounced, just as he had done before. It was the sound of the door shutting which caused Everard and Laura to look up, so that the servant must have opened it for him as for any ordinary visitor, but the noiseless fashion of his entrance gave it almost the effect of an apparition. The scene was

nearly an exact repetition of that of the previous evening. Count Souratkin stood gazing at Laura, his eyes dilating and contracting, she returned his gaze with a look which expressed neither surprise nor displeasure, but rather expectancy than anything else, and Everard was once more conscious of a feeling of intense irritation.

It was all over in a minute. Souratkin shook hands with the ladies, bowed to Everard, and said what a pity it was to stay indoors on such a beautiful afternoon. "I scarcely thought to have seen you to day," he remarked, speaking with that slight foreign accent of his. "I was wandering about, not knowing what I should do with myself, when I passed the end of the street, and as I perceived that you were at home—"

"From the end of the street?" interrupted Everard, not very politely. "You must have remarkably good eyesight."

"My eyesight is good," replied the count, "still it is not good enough to penetrate brick walls. No, it was a—what is the word, Mrs. Patterson?—an intuition?"

Mrs. Patterson bowed her head gravely.

"An intuition—yes. I had an intuition that I should find Miss Denham here, playing the piano—was it not Rubinstein that you were playing?—and I said to myself, 'I shall ask her to be so kind as to take a little walk with me in Kensington Gardens. That will be good for her.'"

"Thank you," said Laura; "but I don't think I will walk this afternoon. I am rather tired."

"*Raison de plus*, the air will refresh you. I shall talk to Mrs. Patterson while you put on your bonnet."

This was more than Everard could stand. He was a quiet, peaceable man; but his longing to pick a quarrel with the Russian was irresistible. "I hope," he said, "that you will not think of going out if you are tired, Miss Denham."

"It is not worth disputing about," replied Laura, leaving the room.

She returned almost immediately with her bonnet on.

"I am ready when you are," she said to the count.

She was drawing on her gloves, one of which she had a momentary difficulty in buttoning. Turning suddenly to Everard, who was watching her with a gloomy face—"Will you fasten it for me?" she asked, and held out her wrist to him.

"Why are you doing this?" he whispered, as he obeyed her.

"Because—" she replied. With which unsatisfactory answer she moved away, followed by Souratkin.

Everard was greatly annoyed and did not care who knew it. "Who and what is that fellow?" he asked a second before the door had closed.

"Hush!" exclaimed Mrs. Patterson, holding up her finger warningly. Then she beckoned to her questioner to draw nearer, and answered in a low, solemn voice, "Sometimes I think he is the devil!"

"My dear lady," returned Everard impatiently, "you must excuse my saying that that is very great nonsense. How can any man be the devil? I suppose what you mean is that he is a spiritualist,

or some charlatan of that kind. He evidently wishes to convey that impression."

"He does not wish to convey the impression that he is a charlatan," said Mrs. Patterson, smiling faintly. "If you will sit down I will tell you what he is, so far as I know. But I do not know much."

"I shall be glad to hear what you do know."

"Well—but first let me ask you a question. It is rather an unusual one; but perhaps you will pardon an old woman for thinking more about her niece's happiness than about etiquette. Am I wrong in fancying that you take a special interest in her?"

"So special an interest, Mrs. Patterson, that I would ask her to be my wife to-morrow, if I thought there was a chance of her accepting me."

"That was what I imagined; and glad and thankful shall I be if she ever does accept you. But I think you must not ask her to-morrow, nor even the next day. Now I will tell you about that terrible man. We met him first some years ago, during Mr. Denham's lifetime. Mr. Denham was a great gambler, and so is the count; so that they were drawn together in that way, and he used to come often to the house. I was immensely interested in him, because he told me more about the unseen world than I had ever been able to learn from books, and because—though that is a comparatively small matter—he has the gift of second-sight in a remarkable degree. Perhaps you don't believe in second-sight, but I can give you instances."

"Some other time, Mrs. Patterson, if you don't mind. And was Miss Denham as much interested in this man as you were?"

"No, she always disliked him; although he took a great deal of trouble to ingratiate himself with her. She even doubted his powers, poor child! One evening, when he was telling us how he had imposed his will upon different people she very foolishly defied him to make her do anything that she did not choose to do. Not five minutes afterward she got up from her chair, crossed the room, and kissed him on the forehead. He laughed, and asked her whether she was convinced now. Was it not horrible of him?"

"Her father kicked him out of the house, I suppose," exclaimed Everard indignantly.

"Oh, no; Mr. Denham was not that kind of man. Besides, Count Souratkin did what he liked with him. For some reason or other he chose to prevent Laura from playing in public, though both she and her father wished that she should do so. Mr. Denham was very much vexed about it, yet he gave in. And ever since that day poor Laura has been completely in that terrible man's power. She has fought and struggled, but it has always been useless."

"I should have thought you might have helped a little. In what way does he propose to use his power over Miss Denham? Does he wish her to marry him?"

"Ah, that I can't tell. He has never said so, but when she came into her little fortune we feared that that might be his aim: for he is extravagant, and I believe he is poor. And he is utterly unscrupulous. You see, we have gained nothing by running away from him and concealing our address."

“It is possible to discover addresses without supernatural aid. This man may be a humbug, or he may really have some such power as he claims. Either way, I presume that his influence over Miss Denham only exists when he is with her.”

“I cannot say for certain, but it is undoubtedly less when he is absent.”

“Very well; I will take care that he shall be absent from her henceforth and forever.”

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. PATTERSON smiled. “It is not such plain sailing as that, Mr. Everard. In the first place, I doubt whether you could persuade Laura to close her doors against Count Souratkin; in the second, I don’t think you would be able to thrash him; and in the third, I am quite sure you would not be able to frighten him. There is only one way of releasing Laura, and that is to oppose a stronger will than his own to the count. It is a forlorn hope, I fear, but it is worth trying; and there is just this in your favor, that Laura herself will fight, consciously or unconsciously, on your side. If you can get her to refuse him anything, no matter how small, you will have gained a great victory. Now, do you think you have patience and strength enough to undertake this struggle? It will be a long one, and the chances are against you.”

Everard was pacing up and down the room with his hands in his pockets. “I should prefer a rougher and readier method,” he remarked.

“There is no such method.”

“So be it then. But if your plan fails I shall take the liberty of reverting to mine. The fact is that I don’t know much about my adversary’s weapons, whereas I do know how to use my fists.”

The clearness and decision with which Mrs. Patterson had stated her case impressed Everard a good deal more than the supposition upon which it was founded. It vexed him to think that Souratkin’s tricks—for as such he regarded them—should have inspired the woman whom he loved with awe, and he was personally convinced that the count was more or less of an impostor. He had, however, the sense to perceive that this was not the point at issue. Whether the state of slavery to which Laura had been reduced was the result of Souratkin’s strength of will or of her own over-excited imagination signified comparatively little; the main thing was that it should be put an end to, and for that purpose Mrs. Patterson’s suggestion was perhaps the best that could be adopted.

In the meantime Everard thought that it could do no harm to get a little more information about this mysterious personage, so he applied to a friend of his in the Foreign Office who promised to make inquiries at the Russian embassy. In the course of a few days this gentleman sent in his report.

“It seems,” he wrote, “that your man is a deuce of a fellow. They call him exceedingly dangerous, and if ever he crosses the Russian frontier again he will find himself at the bottom of the deepest dungeon in St. Petersburg before he knows where he is. He began life as a man of fortune and a staunch supporter of the dynasty, but

he gambled away the last of his money some years ago, and since then he has been a wanderer upon the face of the earth and has espoused advanced liberal ideas. It is not certain whether he is actually a member of the Terrorist party, but there seems to be no doubt that his sympathies are with it. If he has not assassinated any generals or prefects of police with his own hand it is probably because he has always found it easy to get others to do such jobs for him, for his personal influence is said to be extraordinary. This seems to show that he is no fool, and as he is reputed to be a first-class player at games of skill *and chance* (this is my informant's description of him, and he gave it without a smile) I don't think I should cultivate his acquaintance if I were you."

The above communication was rather pleasant to Everard, since, when summed up, it amounted to a confirmation of his own opinion that Souratkin was a clever scamp. While waiting it he had abstained from calling upon Miss Denham, but now he betook himself to her house, prepared for the struggle in which he was about to engage, and more confident of success than Mrs Patterson would have wished him to be. He found Laura at home and alone, and was surprised by the joyous expression of her face.

"Ought I to receive you when Aunt Sarah is out?" she asked. "I suppose I ought not, but I can't resist telling you the good news. Count Souratkin has gone off to Paris."

"Oh, has he?" said Everard, thinking that he had better not seem to attach too much importance to this announcement. "I sincerely hope he will stay there."

The girl sighed and shook her head slightly. "At any rate, he is gone for the present," she said. And then, passing her hand across her forehead, as if to sweep away all gloomy thoughts—"I want to be happy now and to enjoy myself; I have an attack of wild spirits coming on. Do you ever have attacks of wild spirits, Mr. Everard?"

"I sometimes had them when I was your age," answered Everard, smiling.

"Oh, but you are still quite young; and as for me, I often feel as old as the hills. Age has nothing to do with the number of years that one has lived. One is always young so long as one has one's faculties of enjoyment, and you are not past enjoying things, are you?"

"Well, no; I am not quite so ancient as all that."

"Would you enjoy going to the opera to-morrow night, for example?"

"I should—with you," answered Everard.

"Because Lady Denham has sent to say that I can have her box, and they are going to give the 'Barbieri,' and I thought that perhaps, if you had nothing better to do, you would dine with us and take us to Covent Garden afterward. And Mr. Fellowes—I wonder whether he would come."

"I will ask him," answered Everard.

"And then do you think it would be very wrong if we were all to come back here after it was over and eat oysters? I can't eat raw oysters myself, but I dare say you can, and I know that Aunt Sarah is simply a victim to them. My share of the feast will be confined

to brown bread and butter, but what I shall value will be the reckless dissipation of it. I have heard of people partaking of oyster suppers after the play, but I never did such a thing myself, and very likely I never shall; so you see, if you and Mr. Fellowes will consent to be present at this one you will provide me with a cheering memory for my declining years. When the other old ladies begin talking about the wonderful things that they did when they were young I shall be able to wag my head knowingly and say that I, too, could tell a tale if I would."

Everard smiled to himself as he walked away, thinking of this speech. After all, that old father of hers could not have been quite such a reprobate as he had been represented, or Laura would hardly be still the child that she was. He was not sure whether he liked her best in her childish or in her graver humors, but indeed the question was of no great consequence, for he had reached that absurd condition of mind in which one person, and one only out of the whole world, seems perfect at all times and under all circumstances.

Fellowes was disengaged and was quite willing, as he said, to fulfill the functions of the harmless necessary fourth party. If his friend did not have an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête* with Miss Denham when the appointed evening came that was not his fault, but Laura's, who apparently preferred that the conversation should be general. Everard, for his part, was content to have it so. He had never expected to win her love quickly and, for the time being, what he chiefly desired was to see her merry and careless, as girls of her age ought to be.

In that respect she left him very little to wish for. At dinner and at the opera afterward she talked incessantly, and sometimes rather excitedly. Her gayety infected her companions, her eyes were sparkling, there was a faint pink flush upon her cheeks, and Everard, who did not himself talk very much, thought he had never seen her looking so charming. He did not take his eyes off her for a moment, and thus he at once detected a change which came over her manner after the second act, and which escaped the notice of the two other occupants of the box. When he saw the color fade out of her face when she ceased speaking, and when that nervous twisting of her fingers began, he immediately suspected that she had caught sight of Souratkin, and getting up, he swept the house with his glass in the full expectation of discovering the Russian somewhere. But he was disappointed. Souratkin was not visible, and he was driven to conclude that Laura's obvious uneasiness must have some other cause. She had turned so white that at last he could not forbear bending over her and asking whether she felt ill.

She started and half rose from her chair.

"No," she answered in an odd, hurried way, "but—but I think I must go away."

"Do you wish to go home?" he inquired.

"No—at least, I don't think so—I don't know."

All of a sudden she started to her feet, dropping her fan and cloak, and made for the door of the box. Fellowes turned round and stared, while Mrs. Patterson threw a significant glance at

Everard, who perceived that the moment had come for him to try his strength against Souratkin's.

"You can not go away now, Miss Denham," he said quietly. "Your carriage will not be there, you know."

He had placed himself in front of her, and was looking steadily into her eyes, which met his with a piteous, bewildered gaze. "Oh, what shall I do?—what shall I do?" she murmured faintly.

"Stay where you are," he answered smiling. "Nothing is going to happen to you, and you will feel all right again directly."

"Ah, you don't know!" she exclaimed, with a long, shuddering sigh.

Nevertheless, she dropped into the chair which he placed for her; and at the same moment the curtain rose. Several times after this she started convulsively, and made a movement as if to escape, but always she met Everard's eyes, and fell back again—whether with relief or with resignation, he could not determine. Gradually the fit, or whatever it had been, seemed to pass away from her, leaving her pale and exhausted, but apparently calm. She did not open her lips again until Everard was helping her into her carriage, when she turned to him with a ghost of a smile, and said: "I don't think we will have our oyster supper to-night; I am too tired."

Mrs. Patterson put her head out of the window to whisper: "I congratulate you; you have won your first victory."

It might be so; but the whole business was provoking and ridiculous to Everard, who was very reluctant to take Count Souratkin's power seriously, and yet found himself unable any longer to make light of it. His was one of those essentially Britannic minds, to which the incomprehensible and the incredible mean pretty much the same thing, and which, in the presence of phenomena which can neither be explained nor denied, are apt to grow defiant, and conclude that the best way out of the difficulty is to punch the phenomena-monger's head. Everard did not punch Count Souratkin's head, because, for one thing, he did not know where that head was to be found, and, for another, he thought it well to hold physical force in reserve; but he strongly suspected that the reserves would have to be called out before the campaign had proceeded much further, and the prospect of the preliminary operations was in no way attractive to him.

As for these, he had not long to wait before embarking upon them. Walking down Oxford Street the next day, on his way to inquire whether Miss Denham had recovered from her fatigue, he was a good deal astonished at meeting the object of his solicitude near the Marble Arch. She was alone; she was hastening eastward with an odd, uncertain gait, as if she did not quite see whither she was going; and indeed the vacant expression of her eyes seemed to show that she had not all her wits about her. She would have passed Everard without noticing him, had he not intercepted her, and when she recognized him she only smiled faintly, and made as though she would have pursued her way.

But he had no idea of allowing her to do that. "I was intending to call upon you, Miss Denham," he remarked. "Where are you going in such a hurry, if I may ask?"

"To the Langham Hotel," she answered. "At least, I think

so—yes; it must be there.” She paused for a moment; then seemed to collect herself. “I must go now, Mr. Everard,” she said. “Perhaps you could come and see us to-morrow?”

“Indeed,” said Everard, “I think you had better let me take you home. You ought not to be walking through these crowded streets all by yourself.”

“What does it signify?” she returned, rather impatiently. “At any rate, I must go on, whether it is proper or not.”

“Why must you?”

“Because—because—oh, I can’t tell you why; only I must! It is impossible to do anything else.”

“I assure you you are mistaken. It is perfectly possible for you to go back to your house with me, and I will prove it to you.”

Everard had called a hansom while he was speaking. He now gently forced Laura to enter it, gave the address to the driver, and sat down beside her.

“Oh,” she exclaimed, under her breath, “you don’t know what you have done!”

“Don’t I? Well, at least I have shown you that it *could* be done.”

She looked up at him with a smile and a sigh. “Thank you,” she said; “you are very kind to me. Only I am afraid it is all no use.”

She sunk back with an air of exhaustion, just as she had done the night before at the opera; and Everard began to talk unconcernedly about the first thing that came into his head. It did not much matter what subject he chose, since she was evidently not listening to him.

When they reached her house she did not ask him to come in, but he took the liberty of doing so uninvited, for he was anxious to have a few words with Mrs. Patterson. Laura, after remaining for a moment in the drawing-room, went away to take off her bonnet, and then Everard seated himself beside the old lady.

“Now, Mrs. Patterson,” he said, “this sort of thing won’t do, you know. By a lucky chance I met Miss Denham in Oxford Street, and induced her to come back here with me; so for this time no harm is done; but one can’t count upon such a thing happening twice, and if I had not stopped her she would have gone straight to the Langham Hotel, where I suppose I may take it for granted that Count Souiatkin is staying.”

Mrs. Patterson threw up her arms. “This is most marvelous! You are quite right; that terrible man is at the Langham Hotel. He returned from Paris unexpectedly, and called yesterday afternoon while we were out; but I took care not to spoil poor Laura’s pleasure by saying a word to her about it, and she could not have known that he was in London, much less have found out his address. Yet, you see, she has twice within twenty-four hours been irresistibly impelled to go to him. The only thing that reassures me is your having been able to prevent her from yielding to the impulse. That shows that you are beginning to exercise a counteracting influence upon her.”

Everard did not look pleased. “It seems to me,” he observed, “that you might have done a little more in the way of counteract-

ing influence yourself. Surely, after what you saw last night, you might have anticipated this!"

"What could I do? I could not lock my niece up in her own house."

"I am by no means sure that it might not have been better to do that than to let her expose herself to such risks. At the very least, you might have insisted upon accompanying her when she went out."

"But I had no suspicion that she was going to the Langham Hotel. It seemed impossible that she should know—"

"Just look at that!" interrupted Everard suddenly. He had picked up from the table a visiting-card, which bore the inscription of *Le Comte Souratkin*, and the words "Langham Hotel" written in pencil underneath the name.

Mrs. Patterson looked confused and penitent. "It was very stupid of me," she murmured. "I did not know what had become of the card—I thought I had put it in a book which I was reading yesterday—"

"And where, of course, Miss Denham found it. The thing is as plain as a pikestaff. She knew the man was in London; she over-excited herself in trying to forget him, and that scene at the theater was nothing more nor less than the effect of the reaction. The truth is that you are so anxious to have your nonsensical superstitions confirmed that you will accept any explanation of an occurrence rather than the natural and obvious one."

"But, Mr Everard, even if Laura did see the card, that would not account for the magnetic attraction which drew her toward a man whom she hates."

"When the existence of the magnetic attraction is established, it will be time enough to try and account for it. In my poor judgment, she is simply the victim of a delusion, which it is our business to dispel, if we can."

"Ah, no! there is no delusion. She is possessed—possessed by a devil, poor child! and no one can save her, except by exorcising him."

"Very well, very well," returned Everard, irritably: "I'll exorcise him with a thick stick, if necessary. But in the meantime, since you won't help me, do let me beg of you to remain neutral, and not to play the enemy's game. The man will come to the house, of course, there's no help for that; but I mean to keep Miss Denham out of the house all day and every day until her mind has recovered its balance a little. You won't put obstacles in my way, I trust."

"Oh, no," replied Mrs. Patterson, with a despondent shake of her head; "on the contrary, I will do all that I can to assist you. But you little know Count Souratkin, if you imagine that he will not find her out and follow her, wherever she may be."

"Well," said Everard, "he shall not find her alone, anyhow."

And at that moment Laura's entrance put an end to the dialogue.

"Shall we have some music?" she asked, as composedly as if nothing unusual had occurred.

She sat down at the piano, and began to play one of those solemn, stately compositions of the old masters, for which our feverish

generation, with its taste for all that is odd, fantastic, or far-fetched, is ceasing to care.

"That is better than 'Le Délire,' is it not?" she said, after a time, with a quiet smile, of which Everard easily interpreted the meaning.

He nodded, but made no articulate reply, knowing that Beethoven could say all to her that he could, and could say it a thousand times more convincingly. She went on playing while he sat silently watching her, and while Mrs. Patterson dozed over her book, and when at length he rose to take his leave, he did not think it necessary or advisable to refer to what had taken place earlier in the afternoon.

But after he had said good-by, and was half-way down the stairs, he heard the drawing-room door shut behind him, and Laura followed him to the landing.

"I wanted to thank you for your kindness," she said simply, "and to tell you that I understand it all. I don't know why you should be so good to me."

Everard hesitated. If he told her that he loved her, he might at once and forever lose all power of giving her help. Fearing that his self-control might desert him, and that he might say too much, he erred a little in the opposite direction.

"Oh, everybody's nerves are apt to get unstrung at times," he answered lightly, "and when one is out of sorts in that way one is sure to see visions and dream dreams. I'll undertake to put you all right in no time, if you'll let me prescribe for you, and what I should recommend first of all is plenty of fresh air. I don't believe either you or Mrs. Patterson have ever seen Richmond or Windsor, or any of the pretty places that are within reach of London. Won't you allow me to do the honors of the neighborhood for you? I would get Fellowes to join us, and we would have a series of happy days in the country."

He could see that she was a little hurt by this way of treating her affliction. "Yes," she answered, "of course you think it is all nonsense, and though it is not nonsense, perhaps it is best that you should think so. Yes, I should like very much to go to all those places with you, and so would Aunt Sarah, I know." She paused, and then held out her hand to him. "I will try to do exactly as you tell me," she said, "since you are so good as to take all this trouble. Only you will not lose patience with me, will you? I have confidence in you, but I have none in myself. Indeed, I sometimes think that I have no self left, that I am only the shadow of another person."

"You will think differently a short time hence, I hope," answered Everard. "For the present we are going to enjoy ourselves, and forget all about bogeys."

CHAPTER V.

"No," said Fellowes, good-humoredly, but firmly, in reply to a suggestion of Everard's; "I'm sorry I can't oblige you, old chap; but enough is as good as a feast, and, fond as I am of Mrs. Patterson's ghost stories, I doubt whether I could stand seven or eight hours of them at a stretch. So long as you keep inside the four-mile radius I'm with you; but if you want somebody to take complete

charge of an old woman during several long days in the country, you had better advertise, and offer suitable pay. I don't much think you'll get any one to do it out of pure friendship."

Everard had not the face to ask another friend to undertake the task which Fellowes had declined; so that Mrs. Patterson was conducted to the environs of London without a special cavalier. She did not, however, object to this arrangement, nor was she herself found in any way objectionable as a *chaperone* by her companions. A bench in the shade was all that she asked for, and she would sit contentedly nodding over a book for as long a time as it pleased them to wander away and leave her there.

Well was it for her that she was so patient; for both Everard and Laura were very apt to forget all about her on these occasions. The former had every reason to believe that his regimen was working satisfactorily. Whether Laura had seen Souratkin again he did not know, not having cared to mention the man's name to her; but if she had, the meeting had evidently done her no harm, and it was certain that she had benefited both in health and spirits by these daily excursions.

"How delightful it has all been!" she exclaimed one afternoon. "But we shall soon have seen every place that there is to see, I suppose, and then the only thing to be done will be to stay at home and practice one's neglected scales. I wish London had more sides!"

It was upon the Terrace at Windsor that she breathed this aspiration, so welcome to her hearer. They had visited the State Apartments; they had strolled leisurely beneath the elms in the Long Walk; they had attended the afternoon service at St. George's, and now they were enjoying the view of the distant spires and antique towers which crown the wat'ry glade, while Mrs. Patterson was taking a little well earned repose at the White Hart.

"There are thirty-two points of the compass," Everard remarked.

"Yes; but there are not thirty-two Windsors, nor thirty-two days in July, and if there were, I shouldn't have the heart to condemn you to thirty-two consecutive holidays. I wonder whether I have been a great bore to you?"

"Is it necessary to answer that question?" asked Everard, smiling.

"Well, no, considering that you could only make one answer. And perhaps, after all, you haven't been very much bored, so far. You would be, though, if this sort of thing were to go on much longer."

"I should like this thing, as you call it, to go on to the end of time," Everard declared with pardonable exaggeration.

She did not seem to hear him. She was silent for a few seconds, leaning on the parapet, and gazing down at the blue smoke of the town beneath and the river all aflame with the setting sun. "I am not sure whether you know that I am very grateful to you," she said suddenly. "I want you to know it."

"I can't help being glad that you should feel so; but in reality it is I who have reason to be grateful to you."

"In a way, perhaps you have. A doctor is grateful to a patient who allows himself to be cured, I dare say; but naturally the patient is still more grateful to the doctor who cures him."

"You consider yourself cured, then?" cried Everard joyfully.

"No, no—not that; how can I tell? All I know is that I have tried to obey you implicitly and that I have been much the better for it. My disease may be incurable, but it is something to have been free of it for a time."

"Don't you think," said Everard, "that you might free yourself from it finally, if you would?"

"If I would! But the very nature of the disease is that my will is gone."

"You fancy so; but the proof that you are mistaken is that you desire to escape."

"Desire is one thing, and will is quite another. It has been owing to your will, not mine, that I have escaped for a week. I know that what I say sounds absurd to you," she added, with a despondent gesture, "and I don't wonder at it. There was a time when I thought all such things just as absurd as you think them now."

"I don't consider everything absurd that is outside the range of my intelligence, Miss Denham," said Everard, sitting down beside her; "only I can not believe that this supernatural power—"

"I don't know that we need call it supernatural," interrupted Laura.

"Natural or supernatural, I should be very slow to admit that absolute power over a fellow-creature could be committed to any man. Let us assume, however, that it is as you say. Even so, you would be safe, according to your view, so long as I am with you."

"But you can not be always with me."

"Why not? I have very little to offer; I am neither rich nor clever, nor as young as I once was; but—I love you. Will you not let me stand between you and harm?"

Laura started to her feet with an affrighted look. "Oh, no!" she cried, catching her breath; "don't ask me! It is impossible—utterly impossible!"

Everard felt a momentary pang of bitter disappointment, but he concealed it bravely. "You mean that you don't love me," he said, in a quiet, steady voice; "I could not expect that you should. But I believe that you might come to love me some day; otherwise I would not say another word. If I can give you nothing else, I can give you peace and protection. Think it over, and allow me a day or two of hope before you refuse me decisively."

"You don't consider what it is that you ask for!" exclaimed the girl, trembling and clasping her hands. "I am not a free agent—you have seen that yourself—and neither you nor I can tell what may happen in the future. I might make your life miserable—I might even have to leave you. Oh, no! I should care very little for you if I could consent to drag you into my trouble."

"Is it for my sake, then, that you reject me?" asked Everard.

"Yes, for your own sake," he answered unguardedly. "I dare not take what you offer me; it is too great a risk."

"Put the risk on one side for a moment. If it did not exist, could you care for me, do you think?"

She made no reply; but, looking into her face, he saw there all that he wanted to see. "My dear," he whispered, drawing her toward him, "your troubles are over and done with now forever."

Certainly that was rather a bold thing to say about anybody who was not yet dead; but the circumstances of the case were, perhaps, such as to justify a little hyperbole even in so sober-minded a man as Everard. And indeed his language did not strike Laura as hyperbolic. From the beginning of their acquaintance she had relied instinctively upon him; she had been greatly impressed by what she considered as his successful resistance to Souratkin; finally, she was young and could not help being sanguine, in spite of the gloomy forebodings to which she had just given expression.

The two lovers paced up and down the Terrace arm-in-arm, until long after sunset, oblivious of poor Mrs. Patterson; oblivious, too, of the time agreed upon for their return to London. But Everard, when at last it occurred to him to consult his watch, observed that trains left every half hour or so, and that there really was no need for hurry. However, it clearly behooved them to go and wake up their long-suffering chaperon, and they prepared to leave the precincts of the Castle accordingly.

Beneath the first archway Everard felt Laura's hand tighten convulsively on his arm, and, looking up, became aware of a tall figure looming up in the dusk which was unmistakably that of Souratkin. If there was one thing about this man which exasperated Everard more than another, it was his theatrical way of appearing suddenly out of space. Upon this occasion he was more than usually annoyed by it; for he had been taken by surprise and had started, and he knew that Laura must have felt him start. For this reason he said in the most matter-of-course tone possible:

"How do you do, Count Souratkin? I suppose you heard from Mrs. Patterson that we were here."

"Precisely so," answered the count blandly. "She was becoming alarmed and sent me to look for you."

He did not explain how he came to be at Windsor at all; but that circumstance hardly required explanation. Everard was sorry that Laura thought fit to ask the question, and still more sorry when Souratkin only replied to it by a low laugh. To counteract the effect of this ominous sound, he himself said: "Oh, all foreigners make a point of seeing Windsor; and they are quite right. There is nothing finer in England."

"That is not my view," remarked Souratkin. "To me a building like Windsor Castle is a hideous blot upon the landscape—the symbol of tyranny—the abode of generations of oppressors."

"I don't know that it is the symbol of anything in particular, except of monarchy, which still exists, in a constitutional form, in this country," said Everard. "As for her majesty, she has neither the wish nor the power to oppress her subjects."

"Ah, the power—perhaps not; but there is no monarch who would not be a tyrant if he could. What can be more absurd than a ruler who is not allowed to rule? Happily, the day of kings and queens is nearly over. A few more charges of dynamite and puff!—there will be an end of the whole accursed race."

"If you hold these opinions, you had better have the courage of them and go and blow up your own emperor," observed Everard, dryly; "but it is easier and safer to talk about committing murder than to do it."

Souratkin laughed again. He either had his temper well under command, or did not think it worth while to quarrel with the Englishman. They all three walked down the hill together, Laura, who had relinquished Everard's arm, keeping her head resolutely turned away from Souratkin, who strode along beside her, with his hands behind his back, and darted a swift glance at her every now and again from between his half-closed eyelids. When they reached the turning which leads down to the Great Western station he volunteered to go and fetch Mrs. Patterson, an offer which was at once accepted by Everard.

Laura had grown grave and silent, and perhaps her companion was not very well advised in remarking: "I think we should encourage our friend the Nihilist to carry a few dynamite cartridges about with him for the removal of tyrants. The tyrants would not be at all likely to suffer in consequence, and there would always be the chance of his own abrupt removal to another sphere."

"Don't laugh at him," pleaded Laura earnestly, "and pray, pray don't quarrel with him! I assure you he is not a man to be laughed at. He thinks nothing of taking the life of any one who is obnoxious to him, he has told me so often."

"I should venture to disbelieve a good deal of what he told me. Besides, I thought he seemed to be in a particularly amiable humor to-night."

But she said: "Ah, that is just what frightens me. He would not have been like that if he had meant well. And I am sure he knows about—about you and me."

"If he doesn't, it will give me great pleasure to tell him," said Everard.

Laura raised both her hands to her head and then let them fall dejectedly. "Oh," she sighed, "I hope I have not done wrong—I hope you will not live to regret that you ever met me! But I am afraid!—I am afraid!"

CHAPTER VI.

EVERARD was not a little disappointed when, on calling at Laura's house the next day, he was told that she was not well enough to receive him. It was nothing serious, the servant said, but Miss Denham had a bad headache and could not leave her room. Mrs. Patterson had just gone out. Under these circumstances, there was nothing for Everard to do but to scribble his regrets and sympathies on his card and retire; but he had an uneasy suspicion that Laura's malady was more mental than physical, and for the remainder of the day he wandered about restlessly, not knowing what to do with himself, and half regretting that he had not forced an entrance, or at least demanded fuller particulars.

So intolerable did his suspense become that he could not bring himself to wait twenty-four hours before repeating his call, but betook himself to Bayswater on the ensuing morning. "After all," he thought, "I have a right to dispense with formalities now."

He was admitted this time, but found only Mrs. Patterson in the drawing-room; and as soon as he saw the old lady's face he perceived that there was something wrong.

"Where is Miss Denham?" he asked in a rather peremptory tone.

"Don't scold me," pleaded Mrs. Patterson, plaintively; "I am not to blame; and I am sure, if it depended upon me to make things smooth for you both, you would have no reason to complain. Unfortunately, nothing depends upon me, not even the power to say whether you shall be let into the house or not."

"Do you mean that Miss Denham wishes to forbid me her house?" asked Everard, turning a little pale.

"Oh, no; not Laura. Poor girl! she would be very unlikely to wish that. But you know, I warned you that you must not anticipate an easy victory, and now exactly what I foresaw has happened. Count Souratkin will not hear of your engagement to my niece."

Everard broke into an angry laugh. "You don't say so! Then of course there must be an end of it. Count Souratkin's right to interfere in the matter is incontestable, and I ought certainly to have asked his consent before I ventured to speak to Miss Denham. My only excuse is that it really did not occur to me to do so. As it is too late to gain his consent now, I shall—what do you think I shall do, Mrs. Patterson? It's very astonishing; but I shall make so bold as to dispense with it."

Mrs. Patterson shrugged her shoulders. "It is quite useless to go on like that. Sit down, and let us talk things over quietly."

Everard took a chair. "I am willing to listen to anything that you may have to say, Mrs. Patterson," he remarked; "but I may as well tell you at once that I shall not allow this fellow to stand for a moment between me and Laura. She has told me that she loves me; she has promised to marry me; and after that, the approval of Count Souratkin is a matter of no more interest or importance to me than the approval of the crossing-sweeper over the way."

"That may be; but his approval is of great importance to her."

"Why should it be?"

"She herself could not tell you why; but we must accept facts. At first I really thought that she would succeed in defying him. He flew into a passion and frightened me out of my senses; but she did not care a bit, and it was only after he had recovered his coolness that she seemed to waver. You can't imagine anything more curious to watch than the way in which her will staggered, as it were, and then suddenly broke."

Mrs. Patterson's manifest enjoyment of this spectacle was infuriating to Everard, who nevertheless subdued his wrath.

"I think it will be all right when I have seen her," he said quietly.

"I hope so, I'm sure; but you cannot see her to-day. To begin with, he has forbidden it, and—"

"This is monstrous!" interrupted Everard, jumping up. "Do you suppose that I am going to submit to his commands?"

"Dear Mr. Everard, remember what I told you; you must have patience, and plenty of it. Besides, Laura is really not in a state to talk to you to-day. She is completely knocked up, and if she did see you, you would gain nothing by it. Shall I tell you what I think?"

"I shall be very glad," answered Everard, sitting down again.

"Well, then, I think that, instead of fighting Count Souratkin, you had better try to make terms with him. He did not tell Laura

distinctly that he meant to marry her himself; but he gave me to understand as much, and I feel convinced that what he wants is not her, but her money."

"That is extremely probable."

"And what you want, I imagine, is not her money, but her."

"Do you mean to suggest that Miss Denham should hand over her fortune to this man?"

Mrs. Patterson sighed. "I believe that, if she did, he would leave her in peace; and peace is better worth having than money."

"I could never be a party to such a transaction. I can't prove to you that I am not mercenary; but I will ask you to take my word for the fact. As for aiding and abetting Count Souratkin, or any other rascal, in a robbery, I wouldn't do such a thing to save my life. Added to which, I can imagine no surer way of strengthening his hold upon Laura than yielding to him."

"He would cease to persecute her when there was nothing further to be gained by doing so."

"So long as she or her husband had a guinea there would always be something to be gained. No, Mrs. Patterson; that plan will not do. And now, in spite of what you have said, I must beg you to let Laura know that I am here, and ask her to speak to me, if it is only for five minutes."

Mrs. Patterson obeyed; but presently she returned, shaking her head. "Laura is very sorry," she said; "she hopes you will forgive her, but she does not feel equal to meeting you to-day. If you will call to-morrow afternoon between four and five o'clock, she will be down-stairs, and of course I will leave you together. Perhaps you are right about the money; but I have my misgivings, I own. You are not fighting with a man, but with the devil."

"Never yet," remarked Everard, "have I heard that it is good policy to give way to the devil. Moreover, Count Souratkin is not the devil at all, but a vulgar Russian impostor. However, I know that it is vain to try and persuade you of that." And so he departed, with an uncomfortable conviction that the vulgar impostor had got the better of him this time.

He had not proceeded a hundred yards down the street when he encountered, and almost ran against, the subject of his thoughts. Souratkin smiled, raised his hat, and made as though he would have passed on; but Everard, not over wisely perhaps, detained him.

"If you are on your way to call on Miss Denham," he said, "I can save you the trouble of going any further. She is not well enough to receive visitors."

Souratkin's smile was ironical, and even a trifle insolent. "That is a pity," he answered; "but I shall ask for Mrs. Patterson, who is no doubt at home."

"Count Souratkin," said Everard brusquely, "I don't know why I shouldn't use plain language with you. You are aware that Miss Denham and I are engaged to be married, and I hear that, for reasons best known to yourself, you have been trying to put a stop to the engagement. Now I wish you to understand, once for all, that I am not going to tolerate that kind of thing."

Souratkin raised his eyebrows. "But, dear sir, how can you help tolerating it?" he asked suavely. "I am an old friend of Miss

Denham, an old friend of her father, and I should think to fail in my duty if I did not advise her when an important crisis of her life presented itself. I am not able to advise her to marry you—no, I do not think you a suitable person to be her husband. It grieves me to say this; but in honesty—”

“In honesty,” interrupted Everard, “you would have to say something quite different, and that would not serve your purpose. Well, I only wanted to warn you that you will find me a rather tougher customer than Mrs. Patterson. Use your influence with Miss Denham, by all means, and I will use mine. We shall see who will win.”

For an instant Souratkin’s face clouded over and a gleam shot out from his narrow eyes. “Your influence!” he exclaimed roughly; “you have no influence.” But he recovered himself immediately and said, with the same bland air as before, “So be it, then. As you say, we shall see who will win. I may be mistaken; but I do not think that it will be you, my dear sir. Good-day to you.”

Whether Everard had advanced his own interests in any way by provoking this encounter seemed doubtful; but at least he had thrown down the gantlet openly to his adversary, and to have done that is always a comfort to a straightforward man. Moreover, Souratkin’s momentary trouble had not escaped his notice, and on reviewing the situation calmly that night, he was disposed to flatter himself that he had taken the most sensible course. The man’s hold upon Laura had evidently been obtained by an affectation of mystery, by a carefully undefined menace of his power to do something dreadful to those who thwarted him. If he could be quietly defied in her presence to do his worst, and if it should then appear that he could do nothing more than use his eyes in a peculiar fashion, the spell would probably be broken there and then.

When, therefore, the appointed hour on the following afternoon came round, and Everard bent his steps once more in the direction of Bayswater, it was with the determination of asking Laura to let him meet the enemy face to face. He did not mean to be over-gentle or persuasive with her; he intended to tell her plainly that she must choose between him and Souratkin, and he had very little doubt as to what her choice would be.

He was kept waiting for some time before his ring was taken any notice of, and when at length the door was opened a couple of inches, the dirty face of an old charwoman peered out at him through the aperture.

“Fam’ly’s left,” said this person curtly.

“Left!” ejaculated Everard; “what on earth do you mean?”

“Why, gone out o’ town—gone to the country, I s’pose,” replied the old woman; “I don’t know nothin’ about ’em.”

“But surely they must have left some address or—or note?”

“They ain’t left neither one nor t’other with me. I should say you was best go to Mr. Mason’s the ’ouse-agent’s; ’twas ’im as put me in ’ere this mornin’. He can tell you their address, I dessay. Second turn to the left, the first large furnitur’-ware’us you come to.”

But Mr. Mason, when applied to, professed himself quite unable to do this. “Really, sir, I am very sorry,” he said, in answer to

Everard's reiterated demands; "but I can give you no information at all. We were told last night that Miss Denham was called away suddenly, and only two days ago we received the rent for the coming month. This morning I went round myself to take the inventory, and I made a particular point of inquiring whether there was any address for letters to be forwarded to; but I was given to understand that no letters were expected."

"Did you see Miss Denham herself?"

"No, sir; I saw no one except a tall gentleman, a foreigner by the look of him. I made the remark to him that it was rather unusual for a family to move in that sudden way, without saying where they were going; but he was very short in his manner; and as all claims were paid quite correct, of course it was not for me to say anything more."

Everard ground his teeth in impotent rage. It had never entered into his head that such a thing as this could happen, and he could not believe that Laura would have allowed herself to be spirited away without giving him some clue as to her destination. He hurried back to his rooms, half hoping that he might find a letter from her awaiting him; and there, sure enough, upon the table lay an envelope addressed in her handwriting. He tore it open and read the following words:—

"Good-by. I can not fight against my fate, and I must not ruin your life. It would only have made us both more unhappy if we had met to-day. I know you will want to follow me; but pray do not attempt that. It would be useless, and indeed I have no idea where we are going. I shall never marry any one else—that is all that I can promise you. Forgive me, if you can, and try to forget me. You must see by my going away now that I can not have been worthy of you. Any one who had loved you as you deserved to be loved would have been able to resist doing that. Thank you a thousand times for all your goodness to me, and good-by again.

"LAURA."

CHAPTER VII.

THERE are very few calamities which appear instantly to be irremediable. In nine cases out of ten our first emotion on receiving bad news is one of incredulity, and our next an instinctive determination to set the crooked straight forthwith. Everard, after he had read Laura's letter, was very far indeed from giving way to despair. He had no thought of taking her at her word, nor any doubt that he should shortly discover her whereabouts and deliver her from the unscrupulous ruffian by whom, for the time being, she seemed to have been enslaved. He was rather vexed and disappointed than alarmed. The whole thing struck him as too melodramatic and preposterous to be real, and he could not bring himself to believe that it was possible in these days for any one to vanish suddenly and never reappear.

Unfortunately, it is precisely in these days of steam-power that people who have a mind to vanish find it most easy to do so, and a little reflection convinced Everard that, if he wanted to overtake the

fugitives, he must lose no time about it. That they would make for the Continent he felt pretty sure, and he at once hastened to his club, where, with the aid of a foreign Bradshaw, he soon satisfied himself that they could not yet have left England by any of the ordinary routes. They would have been too late to catch the day services, and the probability was that they were at that moment awaiting the departure of the night boat at one of the southern or south-eastern ports. As there are no less than seven of these, it became a somewhat difficult question to which of them he had better betake himself; but he decided upon Dover, as being on the whole the most likely; and then, happening to catch sight of Fellowes yawning over the "Sportsman," it struck him that he might contrive to have the Queenborough boat watched into the bargain. Folkestone he put out of the question, because nobody travels that way at night.

He took Fellowes by the arm, led him into a corner, and rapidly narrated the circumstances to him. "And now," he concluded, "I want you to do me a great kindness. I want you to run down to Queenborough to night and see whether they go on board."

"All right," answered Fellowes, endeavoring to look as if he did not at all mind sacrificing the dinner to which he had been engaged. "And if I do see them?"

"Well, then I am afraid you would have to follow them; it wouldn't do to let them out of your sight. You could telegraph to me on the first opportunity though."

"But, my dear chap, supposing they go straight through to Yokohama?"

Everard frowned slightly. "This isn't a joking matter, Fellowes."

"No, no, of course not," agreed Fellowes, hastily assuming an appropriate air of solemnity. "I don't see why they shouldn't take the express for St. Petersburg, all the same. Hope they won't, I'm sure; because I do like to change my clothes every now and then. However, anything to oblige a friend."

Everard was just one of those calm, logical men who can state at a moment's notice what are the mathematical probabilities in favor of or against the occurrence of any given event, and he must have been aware that the chance of his meeting Laura at Dover was only as one in a very large number. Nevertheless, he was unreasonably disappointed when his mission proved a failure. He went on board the Calais and Ostend boats and subjected the passengers to a close scrutiny; but the persons of whom he was in search were not among them, and he had to get through the time as best he could until the Paris mail came in, when he returned to London, appearing at his rooms at the scandalous hour of seven o'clock in the morning. He had scarcely finished dressing when Fellowes arrived, haggard and unshaven, from Queenborough, where, as he plaintively said, he had spent a truly miserable night in vain.

"I don't mean to grumble, you know," he added—"always delighted to suffer in a good cause. Only it strikes me that we are setting to work in a rather unscientific way. It's like stopping a couple of earths and leaving any number of others open, don't you know."

“What could I do?” asked Everard despondingly. “It was an off chance; but I thought it worth trying.”

“And what is the next move to be?”

“I haven’t an idea.”

“It is a proud thing,” observed Fellowes reflectively, “to be a free-born Briton; but there are times when one feels the disadvantages of it too. Now, supposing we had been in Souratkin’s native land, our course would have been perfectly clear. We should only have had to get somebody to introduce us to the chief of the police, and in twenty-four hours, or less, we should have spotted our friends to a dead certainty. But I suppose Scotland Yard wouldn’t help us if it could, and couldn’t if it would. What do you think about applying at a Private Inquiry Office?”

Everard did not much fancy this plan; but after some discussion he was fain to adopt it, no alternative suggesting itself to him, and in the course of the day he had an interview with an alert gentleman of uncertain nationality who had once been a detective, and who now, according to his own account, had offices and emissaries in all quarters of the globe. This personage knew all about Count Souratkin, and was confident of being able to lay his hand upon him, although, as he pointed out, the count’s long experience in the art of baffling pursuit made him a somewhat difficult person to trace. “But we shall obtain a clew, sir,” he added; “we shall obtain a clew before long, depend upon it.”

And indeed he was even better than his word, for he obtained not one clew only but half a dozen. Persons corresponding to the description given of Souratkin and the two ladies had, it appeared, been seen to leave Paddington, Charing Cross, Victoria, and Euston, on the day of their supposed departure from London, and had likewise been observed since in Edinburgh, Dublin, and Liverpool at one and the same time. All these cases had, of course, to be investigated, and no small expenditure of time and money was required before they were satisfactorily proved to have been cases of mistaken identity. Everard, consumed with anxiety, went every day to the Inquiry Office, and was always received with imperturbable good humor and oracular encouragement. “We are progressing, sir—we are progressing,” he was told. “We have now ascertained beyond a doubt that the count is not in Paris—and so forth.”

“But it doesn’t interest me in the least to hear where he isn’t,” Everard would protest. “I want to know where he is.”

To this there could be no rejoinder, save a shrug of the shoulders and an exhortation to be patient.

Thus three long weeks passed—weeks which Everard has never forgotten, and is not likely to forget to his dying day. He attended to his business, being unable to sit idle from morning to night; he took food and sleep, since both are necessary to support life; but the agony of suspense from which he suffered was not the less, perhaps, because his nature would not allow him to display it in any violent or exaggerated form. Hope did not entirely desert him; yet he was too clear-sighted to ignore the gravity of the situation, and too sensible to build much upon poor Laura’s promise to marry nobody but himself. For a time, no doubt, she would hold out, but for how long? This was the question which Everard asked himself all day

long and every day, and he was without data upon which to ground an answer to it.

Sitting down to breakfast the morning, he found, amongst the letters on the table, one addressed in a shaky handwriting unknown to him. He opened it listlessly; but when he had glanced at the first words his heart gave a great leap and the color rushed into his cheeks. The letter, which was almost illegible in parts and was blotted, as with tears, ran as follows:

“ROYAL HOTEL, DEAL.

“DEAR MR. EVERARD,—I feel that I must write to you. It is a dreadful risk—not to me alone—that would not matter, for I am only an old woman, and my life is nearly over at any rate—but to you and Laura; yet there is nothing else to be done. If, after the way in which you have been treated, your feelings are unaltered, and if you wish to save my niece from a *terrible fate*, come here at once. I will explain everything to you when we meet—that is, *if* we meet. I am not sure whether it would be safe for you to stay in this house or not; but perhaps you might, as *he* is not living here. Whatever you do, pray, *on no account* let him see you. He always comes in after dinner, but very seldom during the day. You might ask whether we were alone and then send in your card. Believe me, dear Mr. Everard, most sincerely yours,

“SARAH PATTERSON.”

It need hardly be said that within an hour of the receipt of this appeal Everard was speeding toward Deal as fast as an express train could take him. He reached his destination early in the afternoon, proceeded to the Royal Hotel, and, having discovered by inquiry that Miss Denham was out, but that Mrs. Patterson was at home, had himself shown at once into the presence of the latter lady.

Mrs. Patterson rushed across the room to meet him, and seized him by both hands. “Oh, Mr. Everard!” she exclaimed; “how good and generous of you to come! I was afraid you would never forgive us.”

“We needn’t mind about that,” answered Everard. “Laura would not have made me suffer if she could have helped it, and as for you, I had no claim upon you. Besides, you have sent for me now.”

“And I should have sent for you before,” cried Mrs. Patterson, eagerly, “only—only—”

“Only you were afraid,” suggested Everard.

“I admit that I was afraid; I had reason to be. But I should have written to you, notwithstanding, if I had believed that the worst would come. I didn’t believe it. He assured me solemnly, before we left London, that he would never make Laura marry him against her wish, and I could not guess that she would ever wish it.”

“Good Heavens! Does she wish it?”

“She says so. His influence over her has increased to such an extent that she has no wishes now but his. Yesterday she told me that she had consented to marry him, and when I reproached her she hardly seemed to understand me. I sent for you because I know that you can influence her strongly, though not so strongly as

he can, and because your coming was the only chance left of saving her life. Yes, saving her life; for all this is killing her. If she ever does become Count Souratkin's wife, it will not be long before he is left in sole possession of her property. And he won't take her money without her. I asked him point-blank whether he would, and he flew into one of his frightful passions, declaring that it was not her fortune that he loved. Then he read my thoughts—as you know he can—and swore that if I brought you down here he would murder me and you too."

"Threatened men live long," remarked Everard.

"That depends upon who threatens them. Nothing is more certain than that your life will be in very great danger if Count Souratkin discovers that you are here; and for Laura's sake as well as for your own, I do trust that you will take care not to let him see you."

"I can't bind myself as to that," answered Everard, with an impatient gesture. "I should think he is pretty sure to see me."

"Not if you are careful. He only comes into Deal in the evening. Where he lives I don't quite know; but I heard from some of the trades-people that he had taken a small cottage somewhere between this and Sandwich. He has said nothing about it to us, he is always apt to be mysterious."

"Naturally he is. Mystery is the backbone of his profession."

"What profession? He has none that I know of. I fancy that he keeps his address a secret because he has meetings of conspirators or something of that kind at his house. Anyhow, we scarcely ever see him until after dinner; and what I hope is, that if Laura is with you during the day, she may lay in a stock of strength, as it were, to oppose him in the evening. There she is—I hear her step on the stairs. Now I shall go away and leave you with her; so good-by for the present. I am sure I need not warn you to be kind and patient."

And Mrs. Patterson slipped out of the room by one door as Laura entered at the other.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Laura saw who was waiting for her, she stopped short, her pale lips moving, but no sound coming from them. Then in a low voice she exclaimed, "Oh, why have you done this?"

"It is I who should ask this question," returned Everard rather sadly. "Why have you had so little faith in me? Why have you left me? Why have you broken your word?"

She did not answer. She stood before him, her arms hanging listlessly, her head slightly bent, and her sorrowful eyes cast down. At last—"Was it Aunt Sarah who told you where we were?" she asked.

"Yes, it was; and I can never be grateful enough to her. I have been seeking for you high and low and could get no trace of you, though you were so near me all the time it seems. But I have found you at last, thank God! and no one shall ever separate us again."

Laura raised her eyes and looked at him, frowning a little and

seeming as if she did not quite take in his meaning. "Has Aunt Sarah told you—everything?" she asked, after a minute.

"She told me that you have engaged yourself to that man. Just at first I was startled; but I am not going to be so foolish as to upbraid you. I know that you are not responsible for anything that you have done. Let us forget it. Some day, if you like, you shall tell me how it all happened; but not unless you like. I am content either way now that I have found you again."

Laura sighed deeply. "You are very generous," she murmured.

"My dear," answered Everard, "if you had deceived me and I had forgiven you, that might have been generous; but it is not you yourself who have caused me these weeks of agony—I know that. The shortest and best way is to let by-gones be by-gones and make a fresh start."

"That is not possible," she answered, shaking her head—"at least it is not possible for me. It is for you; and it is what I want you to do. Oh, why don't you despise me?—why don't you hate me? I should if I were in your place."

"I don't think you would," said Everard tranquilly. "I love you, and I know that you love me. More than that I don't ask, or even care very much to know. Nothing else is of any real consequence."

"How good you are!" cried the girl, suddenly seizing his hand and pressing it to her lips. "I *do* love you! Oh, can't we escape?—can't you take me away somewhere and save me?"

"Why, of course I can," answered Everard, folding her in his arms. "My darling, you belong to me and to no one else in the world. If any one else thinks he can get possession of you let him come and try, that's all."

But she wrenched herself away from him with a revulsion of feeling as abrupt as the last. "No, no!" she exclaimed, "it can't be! It is madness to dream of it. He would kill you!"

"Good Heavens, what nonsense!" ejaculated Everard. "How am I to convince you that this is the most absurd hallucination? As if I should stand still to be killed!—and as if a man who uttered such empty threats were in the least likely to carry them out!"

"Ah," she sighed, "you don't know what he is; you have never seen him angry. Before we left London he swore to me that he would kill you rather than that I should ever be your wife; and I know he meant it; it was no empty threat."

"Was it because he said that that you left London?"

"Yes, partly—or rather, no; I don't want you to think better of me than I deserve. I went away because—because I *had* to do as he told me. When I wrote to you, I thought I might safely promise to remain unmarried all my life; but even in that I overrated my strength. I can't resist him. And I did not know then that he—loved me."

"I don't for one moment believe that he does," returned Everard; "and if he did, would that make any difference?"

"I suppose it would," she answered slowly. "Can you understand that one may loathe a person and yet feel that his wishes must be in a sort of way one's own wishes?"

"I am not sure that I can."

"No; to you it is only an hysterical fancy; but to me it is as real as anything else in life. I can't explain how I feel; I can only tell you that so it is."

"You did not feel so a moment ago."

"Because for a moment I forgot. Don't try to make me forget again; it would be useless and—and cruel."

She had been speaking in a calm, despairing sort of fashion; but now her manner became more excited. "Don't you see," she went on, "what would happen if we were married? Don't you see that he would follow us wherever we went, and that, even if he spared your life, he would not spare me? It is horrible to think of it, and I was obliged to think of it, and I was obliged to acknowledge to myself that he might make me leave you and go to him. After admitting that, I could only admit that I had better be his wife. Perhaps I shall not live long; at any rate, I shall not bring misery and disgrace upon you. There!—now you know it all."

"And now that I know it all, what do you wish me to do?" asked Everard.

"There is but one thing that you *can* do; you must go away and leave me to my fate. I hope—I pray, that I may never see you again after this! Not because I don't love you, God knows!—but because our meeting could only bring you unhappiness. Poor Aunt Sarah meant to be kind when she wrote to you; but it was no kindness really, and I am afraid your having come here will make it harder for you to forget. I should like to tell you how grateful I am to you, and how very, very sorry it makes me to think that I have caused you suffering; but it is best to say no more. Please go now."

Everard knelt down beside the chair into which she had sunk. "Laura," he said, gently, "I have listened to you; will you listen for a minute to me? Perhaps your feelings are a little beyond my comprehension but certainly mine can be understood easily enough. Do you think that I, or any man who loved you, could be capable of 'leaving you to your fate'? Admitting, for the sake of argument, that such a risk as you speak of exists, do you think that I would not a thousand times rather run it than turn my back upon you when you most need help, and tamely give up all that makes life worth having to myself? Isn't it self-evident that no human being could act in that way?"

"But it is not the only risk!" cried Laura. "It is one risk, and a very terrible one, I think, but it isn't the only one. You won't believe that your life would be in danger; but indeed, indeed it would. Yes, and it is in danger even now. He might come in at any moment; and if he found you here!"—

"He most assuredly will find me here," observed Everard, smiling, "for I have no intention of leaving the room until he enters it."

Laura started to her feet. "That must not be!—anything rather than that!" she exclaimed vehemently. "Listen, I will promise you something, if you will promise in return to go away now, and not to attempt to see me while he is here. I will promise to tell him that I love you, and that I can never love him. Perhaps he may yet let me off; it is possible. He has said all along that he would not marry me without my consent."

“At the same time doing all that he could to make you fancy that you wished to marry him.”

“That is no more than every one would do. Of course I have told him the same thing before; but I was only half-hearted about it; I thought it would be no good. I shall speak to him in a different way now.”

“My poor child, you are only staving off the evil day.”

“And if I am? A day staved off is something. I know what you are thinking; but you need have no fear. If you doubt me, you can tell the servants to let you know the moment that I leave the house; but I shall not leave it. Let me—let yourself have this last chance!”

Everard yielded somewhat reluctantly. An appeal to Souratkin's mercy did not seem to him likely to meet with success; but on the other hand he had no desire to come to blows with that redoubtable personage in the presence of a lady. He withdrew to his bedroom and stationed himself by the window, awaiting, with such patience as he could command, the approach of the enemy. The latter, however, did not appear, and after a time he went down to the coffee-room and disposed of a hasty dinner. It was while he was thus employed that he at length saw the tall figure of the count pass along the street and enter the hotel.

“Know anythin' o' that gent, sir?” inquired the waiter who was serving him, and who had already been discouraged in several attempts to enter into conversation.

“I have met him,” answered Everard shortly.

“'Ave you indeed, sir? Now, if you could be so kind as to tell me somethin' about him—leastways somethin' to his advantage, it 'd be a kind o' comfort to me, sir. Down 'ereabouts we think he's a Irish-American, which his accent is very sing'lar, as you've noticed, sir, I dessay.”

“He is a Russian, it that makes your mind any easier,” said Everard.

“A Rooshian—dear, dear! Sour-Atkins, he calls hisself; but he'd assoom a name, no doubt, for to put people off the scent. What I says is, why does he go and take a cottage a mile and a 'arf away from any other 'abitation? Why don't he keep no servant? What is he *up* to?—that's what I want to know.”

“I'm afraid I can't enlighten you,” answered Everard. “Is it any particular business of yours?”

“Well, it is and it ain't, sir. 'Tis not on my own account I'm uneasy; but my sister's 'usband, sir, he's in the county constabulary, and as courageous a man, sir, as you or me. But there's jobs as is enough to terrify the boldest, and no later 'n yesterday he says to me, ‘It's bore in upon me,’ he says, ‘as I shall be hordered to search that there feller's premises afore long, and it do make my blood run cold to think of it.’ His very words, sir. For 'tis one thing to arrest desperate characters—which comes in the way of dooty to all perlice, both borough and county, at times—and 'tis quite another to get messin' about with them beastly internal machines and nitre o' glycerines and such-like. It's a bit 'ard on a innercent man in the hexecootion of his dooty, sir, to 'ave his remains that mangled that they can't be given decent burial—a leg

'ere, a harm there, and his 'ead nowhere, maybe. The American gov'ment ought to be 'eld responsible, sir—my opinion."

"I think you may safely reassure your brother-in-law," Everard said. "It is extremely unlikely that he will be ordered to search this gentleman's premises, and still more unlikely that he would find any infernal machines upon them, if he were. Where is this cottage that you speak of?"

"A little way off the Sandwich road, sir, in as lonely a place as you'll find. The gent he 've been there off and on for a matter of three months now, and if he comes down 'ere for nothin' more than sea air and quiet—well, he don't look like it, that's all I can say; nor yet he don't talk like it. Why, 'taint so long ago he steps into this very room one evenin' and gets into conversation with two commercials as was talkin' about them drefful explosions in London. and 'You ain't heerd the last o' that,' he says, smilin' and lookin' as pleased as ever he could look: and 'dynamite's a powerful argyment,' he says. One o' the commercials passed the remark to me arterwards that a man as would say such things didn't ought to be at large."

The waiter paused for a moment and then added: "I 'ope you'll excuse o' me mentionin' it, sir, but it really do distress me to see the way he carries on with that pore young lady upstairs. Rooshian or American, he's a bad lot; and if you're a friend o' hers, sir—"

But Everard judged it best to put a stop to this loquacity. "The young lady is perfectly safe," he said, rising; "and I think you would do well to bear in mind, that the first duty of a man in your responsible position is to hold his tongue."

"Yes, sir; very true, sir," replied the waiter, who did not seem to be easily snubbed. "What time would you please to 'ave your breakfast in the mornin', sir?"

Everard strolled out into the street and lighted a cigar. It was growing dusk, so that there was little likelihood of his being recognized by Souratkin, should the latter come out suddenly; but as far as that went, he would not at all have objected to being recognized. That he must have an encounter of some sort or kind with the Russian ere long seemed tolerably certain, and he now began to think that it might be as well to follow the man home that very night and get the thing over. He smiled as it occurred to him how frightened Laura would be if she knew that he proposed bearding the lion in his den. For his own part, he had no fears, and strongly suspected his enemy of being nothing more formidable than an ass in a lion's skin, which it was now high time to pull off his shoulders. He sauntered up and down, therefore, while the twilight deepened into darkness, not liking to leave his post, although he was aware that he was becoming an object of curiosity to the shopkeepers, who had put their shutters up, and were lounging in the doorways, as well as to his friend the waiter, whose round eyes could be discerned above the wire blinds of the coffee-room.

It was not until past ten o'clock that he was relieved of his self-imposed sentry duty. Souratkin stepped out into the street and walked swiftly away, his head bent and his hands clasped behind his back. Everard let him have a short start and then followed him, keeping in the shadow of the walls and moving as noiselessly

as he could. He did not want to be accosted out of doors, having an impression that he would be better able to hold his own during the coming interview within four walls. There was no moon; but the sky was clear, so that he was able without difficulty to keep in sight the dark form of the Russian, who never looked round.

Souratkin made his way through the straggling outskirts of Deal into the country beyond, and after proceeding some little distance along the high road toward Sandwich, turned abruptly down a lane to the right. A walk of about a mile across the flat, low-lying region which here borders the sea, brought him and his pursuer to a laborer's cottage, which for loneliness of situation certainly seemed to deserve the character given of it by the waiter. Everard heard the key turned in the lock, and directly afterward a light appeared at one of the latticed windows.

Then for the first time it struck him that the proper course for a prudent person to pursue would be to go home and call again in the light of day. He was a fairly strong man, but he hardly believed himself to be Souratkin's equal in physique, and as to weapons of defense, he had nothing with him but a light walking stick. Any stick, however, will serve to beat a cur with, and he felt sure that this fellow was a cur. Besides, nobody likes to walk two miles at night in pursuit of a certain object and then turn back out of prudential considerations. Everard, therefore, advanced and rapped loudly on the door. Almost immediately it was flung open, and Souratkin, a candle in one hand and a revolver in the other, stood before him.

"Don't shoot me," said Everard, quietly. "I am not a burglar."

Souratkin manifested no surprise. "Always enchanted to see you, dear sir, at any hour of the day or night. Pray, come in."

Everard did as he was requested, and the moment after he had crossed the threshold the door was slammed, locked, and barred behind him. He turned round and saw that Souratkin was standing with his back against it. For an instant he experienced an unpleasant shock, as if he had walked into a trap with his eyes open, and this impression was evidently detected by his host, who said, with his faint, ironical smile:

"You will pardon my precautions, Mr. Everard, the district is such a solitary one, you see. Are you at all nervous?"

"Not in the least," said Everard, stolidly.

"How fortunate! Will you do me the favor to walk into my humble sitting-room? I cannot offer you many luxuries, but I have some brandy and I believe I have two chairs. I shall feel greatly honored if you will occupy one of them."

CHAPTER IX.

COUNT SOURATKIN had used no conventional language in calling his sitting-room a humble one, for it had neither carpet nor curtains, and its furniture consisted solely of a bare deal table and a couple of wooden chairs. Upon the table were writing materials and a mass of letters and papers, some half-dozen books were piled upon the mantel-shelf, and there was absolutely nothing else in the room.

The count went to a cupboard in the wall and took out a bottle and two glasses. "Please be seated," said he. "Do you take water with your brandy?"

"I won't have anything to drink, thank you," answered Everard.

"Are you indeed so abstemious? I envy you."

He more than half filled his own glass, and tossed off the contents without so much as winking. This heroic potion appeared to produce no effect upon him, except to make his eyes somewhat brighter. He was standing opposite to his guest, whom he was surveying, as usual, from between half-shut eyelids, while a smile still hovered about his lips.

"You wonder why I live in such a dog-hole, do you not?" he asked, suddenly.

"I am not inquisitive," replied Everard.

"No? Then you must be very unlike the good people of Deal. They have exhausted themselves in conjectures; they take me, I believe, for a coiner or some other kind of criminal—to me it is quite the same thing what they think. In truth solitude suits me; and I have, besides, another reason for living here, such a simple one that nobody would ever guess it. It is that I am too poor to take a decent lodging and that I get this cottage for next to nothing."

He paused for a moment. Perhaps he really had the gift which Mrs. Patterson claimed for him of discovering what was passing through other people's minds; at all events, he read Everard's thoughts now. "Ah, the Langham Hotel," he said, "yes, to be sure, that is an expensive place to live in; but when I go to London, you see, I go upon the business of those who can afford to pay. I do not mind saying this to you, dear Mr. Everard, because you are so discreet and your countenance invites confidence. Will you be a little candid with me in return and answer me one question?"

"With pleasure."

"To what, then, do I owe the honor of your visit to-night?"

"I dare say you can guess, but of course I am quite willing to tell you. I am here simply because you and I must come to an understanding, and because it is better, for Miss Denham's sake, that we should not meet in her presence. There is no use in pretending to ignore the fact that you have established a sort of ascendancy over her, and although that will have to come to an end, I would rather that it came to an end quietly."

"Mr. Everard, do you know that you are not very courteous?"

"You can hardly expect courtesy from me, Count Souratkin, considering what the circumstances are. You have shown yourself my enemy and I treat you as such."

"In short, you have come here to defy me."

"Well, yes—if you like to put it in that way."

"And did you bring a revolver with you, may I ask?"

Everard shrugged his shoulders. "No," he answered, "I didn't bring a revolver."

"Permit me to compliment you upon your courage."

"Thank you; but I don't see much occasion for alarm."

"Pardon me; that is perhaps because you are too stupid to see it."

"Perhaps so. At the same time I am not stupid enough to be

fearful because you have chosen to tell Mrs. Patterson that you proposed to murder me. Barking dogs don't bite, Count Souratkin."

"Ah, that is so like an Englishman? You will never understand that the world is not peopled with Anglo Saxons. You, when you love, you say to the lady 'I love you,' and that is sufficient. Whoever says or does more is insincere, theatrical—what not? When you hate you bring an action at law against the man who has injured you and recover damages; or it may be that, if you are very angry indeed, you will have a boxing match with him and make his nose bleed. But to stab or to kill out of jealousy or revenge—oh, no! you cannot admit that. That is not practical at all. That gets you in trouble with the police, leads you to prison, possibly to the gallows. And so, when one says to you 'Move out of my path or I will remove you from it,' you only laugh and do not believe, and stand still. Well now, Mr. Everard, I will tell you that you never did a more foolish thing in your life than when you came here to-night, and I will prove it to you in your own practical English way. You own that I exercise an ascendancy over Miss Denham: what you have not, perhaps, realized is that you yourself exercise an ascendancy still stronger over her. But for you she would have married me—yes, and loved me, too. You see, then, that I have a very real interest in putting you to death."

"I don't think you will do it, all the same," remarked Everard, composedly.

"You don't? You are a little difficult to convince, but I shall endeavor to convince you."

"Endeavor, by all means," returned Everard.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when he was lying on the floor, face downward, with Souratkin kneeling upon his back. The Russian had sprung upon him with such suddenness that he scarcely knew what had happened, much less had time to defend himself. In another minute his arms were bound tightly behind his back with a pocket handkerchief; after which Souratkin, rising and fetching a rope from the cupboard, proceeded to pinion his captive scientifically hand and foot. All this time Everard had been kicking and struggling to the best of his ability; but the other was far more than a match for him, and, for any good that he did, he might as well have submitted quietly from the outset.

When the pinioning process was completed, Souratkin placed him in a sitting posture on the ground, with his back against the wall, and said, "You will perceive, Mr. Everard, that you are now completely in my power. You might shout until you lost your breath, and nobody would hear you. Have I proved my case to your satisfaction?"

"No," replied Everard, doggedly, "you haven't. You have proved that you can kill me; but that I knew before. What I said was that you wouldn't do it. You will most unquestionably be hanged if you do. Unless I return to the hotel before morning I shall be missed, and suspicion will immediately point to you because a number of people saw me waiting for you outside, and may, for aught I know, have seen me follow you. You are already known to the police, and your chance of escape would be scarcely worth considering."

“Unfortunately for you,” observed Souratkin, who had produced his revolver from his breast-pocket, “I have thought of all that. My course is beautifully simple. I have a second weapon exactly resembling the one that you see. When I have killed you, I turn it toward myself and fire, grazing my right arm, and inflicting a slight wound. I then place it in your hand, and presently your fingers stiffen round it. After that, I hasten to the nearest police-station. ‘Ah, gentlemen, I am desolated! I have had the misfortune to kill a man!’ I explain the circumstance as well as my agitation will allow me. We were rivals, you were furious against me because you considered that I had robbed you of the affections of the lady whom I am about to marry; you followed me to my house in the dead of the night; some angry words were exchanged; you seized one of the pistols which I keep always loaded as a protection against burglars, and which, by ill-luck, was lying on the table; you fired, and I, what with the instinct of self-defense, and what with the smart of the wound, returned the fire. To my horror, I discovered that my bullet had entered your heart! I sink upon a bench, overpowered by grief and remorse. I demand to be taken to prison, there to await my trial. Do you think that any jury could convict me of murder upon such evidence? Do you think, by chance, that Mrs. Patterson or Miss Denham would state that they had heard me threaten your life? Not they! They would know nothing. Even you will concede that I have power enough over them to close their lips when I exert it. Prepare, then, for death.”

The last four words were spoken in a totally different voice from the preceding ones. Souratkin’s face expressed a diabolical joy. His narrow eyes were gleaming; his lips were drawn back, showing his white, pointed teeth; he slowly raised his revolver and covered his helpless victim.

It wou’d, perhaps, be asserting too much to say that Everard was not frightened now; but he kept his presence of mind.

“Stop a bit, Souratkin,” he said. “My life is worth something to me, and I’m willing to buy it of you. I’m not a rich man; but I’ll give you two thousand to let me go.”

Souratkin lowered his pistol and broke into a short laugh. “Oh, these English!—traders—even with their last breath! And so two thousand pounds is the value that you put upon yourself? It must be confessed that you are not proud. No, my dear sir, it is not with that sum that you can buy me off. Let us waste no more time in words.”

He raised the revolver once more; there was a flash, a report, and Everard heard the bullet strike the wall just above his head. A little of the plaster fell upon him.

When the smoke cleared away, he saw Souratkin contemplating him with a derisive smile. Evidently the man had no; meant to hit him. “I wonder whether he is amusing himself by torturing me or whether he is really going to let me off,” thought Everard. “Either way, he sha’n’t have the triumph of knowing what a funk I am in.”

He gazed steadily at the Russian, who presently laid his pistol down on the table with a sigh. “You are a brave man, Mr. Everard,” he said. “You have courage—whatever that may be worth. It is not an uncommon quality; but such as it is, you have it. I

Have no intention of killing you, although there is nothing in the world to prevent my doing so; for, as it happens, I do not mind being hung. In a few minutes you will be free to go where you please. In short, you have beaten me; and I should gain nothing at all by taking your life."

Everard stared. "Do you mean what you say?" he asked.

"You will soon know whether I mean it or not. Listen, Mr. Everard: I am not the adventurer that you take me for. I admit that, when my friend Denham died, I thought I should like very well to have his daughter's money. I do possess—believe me or not as you choose—the gift of imposing my will upon those who are weaker than myself, and I could easily have induced her to marry me, in spite of the fact that I was personally distasteful to her. Why did I not use my power? Because I found out that I loved her. I really do not know why you should look incredulous. Am I less capable of love than you because, instead of being a London wine merchant, I am a visionary who has spent his life and his fortune in trying to help forward the cause of his fellow-countrymen? Well, I let her go. I knew where she was; but I did not choose to follow her, partly because I hoped to conquer my passion, and partly because I had made such an unfavorable impression upon her at starting, that I wished to obliterate it. Whether she would actually have married me if you had not sought her out, I do not know; but I doubt it. To-day, when she told me that she abhorred me and that she would always love you, I knew that you were here, and I knew also that there was no hope for me. I did not mention it to her—you can tell her to-morrow, if you like. I won't detain you longer, Mr. Everard. After this we shall meet no more, and neither you nor Miss Denham have any further annoyance to fear from me. Allow me to untie these cords for you."

He stooped down and deftly unfastened the knots which he had tied, and presently Everard rose to his feet, a free and a somewhat bewildered man.

"If I have done you an injustice, Count Souratkin, I am sorry for it," he said, rather awkwardly; "but at the same time—"

"At the same time, you would like to reserve your opinion as to that. I give you full leave to do so—the more willingly because it is really no fault of yours that you are unable to understand a nature which is in some respects superior to your own. You will certainly always do your best to make Laura happy, and probably you will succeed. Had she loved me she might have been happier; but it is also possible that she might have been wretched, for I am jealous and exacting. If you had lost her you would not have broken your heart; I, who have lost her, am beyond reach of consolation. That, too, you can not believe. But in truth it is a matter of no importance at all whether you believe me or not. Good-by."

He had been leading his visitor toward the door while he spoke. He now pushed him gently through it, and shut and barred it behind him.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Everard woke the next morning he was more than half inclined to think that the events of the night had been part and parcel of a dream; but an uncomfortable stiffness of the limbs and certain red marks on his wrists and ankles convinced him that the experience which he had passed through had been quite a material one, and he rose and set to work to dress himself in a somewhat pensive mood. His intelligence, as Souratkin had hinted, was not of a very receptive order; he was slow to make up his mind and slow to change it; so that he had some difficulty in believing that the Russian was what he had represented himself to be. The man had spared his life when he might have taken it, it was true; but then there would have been so much more risk than advantage in murdering him. Was it not at least possible that this apparent magnanimity was only a blind to conceal some fresh plot?

However, he put these suspicions away from him when he was out of doors in the fresh air and the sunshine, and gave himself up to the joy and triumph of success. Come what might, no one should rob him of Laura now, he thought, as he paced up and down the beach; and presently he saw Laura herself emerge from the hotel and advance toward him. He was at once struck by the brightness of her face and the elasticity of her gait. She came up, holding out both her hands, and the first words that she said were—"I am free!"

"Have you seen Souratkin?" asked Everard quickly.

"I saw him last night, you know. I told him what I promised you that I would tell him, and he argued with me for a long time. I thought he seemed less sure of himself than usual; but he said nothing about releasing me. It was not anything that he said; only I woke very early this morning—about half-past five—and all of a sudden I knew— But you will think that it is nonsense."

"No," answered Everard; "go on."

"Well, I knew that I was free, that is all. I feel as I used to feel in the days long ago, before I saw him. Somehow, I don't think he will ever get hold of me again."

"I don't think he will," said Everard. And then he gave a brief account of what had taken place between him and Souratkin on the previous night.

It is to be feared that the lovers did not trouble their heads very much about that unfortunate man and the despair to which he had asserted himself to be a prey. Everard and Laura roamed about the whole morning, rejoicing in the present, making plans for the future, and well pleased to forget the painful past. But when, after having considerably overstayed the luncheon hour, they re-entered the hotel together, the waiter, who had for some time been eagerly watching in the doorway for their return, beckoned Everard aside and said in an excited whisper:—

"Sir, are you aware that that there Rooshian gent is no more?"

"Good God!" exclaimed Everard; "do you mean that he has put an end to himself?"

“ Ah, there 'tis, sir. Whether it were cramp or whether it were soocide, who can tell? But my brother-in-law he says this is just what he feared; for them premises must be entered upon, and he thought as you, sir, bein' a friend of the deceased, might like to go along of him, and p'raps just take a look inside first, so as to see—”

“ But how did it happen? How did he meet with his death?” interrupted Everard.

“ Oh, he's drowneded, sir. Between five and six o'clock in the mornin' it was. Some fishermen was cruisin' along past his place, and they sec him come down to the beach and undress hisself for to bathe. He swims out some distance, and then all of a sudden he throws up his arms and down he goes. They're all ready to swear as he never rose again—which is a cur'ous thing.”

“ Have they found his body?”

“ No, sir, they 'ave not; but 'tis bound to come ashore afore long, they tell me. I'm afraid this will be a sad sbock to the young lady, sir.”

The sea gave up his body in due time, and the coroner's jury returned a verdict in accordance with the evidence. Some few people who knew him, and who were in possession of evidence which was not before the jury, may have arrived at a different verdict; but if so, they kept it to themselves. Mrs. Patterson, to whom death does not by any means imply a severance of the ties which bind the living, was long harassed by fears lest her former tormentor should return in the spirit and work some dire mischief to her niece or herself; but as he has never done this, she concludes—correctly, let us hope—that he is now at peace.

THE PRINCESS DAGOMAR OF POLAND.

By HEINRICH FELBERMANN.

CHAPTER I.

I CAN hardly remember my earliest years. I recollect living in a little country village, at a sort of place like a farm-house. I lived there with an old lady who was very kind and good to me, and who told me she was my nurse. I never asked her why she was my nurse, and she never told me, but she was always very kind to me and I was very fond of her. It was a pretty farm-house. At the back of it were large woods, which ran away up the hills. I used to be told that there were bears in these woods, and I certainly believed it; I am sure there were wolves there, for I used to hear them sometimes at night, howling and yelping round the farm after we had locked up the pigs and shut the cows into their house. You can not mistake the cry of a wolf, it is too terrible, and it is unlike anything else. There were large fields full of cherry-trees, and there were great gardens full of every kind of flowers. Wolves are not troublesome at day-time, so I was allowed to go about as I pleased, and it was my habit to go about and to look at the flowers and listen to the birds, and to look at the great dark, black forest of pine trees that stretched away right up the hills, and beyond the hills into the mountains, and to wonder whether there were many bears in it, and whether there were many wolves, and whether bears and wolves would eat little children, and whether they would be so unkind as to eat a poor little baby-girl like myself; and so I gathered the wild strawberries and I plucked the flowers, and I used to sit and listen to the music of the water as it tumbled down over the fall, and I heard the birds sing, and I fed them, and they got to know me, and I was as happy as a girl need be.

A time came at last when there was an end to my happiness. My dear old nurse, to whom I had always looked and who had always told me everything, told me that I was a queen. This was a new thing for me. I had heard of queens in fairy stories, I had heard of queens in history. I knew that queens wore crowns upon their heads with great diamonds and emeralds and rubies in them. I knew that queens could do whatever they wished. I knew that whenever a queen wanted anything done she could give her commands and they would be obeyed. I knew all this, because I had read it in fairy stories, and because my dear old nurse had told it to me, and because I had heard the children with whom I used to play say the same kind of thing. But it was entirely new to me to be

told that I was a queen myself. I shall never forget it. I sat down and began to cry. My first idea was that I should not like to be a queen at all. I had never seen crowns and diamonds, and emeralds and rubies, and soldiers, and trumpeters, and the rest. I had never seen them, and I did not want to see them, and I did not want to have a crown of gold on my head; all I wanted was to gather the wild strawberries, and to look at the squirrels as they sat in the pine trees or jumped from bough to bough, and to listen to the chaffinches and to see the busy little rabbits pop out of one hole into another, and to watch the great big hare go slipping by at full trot. I knew the woods and I loved them. What was the good of telling me I was a queen? I had no ambition, no fancies, no desires. I knew nothing except that I loved the flowers, and the song of the birds, and the green grass, and the shadow of the trees. What more could I know? I had never been taught anything.

As I grew older, however, my nurse, dear old Sophia, began to tell me things that interested me. She told me the terrible story of the crushing down of Poland. She told me how it had been cut into parts and divided. She told me how brave men had been slaughtered by thousands. She told me how women had been flogged in public and in the sight of men. She told me of things that made my blood curdle as I listened to them. She told me the whole dreadful story of a great and powerful army swooping down upon a small and defenseless state, and whirling everything before it as an outburst of a river does when it overspreads its banks. And then as I listened to her I heard that all those who were dearest to me had died in this cruel and wicked conflict. I heard how my mother had been sent to Siberia because she was supposed to favor the cause of Polish freedom. I heard that they had marched her through the frozen snow month after month until she laid herself down by the side of the road and died. I heard how the chains upon her feet had bitten great holes into her flesh. I heard how my father had been chained wrist to wrist to a malefactor of the worst stamp, a man who had been a common thief and murderer and robber. And I then heard that I, Dagomar, was the proper heir, and the true representative of Stanislaus II., the last King of Poland. My old nurse told me all this, little by little. Sometimes we were fetching the cows back that they might be milked in the morning; sometimes we were under the cherry-trees in the orchard; and sometimes we were searching for eggs that the ducks had laid in odd places or hunting for the nests of the plover. But I learned the story, and it burned itself into me. The minds of children are wonderfully quick and clever. I do not mean that my own mind was clever; I wish you to understand that it was quick. While we were strolling in the fields, or rambling along the lanes, or looking to the preparation of our humble dinner, or sorting the linen, or otherwise busying ourselves in little cares, my old nurse kept on telling me one thing, and one thing only. "You are Queen of Poland," she kept on saying. "You are the great-granddaughter of Stanislaus II. There is no heir except yourself. You are the queen. The kingdom of Poland belongs to you. Some day we will drive out these hateful pigs of Russians." And then she would go down on her knees and would kiss my hands, and take my feet in her own hands

and caress them. I hardly understood what it all meant, but I felt certain that she was in earnest.

Years went on, and my dear nurse grew older. It was a strange little world in which we lived. It was a tiny, little Polish village. There were two or three farmers. There were the man and his wife that kept the little shop where everybody bought everything. There was the priest. There was nobody else. Each owner of a house baked his own bread. We bought our meat from one another. We most of us kept fowls and cows, and a few pigs. We all had plenty of garden fruit and other such things. Now and again there would be a fair in the nearest town, and we would then go and purchase wonderful things in the way of cloth and printed calico and a paca. We would buy trimmings and tape and flannel. And we would then come back and make our dresses for the next year. We had really nothing to trouble us. Perhaps the goose would lay her eggs so far from the house that we could not watch her, and the fox would eat the goslings. Perhaps a tinker would come in the night and carry off all our best apricots. Traveling tinkers are terrible thieves. But all this was of very little matter after all; and so I lived on, and all that troubled me was that I should be the Queen of Poland, and yet be living in a little country cottage. Why had I not got a crown? Why had I not got soldiers about me, and bands of music? And my old nurse used to shake her head, and to say, "You shall see, my child; you shall see."

But one day a great trouble came upon me; greater than any of these little things. My poor old nurse fell ill. I do not know what it was. But there was a wise woman in the village, and she went to see the wise woman; and she then came back and told me that she had to take me a long journey—twenty miles, she said—to Purlawski, the nearest town. I had often heard of it, and had wanted to go there. There was a big fair there every month, and I had heard about the fair and the shows, and the miracle plays, and about the great church and the market place, and the band that used to play there in the evening, and the park. So I was glad to have to go to town. But I was sorry, because my poor old nurse was ill; and I was a little timid, for she did not tell me what she was going to take me to the town for.

There was a man in the village, Michael Ivanski, who was going into the town with his cart, and he took us with him. We went all day through the thick woods on each side of the road—woods where my old nurse told me the wolves lived, so that we must finish the journey by day. When we got into the town, she took me to a large building, which had a great, high wall all around it. I did not know what it was, and the great, high wall frightened me. There was a small bell in the wall; and, when we rang, the door was opened by a lady, whom I knew to be a nun, for I had seen nuns before; only I had never seen a convent. The nun took us into a room where there was a lady, and my nurse told me to sit down; and she then talked to the lady for some little time. I could not hear what they said, but when they had finished, the lady kissed me, and my nurse said that she was coming back for me in a few days, and that the lady would take care of me, and be very kind to me. This I quite believed, for she looked very kind, and spoke

nicely, and so my old nurse went away, and I commenced my life in the Convent of the Sacred Cross.

I was never to see my dear old nurse again. She died soon after she went back to the village, as I heard later on, although the kind sisters kept the news from me, and used, once a week, to tell me she was getting better. I think the recording angel will forgive them the pious fraud. But the Lady Superior of the convent, Sister Vera, was very tender with me, and all the nuns were gentle and kind. There were several other girls in the convent, and our life was not at all dull. There were the hours to be kept, and there was the garden, and there was needle-work, and I was taught to illuminate and to sing. The good sisters knew very little of the outside world, and I learned very little; but it was a pleasant, happy life, and two years of it passed almost as if by magic. We went out into the town sometimes, or we went to high mass at the church, or we visited the sick, or, on very fine days, we went into the country. It was a quiet, peaceful life; I often afterward wished I could go back to it.

Among the girls in the convent was one to whom I became much attached. Her name was Katherine Orloff; her father was a Russian nobleman in great favor at the Court of St. Petersburg, and he had, as I afterward got to understand, the fullest confidence of the emperor. He was Governor-general of Poland at the time, and he lived in the old palace at Warsaw, where the kings of Poland used to live, and which my nurse had always told me was my home. But then she had also told me never to talk about these things—not to anybody. So I had never talked about them to Katherine Orloff. But the Lady Superior had said things to me once or twice that made me think she knew all about me; and when Katherine Orloff was going home, and asked to take me with her for a time, Sister Vera told me I might go, but also told me that I must never say a word to anybody of anything my nurse had said to me. I kept this promise for some years, as you will soon see, and I parted with the sisters. I had been allowed a little pocket-money while I was in the convent, and I had saved it, and I bought some small presents for the sisters—books, and music, and pictures, and things of that kind; and the Lady Superior made me plant a tree in the garden.

CHAPTER II.

WE had a long journey to Warsaw. A carriage came to the convent with a maid, and Katherine and I were driven a good many miles to a station, and I then, for the first time in my life, saw a railway. It was all new to me and bewildered me. But there was nothing new in it to Katherine, who had come all the way from St. Petersburg, miles and miles away.

When we got to Warsaw I found myself in a house grander than anything I had ever even read of. I need not attempt to describe a palace; everybody knows what a palace is. This had been the palace of dear old Poland, and I knew it ought to be mine. This was doubly strange. Strange, because I seemed to know the place and seemed to feel quite at home in the great rooms and long corridors,

and upon the huge staircase. Strange, on the other hand, because I had never seen anything of the sort before or been accustomed to it, and it contrasted so marvelously with the little cottage and with the simply furnished rooms of the convent.

There were soldiers about everywhere, and servants in gorgeous dress, and every room after sunset was blazing with wax tapers, and everywhere there were beautiful and rare and wonderful things—things of which I had never before seen the like. Katherine used to laugh at me, and call me a baby, because I would stand ever so long looking at a great china vase covered all over with little flowers molded so wonderfully that one could hardly believe they were not real. She would say, “Oh, that is only a silly Dresden vase, don’t waste time over that.” But the vase was so beautiful that I could have looked at it for hours and should not have thought the time wasted.

Count Orloff was a tall, handsome man, with what I now know to be a Russian cast of features. He had high cheek-bones, and a heavy under-jaw; he was very tall, and he had an air of authority that somehow communicated itself to you without any indication on his own part. I know now what gives men this bearing. When a man has the power of life and death in his hands and can use it at his absolute discretion, there is something in his manner that lets you know as much. But in these early days I hardly understood what the power of life and death meant. I knew nothing but what I had learned at the village and among the good sisters.

After I had been at the palace for a few days, Count Orloff came one morning into Katherine’s room. She and I had been feeding her parrot and playing with a white Persian kitten that an officer in the regiment of Lancers, quartered at the Warsaw barracks, had given her. He came striding into the room in his heavy way, and said, “My dear young lady, I wish to speak to you.”

I wondered what it was, and listened.

“Sister Vera, Lady Superior of the Convent of the Sacred Cross, has written to me about you. I have a piece of bad news to tell you, and a piece of good news—at least, I hope good news. The good news is that you are to live here for some time with Katherine; in fact, my child, you may live with Katherine as long as you like, if you do not quarrel with her. I am sure you will not quarrel with me. I should not allow you to do so. You need not trouble about paying for anything; you have quite enough money of your own of which I have care. It is more than you will want, and you can order dresses or anything of that kind for yourself, and I can always let you have money when you want it for your own private pocket. Sister Vera says that it is no good your going back to the convent; you have learned all that they can teach you, and she thinks it better for you to stop with Katherine, but she will be in Warsaw now and again, and will be sure to see you, or if you wish to spend a week or two at the convent you can go back. So much for the good news. The only bad news is that your old nurse” (here he took a letter out of his pocket), “Sophia I see her name is, has been dead some little time. There are some things of hers, pictures, and some old books, and other such things, which Sister Vera will send on to you; meantime, you will continue to live here with Kath-

erine, unless you wish otherwise, but you will not be able to leave without permission."

I did not know what to say; I felt completely crushed at the news of the death of my best friend. I could only look at the count. I suppose he thought I had nothing to say, or that he did not care whether I had anything to say or not. Anyhow, he turned round and strode out of the room with that great, dull, heavy step that officers of cavairy always acquire.

I was bitterly distressed to hear of the death of my dear old nurse. At the same time the news was not altogether unexpected. I had known, or, at any rate, had guessed when she took me to the convent that her health was failing. I was also philosopher enough to know that we must all die sooner or later. So, after a short, sharp burst of tears, I went to seek comfort with Katherine.

Of course Katherine and I had an immense talk. She knew all about my past life, and we wondered what it all meant. I was very nearly telling her the old secrets that my nurse and Sister Vera had told me to keep, but I recollected their warning, and held my tongue. It was quite clear that I was not poor. That was one comfort. And Katherine and I were very happy talking about the dresses I was to have made when the spring came, and about a ball that was going to be held at the palace, and a number of other such things that only interest young girls. Katherine assured me that I had better not ask the count anything. Even she was afraid of him, although she was his own daughter.

"He has told you all he means to tell you," she said, "and if you were to try ever so much he would not tell you any more. You may be quite sure that if he says you are to live here, he means it; and if he says you are not to go away without his leave, you had better not try to do so. And it will be very nice to stop here with me, and we can be very happy together: and so now we will order the carriage and send for Pauline, and I will get some flowers. I want some flowers for the ball."

I had entirely forgotten to tell you that Count Orloff was a widower, so that Katherine was her own mistress. Pauline was only Katherine's maid. We went for our ride, and we bought the flowers; and the next two or three days were all spent in preparing for the ball. It was a great event for me, for you must recollect it was the first ball in my life. I had seen them sometimes dancing at the village, and at the fair in the town, but I had never danced myself, although I had been taught to dance at the convent, where, as I was not intended for a nun, a knowledge of the steps was considered a necessary and polite accomplishment. My dress, of course, occupied me a great deal; and one day, Count Orloff came into the room and gave me a morocco case, telling me that it was his present for my first ball. It had a beautiful string of pearls in it, and a little pearl brooch; and I was so pleased that I could hardly think of anything else for the rest of the day. Katherine gave me a beautiful bracelet, made of small pieces of gold, so linked together that you could almost have tied a knot in it. There was a tremendous consultation as to the decorations of the rooms, and ever so many things. But the day came at last—the first eventful day in my life.

Need I describe the kind of ball that would be given by the Russian governor-general in the Warsaw Palace? Need I speak of the lights, and the music, and the splendid uniforms, and the sort of blaze of magnificence which it is the duty of the governor-general to show on such occasions; of the diamonds; of the decorations? I was bewildered at first; but the excitement of the dancing gave me back my nerve again. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

At this time the cotillon had just come into fashion. I was the youngest girl in the room, and I was known to be the friend of the count's daughter. So as the cotillon went on I had any number of partners, and among them were two who afterward played a very marked part in my life. One of these was Count Alexander, Katherine's brother, who had come all the way from St. Petersburg to be present on this very evening. Katherine had told me all about him. He was very young (only thirty, she said) and very clever. He was chamberlain of the Czar, and he was the real head of the secret police. Whatever the emperor wanted done, he would consult Alexander about it, and whatever Alexander thought was the best course, the emperor would be sure to take. Let me describe Alexander, for I danced with him twice, and he took me down to supper. He was a tall man, like his father, and strongly built. He had been in the army, for he was already General Count Alexander Orloff; but I expect his command had not been for long, for he had none of the air of a soldier about him. His features were French rather than Russian, and although they were fairly well cut, I did not like them. His manner was all that could be desired, but women are apt to take strong impressions, and I took a very strong impression as to General Count Alexander Orloff, which I have never changed, and which events have since justified. I disliked him instinctively. He was insincere; so, at least, I determined in my own mind. He was cruel; he was utterly unscrupulous: he was just fit for the office he held—head of the Russian secret police, and right hand of the greatest despot on all this unhappy earth. Now let me tell you about the other man I met—Count Urban. He was introduced to me by the governor-general, who told me that he was a nephew of the Sister Vera, and that he had heard from her. Of course, I was glad to meet any relative of dear Sister Vera. But I was also, to tell the truth, glad to meet Count Urban for other reasons. In the first place, he was a young man, not so much very older than myself. I know now that he was only five-and-twenty. In the next place, he was extremely handsome—at least, so I thought. Thirdly, he had that indescribable way with him which women so like—a way of paying you every attention, without in any way suggesting that they are not the merest matter of course. But the strangest thing of all was this. As we were walking round the gallery in the interval of a waltz, he said to me—

“I have heard of you, Mademoiselle Dagomar; my aunt has told me what you are, and also that it is not matter to be talked about. I belong to no country, I am a citizen of the world and a republican; but I shall never forget that I have had to-night the honor of dancing with a queen. Are not these beautiful flowers?”

Here he stopped me before a great malachite vase full of the most gorgeous hot-house plants. There was nobody near us.

"I should treasure a flower from a queen," he said, very quietly: "Will you pluck me one?"

I plucked one and gave it him. It was some curious kind of small lily, with an extreme fragrance, something like that of a magnolia. He had a ribbon in his button-hole and he passed the flower through it, and said something about its being the decoration of all others which he should ever value and always keep. There was another cotillon after this, and then the ball ended, and I slept till very late next morning and did not dream of anything. I should have had strange dreams if I could have foreseen all that was soon to happen.

CHAPTER III.

FOR some few months after the ball I still remained in the palace at Warsaw, shared the rooms of Katherine, and was treated as if I were a member of the family. Count Alexander was also staying in the palace and there must have been some hard work on hand, for he and his father were always busy together for the greater part of the morning, and sometimes late on into the afternoon. Count Urban was staying at a large hotel in the very center of the city. He was a frequent visitor, and was always treated as a welcome guest. The more I saw him the more I liked him. For this I can give a few reasons. In the first place, he was, as I have said, not only a very handsome man, but singularly gentle and winning in his manner. He attracted children and dogs, and he could do what he pleased with a horse without using spur or whip or bit. He had not got the heavy, brutal hand of the Orloffs. A gentleman rides his horse in one fashion. A trooper of dragoons treats his animal very differently. Any woman can see the difference at once, and I saw it. Count Alexander no doubt had about him all the necessary amount of external polish and varnish. He was a man of courts and salons. But under all this lay the Tartar blood—the blood I hate—and I knew that it would start in a moment if he were scratched ever so slightly.

I was by this time just about the age at which girls begin to understand that there is such a thing as love. I had never even guessed of such a thing at the village with my old nurse, nor at the convent where the sisters gave us little light literature indeed, beyond the Lives of the Saints, and Thomas à Kempis, and where we had to learn by heart long litanies. I do not believe that even Sister Vera knew whether the earth was round or flat, or whether England was an island or a province in Siberia, or even who the Turks were. But my first ball had taught me something, and Count Urban taught me more. He never made love to me—in the sense in which girls understand making love. But he treated me with a deference that pleased me far more than all the courtier's flatteries of Alexander Orloff. Alexander would compliment me on my toilet, and talk to me about the gossip of the day, and send me presents of flowers. Urban only asked for one flower, and never asked for another, but I knew he

had kept the one I had given him. When Urban could find even a moment with me alone I knew that he would say something to be listened to. It was always something about Poland, or about his aunt, Sister Vera. He never said anything definite, never anything which I could possibly construe. But what he did say filled me with hopes and wishes so large that I would lie awake often through the whole night trying to puzzle out for myself what they meant or what must come of them. Spring came on, and the flowers began to bud and the trees to show promise of summer, and the birds to build their nests. Katherine and I could discard our heavy furs, and make little plans with one another for the summer. You can have no idea of the beauty of a Polish spring. People talk of Kent. I have seen Kent. There is nothing in all England to equal a large Polish orchard, when the trees are smothered in white blossoms, turning over and deepening down into crimson.

One day it was announced that Alexander Orloff had been summoned to St. Petersburg, and the same afternoon his father sent for me. The great big man was seated in his own private audience-room in an immense chair, and was in his military uniform, having just returned from parade. He rose and motioned me to his own chair, taking another himself: he removed his helmet; his great saber clattered on the floor as he sat down. I wondered what was coming.

"Mademoiselle Dagomar," he said, "I have a communication to make to you, in which your interests are deeply concerned. You are young and you have neither relations nor friends. The Lady Superior of the convent where you were educated with my daughter Katherine tells me that she is bound to keep your birth a secret, and she refuses to disclose your parentage. That matters not, for you are evidently of gentle blood, and we of the Greek Church reverence secrets which have been committed to persons of holy life. She tells me you have a small fortune; and she has intrusted it to my charge with the assurance that it is yours, and with the request that I should hold it for you as your guardian. Beyond this I know nothing, nor am I ever likely to know. But I know that Sister Vera is herself of gentle blood, and she is the aunt of the Count Urban whom you have met here in the palace. I can believe her word.

"My son, Count Alexander Orloff, seeks your hand. He has asked my permission and I have given it willingly. His sister, the Countess Katherine, is attached to you. They are both anxious that the union should take place. I have every reason to believe that the match is a suitable one, and that you will grace the high position to which you will be called at St. Petersburg. I will not ask you, mademoiselle, to give me an answer at once. You had better consult with Katherine, or, if you prefer, I will send you to the Sister Vera. When your own mind is made up, I will tell Alexander your decision. He has still fourteen days' leave of absence from St. Petersburg, and there is ample time. Believe me, my dear young lady, that I shall welcome you as a daughter, and that I already feel for you the very warmest regard; and that whatever your decision may be, I shall always take the sincerest interest in your welfare and happiness."

This was startling. I was not displeased with the old count, although his manner had been of the most pompously official style,

I am certain that he wished me well. But then I loved Urban in my own heart. I did not exactly detest Count Alexander, but I certainly felt a repugnance toward him. On the other hand, there was a prospect of a fine position and a brilliant household. I had not lived all these weeks in Count Orloff's palace without knowing the value that lies in the favor of princes, and how easy life becomes when power is in your own hands, and your lightest wish has only to be expressed. And, besides, what did I know of myself, or of my birth, or of my prospects? How could I possibly afford to quarrel with old Count Orloff, my own guardian, who could do as he pleased with me, and who was not a man to be angered? And, besides, I really liked the old gentleman, and I loved Katherine Orloff; although with regard to Count Alexander it was a different thing.

Evidently Count Michael considered the discussion closed, for he rose from his chair and resumed his helmet. I rose at the same instant, and made the very best and most conciliatory of courtesies.

"You are very good and kind to me, count," I said, "I will consider during the whole of to-morrow. If I can not then make up my mind, I will ask you the next day to let me see the Sister Vera. Her advice I will promise you to act upon, and as soon as it is given me, I will return. Believe me that I am very grateful to yourself and to Katherine, and I have a proper sense of the high honor which Count Alexander has done me, and of his consideration in communicating his wishes to me through you, whom I have learned to love."

I think this was a pretty little speech for a girl of my age. Evidently the count thought so, for he offered me his arm, and himself escorted me to Katherine's room. Now, if there was one thing as to which I had made up my mind, it was that I would do nothing whatever, and commit myself to nothing whatever, until I had seen Sister Vera.

Of course Katherine knew all about it, and was in the highest of spirits, and was immensely astonished to find that I wanted to see Sister Vera.

"What can Sister Vera know about it, dear?" she said. "She does not know who Alexander is; she has never seen him. I can tell you Alexander is young, as you know, and wonderfully clever. The emperor has the most perfect confidence in him. He has been the emperor's chamberlain for the last four years, and he is the head of the secret police. You do not know what an immense amount of power he has. In St. Petersburg everybody is afraid of him, and all kinds of things are sure to happen to him. He has the ball entirely at his feet.

"We pretend that he has been here for a holiday, but it is nothing of the kind. I do not know what is going on, but I am sure there is some important matter in hand, or else Alexander would never have been so long away from St. Petersburg and from the emperor, and I know that all sorts of promotion are sure to fall to him.

"And it would be so nice, dearest, to have you really for my sister, and to be able to stop with you at St. Petersburg. And you do not know what a splendid palace Alexander has." And so she chattered on, and I let her talk, and paid little attention to what she said, for my own mind was made up; I would do nothing whatever

until I had seen Sister Vera; and, besides, I did not care to listen to all her praises of Alexander, for Alexander had never won my heart. In fact, he repelled me, and I mistrusted him, and I loved Urban; and I could not help thinking in my own heart that the day would come when Urban would speak to me, and say what I so wished to hear from him. So I told Katherine, lovingly, that I was too bewildered to think of anything, and that I must go back to the dear old convent and see Sister Vera, who was in the place of my own mother, and that then I would make up my mind. And I asked her not to talk to me any more, and I kissed her, and we caressed one another as girls do, and I accomplished my object, which was only to make her stop talking, and to have time in which to think for myself; and it was now the hour for our afternoon drive. In the evening there was to be a concert at the palace, and I knew that Urban would almost certainly be there.

As I expected, I met him at the concert, and we got just the chance of a few words.

"I know all about it," he said.

"Have they told you?" I asked.

"Oh, no," he laughed. "I have learned it in my own way. Little birds come and bring me all kinds of strange messages. They tell me of things at which you would never even guess. They have told me that you have made up your mind to go and see the Sister Vera. You are quite right, mademoiselle; go and see her. I am sure that I know what she will tell you, and I am sure what she will tell you will be what is best for you. It is, I am satisfied, what I should tell you myself; and the little birds have already let me know what it would be."

And here our conversation was interrupted, and I was left to wonder all night what it was he possibly meant.

I need hardly add that during the whole of the evening Count Alexander paid me the most marked attention. But he said nothing—that is to say, nothing of importance. He knew, of course, all that had happened, and I suppose he wished me to understand that, as his proposals had been conveyed to me through his father, through his father I was to return my answer. All this puzzled me very much, and all that I could do was to abide still more steadfastly by my determination to act implicitly upon Sister Vera's advice.

I was not sorry when the concert came to a close; and early the next morning I saw Count Michael, and asked him to let me go to the convent at once, as it would save time. To this he assented. I traveled *en princesse*, with a courier and a maid, and Katherine and Count Alexander accompanied me to the station. A carriage had been retained for me, and immediately before the train started Count Alexander, as he took my hand to bid me farewell, said—

"Mademoiselle, I say nothing, but I await your return with impatience."

So away rolled the train, and I was left to my own meditations.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was pleasant to find myself back again in the convent, and to see the sisters, and to inspect the tree that I had planted in the garden, and to be shown the new decorations in the chapel, and a new window of stained glass that somebody had presented, and to learn all the little matters that had happened since I had left. You know how women take pleasure in little things, and you can guess what a lot of little gossip I and the sisters had to exchange. It was another matter when I found myself alone with Sister Vera.

"Dagomar," she said, "I know why you have come, and I understand all about it. I know that you have come to ask my advice; and I also know, or, at any rate, very strongly suspect, that you do not like Count Alexander."

I burst out crying, and Sister Vera waited until my available supply of tears was exhausted.

She looked at me very kindly. She was always kind, even when it had been her duty to be angry.

"I also know," she continued, "that you love somebody else."

Here, of course, I began to cry again.

"But you must not allow yourself to love him, my child, although he is very good, and very noble, and as clever as he is good. You must not allow yourself to think of him. He is not to be married."

I looked at her in astonishment. I thought for the moment that she meant that Urban was going to become a monk, and I am bound to admit that the idea quite startled me.

"He is sworn to the cause of Poland, and to you as his queen. By our old law, a Polish princess can not marry a mere noble. That alone would be sufficient. But Urban is sworn to the cause of Poland. It would be wicked of him to dream of taking a wife. His own life is never safe for a moment. You must respect him, Dagomar, as a brave man and a true Pole; but you must not even think of loving him, unless it be as a queen loves a loyal subject, or a sister her brother."

There was nothing for me to do except to break out crying again. Sister Vera, however, soothed me. I thought it very odd that she did not suggest that we should repeat a litany or go through the rosary, or otherwise invoke the divine aid to guide our counsels. On the contrary, there was nothing of the Lady Superior about her. She seemed to have become all at once a woman of the world, and she talked in just the same manner and way as the great ladies whom I had met at the palace at Warsaw.

"You must marry Count Alexander, my child," she said. "I have told you who and what you are, and what I have told you is true. Like Urban, you have your duty to do. It is a duty you owe Poland, and your duty to Poland comes first of all. What you will have to do, you will know when the time comes. Friends will always be near you, whenever you least think it. Friends of Poland will keep a constant guard over you. Wherever you may be in the world, you will find your subjects, and you will find them loyal."

But, as I have said, you must marry Alexander. Through him you will rule Russia, possibly you will even rule the Czar himself. Be of good heart, my child, and be sure that from heaven will come the strength to enable you to do your duty, and to bear the troubles which come upon us everywhere, even in places so peaceful and so far cut off from the world as the Convent of the Sacred Cross. I shall say no more, child. You must do as I have told you."

And she then kissed me on each cheek and gave me her blessing. She also opened a little cabinet and took out of it a small relic, a little rosary of olive-wood. She told me the trees from which the beads had been cut had grown in Gethsemane; and she blessed it, and I put it into my bosom, for it was too small to go round my neck, and then she kissed me again, and said, just as if we had been talking of nothing at all—

"Now, my dear, you must come with me and see the poultry; they are going on famously."

I knew after that it would be idle to attempt to extract from her another word. Rome had given its judgment, and the case was at an end.

I saw the poultry, and I shared the frugal evening supper in the refectory, and early next morning my courier was ready at the gate with my carriage, and I took a fond farewell of all the sisters, and for the last time in my life my feet crossed the threshold of the Convent of the Sacred Cross.

I can hardly tell how I felt. I can only say just this much: I had made up my mind all along to do what Sister Vera had told me. Only, then, I had expected that Sister Vera would have told me exactly the contrary of what she had. I was in the position of a gambler who puts his money on the red, and then, to his horror, sees the black turn up; so that although my mind was settled, I was by no means happy. I felt as a mariner must who, in the old days, when there was no compass, and before lighthouses had been invented, put out upon strange seas which ships had never before crossed.

But there was one crumb of comfort. Sister Vera was incapable of falsehood. She would never have told me a thing was true because she hoped it to be true, or expected that it might be true. She had told me most positively that wherever I went I should find friends; and friends in whom I could trust with confidence. And so I felt assured that whatever might happen, I should be safe, and Alexander would not be allowed to ill treat me, however bad a husband he might turn out, or however I might get to hate him.

I saw also that it would be impossible for me ever to become the wife of Urban, and I now understood why it was that he had never spoken to me of love.

On my arrival in Warsaw I did not see Count Michael until dinner, when he invited me to the seat of honor next his own. I guessed what he meant by this, and I took the seat, and I think I got through my dinner very bravely. During an interval in the banquet he asked, as if it were the simplest question in the world—

"You have seen the Sister Vera?"

"She has told me to do as you wish," I replied, "and I shall follow your wishes. You have been very kind to me." And then the music began again, and when it had finished the count

asked me how Sister Vera was looking, and whether the convent had changed at all, and how the town looked, and other such questions. And after dinner, when the men rejoined us, I found myself handed over to Alexander, and saw that everybody in the room understood by this that the marriage was an arranged affair.

I need not tell you what Alexander had to say. He employed the usual stock phrases with every word in them carefully measured. That is the way in which diplomats always talk. I myself never considered it a pleasant way from the first, and I afterward came to hate it even more.

Nor need I tell you how Katherine talked while Pauline was arranging our hair for the night, and how she called me sister, and how she chattered about Alexander's palace at St. Petersburg, and Alexander's cleverness, and Alexander's prospects, and Alexander's influence with the Czar, and everything else, until I hated the very sound of Alexander's name, and was grateful to find myself in bed, wearied with my journey and with the pompous dinner, and anxious for sleep.

Only one thing seems I strange to me. I felt certain that before I told Count Michael my resolution, he had known it. I know also that Alexander had known it, from his manner before I had spoken to his father. Now, my courier and my maid had never set foot inside the convent, and I am certain that none of the nuns had even the faintest idea of what I had come for. There is nothing creates excitement in a convent more than the contemplated marriage of one of the pupils; and Sister Vera never even spoke to either my courier or my maid. All of this was very odd, and I fell asleep thinking over it.

CHAPTER V.

I AM not going to describe my marriage to Count Alexander Orloff. The preparations were magnificent. The milliners, and the sellers of lace, and all other such people had also the *carte blanche*. There probably had never been so gorgeous a wedding in Warsaw. My wedding presents surpassed all of which I had ever dreamed. There were tiaras of diamonds, and strings of pearls, and diamond rings, and diamond scars, and porcelain of any age and antiquity. There was everything for which a bride could wish: and the ceremony itself was gorgeous. Count Alexander wore his uniform as a colonel of some Russian regiment—I do not know which. Everybody wore uniform. I myself was dressed superbly. Regiments of soldiers escorted us to the Cathedral of Warsaw, and back again. Military bands played in every possible place. It was a success, so far as absolute power can make any ceremony a success.

We left Warsaw for St. Petersburg by a special train, with an escort of hussars and a subordinate escort of the line. I do not care to describe our journey, or our arrival at Alexander's palace in St. Petersburg. It is easy enough to describe a wedding journey and a honeymoon. It is sufficient to say that only one idea was present to my mind. I had ceased to be Dagomar Vassulovitch. I was now the Countess Orloff, and as such I was determined to bear myself. It was a difficult task to play, and I saw strange trials and troubles

before me. Only consider my perplexities. Sister Vera had advised me to marry Count Alexander. Urban, whom I loved, and who was Vera's nephew, had not objected, but had positively acquiesced. Count Alexander, in my private judgment, had no real affection for me. Count Michael Orloff approved of the marriage, and had been the main instrument in bringing it about. I knew, from him, that I had the command of money to a certain amount, but I did not know to what amount, and I did not know where the money came from, and I did not know anything about it, or indeed anything about all the strange events through which I had passed so suddenly. All I really knew was that I loved Urban, that I absolutely disliked my husband, and that there were friends behind me who, in case of trouble, would come to my assistance.

Meantime it was pleasant to be the possessor of diamonds and fine dresses, and the mistress of servants, and to know that I should in all probability be the queen of society in St. Petersburg. This last anticipation was completely fulfilled. Alexander had indeed a magnificent palace. It was far finer than that of his father. It was close by the Nevskoi Prospect. His retinue was even more than abundant; his horses, his liveries, his banquets, his concerts, his balls vied with those of grand-dukes of the Imperial blood. All St. Petersburg was at his feet. It was known that the Czar himself would drive round in the morning and spend two or three hours with Alexander and smoke with him, and drink champagne with him, or that he would send for Alexander to visit him at the Summer Palace, and to interchange the same hospitalities. Alexander, I soon found out, virtually ruled all Russia. How he had acquired this position, how he came to retain it, and what was the certainty of his ultimate future, I could not ascertain. What I did see, clearly and distinctly, was that Alexander commanded Russia, and that I, who had been taught to regard myself as Queen of Poland, was in reality Empress of Russia, and mistress of the destinies of the largest empire in the world.

I was bewildered for a short time, but I remembered what Sister Vera had said to me, and what Urban had hinted at. It is true that I found no immediate friends, but I felt certain that my friends were round about me, and I felt certain that in times of danger I should never need help, and I consequently was serene and undisturbed.

I ruled the city of St. Petersburg. Generals and statesmen were only too glad to win my favor. The Czar himself made a point of being studiously courteous to me. No grand duchess in all the empire was as powerful as myself. I could easily describe the pomp that surrounded me, the manner in which I lived, the way in which I ruled St. Petersburg. But you can guess it all. I for my part despise all this kind of thing, and I do not care to dwell upon it. All that interested me was the certainty that a time would come when a new destiny would be opened before me, when I should be able to help the cause of Poland, and perhaps assert my own proper rank as queen; and so I waited and watched the course of events.

Of the course of events I ascertained a good deal from Alexander. In spite of all his reticence he could not help letting me know very much more than it was prudent on his part to disclose. I may say

without vanity that my beauty fascinated him. I may say also, that he was cold by nature and incapable of genuine love. He consequently never discovered that I had no real affection for him. I was a dutiful and complaisant wife. He wanted nothing beyond this; indeed, he knew nothing beyond it; consequently I had no difficulties with him. Everything went smoothly, and all I had to do was to wait for the future. That future came at last. One day I heard from Alexander that he had been intrusted with an important mission to Vienna. The same evening I gave a reception, and amongst those who came was Urban. I had not sent him a card of invitation. I did not even know that he was in St. Petersburg. He came with the French Ambassador, by whom he was introduced. I welcomed him cordially.

"You are going to Vienna, countess," he said. "So am I. Private business of my own takes me there. I hope we shall meet."

I answered this enigmatic utterance with a few conventional phrases. Later on in the evening, we met again, and I had the chance of exchanging a few hurried words. He told me that he had come suddenly from Paris to St. Petersburg, that thence he was going to Vienna; that from Vienna he should proceed to Berlin; and then from Berlin he should go to London. "We shall probably meet very often," he said; "and I hope I may take it for granted that I have the *entrée* of your *salons* without a special invitation," and then he hurriedly told me some things which let a little light on my situation. That he was the nephew of Sister Vera I had known; but I had never known that Sister Vera was the foster-sister of my own mother. Nor did I know that my father's property had been secretly conveyed to the Convent of the Sacred Cross, to be held as a trust for myself, and that Sister Vera had religiously carried that trust out; nor did I know that Sister Vera, although herself a sincere enthusiast in the cause of Poland, had persuaded the Russian police that she was in reality a faithful daughter of the Ozar. The pious falsehood had enabled her to retain her position as Sister Superior, and so to exercise considerable influence in the cause of Poland. The Russian secret police believed her to be their servant, and had every confidence in her. In reality she was Polish to the backbone, and she had concealed the real secret of my birth from Count Michael. She had told him that I did not know the secret of my own birth; and that my little fortune was a trust of which the convent had charge. She had added that she herself did not know exactly who I was, or what I was; that I had been left at the convent, and that a certain sum of money had been left at the same time for my benefit; and that the instructions given to herself had been, that I was to be brought up in the true faith of the Russian Church, that I was to be educated as a lady, and that I was to marry no one but a Russian of gentle blood, and of a position suitable to the fortune which the convent held in trust for me.

When I heard all this from Urban, I began to understand things. A scene was lifted. I now saw how I was situated with regard to Urban. I saw what Sister Vera had meant, when she told me that I should best serve the cause of Poland by marrying Alexander. I saw also how it was that, when I had returned from the convent to Warsaw, Count Michael and Count Alexander had foreseen the con-

clusion to which I had come. Everything was clear to me. I remembered what Sister Vera had said that Urban would never marry. I remembered also what she had said when she told me to marry Alexander, and to ask no questions, and to wait for advice and to believe that I should find friends wherever I might go.

And now I had learned that I was to go to Vienna, thence to Berlin, thence to Paris, and thence to London, and that at each of these places I should find friends. At each of these places I should meet Urban. It was wonderful. I was Countess Orloff, wife of the chief of the Russian secret police, and I was also Dagomar Vassulovitch, recognized by all true Poles as their rightful queen. And behind me was the Polish police, the committee of secrecy, which was always to guard my safety, which was always to tell me what to do, and which was always to be near me and in readiness. And yet I knew no more than that Urban and Sister Vera and my dear old nurse were all Poles, and all looked on me as their queen.

It was in this frame of mind that I started for Vienna. There we stayed for three months. I received guests, and gave great entertainments, and figured in Vienna society. Urban was there, too. He was stopping at the best hotel in Vienna, and he regularly attended my receptions, but we never exchanged more than the ordinary conversation of society. I wondered that Alexander was not suspicious. It seemed strange, or ought to have seemed strange, to any one that Urban should thus follow me about. But Alexander was apparently quite unconcerned; if anything, he seemed to grant Urban more of his confidence than he was usually in the habit of bestowing upon people. So it was no business of mine. I knew that when the time came, and when Urban had anything to say to me, he would say it. I knew nothing myself of what was going on. Clearly the only course for me was to wait for events, and to bide my time. That time came even more rapidly than I had expected.

From Vienna Alexander was suddenly called on a special mission to Berlin. What that special mission was I never exactly understood; but all I know is, that again at Berlin Urban was there, moving in the best society of the court, and that Alexander welcomed him as he had always hitherto done. People gave Urban credit for being a sort of admirable Crichton. He knew every European language; he was a splendid shot; he could ride the most unruly horses; he could row, and swim, and dance; he was said to be a great mathematician. He was certainly a most perfect musician, and had more than average skill with the pencil. He was a sort of Ulysses. His knowledge of Europe and of European statesmen was profound. This made him a welcome guest in every salon, and nobody seemed to regard him with the least suspicion. I, of course, knew more. I knew, amongst other things, that Urban was devoted to the cause of the revolutionary party in Poland. I knew that if he was pledged to the secret societies of Poland he would be the enemy of every established government in Europe. This much I had been able to gather from Alexander. However, what could I do except to wait? When the tempest is in the sky, what do you gain by guessing, or trying to guess, when it is about to burst?

We left Berlin and proceeded to Paris. This time, again, it was

a special mission. What it was about, or in what way it was connected with our previous journeys, I could not extract from Alexander. I did gather from him, however, that an insurrection was imminent in Poland, and that the Nihilists of Russia and the Communists of France, and the Socialists of Germany, and the Irish Americans in the United States, and the old Carbonari organized in Italy, and the anarchist societies generally throughout the world, were all working together to aid the scheme. I was consequently able to guess for myself that Alexander had been sent from court to court to sound the opinion of each government, and to ascertain how far each would be disposed to enter into a private league against Nihilism when coupled with schemes of political revolution.

So far I had got upon the track, and I now began to guess why Urban was following us about. Had Alexander ever won my love, had he even been a kind and a good husband to me, I might have been of the greatest service to him; I could have found out anything. And why had he married me? For I knew now, well enough, that he had never cared for me. I need not go into the pitiful little details that necessarily occur when neither husband cares for wife nor wife for husband. But that Alexander was absolutely indifferent to me I was certain; and that he never had cared for me I ascertained beyond question. Women can find out these things in their own way. Then there was another odd thing. I never had a line from Sister Vera, and yet every now and then Urban would say to me—

“I have heard from Sister Vera. She is well, and rejoices to hear you are well.”

And here, again, was another puzzle.

While we were at Paris several arrests were made of persons suspected to be concerned in Communard plots. I used to hear of them or read of them in the papers. Somehow or other the accused men generally managed to establish their innocence. They were always able to explain away the circumstances alleged against them. I asked Urban once whether there was any danger of a Communard rising. He laughed, and said he thought there was no danger. That was all he said.

Suddenly one day I learned that Alexander had been appointed the Russian Ambassador at London. That evening we had a large reception, and while Alexander was talking to the German Ambassador, Urban came up to me and spoke to me in low tones and in Polish. I do not think anybody heard him; if they had they would probably have thought that we were talking Russian. His manner entirely disarmed suspicion. He had a flower in his hand, and he pointed to one leaf of it after another, and he kept on talking in ordinary tones, as if he were expatiating to me upon the beauty of the flower. There was not an accent of earnestness in his voice. What he said, however, was this, as he turned the flower about and called my attention to leaf after leaf:

“Queen,” he said, “you are going to England; Sister Vera says so. There you will meet a great man. You must win his confidence. You must find out from him all that Alexander has told him. All that you so find out you must let me know. All that you let me know I shall communicate to Sister Vera. You need not be

afraid you know that friends are with you everywhere. I am the chief of them, and the most loyal of your subjects."

Those of the guests who were around evidently thought that he was speaking to me in Russian about the flower, so I answered in French, and without any trace of hesitation—"It is a beautiful flower, count, and what you have to say about the shape of its leaves and their perfect symmetry shows how fond you must be of flowers. I was fond of flowers myself once when I was a child in Poland, and I still preserve my love for them. I wish there were more flowers in Russia. Russia is a great country—it is the greatest country in the world—but a country without flowers is dreary. I love Paris; the flowers in Paris are always beautiful." And so ended the conversation, and in less than a week Alexander and I were installed in the Russian Embassy at London.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Russian Embassy at London is, I say it advisedly, the most magnificent post to which any diplomatist in Europe can be appointed. In the first place the allowance from the imperial treasury is more than liberal. It is practically inexhaustible. You explain that you want secret service money, and you get *carte blanche*. About the money there is no difficulty, but you are judged by results. You must do the business that Russia has sent you to do. More than this, you must do it successfully. If you fail in this you are recalled. If you are recalled, you are, so to say, "broken." You will never get another post. No explanation that you may offer will be even considered. You are sent to win, and you can only justify yourself by winning. All this I had often heard, and had often been told how wicked such a system was. But then all systems are wicked more or less, and the Russian Ambassador at the Court of Eng'land is perhaps the most distinguished personage in the whole *Cercle Diplomatique*. It needs some courage to trust absolutely to yourself for success. But Alexander, to do him justice, was not devoid of courage of a certain kind, and had entered upon his duties as English Ambassador to the Court of St. James's with the most absolute indifference. He possibly believed that he was far superior to any Russian officer of state against whom he might be brought into competition. Anyhow, from the first moment of our arrival in England down to the time that he left the embassy forever, Alexander was altogether unmoved. Nothing seemed to depress, nothing to unduly elevate him. He seemed certain of success, although I could not gather from him what exactly was the mission upon which he had been sent, or how long the mission itself was likely to last. He would tell me lightly that these were not things for women; and he would then give me instructions as to some ball, or concert, or banquet, and then he would go away and leave me to my own meditations. It was clear to me that he did not trust me thoroughly. And then of course came back the difficult question, Why should he have married me if he had no real love for me?

One evening at one of our receptions a strange thing happened.

Urban was present. He had brought with him a small bouquet of the same flower as that upon the beauties of which he had discoursed at Paris. As he gave it to me he said—

“Countess, these flowers are beautiful, are they not? You once said that Russia was sad without flowers. These few blossoms came all the way from Poland.”

I carefully kept the blossoms, and when I retired for the night, I found a letter among them written in Polish. It was very brief, but its meaning was clear—“Sister Vera sends kisses. The queen must make the friendship of Mr. Grandrock. He knows everything, and will tell everything. He must be persuaded to tell.”

Alexander noticed the bouquet and laughed at it. He seldom laughed, but to-night he was in a good humor. “I think, Dagomar,” he said, “that you have made a victim of that unlucky Urban; he would tell you anything you ask him. Some day, before long, perhaps, I shall ask you to find out something for me.” The guests had all left and Alexander was smoking a big cigar and drinking tea with brandy in it in my boudoir.

“What on earth do you mean?” I asked. “What can I find out from the count that would be of the least use to you or to anybody else? You know him better than I do. You knew him before we were married. What is the good of perplexing me with enigmas? Tell me frankly what you desire me to do.” He looked about the room, and then he came and took a seat near to me, between myself and the door.

“Dagomar,” he said, “I have not hitherto told you things, because I have always been able to manage what I have wanted without assistance. Matters, however, are now more serious. They have indeed assumed an appearance which gives the greatest anxiety at St. Petersburg. I may tell you that at any moment a revolution is likely to break out in Poland. We shall be able to crush it, but we wish to forestall it. Now, I have every reason to believe that Count Urban knows all about the matter. I believe he has been following us about as he has, to watch my movements, to report upon them, and generally to pick up what he can. He is a foolish fellow to think that he is any match for myself and for those who work under me. I have noticed that he has a sort of attachment to yourself; he hangs about you as a spaniel might. I have ascertained that he is a nephew of Sister Vera, with whom you were brought up. He is a silly, vain young fellow, and very susceptible to flattery. You must encourage him, and you must find out what he really wants. I doubt if he has the confidence of the revolutionary party; they would never trust such a light-headed *bon enfant* of the salons. But he may know a little, and whatever that little is, you must extract it from him.”

I began to see light at last.

“You wish me, then, to play the part of a spy?” I asked; “to extract secrets, if there are any, from this foolish young man, Urban, and then to betray his confidence to you?”

“Exactly so. You know, of course, that I am the real chief of the Russian secret police. I know also something about yourself. It is considered by some of the Polish National Party that you are in the direct succession to the throne of Poland. You are not

likely to have heard of this, but I have heard as much from Sister Vera, who is a spy in the Russian service, and who had somehow managed to pick up the fact that the executive council of the inner circle of the insurrection consider you to have some sort of absurd title to the crown of Poland. It was thought desirable, accordingly, that you should be discredited by being associated with the Russian Government, and in consequence you were invited to my father's palace. This was done with the simple object of removing you from any intercourse with conspirators, who might otherwise have involved you in their own machinations, and in the inevitable consequences of all such plots when they are directed against the overwhelming power of Russia. It was intended that you should stay for some time at the palace of Warsaw, and that then a Russian husband should be found for you. When, however, I saw you I conceived that admiration for you which I expressed through my father, and I determined to marry you myself. You have been a dutiful wife. You have supported the dignity of your position, and it now only remains for you to assist me in my difficult duties, and to show your loyalty to the Czar, as all his subjects do, and have to do."

Now that frank communication perplexed me not a little. In the first place, I did not know whether to believe it or not. Either Alexander was lying when he spoke of Sister Vera as a Russian spy, or else Sister Vera had been lying in all that she had ever said to me. My own instincts told me to believe in Sister Vera. Anyhow, the one thing for me to do was to gain a little time, and to ask Urban what it all meant. This I should now have an opportunity of doing. Accordingly, I answered Alexander as calmly as if he had asked me to make out a list of guests for the next dinner party.

"I shall talk a good deal to Count Urban," I said. "He is a clever man, and it will take some trouble to extract things from him. Besides, I shall have to flatter his vanity, and to pay him little attentions." Here I laughed my prettiest laugh. "You must not be jealous, Alexander, if you see me talking to him a little more than to other people."

How brutal the Russians always are! "You may talk as much as you like to the fellow," he replied, "so long as you get out of him what I want. You have got the tact. You only want a little practice. It is my business, and it has got to be your business, and the sooner you begin to practice it the better. You have a reception to-morrow. Send a private note of your own to ask Urban to come. Do what you can with him. I shall take care not to disturb you." With this he lit another of his huge cigars, and strolled away to his own apartments. I have often said that I disliked him. I now discovered that I positively loathed him.

CHAPTER VII.

My reception occurred next night; I need not describe it. It was very much like any other reception. But presently Urban made his appearance, and I managed to separate myself from my circle.

"Count," I said, "you must call on me to-morrow morning, and I shall be at home at one o'clock. Be sure that you come."

“Certainly, countess,” he answered, “but have you forgotten that among the list of your guests to-night is Mr. Grandrock? He will be here as I know of, in about ten minutes. You must do all you can to propitiate him. He is a very powerful man. He sways the cabinet. His sympathies are entirely Russian, but he would be of immense aid to any country, were he only to consider it oppressed. You will not like him, but it will be your duty to your own country; not the country that owns you, madam, but the country that you own, to do what you can with him.” And with this he bowed and left me.

I was certainly impressed with Mr. Grandrock. He was long past middle life, but he was still tall and erect. His dress was old-fashioned; he had evidently not changed its style for many years, and had taken no trouble to follow such minute details as are involved in the precise cut of a coat, or the shape of a collar. His features must once have been handsome, but there was something forbidding about them. I had never seen an English Cabinet Minister so Puritan in his whole bearing and appearance. This man ought to have been an adherent of Cromwell, or a follower of John Knox. He evidently did not feel at home in a company such as that which he had joined; indeed, he could hardly conceal the fact that he was bored by the glitter of the lights and the babel of the conversation, and that he wanted to get away. I managed, however, to win from him more than a usual share of condescension. I had made inquiries, and had ascertained that he was a more than usually devout Christian, with strong leanings toward the Catholic Church. I had learned also that he was a very eminent scholar, and had written books about the Greek and Roman writers, and, above all, that he had translated hymns out of almost every dialect into almost every other. So I asked him if he knew any of the old hymns that are sung in the parish churches in Poland, and I promised him some Polish hymn-books, and I told him that he would find Polish very much like most of the other Slavonic languages, and that he would understand the hymns at once; and I also said that I would get him any number of other devotional works—I really forgot which, and I talked to him about my life at the convent, and I spoke to him of Sister Vera; and, in answer to him, I said I did not like being the wife of an ambassador. I confessed, that there was too much pomp and splendor about it.

And I described a little English parish which I had visited, and I declared that there was nothing I should like so much as to be the wife of an English clergyman, especially if he were a learned man who had distinguished himself at the university. I should like to teach the children in the school, I said, and to look after the poor. And then I laughed, and vowed I had diamonds enough of my own to build schools and almshouses for the largest parish in England. The old gentleman was quite delighted. He let me talk on; he expressed his approval of my sentiments in a grave and measured manner, and in a most melodious voice. And thus it came about that on our first introduction Mr. Grandrock and I parted the very best of friends.

The next day Urban called. I had told Alexander he was coming, and Alexander had treated the matter indifferently, and said

that he should be too busy to interrupt our conversation. So when Urban came I knew we should not be interrupted. After we had talked a bit about the weather and the latest variety of orchid, and the last great action for libel, and the new opera in Paris, and other such things, we began to talk in earnest.

"You know, madam," he said, "what Sister Vera has told you? You know, also, what I have told you from time to time? You know, too, that within the last few days Count Alexander has said certain things to you, and you, madam, are puzzled what to believe."

I nodded my head, for what could I say, or what different answer could I give?

"Sister Vera," he went on, "is no Russian spy; she is as loyal a subject as I am; she pretends to be a spy, and she serves the cause by doing so. You have been told to turn spy, and to find out things from me. Do so, madam; I will tell you exactly as much as I like, and quite enough to confuse the secret police of the brutal despotism that has your country under its heel, and that would crush out of Poland all its national life and all its great instincts. I belong to the Insurrectionary party; I have belonged to it all my life. Your husband, Count Alexander, is aware of the fact; but he thinks I am a fool, and am not likely to be mischievous. Besides, my aunt, my dear good aunt, Sister Vera, keeps on sending him intelligence which thoroughly misleads him, and still more thoroughly satisfies him that I am a fool. Now, you must do the same. I, madam, will tell you everything; I will give you information as to a terrible conspirator, who is expected to arrive at Liverpool from the United States. On the contrary, he will arrive from the Hague. All the activity of the Russian police will be spent in watching arrivals in Liverpool, and in sending expensive cable messages to New York."

At last life began to have an interest for me; but how was I to be sure that Urban could be trusted? It is true that my husband had been more than sufficiently frank, and far more than sufficiently brutal; but which of the two men could I believe? I cannot tell whether he knew that I was hesitating, but he went on—

"Count Alexander is here in London for a special purpose. Mr. Grandrock has strange Russian proclivities. It is suspected that the headquarters of the Insurrectionary movement which is now going on simultaneously at Warsaw, in Moscow, and in St. Petersburg, are actually concentrated in London. The appointment of your husband as ambassador in London is merely a pretext to allow him to be on the spot. Mr. Grandrock is giving him the whole assistance of the forces at the disposal of the English Government, and they are very large. You must find out from Mr. Grandrock not only what he has to tell Count Alexander, but also, which is more important, what Count Alexander has to tell him. I fear, madam, that you do not exactly trust me, nor do I know how I can satisfy you; but if you trust Sister Vera you must trust me, for you know what she has told you of me. If you do not trust Sister Vera then there is no one for you to trust except Count Alexander, who is the hereditary enemy of Poland. But I know that you trusted your old nurse, and you know that your old nurse trusted Sister Vera, and remember that Sophia knew the whole secret of your birth. Recollect that Sister Vera was your own mother's foster-sister. If you

are in doubt, write to Sister Vera; it will not be many days' post. But if you think the matter over I imagine you will not doubt."

"I shall think the matter over, count," I answered, "and I do not think I shall doubt. Have you seen the new gold fish in the malachite fountain in the central hall?"

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was not many days after this that I met Mr. Grandrock. Now, you must recollect that I am not a trained diplomatist. I learned very little indeed from my nurse, or from the good sisters at the Convent of the Sacred Cross. I picked up a little more while I was at Warsaw, and I had picked up a great deal more in Vienna and Berlin, and in Paris most of all. In Paris—where, I think, as far as I could make out, everybody tells lies about everything—you may take it for granted that a Parisian is not telling you the truth. The difficulty is to gather from his particular lie what the truth may really be. This is best done by collecting the utterances of several eminent liars with regard to the same subject, and then comparing them with one another. To be successful with the Parisians you must yourself always speak the exact truth, or, at any rate, as much of it as suits your purpose. You may be quite sure that they will not believe you. This was Bismarck's plan, and it succeeded.

Now, in England, it is best to tell a considerable amount of the truth, but Englishmen are very stupid, and they will believe any lie whatever, if it pleases them to hear you tell it. If a girl of eighteen, who cannot possibly understand such things, tells an old professor that she believes in the Darwinian theory he is pleased at the news, and he believes her at once, although he ought to know that she is too young to have had the time to study the thing, and too frivolous to have ever interested herself in it. The next minute she will be telling some Low Church bishop that she is devotedly attached to teetotalism and the Gospel according to the Evangelical party. He will also believe her, because it makes him happy to do so. So if I am to conciliate Mr. Grandrock I must believe in everything that is near and dear to his heart. I think I succeed fairly well on the first occasion. I make some inquiries, and find that he is an ardent admirer of St. Augustine, and is actually engaged upon a translation of that good man's works. So I ask a clever young Englishman from Oxford to find me a book in which I can read all about St. Augustine, and I adopt the same plan with regard to one or two other subjects to which Mr. Grandrock is supposed or known to attach himself.

The method succeeds admirably. In less than a month Mr. Grandrock is my abject slave. He considers me the most marvelous woman he has ever met. He talks about me to everybody. He sends me a lot of books that he has written, and through which I have to look, and he introduces me to Mrs. Grandrock's especial notice. Mrs. Grandrock is an old woman who, like her husband, was once, I should think, handsome. At present she is entirely occupied with soup kitchens, and consumptive homes, and a society, of which she is lady patroness, for providing poor curates with

flannel chest-protectors. But I cultivate her carefully all the same. It checks any jealousy on her part, and she has reason for jealousy more than sufficient. For Grandrock, after a time, becomes absolutely infatuated. Need I say more?

I ought to have stated that, soon after this piece of secret police work began, I received a letter from Sister Vera. It was like a letter in cipher, only more clever. I could have left it on my table without danger, in fact, that is just what I did. She talked about London, begged me to write when I could find time, asked me if I had made the acquaintance of that remarkable man Mr. Grandrock, said that I should find him immensely learned, and a devoted believer in the holy mission of Russia, and so on. She then inquired, as if it were a matter of the slightest moment, whether I had seen anything of Urban, and what he was doing. She had heard that he meant to take a long yachting cruise in the Eastern seas, and she fancied he had started, as he had not written for a long time. She added with a devout prayer that in whatever station I found myself, I should put my natural abilities, together with my high position, to the best possible purpose, and that I should be loyal to my country and faithful to all that I had been taught in the Convent of the Sacred Cross. I had no idea that Sister Vera was so clever, and my amusement was increased when I met Urban the same evening.

"I have just returned from Sister Vera," he said.

"And so have I," I answered. "It was a very long letter, and very pleasant."

"Mine was short enough," said he. "She only asked me how I was, and whether I had seen you."

And I looked at him in his eyes, and he looked in mine, and I saw that he knew that I fully believed him.

Poor old Grandrock before long told me everything. There was, it seems, a universal Nihilist outbreak, which had long been planned, and with regard to which the greatest anxiety existed. Secret committees were known to be at work in Odessa, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Vienna, and even Madrid. In the smaller towns also the plot was being diligently carried on. All that Urban had told me was perfectly true. Alexander's mission was to thoroughly ascertain the opinions of the various courts to which he had been accredited. His mission to England had been the most delicate of all. For while on the one hand Grandrock revered the destinies of holy Russia, he had, on the other, a sincere sympathy with all oppressed nationalities, and was thus dragged in sunder between two opinions. The third course open to him, which he took, was to console himself with the reflection that Nihilism is irreligious—that it has no real connection with the best interests of oppressed nationalities, and that it ought accordingly to be suppressed. So he had promised Alexander that the English Government would do all in its power to help the Russian police. And the purposes of Alexander's mission had so far been accomplished.

CHAPTER IX.

I OFTEN wondered that Alexander had never spoken to me about the obvious closeness of my intimacy with Mr. Grandrock. It is

true that Grandrock was old enough to be my grandfather; but, on the other hand, his attentions to me had become a topic of general conversation, if not, indeed, of something more. However, Alexander and I had never since our marriage exchanged confidences on any subject whatever, so I was not very astonished at his silence. I knew he did not really care for me, and that was enough.

One day he enlightened me on all these points. He came into my room, sat down, and lighted a very small cigarette.

"Dagomar," he said; "I am very pleased with you. Sister Vera, in whom my father and I have always had the highest confidence, and whom we know we can trust, assured us that you had great natural abilities, and that you would be able to render important service to his Majesty the Czar, and for that and other reasons you were invited to the palace. That I admired you, I informed you through my father. That admiration has greatly increased. Nothing has astonished me more than the manner in which you have managed Grandrock. I believe that I know as much as I want, so I have not spoken to you until now. I also quite understood that you were planning a surprise for me. It was no surprise, for I saw what was going on; but I am not the less pleased. Tell me now what you have found out."

I told him almost everything, suppressing very little, and he listened carefully to what I had to say. I felt that I was playing a most difficult game; more than difficult, it was dangerous; for, although in England, I was yet in the Russian Embassy, and consequently upon Russian soil, and subject to Russian law, or, rather, to Russian despotism.

"What you have told me," he said, "is absolutely accurate so far as it goes. Do you believe the old idiot was telling you the truth?"

"I am sure of it," I answered. "You forget that he sympathizes with Poland to a very great extent. I doubt if he said as much to you with that frankness he showed toward me."

"You are right, Dagomar," he replied; "and you have distinguished yourself." And with that he left me.

It now became my business to extract as much as I possibly could from Alexander. I had won his confidence, and I succeeded. There were several men and even women in London society who made no secret of their strong republican sympathies. They were the people who had entertained Mazzini and Saffi, and who were on terms of intimacy with Gambetta and Louis Blanc. They were what I may call, writing now when all is over, the Grote-Mill-Stansfeld-Dilke-Holyoake *coterie*. I was to make myself as agreeable to them as I could; I was to show the most extreme sympathy with the cause of liberty generally; I was to regret that I was a Russian, without going too far in that particular direction. I might denounce the late Emperor of the French as much as I pleased. I was to profess a profound admiration for the glorious institutions of England, and I was to find out from them as much as I possibly could. Their real opinions would be useful, but it would be better still if I could get at any actual facts. Now, to carry this purpose out, I, of course, required instructions; and thus it came about that Alexander had to tell me, under pledges of the most inviolable

secrecy, exactly how much the Russian Government knew; exactly how much it suspected, and what were the precise facts it wished to ascertain. All this, of course, occupied more than one interview. I used now to see Alexander every day, and his confidence in me increased marvelously.

All that I did find out, and how I found it out, and from whom, and where, and when, would be a long story. I told Alexander from time to time enough to keep him satisfied. The Grote clique had really nothing to communicate; they were vague enthusiasts, with no very practical purpose. Urban, however, gave me now and again, for Alexander's especial benefit, a few items of actual intelligence, just true enough to seem important and prove exciting, but with quite enough falsehood in them to mislead, and to do more harm than good. I need hardly add that I carefully repeated to Urban every single thing that Alexander told me, and that the former knew fully as much as I knew myself. Also I felt sure that I was rendering Poland service, for I used every now and then to get a long letter from Sister Vera about nothing in particular, and this showed me that she was pleased.

One day I received a piece of news from Alexander so important that I must give it in detail. He told me (this was in the month of December, but there had been a special autumn session of Parliament, so that we were in London at the embassy as usual) that the insurrection had been planned to break out in the September next. (I could have told him that myself.) He told me also that within six weeks there would be a house-to-house search in all the towns where the committees were suspected to be at work, that the garrisons would be suddenly doubled, and that the most stringent regulations as to passports along all the lines and at all the frontier towns would be put in force at a moment's notice. The great Powers who were threatened had determined to effect a simultaneous surprise, and, if possible, to catch all the conspirators in a trap—much as Joshua caught his enemies in the cave by suddenly rolling a great stone upon its mouth, or as fish are caught at a single throw of the cast-net.

“This,” said he, “Dagomar, is the most important secret that I have yet confided to you. We now fully well know all their plans; but we wish to ascertain if they are confident of success. If so, they can have no notion of the thunderbolt that is to fall on them. If they are the least uneasy we must precipitate our plans. Set to work in your own way, but with even more than your usual caution.”

I had soon some very valuable information indeed to afford him. Grandrock had told me, and the chief of the London police had confirmed him, that in London, at any rate, nobody suspected anything, and that the whole thing was believed still to be a profound secret. The few known Nihilists in London were going about as usual, and there was no symptom of any movement or excitement. All this, of course, Alexander knew himself, but I was also able to tell him, at which he was very pleased, that Urban was in happy ignorance—total and complete ignorance—that the Powers intended to take any steps whatever, and the conspirators, so far as he knew anything of their movements, seemed to be in as absolute a fool's

paradise as himself. I was certain, I added, that Urban knew nothing whatever.

And this was strictly true, for Urban had known no more of the thing, until he learned it from me, than I had known until I had learned it from Alexander.

Alexander was again extremely pleased. Urban left London to visit some friends at Liverpool. About a fortnight later I got another very long letter from Sister Vera, telling me all about the convent and the health of the good sisters. Sister Agatha's eyesight was a little worse, and Sister Maria had been attacked with rheumatism. It was a very cold winter, and they all sent their best love.

CHAPTER X.

ABOUT a fortnight after the letter from Sister Vera, Alexander came to me one morning looking very serious.

"Dagomar," he said, "I am summoned to St. Petersburg at once, and I am not told why. I must travel post haste and without stopping. It is impossible that I should take you with me on so short a notice. Besides, you will be of use here. You have the cipher, and can wire me anything of importance."

He bade me a brief adieu, and within an hour he was on his way to Russia.

About a fortnight later strange rumors began to appear in the papers. Telegrams from correspondents, usually well informed, announced that a conspiracy of alarming extent had been for some time past going on in the various principal cities of the three great empires, and that a general and simultaneous uprising had been concerted to take place in the autumn. The Russian police, it was said, had been aware of the fact, and had communicated with the police of Berlin and Vienna; and it had been arranged that on a given day in February a sudden raid should be made, all suspected persons promptly arrested, and all places of suspicious resort thoroughly searched. For reasons of state this raid had been made earlier than was at first proposed, and had signally failed. No seditious documents or papers, or explosives, or other treasonable materials had been found, and the persons believed to be principally implicated had all disappeared. These announcements were vague, but they all sufficiently agreed with one another, and I need not say that they in no way astonished me.

While conflicting rumors were thus in circulation as to the nature of the conspiracy and its extent, I suddenly received this telegram from St. Petersburg—

"Expect unfortunate news. Count Alexander seriously ill. Await further intelligence."

The papers of next morning gave the "unfortunate news" in detail. As Alexander was walking along Nevskoi Prospect with the principal officer of the secret police, he had been shot dead on the spot by a man who apparently was only an innocent passer-by. The assassin was at once seized. He refused to give any account of himself, and nothing was found upon him that gave any clew to

his identity. It was believed, however, that he was a Pole from Warsaw, and so knew Count Alexander by sight.

About noon came a telegram from Count Michael, expressing the deepest sympathy, and adding that as he had been summoned to St. Petersburg, and could not expect me to proceed there at once after so terrible a shock, he had sent Katherine to England to comfort me, and that she was already on her way.

It was an eventful day. Before many hours were over I received a letter written in an unknown hand, to say that Urban would call to offer his condolences, and that, in spite of all etiquette, I must see him.

I saved etiquette by seeing him in the presence of my English maid, who did not understand a word of French, and could never have gathered the tenor of our conversation from our countenances.

"You must leave England to-night," he said. "Places were secured more than a week ago in the Cunarder that leaves Liverpool to-morrow. If you ever return to Russia or to Poland, your life will be forfeited, or Siberia, at least, is certain for you. Even if they know nothing, they may perhaps suspect, and suspicion under a despotism is equivalent to proof. How to escape I leave to you, but escape you must; and remember what Sister Vera told you, that wherever you might be you would have friends."

He left, and I found within an hour that Sister Vera's promises had not been made in vain. My Russian lady's-maid, who had been all her life a servant in the Orloff family, and was the daughter of a peasant on the Orloff estates, effected my escape, and accompanied me herself on the journey. To that moment I could have sworn that the girl had been a thorough Russian, and one of the most loyal subjects of the Czar.

We escaped from the embassy in the simple way in which such matters are usually arranged. I passed out unobserved in the disguise of a domestic servant, and it was not until long after I had reached New York that it was discovered by what route I had fled, or in what manner.

I have written this from the United States, where I am absolutely safe, and where, as Sister Vera promised, I have found friends. I am known to be guiltless of any part in Alexander's death. It has proved to be an isolated act of vengeance. But I have no intention of revisiting either Russia or Poland; and I agree with Urban that the cause of freedom in those unhappy countries is still hopeless, and that under a republic we breathe a freer and purer air.

ENVOI.

THE Countess Dagomar Orloff, whose story has been given above, did not remain long in the United States. She soon recognized the fact that she was personally safe, and she was to be seen at every court and spa, at Vienna and at Wiesbaden, at Berlin and at Kissingen, at Florence and at Monte Carlo. Perhaps prudence or perhaps old association did not allow her to visit St. Petersburg itself, or to explore the curiosities of the ancient city of Moscow.

Some few years after the events which she has recorded, her name became again famous through Europe. She married a grand-duke,

one of those many small potentates whose principality had been absorbed into the German Empire, after the terrible struggle that decided the ultimate destinies of France and Germany.

His highness was a widower, and his first wife had been an English princess, so that the marriage created not a little scandal at the time. It is said that a widower who had known what it was to enjoy the love of an English princess ought to be ashamed of himself for marrying again. It was also said that a grand-duke forgot himself and his order when he married a person who really, as far as the outside world knew, was no more than a commoner.

His highness, however, serenely disregarded all these criticisms, and treated the current opinion of European courts as indifferently as it had been that of his most illustrious and august mother-in-law. He married the Countess Dagomar Orloff, who at this moment graces his palace. And there is every reason to believe that the marriage has been a most happy one.

THE DEVIL'S WARD.

By WILLIAM MACKAY.

CHAPTER I.

Sweete Temmes, runne softly till I end my song!

SPENSER.

"I GOES 'one,'" said Rainbow, with the dejected air of a man who holds a hopeless hand. He further intimated the extent to which he proposed to speculate by holding up a single finger.

Bounder met the half-hearted challenge. He held up a pair of digits, and in more hopeful but by no means exultant tones observed—

"I'll 'ave a try at 'two,' an' chance it."

All eyes now turned on Jo. He was a middle-aged man, noted for his great caution and sagacity. With one eye closed he regarded the cards in his hand critically the while he pursed his mouth and knotted the wrinkles on his brow—laboring in thought. The black streaks acquired in the engine-room detracted nothing from his expression of profound anxiety. At length, when the impatience of the other players had evinced itself in a succession of very full-flavored oaths, he declared his intentions without resenting or emulating the reckless blasphemies of his companions.

He placed his cards faces downward on the table and held up three fingers.

"Pass!" exclaimed the Devil sententiously; "I never 'as no bloomin' luck."

The Devil was a youth of fifteen summers, but he spoke with the resigned air of a victim of mature years against whom the Fates had combined in a bygone time, pursuing him thereafter with relentless consistency. This conspiracy on the part of destiny, however, did not prevent his playing an ace on Jo's king—a brilliant stroke of skill and genius which caused the overthrow of the elder and superior player.

This singular game of Nap was prosecuted in the fore-cabin of the tug "Willy." The gamblers belonged to that interesting class vaguely known as bargees, though but one of them had any real claim to the title. Bounder was a mere afternoon caller from the barge in tow. The other three formed the crew of the tug.

It is a curious fact, known perhaps only to themselves and the patient amateurs who collect census papers, that many of those who navigate the Thames in tugs and barges are known to their com-

panions by no surname, but by a contraction of the Christian name—if the possession of anything Christian may be attributed to a bargee—or more commonly by a nickname suggested by some peculiarity of costume. Thus Rainbow's appellation was manifestly attributable to the neckerchief of many colors which encircled his throat. When he died—for I regret to say he was cut off at the height of his career—no other name could be found for him. All that was mortal of him lies in a grave under the shadow of the parish church of Gayne. From the rustic porch of that little temple you catch sight of the Thames over a bank of osiers, and listen to the never-ceasing music of the wear. The grave occupied by the captain of the "Willy" is covered with long grass and weeds, and a growth of deadly nightshade with its sickly white flower has entwined itself above a wooden cross, on which is decipherable the pithy inscription—

HERE LIES RAINBOW.

Jo had no other name than that by which he was familiarly called, or if he had he never disclosed it. And although the Devil was known to have a widowed mother living in the village of Shepperton, and rejoicing—or perhaps I should say sorrowing—in the name of Bight, he never by any chance obtained recognition for the fact. And, indeed, it may be conceded that he was rather proud than otherwise of the style and title which had been conferred upon him by his discriminating mates.

The Devil had not received his name on account of any great moral obliquity. In moments of excitement and during times of emergency he could swear at large and after a fashion which brought tears of genuine joy to the eyes of men old enough to claim him as son. But that which really gained him the sobriquet which through life he bore with a proper and becoming pride was a certain recklessness at all times, and an absolute fearlessness in the presence of danger.

For the rest he was of a frank, open, and even affectionate nature.

His hair was blonde, his eyes bright and intelligent, and in his stiff corduroy trousers and thick blue jacket he presented no unpleasant picture as he sat with his seniors at the card-table exhibiting a seriousness and anxiety quite foreign to a nature habitually gay. Such, at the age of fifteen, was the Devil.

Outside, the sun was shining on the noon of a July day. The lark was high in the heavens, and odors of new-made hay were wafted down into a dim and insufferably stuffy fore-cabin—an apartment the natural temperature and sweetness of which were greatly increased by the fact that its lower end communicated with the back of the engine-room. The atmosphere was thick as well as hot, for two of the four occupants of the cabin were smoking very full-flavored tobacco, in clay pipes colored beyond all parallel. In the open lockers above the table might be seen a rope of onions—bargees are passionately fond of onions—a pickle-bottle, a few egg-cups, some scraps of bread, and other indications of an occasional meal.

The Devil went "Nap." But the Devil was having the devil's

proverbial luck. He lost, and, having paid, he threw his cards on the table.

"There!" he cried, with a resumption of his usual gayety. "I'm sick on it."

His companions apparently resented this indication of moral cowardice on the part of the Devil, and expressed their opinions with a native force and elegance.

Bounder apostrophized heaven, and uttered a wish to be struck stone blind if it was fair.

Rainbow prayed to be condemnably condemned if he "ever see the like"

Jo alone—the sagacious and thoughtful Jo—was silent.

But in the catholicity of his retort, the Devil did not except even Jo. He consigned the persistent gamblers to a place reputed to be much warmer than even the cabin of the "Willy," and with a frank smile on his face darted up the companion-ladder and stood on deck bathed in sunshine and dazzled with the direct rays of the Great Luminary.

Down below, the three veterans spent little time in lamenting the infidelity of their associate.

"Gone arter that there bloomin' kid," suggested Bounder.

"Ah! shouldn't bloomin' well wonder," acquiesced Rainbow.

Jo said nothing, but, like the determined old sportsman that he was, silently shuffled the dog-eared cards—disreputable pasteboards, greasy and grimy as his own impassive countenance.

The night before had been very dark. The water was low, and the heavily-laden barge in tow of the "Willy" had got aground. All efforts to float her had proved in vain; and the "Willy" gallantly remained in her company all night, waiting till such time as it should please the lock-keeper, a mile or more above, to draw his paddles. There lay the poor stranded hulk—black, huge, and helpless, the blue smoke from the funnel of her after-cabin mounting in a thin straight line to heaven.

Beyond the tow-path stretched the green expanse of Runmede, till it met the wooded slope of Cooper's Hill. On this historic spot, where King John and his barons assembled, the unconscious cows now ruminate; and the daisy and the meadow-sweet luxuriate above the long-effaced footprints of the chargers, or the deeper indentations of tent poles and the supports of brave banners. Across the stream is Magna Chaita island, where, according to some fond authorities, King John affixed sign-manual and seal to an interesting document now on view at the British Museum. By the margin of this fair eyot, the heavy foliage of chestnut and oak threw cool shadows across the stream, and the air was flooded with the song of black-bird and throstle, and the twitter of titlark and sparrow.

The Devil had little eye for the scenic beauties: he had been born among them. Nor was he stirred by the historic memories associated with the spot: he was ignorant of them. He skipped nimbly along the narrow plank that led from the tug to the tow-path, and stood in front of a little boy, who sat among long grasses and poppies, regarding with fascinated gaze the fire in the engine-room of the "Willy."

The hopeful heir of the Widow Bight regarded the little waif with an expression half comic and half sympathetic.

"Well, mate; not gone yet—eh?"

The child smiled, held out a plucked poppy in token of pleasure and recognition, and shook his head.

"Wy, you've been in this blessed place more'n three hours. You're a rummun, you are."

The boy nodded his head in acknowledgment of this gratuitous flattery. The Devil threw himself on the grass by his side, and said—

"Where do you live?"

The boy turned round, pointed out a vague semicircle, which might include half the universe beyond Cooper's Hill, and replied—

"Over dere!"

"Ah!" said the Devil reflectively; "I'm glad I know."

The blue eyes of the child—he could not have been more than four years of age—were again turned toward the burning interior of the tug. The Devil gazed at him thoughtfully. He noted his curly brown hair, his fair skin, just touched with the summer tan; his white dress, clean but of common material; his thick shoes and stockings, now somewhat stained by contact with mother earth.

"Say, mate," he inquired presently, "wot's yer name? What d'they call you?"

"I'm Johnny. What's *your* name?"

"Me? I'm the Dev—"

It was the strangest thing in the world. For the first time since he had silently accepted the sobriquet he appeared ashamed of it. He broke off with ill-concealed awkwardness, and continued—

"Don't matter who I am. I'm nobody, I ain't."

"Me go with *you*," said the child, with the settled determination of one who after long and anxious deliberation had chosen a career.

The Devil gave a long whistle indicative of surprise, and again gazed with curiosity at his small companion.

"Wy, you're on'y a kid, mate."

But Johnny's slender acquaintance with natural history compelled him to deny that proposition entirely.

"Me not a kid. Me a boy. Me go with *you*."

"That be blowed for a tale!" replied the Devil, in the fine and figurative phraseology of his race. Johnny, judging rather from the Devil's tone and expression than from his words, that a gratification of his wish had been denied, put the back of his little left hand to his eyes and sobbed. The Devil could not stand tears. He placed his hand gently on the uplifted one of the boy, and said, in a tone that was mild and comforting as a mother's—

"Come, mate; stow that there! D'ye hear?"

Reassured, the small wanderer smiled faintly through his tears, but returned to the attack.

"Me *will* go with you?"

"Orright, Johnny; we'll see. 'Ave a bite?" saying which he drew from the pocket of his jacket a ribston pippin—robbed from what orchard I know not—and presented it to his *protégé*. Then, in order throughly to restore harmony, he chanted to him a lugubrious

melody, which, as rendered by himself, contained the following formidable stanza—

“ Oh, the birds was a singin' in the mawnin,
The hivy hand the myrtle was in bloom;
The sun q'er the 'ills was adornin',
That's wen we laid 'er in the tomb.”

Costermongers and bargees, although by no means open to a charge of sentimentality, affect a melancholy theme and measure when they call for music. And they prefer the sad themes drawn out through many verses. It was a lengthened lay, long dwelt upon in every note of it, that the Devil sung to the child nestling among the long grasses. When the Devil was engaged in singing, he threw his whole soul into the business. When he had ended he was grieved to find that the brown curls of Johnny were reposing on his corduroys, and that he was sleeping the sleep of the innocent.

“ Oh, scissors! 'Ere's a go. Hi! Johnny. Wayke hup. D'ye year?”

But the tired and unconscious Johnny slept on.

CHAPTER II.

Puzzled at first, the Devil grew eventually pleased as he gazed down on the sleeping child. A proud feeling of possession seized him. He was patron and protector of something more beautiful than water-lily or honeysuckle, more intelligent than the birds, more amusing by far than Bounder's cur, an ill-groomed but precocious mongrel that stood on its hind legs and pretended to smoke an empty pipe.

With an awkward, half-shamed movement the Devil smoothed the brown curls of his charge, and saw a smile play about his lips as if the contact had passed through the gates of sleep. Pale blue were the closed eyelids, as though—to use Rossetti's exquisite fancy—

“ As though some sky of dreams shone through.”

Contemplation is fatal to minds not trained to a perception of a strict morality. Thus, if the Devil saw a desirable apple, he forthwith annexed it. He had been known to net fish on reaches of the Thames most vigilantly guarded by anglers' protection societies and the like. And woe to the rabbit that came across his path. He had not a drop of gypsy blood in his veins, yet he was as predatory in his tastes as any nomad that ever slept under dirty canvas. And if, when occasion offered, he converted to his own use that which belonged to others, it was because he was absolutely ignorant of the difference existing between *meum* and *tuum*.

As he gazed at the face of the tired and sleeping Johnny he recalled his determination so musically uttered, “ Me go with you.”

The Devil's pluck, fearlessness, and indeed, I may add, his unabashed audacity, had gained for him the admiration of men. His equals in age looked up to him as a superior spirit. Dogs and other dumb animals attached themselves to him and performed his sometimes eccentric behests. But he had never known what it was to have a kind word said to him by an innocent woman. He had never

before attracted the sympathy of a child. The sensation was completely novel. He felt absolutely flattered by this infantile preference. And as he once more recalled Johnny's determined, "Me go with you," he raised the sleeping boy in his arms.

"Then, by jimminy, you *shall*," he said, addressing his adopted child.

He ran nimbly up the plank, deposited his charge in a convenient corner on board the "Willy," covered him over with a piece of tarpaulin, and then dashed down into the sultry obscurity of the fore-cabin with the glad intelligence—

"They've drawed them paddles."

Indeed, this was a fact, and while the Devil had been on shore the water had risen about half a foot. With true inconsistency the gamblers grumbled audibly at the interruption to the game, though in their hearts delighted that they could now proceed on their course.

Bouncer returned to his barge, the plank was drawn in, Jo descended in grim silence to his engine, Rainbow took his place at the wheel, and in the commotion that ensued the Devil carried a bundle covered with tarpaulin down the companion ladder into the vacated cabin. He deposited it with a tenderness almost womanly in his own bunk, and on the pillow—not over clean, I must confess—he laid a masterpiece in gingerbread purchased the day before at Staines Fair.

Then he rushed up again and prepared to make fast the tow line of the barge, singing, with all the sweet *abandon* of conscious innocence—

"Oh, Johnny, I hardly knew you."

Never did the act of a public man endanger his position or jeopardise his peace of mind more than this act on the part of the orphan of the Widow Bight, named after the Prince of Darkness. When eventually the barge was nearly floated, and the tug in moving it off reeled to and fro from the strain, he trembled lest the slumberer below should be thrown from his resting-place. An awful sense of responsibility had taken possession of him. His usual gayety had left him. Rainbow, who depended greatly upon him for amusement, rallied him on his evident preoccupation.

Tug and barge—one at a time—had passed safely through Old Windsor Lock, and were proceeding up the long and narrow gut that reaches from the lock gate to the wear. On their left hand stretched the towpath, with the meadows beyond extending to the confines of the royal park. On the other bank thick luxuriant foliage clustered to the margin of the stream and bent over it, and sometimes kissed it, the river answering with a ripple. Forget-me nots studded the loam of the bank cut straight as a railway cutting, and the dog-rose and wild honeysuckle filled the air with fragrance.

It was while they were in this particular stage of their upward journey that Rainbow heard above the throb of the engine, the working of the screw, and the hissing of the steam, a sound that had never been heard aboard the "Willy" since that craft left the stocks.

It was the sound of a child's cry.

"What's that?" he inquired sharply, wiping the perspiration

from his forehead with the back of his left hand, his right grasping a spoke of the wheel.

"Dunno," replied his unabashed companion. And then with a sudden inspiration, anticipated in more classic phrase by no less a writer than Shakespeare, added, "Specks it's a bloomin' rat."

On this he descended once more to the cabin, where by means of whispered and hurried cajoleries he managed to allay the terrors of his ward. Then, feeling that something must be done to engage his attention, and, if possible, open his mind and encourage his taste, he placed before him a copy of the "Police News," the ghastly front page of which, in all its primitive enormity, seemed to have a fascination for the Devil's Adopted.

But a secret of the kind cannot be kept, and the next day Johnny's existence—owing to his own thirst for knowledge and love of adventure—became known. In fact, the little stranger had climbed from his bunk, had ascended the ladder, and stood on the top looking straight at Rainbow, who was more startled at the apparition than he would choose to acknowledge. The Devil bowed before the storm which he knew must break over his devoted head. But in the end the child conquered. Jo had ascended from the engine-room to investigate the mystery. The three occupants of the "Willy" stood gazing at him, as at some strange and beautiful freak of Nature. There was a pleading and pathetic expression in Johnny's face which won their hearts.

"Who am I?" asked Rainbow, in gruff but not unkindly tones.

"Dampoon," replied the child with angelic sweetness.

Indeed, Johnny had heard the Devil apply the appellation of condemned fool to the captain, so that his imperfect memory of it must, considering his age, be accounted to him as a very triumphant effort of politeness. The men, instantly translating the boy's imperfect locution, burst into a loud guffaw. Their laughter, however, died suddenly away. They looked at each other awkwardly. Not one of them knew that there was the slightest harm in an oath. Coming from those baby lips it sounded oddly inharmonious. It was a note sung sadly out of tune. It hurt their ears. That was all. It insulted no moral sense. Indeed, it commended the child to them. It was as though he had been initiated into the mysteries of the craft.

"Take His Nibs below, Devil," said the captain, "and see 'ere,"—this in a lower tone—"don't you get teachin' 'im none o' your precious lingo, it ain't too choice, d'ye year?"

With this simple ceremony the lost child was committed to the keeping of the Devil, and Johnny became one of the crew of the "Willy."

CHAPTER III.

THREE months have passed. October is growing old. Hitherto the autumn has been exceptionally mild, and though the fall of the leaf has set in, the foliage does not fly in clouds before bitter winds. Leaf by leaf falls gently to the bosom of mother earth, still retaining some life and warmth.

In Chertsey Lane the hedgerows have turned to old gold. The

acorn drops from the spreading oak, and is ruthlessly trodden by the foot of the passing tramp. The voices of women sound from across the hedges. Already the plow glides slowly through the cornfields, and the rooks follow its track, finding upturned sustenance in the rich brown furrows.

Here is a break in the hedge, on either side of which cluster berries redder than the breast of the robin that perches among them. Through the break is discovered a marshy no-man's land covered with osiers, and among the osiers you can just catch sight of a gypsy encampment, with scraps of linen—men's shirts and women's petticoats hanging on the osier tops to dry. Beyond the encampment and the osiers, if you still look through the break, you catch sight of the Thames reflecting a leaden sky, and looking cold and deserted.

Sir Penton Hook from the safe eminence of his saddle looks particularly unamiable as his eye falls on the tents and hanging linen of the swarthy vagabonds. As a magistrate he has a natural antipathy to vagrants of all kinds, and as a large landowner with farms stocked with poultry, and preserves full of game, he has a very particular objection to the tanned itinerants of ancient and Oriental descent, who have inherited a pernicious habit of camping out all the year round.

Sir Penton Hook does not look a very happy man. And yet he possesses much that is supposed in this world to afford felicity. He is thirty-five years of age, which, though nowadays counted advanced, is still the period of early manhood. He is rich, boasts some of the best blood in the country, and is blessed in the possession of a wife who is accounted a beauty, who has a genuine admiration for her husband, and whose family is equal in social reputation to his own. Indeed, Lady Hook was one of the Egham Hythes, a family whose services to the crown and the country are matters of history.

Although Sir Penton Hook is the youngest member on the bench of which he is an ornament, his opinion has considerable weight. He is quick to grasp facts, is an excellent judge of the demeanor of a witness, and having, before the death of his father, been called to the bar, has a smattering of law, and of its practice, which gives his expression of opinion a certain judicial tone entirely impossible to his colleagues, who are simply country gentlemen of a dull and somewhat domineering temperament. It is well, possibly, that there is some one in the commission in Sir Penton's district who can "shape the whisper" of the bench, as it is a fact perfectly well known to bucolic litigants that the chairman is an octogenarian idiot.

The worthy baronet has pulled up his horse opposite the break in the hedge, anxious, probably, to see whether any of the occupants of the encampment will discover themselves. And while his keen eyes are piercing through and over the gaps in the osier bed, his horse is approached on the other side by a woman of striking appearance. She has a full figure, large red lips, a handsome but by no means refined face. She is, moreover, well dressed, and her large hands are elegantly gloved. Her hat and feather are scarcely in good taste, and, although even a casual observer would declare

her offhand to be a remarkably fine woman, not one man in a hundred would mistake her for a lady. The points were wrong.

She is now in a state of considerable excitement. She catches hold of the horse's bridle, and calls to the rider.

"Pen?"

He turns round with a start which is momentary. He is thereafter calm and self-possessed, and inquires in measured tones—

"Well?"

"Oh, Pen, don't speak so cruelly. I have kept my promise to you—faithfully, indeed, I have. I've never come near you. But they've stolen our child, Pen—"

"You have broken your promise now, madam," answered the county magnate. "You spoke of *our* child. *Your* child, I think you meant."

"I didn't mean it, indeed I didn't. But do tell me you haven't seen him? You haven't stolen him from his nurse?"

"Don't be a fool, madam. And listen to reason. I don't know with whom your child is staying—nor do I wish to know. I have never seen your child since—that is to say, I have *never* seen him. I have made you an ample provision. You will remember on what conditions. You have a copy of the deed. Read it, and be careful in future as to how you molest one who has been considerate—I may say, *very* considerate—in his dealings with you."

The woman has placed her hands to her eyes, she has withdrawn them again at the end of Sir Penton's formal address, delivered in clear, metallic accents. Her eyes are rolling wildly, and hot tears are streaming down her cheeks.

"Oh, Pen, you loved me once. Give me back my child. I think I'm going mad."

"Indeed, I think you are, madam," he answered, with a sneer; "and in case your anticipation should be verified, pray depend on my interest to obtain you admission to the county asylum. I wish you good-evening."

He raised his hat with studied deference, he touched his horse with the spur, he galloped forward, and in a moment was hidden by a bend in the lane.

The woman stood still as a statue, staring between a passage of elms down which horse and rider had disappeared. Five minutes afterward a gypsy woman emerged from the osiers, smoking a short clay pipe.

"Tell ye yer fortune, my beautiful lady," insinuated the crone. The beautiful lady stared stupidly at her, answered never a word, and, turning from her, walked slowly up the deserted lane.

Meanwhile, Sir Penton Hook had arrived at his home, had dismounted from his horse, had sought the fair daughter of Egham-Hythes in her ladyship's own drawing-room, had expressed a desire to see his infant daughter, and had announced his determination to take some really serious measures in the direction of suppressing tramps.

Her ladyship, who deeply sympathized with all her husband's public acts, accorded her hearty consent to any measures which he might deem it necessary to inaugurate, and trusted that he would stand for the county at the impending election. For Lady Hook was

an ambitious woman, and cherished an idea that a young, influential, and talented man like her husband might make himself so useful to his party as eventually to claim as a reward for his services the right to have a coronet engraved on his plate and painted on his panels.

CHAPTER IV.

FIFTEEN years have elapsed since Johnny went on board the stranded tug. Fifteen years have elapsed since Sir Penton Hook had that memorable meeting in the lane. To the estimable baronet Time had not brought important changes. He was fifteen years older. His hair was sprinkled with gray. He represented his county in Imperial Parliament. But his party was "out," he had never tasted the sweets of office, and was as far as ever from the coveted peerage.

His position on the bench was paramount. He always sat at Petty Sessions when his duties in the House did not prevent. The octogenarian idiot, to whom passing allusion has already been made, had joined the majority, and Sir Penton Hook had been elected to the vacant chairmanship. It was felt that he was the right man in the right place, although it was also believed that he ruled his colleagues with a rod of iron.

In the humbler and younger characters of this story Time had wrought changes more perceptible. At the beginning of life and at the end of it the years tell more sensibly on the children of men. Rainbow had been cut off untimely during a collision, and his remains were duly deposited in their long home.

The Devil, who found it quite impossible to change the prejudicial appellation given to him in a moment of undue levity, had been raised to the dignified position of captain of the "Willy." Less reckless than of yore, the captain was still regarded as a man of some daring, and the Thames Conservancy officials narrowly watched the navigation of his craft so that haply he might one day be indicted for a breach of the by-laws.

Jo, grimy and gritty as of yore, and more gray and grizzled, still presided in the engine-room regulating the motive power, without which the "Willy" would for all purposes of tugging have been comparatively useless. He preserved his ancient reputation for reticence, and was a shining example to all his contemporaries on the Thames who happened to be addicted to the riverain vice of swearing.

But the greatest change of all was that observable in Johnny. That hero was a baby in short frocks when he entered on a public career—a child in his fourth summer when he accepted service on board the "Willy." Now he was a youth of nineteen, erect and supple as a withy, bright as the sunshine, with a smile which came and went like the ripples on the Thames that he loved, and with an uncertain timid growth on his upper lip which, like the premature buds of spring, seemed always destined to be the victim of an untimely frost.

He and the Devil were inseparable, and, although they were companions both during work aboard and in the less frequent frolic on

shore, Johnny always looked up to the Devil. He paid him the homage due to his guardian, and the guardian in his turn treated his ward with an air of proud protection, of affectionate patronage, quite comic in its unaffected seriousness. No parent ever took a more lively interest in the welfare of his son. His feeling was perhaps quickened by the thought that on some day of wrath his ward might be claimed and taken from him. Yet, with an inconsistency which was characteristic, he carefully preserved the clothes which Johnny wore when first he saw him playing among the poppies—that poor wardrobe by which alone he could be identified.

Were I asked whether Johnny had added to his vocabulary of expletives since his infant lips framed themselves to the utterance of "Damphoon," I should be obliged to confess that his vocabulary had been somewhat enlarged. This, you see, is an Unvarnished Tale. There will, I assure you, be no startling *denouement*. Nor will any attempt be made to paint for you a bargee in heroic colors, but rather to paint him as he is. A certain amount of hard swearing seems unavoidable in the navigation of tugs and barges, and Johnny gained proficiency in this as in other accomplishments common to his calling. And my own belief about him is that the recording angel will treat his verbal indiscretions much as he did that famous one of my Uncle Toby—if indeed a staff of recording angels be not set apart for the especial accommodation of the race.

Owing to his not having sworn long enough and loud enough on one particular occasion Johnny found himself the recipient of a summons to attend before the bench over which the redoubtable Sir Penton Hook presided. The facts are short and simple. Moreover they lead up to the closing episode of this narrative, and must be briefly set out here.

One day during the summer and the absence of the Devil, Johnny had been in charge of the tug towing a barge from Kingston to Windsor. He was in the channel and hugging the shore, when a pleasure boat drifted on to him. Three gentlemen were lying at the bottom of the skiff, and one of them, who jumped up to use his paddle-bitcher, fell overboard just as the bow of the boat came on that of the barge.

The Thames Conservancy took the case up with a vigor and intentness quite out of proportion to the incident. The person then actually steering the "Willy" was summoned. That person was Johnny. The hearing—owing to a not unaccountable difficulty experienced by the officers of the Conservancy in obtaining facts and the names of witnesses—did not come off until the first week in December.

The owner of the tug "Willy"—a widow who was impressed with the notion that her servants could do no wrong—provided able legal assistance for the defense, and the crew of the "Willy" appeared in court on the day mentioned in the summons, dressed in their Sunday best and by no means so much impressed with the solemnity of the surrounding circumstances as might be supposed. Johnny, indeed, was on this occasion possessed of the *mens conscia recti*, and anticipated no difficulty whatever in proving to the satisfaction of the bench that he managed his craft with all possible care.

Johnny and the Devil found much to amuse them in the bustle of

the court, the importance of the crier, and the air of calm superiority which characterized the magistrates' clerk. Presently, amid a cry of "Silence," Sir Penton Hook, accompanied by a couple of colleagues, entered and took his seat on the bench.

First the charges were disposed of. These were few in number, the last being that of a woman who was accused of having been drunk and incapable. She was a tall woman, and fifteen or twenty years ago had no doubt been extremely good-looking. But her cheeks were sunken, her eyes blood-shot, and, and her appearance generally disheveled. A night in the cells after a day of intemperance does not enhance the charms of even the most beautiful. She gave the name of Mason, and during the whole time of hearing the charge, Sir Penton Hook, who usually disconcerted prisoners by the keen directness of his gaze, kept his eyes averted from Mrs. Mason; and when the evidence had been heard he ordered the superintendent of police to take his place in the witness box.

"Is anything known of this unfortunate woman?"

"Very little, your worship. She's never been charged. She does occasionally come down here from town. Says she's lookin' for a child she had out at nurse years ago which was lost or stolen. Begging your worship's pardon, I think she's a little queer," the superintendent here tapped his forehead to further elucidate his meaning, "and a little drop takes effect on her."

"Have you inquired as to the truth of her story?" went on the magistrate in his measured metallic tones

"Yes, your worship, she did have a child at nurse with a Mrs. Rowle, which strayed away and hasn't been heard of since; supposed to have been stolen by gypsies."

"How long ago?"

"About fifteen year, your worship."

All eyes were turned either on the bench or on the prisoner, so no one took any particular notice of the Devil. That gentleman's eyes were dilated. He fiddled nervously with his neckerchief—one that Rainbow had given him—and he gazed uneasily at Johnny, who sat on the form beside him, evidently taking a sympathetic and sentimental interest in the prisoner at the bar.

Sir Penton Hook whispered to his two colleagues rather to inform them the decision he had arrived at himself than to ask any assistance from them. Then he turned to the woman and asked—

"Have you anything to say?"

"No," replied Mrs. Mason absently.

Then, in his habitually cold and collected manner, Sir Penton Hook said—

"The magistrates regret to see a person of your apparent respectability in a position so humiliating. Your dress would indicate that you are not without means. An indulgence in the vice of drunkenness may, if persevered in, land you in the jail or the asylum. Fortunately for you, nothing is known against you by the police. The superintendent will give you your fare to town. Take care that you never appear before this bench again, or I promise that it will go hardly with you. You are discharged."

Mrs. Mason said nothing, but walked out of dock. The summons of the Conservancy against the captain of the "Willy" was

then called. Johnny stepped lightly into the place vacated by Mrs. Mason, and she dropped listlessly into the seat next the Devil, which, up to then, had been occupied by the object of the Conservancy's righteous indignation.

While the case against the "Willy" was being opened, and the three gentlemen who had drifted on to her were being examined, the Devil, suffering doubtless from twinges of conscience, had entered into conversation with Mrs. Mason, and had related to that misguided woman a narrative which caused all her listlessness and apathy to disappear. Her face brightened with intelligence. She whispered eager questions, and her companion had occasionally some difficulty in restraining her from rising from her place and performing an act which, in his view, would have been highly imprudent.

After the story of carelessness had been made good by the Conservancy's witnesses, Johnny was offered as evidence by his solicitor, and deposed generally to the correctness of his course on the occasion in question, and the care he had manifested in navigating his craft. He gave his evidence with simple directness. It was in cross-examination that his proverbially excellent temper began to fail him.

"You are acquainted with the Conservancy's by-laws?" asked the officer of the board.

"Well, not what you'd call exactly. There's on'y three hundred of 'em, an' those are changed about once a year."

"Do you know By law Thirty-Six?"

"Te'l me what it says. I don't know it by its number."

"Well, it enacts that in circumstances precisely similar to those which have brought you here to-day, you are to slacken speed, or, if necessary, stop altogether. You know *that*?"

"Yes, but I couldn't a' done it?"

"And why, pray?"

"Because the current would have taken the head of my tug out, and, instead of hitting her on the bow, I'd have cut the skiff down amidships."

This view of the vaunted by-law was borne out by other witnesses. When, however, the bench came to deliver judgment they declined to adopt the theory of the defense. Sir Penton Hook was the owner of a house boat and of skiffs, canoes, and other light craft retained for the pleasure and convenience of his children. He was therefore opposed to all tugs and barges as being lumbering and unmanageable eyesores, calculated to place his offspring in jeopardy. He administered a severe reprimand to the defendant, ordering him at the same time to pay a fine of five pounds and the costs of the case.

"I won't pay a farthing," said Johnny, steadily eyeing the chairman.

Sir Penton Hook was a gentleman who could not bear to be contradicted.

"You will be sent to jail if you don't," he said, in his most impressively judicial tone.

"I don't care for that," said Johnny, with quite as much temper and determination as his judge. "It's a wrong sentence, and if you say I should have eased or stopped you mean I ought to have com-

mitted murder, and, by God, you look the man that wouldn't stop short at that neither."

"Officer!" exclaimed the chairman of the bench, "arrest that fellow for contempt."

But before the awful minister of the law who was so suddenly summoned could approach his prey, Mrs. Mason had jumped from her place, had re-entered the inclosure from which an hour ago she had been released, and placing her arm round the astonished defendant's neck cried out—

"Sir Penton Hook, take care what you do. I have found him. It is our—it is my child. He shall not go to jail. I will not let him go."

Her head dropped on Johnny's shoulder, and she sobbed hysterically.

Scenes of this sort are calculated to interrupt the course of justice in the best regulated temples of the law. The officer of the court was advised to take no further notice of the defendant, who, indeed, had been premature in refusing to pay a fine which his proprietor was ready to settle.

"Call the next case," said the apparently unmoved Sir Penton, as mother and son left the court together. "Quite a romantic conclusion to a pair of very commonplace cases," he went on, turning to his colleagues.

"Quite," they acquiesced, with deferential unanimity.

* * * * *

Mother and son get on as well as can be expected in the case of a mother who loved not wisely, and of a son who took to running away at the early age of four. They have taken a cottage on the banks of the Thames, not far from the scene of the boy's infantile truancy. The Devil, whose sense of duty had impelled him to betray his own secret, lodges with them when ashore, and professes himself as less bereaved than when at first Johnny's mother gained possession of him.

Sir Penton Hook is still much esteemed in Parliament and out of it. His patriotic opposition to the Franchise Bill may secure him a peerage, and he continues his determined dislike to tramps of all sorts and sexes.

I hold that the literary artist, in depicting character, should follow the advice of Caleb Plummer, and go as near nature as he can for sixpence. In describing Jo, the engineer, as a bargee who never swore, I may be accused of departing from a rule so evidently sound. I can only say that Jo is sketched from life, and I can only add, by way of apology, that Jo was dumb.

NOT DEAD.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

By F. GROSS.

THERE is a symphony of Haydn's, in which one instrument after another drops off, till at the close the last musician disappears, and only the empty music-stands remain to tell that there has been a concert. This symphony recurs to my mind as I begin to tell the story of a family in whose midst the angel of death held sway inexorable. After all there is not much to tell, and nothing strange or uncommon. There is no attraction for the lovers of exciting sensational literature in the simple relation of what this family went through, and how they spent last Christmas-eve. All that lives must die; all that exists must pass away. In vain, then, we ery out against fate, and kiek against the iron order of the world; believe me, dear reader, it is of no avail. The world is governed so that human opposition has not a word to say, it is established as an absolute monarchy. Here, then, as so often, what happened was only in the course of nature. The family at one time counted a goodly number of heads. So many members of it assembled on high days and holidays that, when they met together, the great round dining-table was not large enough. Sometimes a plate was wanting, sometimes a knife and fork. Well, so it is, men have ehildren, and two easily grow into three, but knives and forks do not increase, except in fairy tales, where even arm-chairs can speak, and pen-holders make love to ink-stands. And this family very often came together thus numerously, for all birthdays and wedding-days were celebrated in common, and they had all birthdays, and most of them were married. This lasted for some years. From the great-grandmother down to the great-grandchild—the last a very young lady indeed—they lived merrily and happily. But the happiest time was Christmas. At this season sorrow and joy are intensified, solitude presses harder than usual, communion with kind-hearted, genial people is doubly enjoyable. The thought of the Christmas festival rested like sunshine on the heads of the loved and loving ones. The grandmother who had to give presents to four generations became young again, the great-granddaughter became a grown-up person, who had to collect together her whole experience of life to bring joy to the old woman. In the evening, when the little one wore nothing but a long, white

nightdress, and when she had repeated her usual evening prayer, then she knelt up in her bed and prayed to the Christ-child to come to the great-grandmother too, for the good old lady would certainly be bitterly disappointed if she did not get a present. The six-year-old Mary judged of the old lady by herself. Mary looked forward for twelve months to the festival, with its little fir tree and all the burning wax lights, and in the middle of November she confessed: "Now I should like to go to sleep, and not wake up till the Christmas tree is lighted up." In all her love for her great-grandmother, however, Mary did not forget her own little person. First, as we have said, she asked the good God in the usual way for her daily bread—always adding, "with honey and butter"—then she earnestly implored the Christ child not to neglect the great-grandmother, but, lastly—she never puts herself forward in the first rank—she brought forth her own personal wishes to the Christ-child. These were neither small nor few. Once they rose up to five and among them was the request for a leaden kitchen, in which dinners and suppers could really be prepared for her own dolls and those of the little friends invited, according to the receipts in the "Cookery Book for Economical Housekeepers." Mary was quite conscious of not being in the least childish—how could one be so at six years old!—she took care not to follow the example of little Anna, who once directed a letter "To the Christ-child at Vienna," and threw it unstamped into a letter-box. She set about it more wisely. She had been told that a good angel watched beside the bed of every child during its sleep. She acted upon this, and in the evening laid a little list of her wishes on the eider-down quilt, under which she dived like a little bird into its nest, and she thought: "My good angel will read that and give the paper to the Christ-child, for he must certainly know him. He will put in a good word for me." She was not disappointed. In the morning the note had disappeared. At breakfast the mother smiled mysteriously. The child's good angel had really been in the room. Mary had hit upon the right way; and she had not made a mistake; the angel would manage to decipher her somewhat unformed handwriting. Under the tree, fragrant with odors of the pine forest, rustling with fairy gifts, with golden nuts and silver apples growing on it, lay all the things that Mary had put down in the famous list. The good angel, and the Christ-child were then intimately related to one another—or, perhaps, they were only *one* person with the gentle features of her mother? The little great-granddaughter showed how clever she was. Though she was only six years old she would not believe that the stork brought little children in his bill, and laid them on the roofs of people's houses; she knew very well that an old woman, whose name was Meyer, went about with a large pocketful of little boys and girls, and gave brothers and sisters to the best children. When papa once told her Mrs. Meyer had taken out of her pocket a little sister, not bigger than a doll, and left it for Mary, the sharp little one asked, "Does mamma know about it?"

Mary was doomed to learn early the meaning of tears, sorrow, and mourning. Children are wiser on the day of their birth than in the first years of their life—they come weeping into the world, as if they knew what was in store for them, but then they quiet down

and make somersaults into life, till one day a lightning flash descends and a fearful thunder rolls.

A great epidemic passed through the world, the pestilence raged which is personified by the poet as singing:

"I mow down the world with my pilgrim's staff,
And leave it a desolate heath;
With a weeping-willow before each door,
And a family grave beneath."

The grandmother died, and then uncles and aunts died, and, last of all, Anna, Mary's sister. It seemed as if the whole family was to be extirpated root and branch. And those who were left sunk into poverty. That was another great mortality that passed through the world, but this time no corpses were carried out to the place of rest; money-chests and drawers became empty, and, where plenty had reigned, penury entered in. The thriving years of easily earned wealth suddenly came to an end. Property seemed to melt away in a night into nothing, into "vain show." The family had dwindled down to so few that they found room enough at the round table, which was no longer loaded with steaming dishes of costly viands. It is easier to travel downward than upward. Poverty comes in like a flood, and it rapidly overtook our friends.

Christmas-eve drew near. Despite their hard straits the parents could not bear to deprive Mary, now their only child, of the magic tree and the little surprises to which their darling was accustomed. They practiced close economy for weeks together in order to prepare a merry Christmas-eve for Mary. Again she had drawn up a list for her guardian angel, this time instinctively limiting her wishes to very cheap things, and all that she desired had come. But it was for the last time. Mary had entered her eighth year when her parents sank to the lowest grade of poverty. Four bare walls inclosed the room in which father, mother, and child had to live together. But, confined as the space was, misfortune had made itself at home there—no hut is too small or too low for it; it creeps through a slit in the door, it crouches in a corner, contented with any home if it may only abide there. All was faded and dead around the bright child. Mary felt betimes the leaden pressure of want. Not once did she express her wishes to her parents, but when the month of November came, the childish longing grew too strong for her, and again she made out her list for the guardian angel. The good angel had taken it, but he seemed no longer to be on intimate terms with the Christ-child. The mother's eyes were red with weeping when Mary awoke, and could scarcely suppress her joy that her bed-restante little note had been claimed by the person to whom it was addressed. At noon, when Mary came home from school, and the three were seated at their frugal meal, the mother said to the child:

"Do you know what has happened?"

"What, mamma?"

"The Christ-child is dead."

"Dead? Then he will not come any more?"

"Of course not."

"But what was the matter with him?"

"He caught cold."

“Poor child! His mother must have cried a great deal.”

“You must not be sad, Mary.”

“I loved him so much, that good kind Christ-child. And now he is dead. Must death be, then, mamma?”

The mother clasped the child in her arms, and covered her little head with tears and kisses.

But Mary's questions were not ended yet. The father was obliged to join in the conversation, to tell how long the child had been ill and all the particulars of his death. Mary had a hundred questions; one thing only she did not ask; how the announcement of the death had come to her parents. It was enough for her that father and mother had communicated it to her. She listened attentively, then she opened a drawer, took out of it a little manger with a waxen Jesus-child with rosy, fat cheeks and azure blue eyes, and before the parents could ask her what she was going to do with it, she hurried out of the house into the court-yard, and dug away with a little spade, till she had made a hole in the ground large enough to receive the crib. Then she lowered it in, strewed sand and earth over it, knelt down, folded her hands, and prayed to her God. Father and mother had followed her out; they waited till the child rose.

“What have you been doing here?” asked the mother.

“If the Christ-child is dead, it must be buried.”

The next day Mary came home from school and said her school-fellows had laughed at her when she told them of the death of the Christ child. The daughter of a rich jeweler even knew very well what the Christ-child would bring *her* this time—a beautiful gold chain, of Venetian work. As the mother still adhered to her statement that the Christ-child was dead, Mary believed her more than all her schoolfellows; but still she could not help wishing that her mother might be wrong, for now there would be an end of fir-trees, nuts, apples, dolls, and picture books; now she need never lay her list on her cover'et again. All was over, all!

And Christmas-eve came round again.

Silent and alone sat parents and child in the comfortless room. Mary was dreaming of days gone by—of tin soldiers and rocking-horses, of gingerbread and chocolate bonbons, and, as she dreamed, it seemed as if her great-grandmother came in, as if the room was filled with all the beloved ones who used to heap good and beautiful things upon her on Christmas eves long ago. She pictured to herself how beautiful it would be in the world, if the Christ-child had not caught cold and died. Somebody had really come in—a tall, dignified lady, followed by a maid-servant; the latter took Mary by the hand, led her up to the first story, and told her to wait a quarter of an hour there. Meanwhile, busy preparations were going on in the room below. The stately lady was the owner of the house. She had taken a fancy to little Mary, and wanted to give her a Christmas treat. Rich, widowed, and childless, she took pleasure in making other people's children happy on the evening which is not without cause called “holy.” A Christmas tree. The little wax candles on its branches were lighted, and in the shadow of these branches the kind lady placed all sorts of beautiful and useful things for little people and many for grown-up people, and a purse lay beneath, through the silken meshes of which gold peeped out,

and now, when the bare room was transformed into a fairy palace of enjoyment, Mary was brought in.

Speechless, astonished, bewildered, the child remained standing on the threshold. She tried to speak and could not. Joy and excitement choked her voice. She looked inquiringly around her, seeking for explanation, for assurance. Then she burst into a passion of weeping. Tears are the language of the helpless and of children.

"Then the Christ-child is not dead?" asked Mary, as soon as she recovered her speech.

"No, he lives, and will live forever," said her mother; "we thought he was dead, but he is risen."

"And will he never die?" asked the child.

"Never," answered the mother, overcome by emotion.

"Never?" repeated the child.

"Never, as long as a heart beats in a human breast."

"Who brought you the news that you were mistaken—that the Christ-child is alive?"

The parents pointed to the strange lady. The child fixed her large, timid, questioning eyes upon her, half in gratitude, half in astonishment. Then she danced about, clapped her hands joyfully, examined with delight all the Christmas gifts, and cried out, as children cry out when their hearts are full of gladness, "The Christ-child is alive, and he will never die!"

THE POET'S GHOST.

By HENRY PETTITT.

IN taking up my pen to write the details of the following strange adventure, I am actuated by feelings of considerable doubt and perplexity. The event itself is of so unusual, I may say so marvelous a nature, that I am aware I shall run considerable risk of being disbelieved, and I am therefore rather unwilling to announce my personal identity, lest I should bring an avalanche of accusations of mendacity upon my devoted head, while to wrap myself in the impenetrable mystery of an anonymous nonentity, or the doubtful personality of a *nom-de-plume* would only give certainty to a very natural suspicion that I had not the courage to hold myself responsible for a story that I had the temerity to tell.

Shall I, then, conceal my identity, or shall I proclaim it? Shall I, from a peaceful and irresponsible security, hurl my narration into the reading world, or shall I stand boldly forth in the light of day prepared to meet my judges *in propria persona*, and say--I am the man?

Let chance decide. On one of these two slips of paper lying on my desk, I will write a *nom-de-plume*, and upon the other my real name. If I draw the former, I will give such local coloring as will serve to hide my personality without interfering with the main details of my narration. If I draw the latter, I will give a whole true, and particular account of myself, avow my real name, and tell an unvarnished story.

I roll up the papers, I place them in a hat, and shake it. I draw forth one, open it and read. The die is cast, you shall now know my name, and you shall now learn the full details of the strange adventure that is probably designed to exercise considerable influence upon my future career.

My name, though a popular, is not a distinguished one; indeed, to give it any semblance of dignity at all, it requires a kind of shoring, or propping up with a baptismal prefix carefully culled from "Burke's Peerage," or the index of towns in "Bradshaw's Railway Guide." I almost blush as I write letters that compose the wretched syllabic name of "Brown," though my feelings are slightly relieved as I preface it with the gift of my godfathers and godmothers in my baptism, "Howard," and thus stand revealed to you as Howard Brown, the prolific and popular dramatist, with whose plays (if you are a play-goer) you cannot but be acquainted.

The importance of the revelations I am about to make is the best

excuse (I might say reason) I can offer for giving some account of myself, so that the individuality of the man shall be strongly impressed on the mental vision of the reader. Picture to yourself, then, a young man of some thirty-five years of age, with what is generally called a strongly marked countenance, hair worn rather longer than is the usual fashion—a weakness that may be accounted for by my poetic temperament, and with a nasal organ the beak-like proportions of which are slightly out of drawing with the rest of my countenance; but then my shaggy eyebrows and dome-like expanse of forehead lend a dignity to my features, the architecture of which may be generally described as miscellaneous, with a slight tendency toward the Gothic. My voice is clear and distinct, and its melody by no means impaired by an occasional suggestion of an Irish brogue slightly dashed with Welsh. I am of German extraction, was born in Wales, and educated in Dublin. My father was in business in the city of London, and I was intended for the law, but directly I was able to spread my wings I fled from the parental nest and became an actor. Unfortunately however, in the humble position I was forced to accept, I was not permitted to exercise my literary faculty in any channel except occasionally making out the bill, and was, therefore, unable either to write up or adapt my parts to my personal peculiarities, a misfortune that very soon resulted in the manager presenting me with a fortnight's salary in lieu of notice, and informing me that he would be blanked if he knew in what line of life I might ultimately be worth my salt, but it would certainly never be as an actor; unless, he added as I was sadly leaving, you do as many another bad actor has done, become a manager and engage yourself to play the leading parts, or buy a bundle of old plays, get a pair of scissors, and set up as a dramatic author.

This practical advice I ultimately acted upon, as will be seen in the sequel, but in the meanwhile my father—whose prejudices against play-actors and penny-a-liners, as he was pleased to call them, it was impossible to overcome—stopped my allowance until I returned to what he considered some respectable occupation.

I was therefore compelled to relinquish my hopes for a time, and earn my bread and gain experience as a commercial traveler, and afterward in my father's counting house, where, no doubt, I imbibed those commercial principles which have been of such service to me in my business transactions with managers and publishers, and enabled me to conquer that unfortunate tendency of most other authors to make bad bargains for themselves—a weakness that, whatever my other faults may be, has never yet, I believe, been laid to my charge.

While still young, however, my restless disposition impelled me to follow various other occupations, and enabled me to gain a varied experience of life. At one time I was a schoolmaster in a well-known London college; at another, the dramatic critic of a paper, which I left to become the acting manager of a very popular theater, and I also played character parts in a very fashionable one.

It was at this period of my life that I commenced writing those sensational stories whose dramatic force first led theatrical managers to notice me; and some charming little comediettas, whose simplicity and freshness recommended them to the kindly notice of the press

and the public, and gave me my first footing on the theatrical ladder. My progress was rapid beyond all my expectations. In the theatrical world there is a singular appositeness in the old aphorism that "nothing succeeds like success," and one morning I awoke to find myself famous and at the proud summit of my ambition, a successful dramatist.

For some years I worked steadily on, play after play flowed from my prolific pen, success after success enhanced my reputation and increased my banker's balance, but, alas! I soon found success did not bring happiness, and that the sweet feeling of hope that had buoyed me up when I was striving for success was changed to never-ending anxiety when I had attained it. Every reader of these lines who has made a reputation for himself in any branch of literature or art will, I am convinced, agree with me when I say that the difficulties of making that reputation are child's play compared to the ceaseless labor necessary to keep it up; and at last the time came when, with a heavy sinking at the heart, the bitter consciousness slowly dawned upon me that I was in the deplorable condition of the author who has written himself out. A great French philosopher has said: "Ideas are like beards; men seldom have them, women never." I can only confess that I was in the baldest possible condition, and though I raked my brains fore and aft I could find nothing approaching an original idea.

Invention is the most difficult operation of the human mind, and my mind resolutely refused to invent. I had a play to write, and the apparent impossibility of finding a new subject sent the iron into my soul. What was to be done? Should I hide my diminished head, and let the world pass on before me, or should I make one supreme effort to oil my mental machinery and start the manufactory again?

I resolved upon the latter course, and on enjoying a week's rest and change of scene previous to wrestling with my difficulty. Where should I go? Brighton was near, but it was a marine Strand, and Paris was too close to the blandishments of the Press Club. I had no time to waste in indecision. I took up the Railway A B C, opened it at hazard, and read where my thumb rested. "Stratford-on-Avon—the birthplace of the greatest of all dramatists!" I exclaimed, "I will go there!" My bag was packed, the train was caught, and the dull sun of a wintery afternoon shed its parting rays upon my figure as I stood outside the house where the godlike genius of the greatest poet the world has known first awakened into human life.

When a lad, I was once told by my grandmother that I had a hole in my head where the bump of veneration should have been; but I think if her spirit had been hovering anywhere about as I gently pulled the quaint old bell that hung over the door of the poet's house, she might have considerably modified her uncomplimentary opinion; and it was with feelings very much akin to those with which a devout person enters a church that I passed through the opened door, and, in the fading light, actuated by an unconscious impulse, took off my hat as I walked over the broken and uneven stone floor, and seated myself in the chimney-corner where Shakespeare in the earlier years of his life had sat, and, perhaps felt the first dawning of his

divine genius as he gazed at the faces in the fire, and watched the long shadows dancing and playing on the wood-ribbed, plastered walls.

Judging by my own feelings, I am not at all surprised at the extravagances of some of Shakespeare's admirers, who shed tears, fall on their knees and kiss the floor, and even go into hysterics when they visit the little house in Henley Street. It is, as many of my readers are aware, in the charge of two maiden sisters, the Misses Chattaway, daughters of a banker, whom vicissitude of fortune compelled to accept a position the duties of which they fulfill with a grace and courtesy that make these charming gentlewomen one of the pleasantest memories you take away with you.

I will not attempt to describe the pleasure I felt while being conducted over the house and through the museum of Shakespearean relics. A more interesting and sympathetic guide it is impossible to conceive; and when at last I stood in the little room and, in the fast-fading light, looked up at the famous picture of William Shakespeare, bound in its iron case, I could not resist telling my friendly cicerone that I was one of the humblest followers of the same craft as the great master, whose genial, handsome face looked down upon us, and that I would give worlds if he would but open his lips and inspire me with one single happy thought.

"Sit here for a few minutes, rest yourself, and perhaps he will," answered my kindly guide, as she placed me a quaint old Elizabethan chair before the picture. "I must not leave you alone, it is against the rules, but I will wait at the door. You can forget that I am there, and while the spirit and influence of William Shakespeare are around you yield yourself up to reverie and contemplation."

She left me, at least I neither saw nor heard her, and I was alone. Reader, I do not ask you to believe what follows. If you know me and are not my friend throw this down and read no more, but if you are a kindred spirit read on with sympathetic interest, remembering only my mental state when I entered the room, and my strange surroundings.

I was harassed and worn out with my last play. I was dejected and nervous about the one I had to write. Depressed and unhappy; painfully, miserably aware of my own mental deficiencies, I sat opposite the lifelike picture of the Great Thinker, ready, like a literary Faust, to sell my soul for an idea. A jaundiced sun had hidden himself behind the leaden curtains of the December clouds, the last rays of light were fading in the dusky gloom, an intense silence pervaded the chamber, in whose solitude an overwrought mind sought inspiration from the dead semblance of a great poet.

Was it the working of a glorious spirit of that grand craft which, since the days of the building of the Temple of Solomon, has knit together the souls of men, whatsoever their state of life may be, and brought the lofty intellect of the creative architect into sympathy with the simple mind and struggling intelligence of the hewer of wood and drawer of water, I know not. I only know that the great, unspoken wish of my heart was realized; that I closed my eyes in dreamy slumber, that the world I lived in, with its hard-hearted managers, dissatisfied actors, Utopian critics, and exacting

public, seemed to float away in the far distance, and leave me nearly three centuries behind in company with William Shakespeare, who, in the dusky silence, stepped from the picture to the floor and welcomed me.

CHAPTER II.

I HAVE had the privilege and pleasure of meeting some of our greatest modern poets, painters, and philosophers, but Shakespeare's face was the noblest and handsomest I have ever seen: a pair of large hazel eyes, whose bright and sparkling intelligence was only equaled by their kindly humor; a noble forehead, on which the chestnut hair lay in careless curls; a graceful mustache and beard that did not hide the small, sensitive mouth and white teeth; a countenance altogether noble as a prophet's and kindly as a saint's. He had a voice rich, full, and deep, and the carriage of a king.

It is impossible to describe the kindness of his voice as he invited me to follow him down the narrow, gloomy stairs, and the stately grace with which he took my arm, and led me down Fienley Street.

And here the strangest marvel of all occurred; for, as we stepped into the open air, our relative conditions underwent a mutual change, the spiritual form of the poet became corporeal and real, and by a sudden, strange, and inexplicable feeling of lightness I became aware that I had left my body behind me in the chair, and that only my ethereal form was walking beside the stately figure of my companion. Shakespeare had become human, and I had become the ghost.

The scene, too, was changed. The Great Spirit of Time had put back the clock two centuries and a half, and I found myself walking through Stratford-on-Avon in the reign of King James the First with Master William Shakespeare, who, exchanging salutations with the honest townspeople as we passed them, pointed out to me the principal characteristics of the quaint old Warwickshire town in the days of the Stuarts.

"The house you have just left," he said, "was where I lived until I was old enough to think for myself, and bold enough to run away from home to be an actor. This," he added, as he stopped at a gate and opened it, "is New Place, the freehold of which I bought, and where I settled down to end my days."

He took me through the hall and into the library, and after giving me a seat by a blazing wood fire, seated himself opposite to me, folded his hands and said, "And now, Mr. Brown, what can I do for you?"

Strange to say, I felt no nervousness, and no fear. I knew intuitively, that I was with one whose nobility of mind and goodness of heart would shield me from all danger, and help me by all means that lay in his power. I told him my story plainly and frankly, and he listened with grave attention.

"Why don't you collaborate?" he said, thoughtfully. "Beaumont and Fletcher did it very successfully."

"Yes! but Beaumont and Fletcher were loyal to each other, and understood not only the true meaning of the old maxim that 'Two heads are better than one,' but the art of running in double harness.

Besides, they had brains enough to believe that all the literary talent in the world was not locked up in one head."

"True," answered Shakespeare, "when two men write a successful play, they both want all the credit, and it generally ends in making them enemies for life. Fortunately," he added, with a quiet smile. "I never had a collaborateur, but I have had commentators and editors, and when I think of the idiotic things they've written and said about me and my plays, it makes me furious."

"Of whom do you principally complain, Mr. Shakespeare?" I asked.

"The whole regiment of them," he replied, emphatically. "But the fellow who annoyed me most was that concentration of conceit, David Garrick. Why, he almost believed the plays were his, and they have hung up a picture in my birthplace yonder with Garrick embracing my bust, in a manner very strongly suggesting that he had just dug me out of oblivion. But there, all these tragedians are alike. They all believe they have created Shakespeare."

"You surely do not include our modern tragedians?"

"Not to such an extent. Henry Irving has too much brains in his head to be misled by his success; and Wilson Barrett's collaboration with his authors has taught him to respect the labors of the dramatist and to give him his due. A capital fellow, Wilson Barrett, by the way; he is the material great men are made of, and I liked him excessively after he had told that story of the oath to play Hamlet, when he spent his last sixpence to see Charles Kean in a play of mine. But, ye gods! how I laughed when it turned out it was a pantomime he saw."

"Do you like Wilson Barrett's 'Hamlet'?" I asked.

"Very much indeed," replied Shakespeare. "It is a correct reading, and it's full of life. By the way, is he going to produce any new pieces?"

"Not yet. When an actor-manager has a severe attack of Shakespearean fever, there's not much chance for the modern dramatist."

"And the epidemic is spreading," said the poet, "and is breaking out in fresh theaters. I'm afraid you fellows are going to have a bad time of it," he continued, as he rose and stood with his back to the fire. "You see there are no authors' fees to pay, and that must be a consideration with a manager. Why, look at this young American lady, Mary Anderson, she had to pay enormous sums to Mr. Gilbert for 'Pygmalion and Galatea,' but she does not have to pay a halfpenny to me for 'Romeo and Juliet.'"

"In fact, she pays nothing, and gets a better play," I ventured to suggest.

"The admirers of Mr. Gilbert do not think so. I hear that they believe him to be my superior." And Shakespeare laughed, as he turned to me with a chuckle and a wink, and added, "But you know he isn't."

I felt very much inclined to ask him what he thought of Mary Anderson, but refrained, as I was anxious to get his views on my own affairs, and the same thought must have presented itself to the poet also, for he suddenly threw himself back into his chair, and said—

"But we are not here to discuss Mary Anderson—her youth,

beauty, and genius are beyond question—but to help you, my dear boy. While we have been chatting, I have turned the matter over in my mind, and I have a capital idea.”

I looked at him with an earnestness that too truly bespoke my anxiety, and he continued.

“You want a plot for a strong modern drama?”

“Yes.”

“Why not use one of mine?”

“Yours! Mr. Shakespeare?” I exclaimed in astonishment.

“Certainly. They are strong, they are full of interest, and where could you find better?”

“But your stories are known to every reader of my time.”

“And so they were to every reader of my time. Human nature has been the same since the world began, and the complication of incident has altered very little. Modernize my dramas to contemporary life and its surroundings, and you have a wide and glorious field of fiction before you.”

The magnitude of the proposition startled me beyond expression, and my agitation was such that I could scarcely command my voice, as I asked him how it was to be done.

“It is simple enough. Take my plays one by one, use the same dramatic motives, the same incidents, the same characters (with different names of course), the same plot, and adapt them to modern life. Write fresh dialogue, and bring them out as new and original dramas. Come, Mr. Brown,” he said, with a smile, “do not look so amazed, but listen, and I will give you a lesson in dramatic construction.”

And William Shakespeare, the poet, stood up by the fireside, on that dull December afternoon, as the deepening shadows closed around the room, and the flames from the wood-fire flickered and danced around him, now lighting up his sparkling eyes, and then, as the embers sunk into a red glow throwing their rich and ruddy rays round his graceful figure and kind earnest face, he told me the story of “Hamlet” as a modern drama.

“This,” he said with a smile, “is an entirely new and original drama of modern life entitled:

“‘THE HIDDEN CRIME.’”

CHARACTERS:

Claude Henley	..	..	A Devonshire Squire.
Harry	..	..	His Nephew.
John Poland	..	..	The Steward.
Horace	..	..	A Friend of Harry.
Lawrence	..	..	The Son of Poland.
Rosenberg and Goldstein	..	..	Two Country Gentlemen.
Oscar	..	..	A Sportsman.
Mark and Bernard	..	..	Gamekeepers.
Irving Warner	..	..	An Actor.
Gwendoline Henley	..	..	Mother of Harry.
Olivia Poland	..	..	The Steward's Daughter.

Gamekeepers, Sportsmen, Country Gentlemen, Guests, Visitors, etc.

“ The scene opens in Devonshire, on the lawn of Elsinore Hall, the country seat of the Henley family. At the opening of the story, the late John Henley, who was the owner of the estate, has died suddenly within the last few months, and left by a will, which was found a few days after his death, the whole of the property to his only brother, Claude Henley, to the exclusion of his son, Harry Henley, the hero. Harry Henley is very naturally surprised that his father should not have allowed him to succeed to the paternal estates, and is also in deep grief at the sudden and unexpected death of his father, whom he loved with a peculiarly deep and reverent affection. This grief is only the more intensified when his mother, to the scandal of the neighborhood, and in defiance of the law, marries her deceased husband's brother (thus at a time when the Deceased Wife's Sister Marriage Bill is before Parliament, giving a peculiar and immediate interest to a popular question of the day). At this point of the story is introduced an old and faithful steward of the estate, and confidential servant of the Henley Family, named Poland, who has a son Lawrence, and a daughter Olivia. The son Lawrence, is going to Paris, and receives some excellent parting advice from his father—not to make strange acquaintances, to avoid quarreling, always to dress well, and above all, not to lend money. When Lawrence has gone, the old steward questions Olivia, and discovers that she is in love with Harry Henley, and that he has avowed his affection for her; but Poland, who is afraid he might get into trouble and lose his situation if he allowed his daughter to encourage his young master, warns her that Harry's intentions may not be strictly honorable.

“ Claude Henley is giving a party to celebrate his return from the honeymoon, and in vain joins with his wife (Harry's mother) in entreaties to Harry not to give way to useless grief, but to dress and join the party. Harry replies that the clothes are but the outward signs of his sorrow.

“ Claude evidently thinks that his step-son is an intolerable nuisance in the house, but does not like to offend his mother by turning him out; he therefore leaves him to what he thinks is a sulky fit, and Harry, when left alone, bitterly reflects upon the fact that his mother has married his uncle, and given a party within two months of her husband's death, even before the shoes were old with which she had followed his poor father's body, like Niobe, all tears.

“ Harry has been educated at Oxford, and is anxious to return and take his degree. He has a young college chum staying with him, Horace, to whom he confides his sorrows, who, in return, suggests to him that his father might possibly have met with foul play, and tells him of an interview he has had with two gamekeepers, Mark and Bernard, who told him that they saw the late Squire Henley asleep in the rustic summer-house, in the orchard, a short time before his sudden death, and that they, too, suspect there is some thing wrong.

“ Harry immediately cautions Horace to keep his suspicions to himself, and neither by innuendoes nor suggestions to allow his thoughts to become known, and, above all, not to be surprised at anything he (Harry) might do in order to arrive at the truth, and if there has been foul play, to fathom it out. He adds that it may be

necessary to put on an antic disposition, and to pretend to have lost his reason, in order to gain his object; and after having sworn Horace to secrecy, sends him away.

“It is now night, and Harry is left alone to his meditations. He rests himself upon a rustic seat upon the lawn, as the moon slowly rises above the high, thick-set hedge at the back of the garden. Through the long, open French-windows of the Manor House at the side, the bright and gleaming lights may be seen, and the laughter of the merry-makers is wafted away on the evening breeze, together with the music of the “Soldaten Lieder” Waltz. As Harry, overcome with emotion and fatigue, sinks into a dreamy slumber, the voices of the revelers slowly die away. The strains of the “Soldaten Lieder” slowly change to weird and mystic music; a thick, black, heavy cloud overcasts the moon, and, as Harry sleeps, he dreams that the wood at the back opens, he sees his father sleeping in the orchard, and, in the vision that opens to his dreamy gaze, learns how his father met his death by poison, administered by his brother.

“As the vision fades, Claude Henley comes on to the lawn, followed by his wife and the guests; as Harry simultaneously awakens from his dream, rises, sees him, and exclaims—“Great God—the murderer of my father!”

“ACT THE SECOND

takes place in the morning-room at the Manor House. Poland, the steward, feels it is his duty to acquaint Mr. and Mrs. Henley with the behavior of young Henley to his daughter, Olivia, which, to a certain extent, he believes accounts for the recent eccentricities of his conduct, and, in support of his theory, shows them some verses that Harry had formerly written to Olivia. To find out if it be so, they agree to send Olivia to Harry, to try and discover what has caused his eccentric behavior, and to conceal themselves and overhear the conversation. They then retire upon seeing Harry coming, who enters the room reading a book, and who, after evading Poland's attempts to question and draw him out by his badinage, and by willfully mistaking him for a fishmonger, makes the old gentleman look extremely foolish, and sends him off.

“Claude Henley has also commissioned two young friends of his, named Rosenberg and Goldstein, to find out what makes Harry behave so strangely and what is upon his mind. But Harry, penetrating their object, tells them plainly that he thinks they were sent to pump him, and refuses to be pumped. Poland, the steward, now returns and informs Harry that the manager of a traveling company, who are performing at the theater in the neighboring town, has called to solicit his patronage for the benefit that is to take place on the Friday night. Harry, who knows the manager himself, sees him; and after taking a box for the benefit, asks him if he would like to come up to the Manor House, and give a morning performance to the family and the guests on a “fit-up” stage erected in the grounds, in the same way that a fashionable performance of ‘As You Like It’ had recently been given by certain aristocratic amateurs, at Coombe Wood.

“The manager who, as usual in the provinces, is also the leading

actor, is delighted at the proposal, and after receiving some excellent suggestions as to the style of fashionable acting required, it is agreed that they shall play certain scenes specially adapted to the occasion by Harry himself, and written up by him. He then dismisses the manager, and in a soliloquy resolves that the play shall be a representation of the mode by which he believes his father was murdered. He will narrowly watch while it is being performed, and thus by means of the play awaken the conscience of his uncle.

“Olivia now comes to him (watched by her father and Claude Henley) and after speaking of their past love, and his strange forgetfulness and unkindness, returns him his presents, saying that gifts are of no value when the givers are unkind. Harry is at first much moved at the tenderness and love she shows, and is almost relenting when he accidentally sees the curtains move, and discovers that he is being watched. He then bitterly reproaches her for her treachery, and after a powerful scene finally breaks off the engagement and rushes off, leaving her fainting, despairing, and broken-hearted. Upon this effective dramatic picture the second act ends.

“ACT THE THIRD.

“The scene represents a charming sylvan spot in the grounds of the Manor House, with a “fit-up” stage, and all the necessary scenic accessories on one side. Upon the other, seated under the umbrageous shade of a wide spreading chestnut-tree, a gaily-dressed assemblage of the youth, fashion, and beauty of the neighborhood, headed by the host and hostess, Mr. and Mrs. Henley, near whom are seated Rosenberg, Goldstein, Horace, Poland, and his daughter, Olivia, at whose feet Harry is lying on the grass. An orchestra in a rustic summer-house discourses sweet music, as the servants, in bright-colored liveries, hand round the iced champagne. The hum of gay conversation, interspersed with rippling peals of merry laughter, rises as the music sinks into *piano*, and the whole scene is one of brilliance and animation.

“After some badinage and half playful questions as to whether Harry is sure there is nothing offensive in the piece about to be performed, and whether it has been duly licensed by the lord chamberlain, the orchestra plays the opening music, and the curtain of the little theater rises upon the performance of the play, which consists of certain scenes carefully adapted to the occasion from my tragedy of ‘Hamlet.’

“At first Claude Henley listens to the piece with comparative indifference, but as the play progresses his interest becomes profound; and when at last the crime is committed that so closely resembles his own, unable to control his feelings, he rises in a paroxysm of despair and rage, and, amid the amazement of his guests, rushes from the scene, while Harry, who has watched him with absorbing interest, mounts upon the stage in frenzied triumph, and ends the scene with an impassioned speech to the startled and astonished guests.

“The next scene is in the boudoir of Mrs. Henley, Harry’s mother, who has sent for him to reason with him upon his extraordinary conduct to his uncle. In case he should be violent, she asks Poland to watch on the balcony outside the window, and to be ready in case she should require protection. Harry is then admitted, and wrings

his mother's heart with his reproaches for having so soon forgotten his father, of whose noble nature he draws a picture, strongly in contrast to the base disposition of her present husband. She tries to escape from him, but Harry forces her into a chair with such violence that Poland calls out for help, and Harry, crying out that there is a thief in the house, seizes a gun, fires and shoots him. Claude Henley and the rest of the characters rush on, and upon the arrest of Harry for the murder, the act ends.

“ ACT THE FOURTH.

“ Here it will be necessary,” said Shakesperare, “ to make a slight alteration in the story, as an English audience would never tolerate in a modern drama the tragical ending of the original, and the spectacle at the end of a play of four dead bodies lying on the stage. I will, however, preserve for you the same sequence of scenes and incidents, with only one alteration. To continue—

“ At the opening of the next act, the old steward is dead, an inquest has been held, and the jury, taking into consideration the well-known unsettled state of Harry Henley's mind, the fact that the steward had no right to be upon the balcony at night, and that consequently Harry had reasonable cause to believe it was a burglar, have returned a verdict of ‘ death by misadventure,’ and recommended that Harry should be placed under some kind of restraint. He has, therefore, been sent to a private lunatic asylum. Olivia, heart-broken at the death of her father at the hands of her former lover, has had an attack of brain fever, and wanders from her chamber into the hall, where she decorates herself with flowers. Lawrence, her brother, having been apprised of his father's death, returns, and, forcing his way into the house to demand justice, takes his delirious, half-dying sister into his arms, and in powerful language registers an oath to be revenged upon the man who, though he has evaded the law, shall yet be punished for having killed his father and broken his sister's heart, and as he kneels and registers his vow over the senseless form of his apparently dying sister, the curtain falls.

“ ACT THE FIFTH

opens upon a realistic and beautiful picture of an old English churchyard. Two rustic laborers are at work as Harry enters with Horace, and explains that he has escaped from the custody of the keeper. He then learns that Mr. Poland, the steward, is to be buried that morning, and then comes an effect never yet seen upon the stage in a modern melodrama, namely, a rustic funeral procession with all its quaint and characteristic details. Harry and Lawrence meet, a violent scene ensues, in which Lawrence seizes Harry as the slayer of his father and strikes him. A scene of wild excitement follows as the whole of the characters on the stage take either the one side or the other, and a riot seems imminent as Lawrence and Harry are with difficulty separated and held back from each other, and the scene closes in.

“ The next scene is a chamber at the Manor House, where Claude Henley enters with Lawrence and shows him how utterly hopeless it is for him to bring Harry to justice, and suggests that the only

way to obtain revenge is by more subtle means. He then unfolds his plan. Both Harry and Lawrence are officers in the Yeomanry, both have taken prizes at previous assaults-at-arms, and at the last meeting they were matched against each other for a wager. It will be easy for Lawrence to have a reconciliation with Harry, who is naturally of a frank and forgiving disposition, and then, at the field sports that are to take place in the afternoon, it can be incidentally suggested that they should settle the long-standing wager. Harry, under such circumstances, will find it almost impossible to decline, and then, during the bout, Lawrence can strike Harry, apparently by accident, a foul blow—and thus requite him for his father's death. Lawrence, seeing no other means, consents to Claude's proposal, and then takes off his sister Olivia, who has evaded her nurse and entered from the curtained door of her chamber in a manner that almost leads him to suspect that she may have overheard their plot. Claude, then left alone, says that to make doubly sure of Harry's death, he will take a ring he bought in Italy, the stone of which contains in its hollow a deadly poison, and drop it into the wine which Harry will probably drink at luncheon. The scene then changes to another effective stage picture—"The Village Festival and Field Sports," a bright and bustling scene of country life and gayety. Squire Henley, Mrs. Henley, and their party are seated under a marquise. After a representation of Old English Games, Harry and Lawrence appear, and the betting runs high. Claude, dropping his poisoned ring into the prize drinking-cup which Harry had won last year, invites him to drink. He, however, refuses to touch anything until the sports are over, but his mother, taking up the cup before she can be stopped by her husband, drinks to her son's success. The two competitors then take their weapons and commence their bout, when Olivia, almost mad with excitement, rushes in between them, and crying out that she has overheard the plot of Lawrence and the Squire, warns Harry of his danger. Lawrence is overcome with shame and remorse as Mrs. Henley rises, staggers forward, and, falling, declares she has been poisoned by her husband, and then dying, accuses him of having, by the same means, killed Harry's father. 'The proofs at last,' cries Harry; 'arrest that double murderer!' Claude Henley is then handcuffed, and Harry, taking Olivia in his arms, says justice has at last overtaken the guilty, and that there is now peace and happiness for the innocent. The estates will, of course, revert to Harry, as the rightful heir, and the curtain descends upon the picture so dear to every generous-hearted audience and every right-minded playwright—of the villain brought to justice and the hero and heroine made happy.

"There," said Shakespeare, "is the story of a melodrama that ought to run for three hundred nights."

"Is it not rather improbable?" I asked, doubtfully.

"It is not more improbable than 'Hamlet.' They are the same people in the same relative positions, and actuated by the same motives. Go home, begin it at once, and if you only write the dialogue with sufficient literary skill you will have quite as good a drama as any one that has been produced for the last twenty-five years. Besides, reflect what a wide field is now open to you, and what a range of subjects. You can treat 'Othello,' 'Macbeth,'

'The Merchant of Venice,' 'Romeo and Juliet,' and, in fact, the whole of my plays in the same manner, and never need be worried again for a plot while you have a shilling volume of my works to choose from and modernize."

"There is one question I should like to ask you, Mr. Shakespeare," I said, diffidently.

"And what is that?"

"When there are so many abler dramatists than myself, gentlemen far better qualified to do justice to such powerful subjects, why have you chosen me as the recipient of such unbounded favor?"

"Because I think you are the most in want of assistance," replied the poet, "and I like to help the weaker vessel."

I cannot honestly say that this reply altogether pleased me.

"I don't think you have any reason to be dissatisfied with your visit to Stratford-on-Avon," he continued with a smile; "but, before leaving, I must caution you not to believe all you hear about me and my relics. I give you my word that half the objects they show you as having belonged to me, I never saw in my life. I must now wish you good-by. I am not fond of quoting from my own works, I think it egotistical and in bad taste, but, in the words of the Ghost, 'Adieu, remember me.'"

As he uttered the last words, his voice seemed to float away in the far distance, the room itself and its solid surroundings seemed to melt and dissolve like the changing pictures of a diorama, and in another moment I awakened into consciousness, and found myself seated in the quaint old high-backed Elizabethan chair, opposite the portrait of the poet, and heard the gentle voice of my kind cicerone say:

"I am afraid you have been asleep, sir?"

"I am afraid I have," I replied, as I rose to my feet, and looked round in a bewildered manner.

"Have you been dreaming?"

"Yes, I have been in the company of William Shakespeare, and I have had a lesson in the art of play-writing I shall not readily forget from

THE POET'S GHOST.

THE END.

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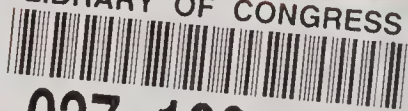
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