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SECRETS OF THE COURTS OF EUROPE

THE CONFIDENCES OF AN EX-~~AM~~BASSADOR

BY
ALLEN UPWARD

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TO
THOMAS TERRELL, ESQUIRE,

ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S COUNSEL,
WITH THE VERY KIND REGARDS OF
THE AUTHOR.

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A Stolen King.

“IT is a pity,” remarked the Ambassador to me, as we sat sipping his Excellency’s very choice cognac after dinner, “that there is no one who can write the secret history of Europe for the last twenty or thirty years.”

“Is there a secret history to write, then?” I asked, with an inflection which did not escape the keen ears of my host.

He removed the stump of his Larranaga from his lips, and laid his head back to let a cloud of grey smoke escape towards the ceiling, before he replied:—

“Without doubt. Only the other day, after more than twenty years’ silence, Prince von Bismarck let the world into the secret of his telegram which precipitated the Franco-German war. Contemporary history is full of similar episodes, which

never find their way to the ears of that good Baron Reuter. Rest assured," continued his Excellency with severity, "that the blatant dogmatism of the press on these subjects is only equalled by its truly pathetic ignorance."

"But, M. l'Ambassadeur,"—we were in Paris,—
"surely it is impossible for any event of real importance to remain concealed? A mere telegram is different!"

"Not in the least, my dear sir. I will give you an instance." The Ambassador gazed thoughtfully for a few moments at the thin blue smoke-line twisting and writhing itself out of the burning heart of the cigar-stump between his fingers. "You remember that supposed illness of the little King of Spain?"

"Why, perfectly. But what do you mean by supposed?"

"Merely this, that his young Majesty was no more ill at that time than you and I are at this hour. The whole of the accounts which appeared in the press were an elaborate fiction, designed to cloak a state of things which, had the truth become known, would have shaken the kingdom to its centre. Alfonso XIII. had been stolen!"

And, lighting a fresh cigar at the dying stump,

the Ambassador proceeded to give me the following astonishing narrative.

“The difficulty I have in telling you this story arises from the fact that I myself happened, by the force of circumstances, to take a prominent part in the discovery. I fear that this accident may impart to my account of the episode a flavour of egoism which is disagreeable to me. You shake your head, but I assure you the danger is a real one.

“It was about two years ago, as you will recollect, that the press of Europe was filled with reports of a mysterious illness from which this young monarch was said to be suffering. This malady was described as being of a highly infectious character, though not exactly dangerous. At the same time the world was called upon to admire the maternal solicitude of the Queen-Regent, who, it was said, in order to nurse her son, had shut herself up in his apartments, with only two attendants, refraining from all intercourse with the rest of the Palace while the critical period lasted. The only other persons who were permitted to have access to the sick-room, besides the physician in attendance, were Father Oliva, the King's tutor, and Senor Guastala, at that time Prime Minister of Spain.

“In the meantime, what had really happened was this:

“On the day before these reports began to appear—which was, I think, a Monday—a grand review of the troops forming the Madrid garrison was to come off in the city park. The review was in honour of Saint Jago, the patron Saint of Spain, and it had been publicly announced that the young King would be present, together with his mother, the Queen-Regent. It was, in effect, to be an imposing celebration, and all Madrid was expected to be there. On the very morning of the review, however, a letter came to the Palace, addressed to her Majesty, and marked urgent. On being opened this letter was found to contain the alarming intelligence that there was a plot on foot to attempt the King's life. The anonymous writer went on to add that the conspirators hoped to carry out their design during his Majesty's presence at the review.

“This letter bore the postmark of Pamplona.

“I see that that name produces the same effect on your mind as it did on the Queen's. Pamplona is, of course, the centre of the Carlist region, and the ancient stronghold of the party. It is well known that the hopes of the Legitimists had greatly revived on the death of Alfonso XII. without a male

heir, and, though their schemes received a check by the posthumous birth of the present King, the pretensions of Don Carlos to the throne have remained a standing menace to the modern dynasty. Nevertheless—but it is best that I should relate the facts without comment.

“Her Majesty showed this letter to Father Oliva, in whom she reposed great confidence; and, as was natural, they decided to keep the King at home, giving out as a pretext that he was unwell. The Regent accordingly set out to the review without him, taking, instead, his elder sister, the Princess of Asturias. Alfonso was greatly disappointed, but they succeeded in pacifying him by the promise of a huge box of lead soldiers, a toy which has always given him supreme delight.

“As soon as the Queen was gone, Father Oliva took the King into his study, and commenced to give him his lessons as usual. An hour passed in this way.

“At the end of this time a closed carriage drove up at a furious rate to the principal entrance of the Palace, and there alighted a person in the uniform of a general officer, attended by an aide-de-camp. This personage, who appeared to labour under considerable excitement, announced himself to the

porters in waiting as General Espinosa. He stated that he had been sent by the Queen-Regent to fetch the King to the review, and demanded to be taken immediately into his Majesty's presence."

The Ambassador broke off his narrative at this point to fill himself another glass of cognac. I took advantage of the opening to put a question.

"Excuse me, but was there a General Espinosa in the Spanish army?"

"There was; but he was at this time stationed in Barcelona. Command your impatience till the end, and you shall hear everything."

His Excellency uttered these words with an air of rebuke, twisting the points of his white moustache in his fingers as he spoke. He took a sip at his cognac before proceeding:

"Thoroughly overwhelmed by the manner of these officers, the lackeys hastened to conduct them to the room where the tutor and pupil were at work. Here, as soon as the servants had withdrawn, the general repeated his statements, adding to Father Oliva that the troops had shown grave symptoms of dissatisfaction at the King's absence, and that serious consequences were apprehended if he were not immediately forthcoming.

"You can well understand that in Spain, the

land of *pronunciamentos*, where the army has so long been accustomed to regard itself as the master of the government, and is always seething with sedition, such intelligence was not to be trifled with. The general's uniform and the presence of the aide lent an air of reality to the story; and, in short, the priest appears to have been completely taken off his guard.

"No doubt it would have been more prudent on his part to have insisted on accompanying his pupil. But the suddenness of these men's arrival, and the alarming character of their statements, deprived him of his usual presence of mind. He sent for the child's hat, and allowed him to depart with the emissaries. The King himself, it is needless to say of a boy of seven, was only too eager to go. He is a youngster daring as a lion, and to whom shyness is absolutely unknown.

"The next thing that happened was the return of the Queen-Regent, at the close of the review. She sent to the tutor to bring Alfonso to her. Confounded at such a message, he hurried into her Majesty's presence, and at once the truth was discovered. There had been no discontent among the troops, and no sending for the King. He had become the victim of a cleverly planned abduction.

“Figure to yourself the despair of Queen Christina, a woman who, beneath her infernal Hapsburg pride, conceals the most tender affection for her children. I have had the honour, sir, to be admitted into the circle of the Royal nursery, and I have found it difficult to believe that this charming and caressing parent was the same woman who had inspired the whole diplomatic body with awe at the public levees. The distress of the unfortunate tutor was not less pronounced. But even in such moments, Royal personages are not freed from considerations of State. Before taking any steps, it was necessary to consult the Prime Minister.

“A messenger was at once despatched to fetch him to the Palace. Senor Guastala lost no time in obeying the summons, and the facts were laid before him.

“It was by his imperative advice that it was decided to keep the affair secret as long as possible. In the unsettled state of the Spanish Kingdom, with a dynasty hardly yet seated on the throne, and threatened by Republicans on one side, and Legitimists on the other, the news that the King had been spirited away might very well be the signal, as you may imagine, for a revolution.

“It was therefore that this comedy of a pre-

tended illness was devised. With the exception of two old, trusted servants, everyone was strictly excluded from the King's apartments, in which it was given out that he was lying ill, and Queen Christina arranged to take up her own quarters there, to escape the prying eyes of her suite. On his part, Señor Guastala undertook to bind one of the Court physicians to secrecy, and induce him to attend at regular intervals, and issue the usual bulletins.

“At the same time the police were warned that an abduction had taken place, and furnished with a general description of the carriage, and of its three occupants. The railways were watched, the frontiers guarded, in short, the usual precautions were taken. Unfortunately it was considered unsafe to describe the missing boy too plainly, for fear of his identity becoming known.

“The porters who had seen the carriage drive away were also questioned with caution, but beyond the mere statement that they had seen his Majesty enter the carriage with the officers, no information of any value was elicited from them.

“The exertions of the police during four days were entirely fruitless. The Spaniards are a fine race with many admirable traits, but they lack the

French quickness. But for the accident of my presence in the capital, it is difficult to say what would have become of the Spanish monarchy. Luckily I chanced to be in Madrid at this time."

"But, my dear Ambassador," I interposed, thoughtlessly, "you were not then accredited to the Court of Spain!"

His Excellency put on an air of reserve.

"My friend, you are indiscreet. My presence in Madrid had no connection with politics. When I mention that a lady was concerned, you will perceive that it would be an indelicacy on my part to tell you more."

I hastened to apologise for the error of which I had been guilty. The Ambassador graciously dismissed my excuses with a wave of his hand, and resumed the tale.

"The moment I heard that the King had been taken ill, I went to call at the Palace. During the period of my connection with our Embassy in Madrid, I had become greatly attached to this delightful youngster, with his superb airs of a king; and I think I had had the honour to attract the regard of his Majesty. I went, therefore, confidently expecting that my visit would be welcomed by the little invalid. Judge of my surprise when I found

myself denied admittance to the sick-room. I came away, cursing the ingratitude of princes.

“But you are aware of my character. I am not easily to be baffled in a design which I have once undertaken. That very day I telegraphed to Paris, to Emile Gerault et Cie., of the Rue Luxembourg, to forward me the most splendid toy in their warehouse.

“On the fourth day it arrived. It was a marvel—a work of art. Imagine a soldier, completely accoutred in the uniform of a Chasseur d’Afrique, with everything removable, down to the very spurs, and mounted upon a fascinating camel, which drove itself by clockwork! I packed my treasure in a cab, and took it round instantly to the Palace.

“As I had anticipated, I was again refused entrance into Alfonso’s presence. Thereupon I demanded an audience of the Queen-Regent. Daunted by my firmness, the attendants gave way, and consented to take in my card to her Majesty. I ventured to inscribe on it the word ‘Pressing.’

“Doubtless, in her immense grief, the Queen was ready to clutch at any straw which might promise assistance. She agreed to receive me in the room adjoining the King’s bedchamber.

“You know those Hapsburgs. In the midst

of her terrible sufferings Christina preserved the haughtiness of her family. She omitted to accord me the privilege of being seated.

“‘What is it that you desire to see me about, M. le Baron?’ she demanded, addressing me in the French language.

“‘Madame,’ I replied in Spanish, of which language I am a master, ‘I have come to crave permission to present myself to his Majesty. I do not in the least fear infection; and I am not without hope that my society may cheer the tedium of a sick-bed.’

“I saw an embarrassed look pass over the Queen’s face. She replied, however, without unbending in the least :

“‘I regret that what you ask is impossible. The King is too ill to receive even the most intimate of his friends. On his recovery he shall be informed of your kind attentions.’

“‘But, your Majesty,’ I remonstrated, ‘see what I have just procured from Paris!’ And I unfolded the wrappings, and produced my Chasseur on his adorable camel.

“‘Surely the King is not too ill to be amused with this toy,’ I ventured to add. ‘I implore you to let me offer it to my young friend.’

“Queen Christina made no reply. I turned towards her, trembling, and was astonished to see tears in her fine eyes.

“‘Pardon, Madame, what have I done?’ I exclaimed, in consternation.

“‘You have done nothing, M. le Baron, that is not worthy of your admirable heart,’ the Queen was good enough to answer. ‘It would be ungrateful to keep up this deception with you any longer. Alfonso cannot receive your touching gift, because he is not in the Palace. My son was kidnapped four days ago.’

“I was thunderstruck by this news. Her Majesty then invited me to be seated, and told me the whole of the circumstances, exactly as I have related them to you. As soon as the recital was finished I rose to my feet.

“‘Madame,’ I said, with impressiveness, ‘leave this affair in my hands. Give me five days, and I undertake to recover my young playmate from the clutches of these assassins.’

“The Queen gazed at me as if afraid to hope.

“‘You say so, M. le Baron? Why, have you any means of influence over the Carlists?’

“‘Your Majesty is mistaken in supposing this to be the work of Carlists,’ I answered, with pardonable warmth. ‘I know Don Carlos personally; I

have had the honour of dining at his table, and I can vouch for him as I would for myself. He is incapable of such a crime.'

"The Queen appeared to be puzzled.

"'But the warning received that very day—the letter from Pamplona?'

"'A mere ruse, Madame, to keep the King at home, in order that the conspirators might effect their purpose.'

"'Then perhaps you will attach importance to this letter. Senor Guastala received it yesterday. We considered it a mere blind.'

"She produced the letter from a desk as she spoke. It was of the ordinary blackmailing type, demanding a million pesetas and an indemnity as the condition of restoring the stolen King. It was signed, 'By Order of the Black Hand.'

"'There is something in this letter, doubtless,' I said, when I had considered it; 'but I do not believe that this abduction is the work of Anarchists either. It appears to me to be the work of more skilful criminals than are to be found in the ranks of those fanatics. Still, I entreat you to let me make an effort to defeat these scoundrels. It will be time enough to think of your million pesetas, when I have failed.'

"My assurances appeared to satisfy her Majesty. She then condescended to sign a paper investing me with full powers to take what steps I deemed necessary in the conduct of the affair, and, armed with this document, I took my leave.

"My first step was to invent a disguise. After much thought, I decided to assume the character of an English doctor. I procured a card, and inscribed it with the name of Doctor Harry Brown, of the Institute of Doctors, London."

"It should have been College of Physicians," I objected.

The Ambassador shrugged his shoulders, and gave me a pitying glance.

"That is so like you English, with your insular egoism," he observed sadly. "Do you suppose that any one in Madrid knew or cared whether your doctors called their building a college or an institute?"

I prudently refrained from replying to this challenge; and the Ambassador presently took another sip from his glass, and went on:

"You ask yourself why I chose to become an English doctor. I will tell you. It is well known that there is a streak of insanity running through your nation, which renders them the most eccentric

people in the world. As an Englishman, it would excite no remark that I should take the extraordinary measures which I proposed to myself. I had observed this in connection with the extraordinary affair of the Ruby of Bhurâni, in which the late King of Holland was concerned—I will tell you about it another time. Moreover, as a doctor, I had an excuse for my presence in the Palace. I could announce that I was investigating the cause of the King's attack.

“My next step was to interview Father Oliva, the tutor, a dreary man, who concealed the most intense stupidity under an appearance of great craft. I found him in the room from which Alfonso had been carried off. He had known me formerly, and exhibited much surprise on learning of my assumed character. I made him repeat to me the details of the abduction, and then asked to see the most recent photograph of his pupil.

“The Father produced a handsome portrait, taken within the last few weeks. The King's face, as you are aware, is a very striking one. The features are noble and defiant, the eyes large and brilliant.

“‘Has this portrait been widely circulated?’ I asked. ‘Is the man in the street familiar with it?’

“‘Certainly,’ the priest answered. ‘It has figured in all the shop windows. The King’s portraits are always very popular. There is scarcely a cabin in Spain where you will not see something, if it is only an almanac, with the likeness of Alfonso XIII.’

“‘So much the better ; it makes it all the more difficult for the conspirators to carry out their plans. It is incredible that they should have been able to carry him through the streets of the capital in broad daylight without recognition. I must see the servants who were present when the carriage drove off.’

“The Father hesitated.

“‘Are you not afraid of arousing their suspicions?’ he asked. ‘Remember that they suppose the King returned in safety.’

“I never permit myself to be discourteous to an ecclesiastic. As you know, I am not a Catholic. I have no religion except France and my honour. But I respect the Church. Priests, in my opinion, are like women, a class whom it is cowardly to affront. You Protestants are wise, you exclude your clergy from the political franchise.”

“Pardon me, M. l’Ambassadeur, merely from sitting in the House of Commons.”

"It is the same thing. I was about to say that I was not willing to be rude to the good Father. Nevertheless his remark annoyed me.

"‘Her Majesty the Queen-Regent has been good enough to confide fully in my discretion,’ I said to him. ‘I beg that you will do the same. Where are these men?’

"He murmured his excuses, and led the way down to the main entrance. On the way I remarked :

"‘I do not see many persons about.’

"‘No, M. le Baron; there seldom are at this time of the day.’

"A thought struck me. I consulted my watch.

"‘At what time was the King carried off?’

"‘About this time, I think,’ was the answer. ‘Do you consider that anything turns on that?’

"‘It reduces the number of witnesses to the abduction,’ I replied, evasively.

"By this time we were at the entrance, where we found a number of lackeys. The Father presented me to them.

"‘The Doctor is seeking for information as to the source of the King’s illness,’ he explained. ‘Which of you saw his Majesty get into the carriage to go to the review?’

"Three of the men stepped forward, evidently surprised. I gave them no time to invent falsehoods.

"'Did you notice how the King was looking when he went out?' I demanded.

"I saw them exchange questioning glances. At length one ventured to respond.

"'I didn't see his Majesty's face, Señor. But I fancy he had a chill, for he was well wrapped up.'

"'So? And did none of you observe anything else unusual?'

"One of the other two looked as if he were hesitating whether to speak. I turned a penetrating look on him.

"'Now you remind me, Señor,' he said, respectfully, 'I think there was something wrong with his Majesty. I don't think he walked quite firmly, and he didn't hold himself up in the same way as usual.'

"I was satisfied, and led the way back into the palace, followed by Father Oliva. He was very curious to know what was in my mind. I began to find the good Father wearisome; however, I excused myself from saying anything then, and promised to be more explicit later on.

"As we were returning to his room an awkward incident took place. A door opened at a short distance in front of us, and a man came out, who bowed to my companion.

"That is Dr. Henarez, who is attending the palace *chef*,' he whispered in my ear. 'Shall I present you to him?'

"The devil, no!' I replied in consternation. 'He would enquire about the faculty in London, and penetrate my disguise directly.'

"True; I had forgotten that you were disguised,' muttered this simple creature. And we allowed the physician to pass without speaking, though I observed him casting inquisitive looks at me.

"I asked if the cook were a fellow-countryman of my own, and was amazed to learn that this was not the case. It was inconceivable to me that a Spaniard should understand the culinary art, and I observed as much to my companion.

"Yet I can assure you that his cookery is very much esteemed,' he answered, smiling, 'by no less a person than the King of Spain. If my pupil had been really ill, I should have put it down to Señor Gomez, his tarts are so much in demand in the nursery.'

“‘He seems to have made himself ill instead,’ I retorted. ‘Has he been laid up long?’

“‘About a week, I believe. It is to be hoped he will recover by the time his Majesty comes back, or the King will be terribly distressed.’

“I ceased to reply to the worthy Father’s conversation, being absorbed in considering my next move. As soon as we were again in his room, I requested him to send for the steward of the household.

“He complied, not without several delicate attempts to elicit my motive for this step. But he was dealing with an old diplomatist. You will readily believe that he elicited exactly what I desired him to.

“On the steward’s appearance, I repeated the explanation of my pretended mission. I also exhibited the powers furnished me by the Queen-Regent, so as to stifle at once any possible objection to my demands. I then gave him these instructions:

“‘In the first place, I require you to examine the servants stationed at the various entrances to the Palace, and to draw up a full report, showing all the persons who have entered or left the building within the last ten days, with the times of their coming and going. You will make this report as

accurate as possible. Secondly, you will at once station a special agent at each of these entrances, with instructions to allow no one, whatever his position or business, to enter or leave the Palace, without first communicating with me, and obtaining my sanction.'

"The steward bowed.

" 'Do these orders apply to the kitchen entrance, by which the supplies of the Palace are received, Señor ?'

" 'They apply especially to that entrance. There is no more fruitful source of contagion than food, particularly milk.'

"The steward was evidently impressed by this observation, which I flatter myself was not without ingenuity.

" 'And they apply equally to the servants of the Palace, I suppose, Señor ?'

" 'To every man, woman, and child in Spain, with the exception of the Queen-Regent and the Prime Minister.'

"The steward was a sensible man. He asked no further questions, but departed to carry out his instructions.

"During the next hour I sat in the tutor's room, receiving continual messages with respect to the

various persons who sought to come in or out. In each case I gave my consent. Finally the steward returned, bringing his report, a most admirable paper, which would have done credit to any chancellory in Europe. The name and, in most cases, the business of every visitor had been noted down with scrupulous care. I read the report through, and a mist came over my eyes.

“‘You have done your work magnificently, Señor,’ I said to the steward. ‘I am now going to show this document to the Queen. Should anyone want to enter the Palace while I am with her Majesty, be sure and let me know.’

“I dismissed him, and made my way with ill-suppressed agitation to the Royal apartments, where I was instantly admitted. I handed the report to her Majesty, and desired her to look through it, and see if it contained anything worthy of remark. She complied with my request, but observed nothing. I then ventured to put a question :

“‘I should be grateful if your Majesty could recollect any incident, however trivial, during the last few days before the King’s disappearance, which might throw light on the means of persuasion employed by his abductors.’

“Queen Christina appeared slightly puzzled.

“ ‘Persuasion ? I do not follow you, M. le Baron. Surely that was not the method employed ?’

“ ‘Think, Madame. The King must have very speedily discovered that his companions were not taking him to the review ; he is a boy of high spirit, it is incredible that he should have made no struggle, no outcries which would have attracted attention.’

“ ‘In other words—— ?’

“ ‘In other words, wherever the King has gone to, he must, in the first instance, have gone willingly.’

“ The Queen looked dismayed, and shook her head doubtfully.

“ ‘Think again, Madame. Did anything occur to excite the King during the last few days ? Children sometimes have strange ideas ; they desire to leave their homes, to imitate Robinson Crusoe, to become bandits——’

“ The Queen suddenly looked up.

“ ‘There is one thing which perhaps I ought to mention to you, though the recollection is painful at this time. My son was very much put out with me shortly before this terrible event. It was on account of the dismissal of the chief cook, whom the steward had detected in gross dishonesty. This man, it appears, had a nephew, a child of about the

King's own age, who had contrived to ingratiate himself with Alfonso, and through this nephew Gomez had got a petition into the King's hands, praying that his fault might be overlooked. Of course I had to refuse the petition, and Alfonso was bitterly aggrieved.'

"'Enough, Madame!' I had begun, when we were interrupted by the arrival of the steward. I begged the Queen to admit him.

"'You asked me to let you know, Señor, if anyone desired to enter the Palace, and I therefore thought it my duty to come to you, though it is only the case of a child.'

"'What child?' I asked as calmly as I could.

"'Pedrillo Gomez, the cook's nephew, who has come to visit his uncle.'

"'He cannot be admitted for the present,' I said sternly. 'Detain him in your room till you hear from me.

"The steward was plainly confounded. But he discreetly refrained from any reply, and withdrew to fulfil my directions.

"'Surely that is a rather harsh step,' remonstrated Queen Christina.

"'Madame,' I replied, with the utmost good humour, 'the child who has just come to the Palace

is some impostor. He is not Pedrillo Gomez at all.'

"The Queen looked at me as if I had just claimed omniscience.

"How can you say that, M. le Baron?"

"Simply by referring to the report in your Majesty's hand. You will see from it that the cook's nephew entered the Palace last Monday morning at eight o'clock, and that he has never left it since. Consequently, the child at the door must be some one else.'

"I could see her begin to tremble.

"Speak! What do you mean?"

"I mean this, Madame, that whereas I formerly asked for five days in which to bring your son to you, I now ask for five minutes. I am going to interview the true Pedrillo, the Pedrillo who has been concealed in the cook's apartment for the last four days.'

"I darted from her presence, and made my way straight through the building to the door from which I had seen Dr. Henarez emerge. I rapped, and a man's voice inquired:

"Is that you, Pedrillo?"

"At the same time a bolt was withdrawn from inside, and the door partly opened. I slipped

through, and walked into the middle of the chamber. The cook, a huge man, with as villainous a face as I have ever seen, eyed me like a tiger as I coolly took possession of his sitting-room. No Pedrillo was anywhere to be seen.

“‘Who are you, Señor?’ the man stammered out.

“‘I am a doctor,’ I responded, with the most friendly air in the world, feeling at the same time in the hip-pocket, where doctors usually carry their medicine cases. ‘I have been called in by another patient, and, hearing that you were ill, the Queen-Regent graciously desired me to place my skill at your disposal.’

“‘But, Señor Doctor, I do not need your services,’ he muttered, terribly embarrassed, as he well might be, for the fellow was in perfect health. ‘I have my own doctor.’

“‘Nonsense,’ I replied, ‘an extra opinion can do you no harm. Besides, her Majesty’s commands must be obeyed. Let me feel your pulse.’

“I took it in my hand before he could object. It was beating at a tremendous rate.

“‘I see clearly what is the matter with you,’ I said. ‘You are suffering from want of fresh air. Instead of being shut up in these two rooms—

suppose that is the door of your bedroom?—you ought to be out in the grounds. Let me advise you to put on your hat at once, and come out. I will give you my arm.'

"The wretch sank into a chair.

"'Indeed, Señor, I am too ill to be moved. To-morrow, perhaps.'

"'You make a mistake,' I retorted, interrupting him. 'I assure you these rooms are unhealthy. Let me see your bedroom.'

"While I spoke I went up and turned the handle of the door. As I had anticipated, it was locked. Gomez sprang towards me with flashing eyes. I did not hesitate a moment.

"'Sit down, Señor Gomez, if you please, or I will shoot you like a dog.' And I snatched out my revolver, and levelled it at his breast.

"He sank back, shuddering. I turned the key, and opened the bedroom door."

The Ambassador stopped deliberately, struck a match, and carefully relit his cigar, which had gone out. I did not dare to speak.

"There," he said, sending out a great puff of smoke,—“there, seated on the floor, amid a disorganised army of leaden troops, his hands black with dirt, his hair rough like a dog's, and his

charming lips all smeared with jam, I beheld his Majesty the King of Spain, calmly devouring one of his favourite tarts."

"And after?" I said, as the Ambassador again came to a full stop.

"And after? Why, is there anything more? I caught up the young rascal in my arms, King or no King, and made two steps of it to where his mother was waiting. Do not ask me to describe that scene. Such emotions are sacred."

I firmly believe that the Ambassador was actually moved. I was silent for a moment.

"I am not quite sure that I have followed all the steps by which you arrived at your discovery," I said presently.

"My friend, you cannot have been listening. Did I not tell you at the outset that the boy left his tutor's room with only a hat on? The moment I heard of the wraps, I perceived that something must have taken place during the passage through those deserted corridors. When I found that no one had seen the face of the boy who entered the carriage, and that his walk and bearing were different from the King's, the whole plot was clear. The conspirators, afraid to risk carrying the young monarch through the streets of his own capital, had disposed

of him in the Palace on the way out, and carried away another boy to create a false scent.

"The scheme was clever enough. The moment I had realised the character of the plot, it only remained to discover whether the King had been taken out of the building since, and, if not, with whom he was likely to be concealed. At the same time, I took precautions against his slipping through my fingers while I was engaged in the search."

"The cook, I suppose, made a full confession?"

"I had left him very little to confess. It appeared that he had been the chief contriver of the plot, in revenge for his own dismissal. He had got two accomplices from outside, one of them that doctor, who was as great an impostor as I was myself.

"They elaborated their plans with a good deal of ingenuity. Gomez began feigning illness several days before the review, and made his nephew come to and fro continually, so that his appearance ceased to excite remark. Then they despatched the warning through Pamplona, and lay in wait.

"The King was, of course, brought straight from the tutor's presence into the cook's apartment, and exchanged for Pedrillo, and all that remained

was for Gomez to keep the child prisoner, by force or persuasion, till they could contrive to smuggle him out of the way unobserved. The idea of obtaining the ransom while the captive was still in his own Palace was a brilliant afterthought."

"They were not punished?"

"No; it would have been unwise. They were informed that if they ever referred to their exploit they would be put on trial for high treason, and they seem to have held their tongues. Of course the fiction of the illness was kept up to the end, and the King's convalescence duly announced.

"What pleased me most in the affair was the vindication of my friend Don Carlos. Queen Christina was good enough to express regret to me for having allowed her suspicions to rest on his followers. She also expressed herself very handsomely about the trifling part I had been able to play in the affair—very handsomely indeed. Queen Christina is a very fine woman."

The Ambassador paused, and appeared to be hesitating whether to say anything more. At last he added of his own accord:

"When I finally took my leave she drew a magnificent ring from her own finger and presented it to me.

“‘For the service you have rendered to the Queen-Regent of Spain my Prime Minister will thank you,’ she said. ‘For that which you have rendered to the mother of Alfonso, she begs you to accept this souvenir.’”

He glanced at a very fine diamond on his hand, and, I thought, sighed.

“Have you the ring there?” I asked.

His Excellency shook his head.

“That ring is no longer in my possession. I parted with it under certain delicate circumstances which I must beg that you will not ask me to explain.”

I saw that I was on the verge of another indiscretion, and prudently changed the subject.

My host accompanied me to the outer gate of his *hôtel*. The night air was heavy with the perfume of orange trees, standing in green tubs around the courtyard.

“You will respect what I have told you to-night in the most sacred confidence,” he said, as he pressed my hand at parting.

“Of what do you think me capable?” I returned in my best manner.

“A journalist is capable of everything. Swear

to me that if you repeat this story my name shall not transpire !”

“ M. l’Ambassadeur !”

“ Good. I shall judge of your discretion by the time you come again.”

The Honour of an Empress.

“THIS is a trivial affair,” commented the Ambassador, as he laid down the newspaper in which he had been reading an account of one of M. de Rochefort’s numerous duels. “I do not wonder that you English amuse yourselves with these comedies, which reflect little honour on France. Nevertheless, let me tell you that, when we please, we can make of the duel something very different ; that is to say, an affair of life and death.”

“Without doubt,” I answered, tossing aside my own copy of the *Matin*—we were in the smoking-room of the *Cercle des Etrangers*,—“but your press should not give such importance to these farces.”

The Ambassador brushed this observation aside with a wave of his hand.

“It is the too great facility with which these affairs are arranged that has involved them in

ridicule," he said, pursuing his own line of thought. "It is when a crime has been committed which is truly worthy of death, and yet which, from its nature, is beyond the reach of laws, that the duel becomes a sacred resource, indispensable in the interests of mankind."

"And are there such occasions, then?" I responded, in order to see what was in his Excellency's mind.

"I have, at all events, known of one," he returned gravely, as he began to roll a cigarette. "It was the case of an infernal plot directed against one of the most illustrious personages in Europe,—a plot to which innocent lives were sacrificed, and yet one which could never be dealt with by the coarse machinery of jurisprudence."

"You arouse my interest, my dear Ambassador. Is it forbidden to ask for the history of this strange case?"

"I will tell it to you, my friend. But since the personage I have referred to is still alive, and is a woman for whom I have the most distinguished respect, we will, if you please, allude to her simply as the Empress. You will, of course, have no difficulty in recognising this lady before I have gone very far."

I hastened to accept this condition; and the Ambassador, having lit his cigarette with a match which I handed to him, leant back in his chair and began:

“I cannot recall the exact date at which I was accredited to the Court of St. James’s, but it must have been at least twelve years ago. I had come to Great Britain with a sincere desire to win the confidence of the brave English people; and knowing that in your country even politics receive less consideration than what you call ‘sport,’ I resolved to prove myself a huntsman. Accordingly I bought myself horses, and went out to hunt the fox.

“The hunt of which I became a member was at that time the most aristocratic in the world. It was rendered so by the patronage of the illustrious personage I have mentioned. Her Imperial Majesty had formed the habit of coming over to England during the season of the chase, under a strict *incognito*, and attended by only a small suite, in order to take part in this sport. It was in this way that I obtained the privilege of an acquaintance which I shall always look back upon as my most cherished remembrance.

“Among the members of her Majesty’s suite at

this time was a certain Baron Magratz, who filled the post of private secretary and comptroller of the household. You will understand, of course, that my intercourse with the Empress was on the most respectful footing; but it was not long before I discovered that this Baron, of whom I saw a good deal, was a dangerous, insolent man, quite unworthy of the confidence reposed in him by his august mistress.

“So acutely did I realise this, that it became a question with me whether the favour extended to me by that noble and unsuspecting lady did not cast upon me the obligation of warning her against this man’s presumption. While I was still in doubt, an incident occurred which rendered it unnecessary for me to speak.

“One morning, when we were engaged in waiting outside a small covert for the fox to appear, I observed Magratz ride up to the Empress and point with his hand, as if persuading her that the beast was about to emerge from a point further on. She turned her horse, and they rode off together round a corner of the wood. Troubled by some vague presentiment of mischief, I at once gave rein to my horse and followed.

“I got round the corner just in time to perceive

what took place. The Baron had stooped forward, with an air of undue confidence, and was apparently addressing some remark to the Empress, when all at once I saw her Majesty rein in her horse, lift up the riding-whip she held in her hand, and draw it swiftly across his face.

“Magratz started with a violence which caused his horse to rear. What he would have done next I cannot say, but luckily at that moment he caught sight of me. The Empress had already turned, and she rode back past me, the angry gleam in her eyes relaxing into a gracious smile as she acknowledged my respectful salute.

“The Baron followed at a walk, and as he came up to me I observed on his face a narrow streak of red, crossing from the right ear to the mouth.

“Stung, doubtless, by my indignant look, he checked his horse, and addressed me with bitter emphasis:

“‘I congratulate you, M. l’Ambassadeur, on your good fortune.’ (The scoundrel spoke in French—no doubt for the sake of the double meaning.) ‘You have seen how a member of a family which is six hundred years old is treated by one of these royalties. We others are not of the same clay, you perceive. A Magratz is no more to them than the ground

beneath their feet. But perhaps this chapter will have a sequel.'

"I disdained to make any answer, and he passed on, with a wicked smile, and rode away out of sight.

"The next day I heard that he had quitted England under the displeasure of the Empress, and some years passed before I was again reminded of his existence."

The Ambassador stopped, and flicked his cigarette ash into the fireplace before us with much dexterity.

"It was in — that I next met with my Baron." His Excellency checked himself abruptly, and appeared to be overwhelmed with confusion at having allowed this name to escape him. I was careful to show that I had not heard it.

"You met him, where did you say?" I asked languidly.

"In the dominions of the Emperor whose illustrious consort I have spoken of," replied the Ambassador, swiftly recovering himself. "I had just been appointed to the charge of our Embassy in the Imperial capital, and it was at a State ball given in honour of the Crown Prince's birthday that I recognised Magratz again.

“He was moving about among the guests with the assured manner of one who held a recognised position at Court. He wore on his breast the cross of the Order of Saint Luke, the second order in the Empire, and everyone appeared to treat him with marked distinction. But what attracted my notice particularly was a young girl of extraordinary beauty, whom he was escorting through the ballroom, and who clung to his arm with a delicious shyness. You know that I am not easily moved by the sex; picture the fascination of this damsel, therefore, when I tell you that I had hard work to refrain from going up to the Baron and soliciting an introduction.

“While I was wondering who she could be, and how Magratz had contrived to regain the Imperial favour, I observed a movement in the crowd through which the pair were straying. The bystanders fell back, and a young man suddenly came through, a young man with heavy features and bloodshot, rolling eyes, who was dressed in a rich uniform blazing with the stars of a dozen royal orders. It was the Crown Prince.

“The Prince, whose leaden face flushed with pleasure on catching sight of the couple, greeted Magratz in a style of much intimacy, and eagerly took possession of his exquisite partner, whom

he led off through the apartments out of my sight.

“Magratz stood looking after them with an expression of dark and furtive satisfaction. Then he turned round, and for the first time caught my eye. He bowed with a polite, almost cordial, air, and advanced towards me through the throng.

“‘Permit me to welcome you to my country, M. l’Ambassadeur,’ he said, extending his hand, which I accepted with reluctance. ‘What little influence I may possess here, and especially with his Imperial Highness, is entirely at your service. I trust you will allow me, within the next few days, the pleasure of paying my respects to you at the Embassy.’

“While I murmured my formal acknowledgments, I could not take my eyes off his face. It was, doubtless, an illusion, but I thought I could distinctly perceive a faint purple mark where I had seen the whip of the Empress descend.

“M. de Magratz no doubt divined my thoughts, or rather they were conveyed to him without words, by that subtle process for which science has not yet invented a suitable name. He bit his lip, and permitted himself an ill-bred remark :

“‘To a man of your Excellency’s well-known

discretion it would be an impertinence to recommend silence with regard to certain incidents in the past.'

"I bowed, but with coldness, and changed the subject by complimenting him on the beauty of the young girl whose arm he had just relinquished.

"'Ah! that is my niece,' he observed, with affected carelessness. 'She is an orphan whom I have brought up. The Crown Prince is good enough to interest himself in her, but of course the difference in their ranks is too great for it to be any more than a passing fancy.'

"He pronounced these last words with a fatherly air which did not impose upon me. I even fancied I detected in them a veiled allusion to the circumstances of our last meeting.

"I turned on my heel, feeling strangely disturbed, and passed on through the rooms. The Crown Prince and his charming partner were nowhere to be seen."

The Ambassador paused. His cigarette was smoked out, and he proceeded to roll himself a fresh one.

"Catching sight in the crowd of my friend the little Count Messana, of the Italian Legation, I resolved to question him. The Count is a most

remarkable man. He is the greatest repository of scandal in the whole of Europe, and, as his tongue never spares man or woman, he is immensely popular and goes everywhere."

"I think I have heard of the Count," I remarked. "Was he not mixed up in that scandal in the Quirinal, in which Prince——"

The Ambassador frowned rebukingly.

"Yes, yes; we will speak of that some other time. Do not let us distract ourselves now, I beg of you."

I excused myself for my interruption, and his Excellency went on:

"From Messina I gathered enough to confirm my uneasiness. It appeared that Magratz, after being in disgrace for some years, had recently been allowed to present himself again at Court. Fatal magnanimity! Unpardonable forgiveness! He had come up from his estates, bringing with him this niece, who had immediately cast a spell over the Crown Prince, a young man unfortunately not without a reputation of a certain kind. Her uncle conducted himself in this affair with great prudence, so managing matters that his niece's reputation was not compromised, while the Prince became every day more desperately enamoured; and all kinds of

conjectures were afloat as to what would be the ultimate issue of this strange situation.

“Although I was still far from suspecting the real object which Magratz had in view, I could not help seeing in all this some machination which boded no good to the peace of the Imperial house. I was hardly surprised, therefore, to receive on the following day a summons to a private conference with the Empress herself, and at once divined the subject on which she desired to consult me.

“Her Majesty received me in her own apartments, without anyone else being present, a mark of confidence which touched me profoundly. We had not met for six years, and I was distressed to perceive the change which had taken place in this exalted lady. Her finely-cut features bore the marks of suffering, and the exquisite gaiety which had formerly distinguished her had become overcast. Doubtless the sad fate of her relative, the King of Bavaria, had done something to effect this alteration, but the chief cause, I more than suspected, was the anxiety given to her by the conduct of her son.

“It is needless for me to repeat to you the kind expressions which the Empress was pleased to make use of on thus meeting me again. It was her first

words on the subject of the Crown Prince which roused my alarm.

“‘I have hoped, M. l’Ambassadeur, that an old friend like yourself might be able to advise me with regard to my son,’ she said, ‘and I look especially to you, because you alone are in the secret of the past history of M. de Magratz.’

“‘Madam,’ I replied with fervour, ‘the only thing that can prevent my advising you is the confusion with which your condescension overwhelms me.’

“Her Majesty heard me with a mournful smile.

“‘You have heard, no doubt, of the Prince’s infatuation for this man’s niece?’ she proceeded.

“‘I have, Madam. I have even seen the young girl herself, who appeared to me to be quite incapable of knowingly taking part in any treacherous design.’

“‘You may be right, but unfortunately she is under the control of a man who has no such scruples. To come to what I was about to say, this entanglement is by far the most serious of any in which my son has been involved. So serious is it that the Emperor and myself live in actual dread of hearing that the Prince has privately married this young woman.’

"I started, realising at once the full consequences of such a situation. The Crown Prince was the only child of the Imperial couple. By the well known family statutes of his house, his marriage with a lady not of Royal blood would be legitimate only in a social sense. Politically it would be treated as a nullity, and the offspring of the union would be incapable of succeeding to the throne. It is well known that the husband of one of your Queen's daughters is illegitimate in this sense.'

"But since such a marriage would, at the same time, have sufficient force to render any other alliance impossible, the consequence would be, in effect, that the line of the Emperor would become extinct in the next generation, and the crown would pass to some collateral branch of the Imperial House.

"Well might Magratz triumph in such a possibility. I could see only one thing to advise, and even now I do not see how I could have taken any different view.

"'You must arrange a marriage for his Imperial Highness without delay,' I said with firmness. 'Let him be despatched at once to some Court where there is a Princess of suitable age, and ordered not to return till the betrothal is an accomplished fact.'

"Ah, how profound is the instinct of a woman !
Her Majesty immediately replied :

" ' But I dread the effect of a loveless marriage
on my son. I know too well——' "

The Ambassador broke off short at this interesting point, and began coughing with violence. The cigarette smoke seemed to have got into his Excellency's throat.

" But I weary you with this long conversation," he observed, as soon as the coughing had subsided. " Enough that this venerated personage placed entire confidence in me.

" Within a week of our conversation the Crown Prince had set out for the capital of a small kingdom in the West of Europe, under stringent instructions to offer his hand to the monarch's daughter.

" The manner in which he did so is well known. Harshly ignoring the conventions of love-making, he bluntly approached this young princess in a ballroom, and, in bare words, asked her if she would become his wife. The girl, no doubt under equally strict compulsion, gave her assent, adding a profession of fidelity and submission. The Crown Prince instantly turned away, and that was all that ever passed between them in the nature of courtship.

“The next day the betrothal was officially announced to me by the Imperial Chancellor, and the news speedily spread through the capital, where it created an immense sensation. It was immediately after this that I received the promised visit of Baron Magratz.

“I had given orders that he was to be admitted; for though I am, as you are aware, the least curious person in the world, my high regard for the Empress made me anxious to fathom the intentions of this villain.

“He appeared to take his defeat with philosophy.

“‘I sincerely trust this marriage may end happily,’ he said, when I introduced the topic. ‘It is, of course, absurd to suppose that there is any attachment, at all events on the side of the Crown Prince. Unhappily, the preference His Highness has shown for my niece has turned out to be more serious than I believed, and I am afraid the poor child has allowed herself to cherish unreasonable ideas. I shall make it my business to obtain a husband for her, if possible, before the Prince returns.’

“I saw nothing to take hold of in this announcement. If true, it seemed that the Baron was taking the most prudent course, both in the interests of the

Imperial dynasty and of his niece. I did not yet appreciate the subtlety of his combinations, far less did I foresee the terrible end he had in view, and which you perhaps already perceive ? ”

I evaded this question.

“ Proceed, my dear Ambassador, if you please,” I said. “ Your story interests me greatly.”

His Excellency blew a wreath of smoke from his lips and complied with this request.

“ For a moment I thought of immolating myself on the altar of the Imperial House by offering myself as a match for the charming Baroness. But a secret attachment—of which I am forbidden to speak—restrained me. I allowed Magratz to depart ; and before many days had passed I learnt that he had found a husband for his unfortunate niece in the person of Count Schwartzfeldt, an immensely wealthy nobleman of fifty, but possessing no single attraction which could recommend him in the eyes of a young girl.

“ The ceremony was hurried on, and Paula von Magratz became the bride of this ogre on the very day on which the Crown Prince returned to the capital.

“ I happened to meet the Prince next day, and for the first time I was seized with a presentiment of the coming tragedy. If ever I read anguish and

despair on a human face, I read it on that of this miserable young man. So violent was his grief that he openly threatened to put an end to his life, and his unhappy parents were reduced to the extremity of distress.

“It was, of course, impossible that a scandal of such a kind should be long in reaching the ears of the bridegroom. Naturally alarmed and annoyed, Count Schwartzenfeldt left the capital with his wife. He carried her away to his estates, some hundreds of miles off, and buried her in one of those frightful feudal castles which this nobility continue to inhabit.

“In the meantime the only resource which occurred to the troubled Emperor and Empress was to press forward the marriage already arranged for their son, in the hope that he might be distracted from dwelling on his fatal passion for the young Countess Schwartzenfeldt.

“I was present in the Diplomatic gallery when the Royal nuptials were celebrated in the national cathedral, before an immense concourse of the nobility and citizens. It was the most melancholy pageant at which I have ever assisted. The demeanour of the wretched bridegroom created universal dismay. It was impossible to escape

noticing the reluctance with which he uttered the responses, and the sullen coldness with which he gave his arm to the trembling bride.

“Among the most interested spectators of it all, I caught sight of Magratz. I had but to glance from him to the pale face and drooping eyelids of the illustrious object of his hatred to see how far his scheme of vengeance had already succeeded.

“Some months passed before he made his next open move. He waited, with prudent calculation, for the Crown Prince to begin to feel the chafing of his new fetters. It was with alarm that I discovered he was beginning to renew his intimacy with the Prince.

“I had the opportunity once or twice of observing them together, and I noticed that his Imperial Highness, when with this man, shook off the listless apathy which had become his habitual mood, and listened with feverish interest to the Baron’s conversation. It was not difficult to guess the subject of their discussions.

“Finally, Magratz came one day to the Embassy to take leave of me before departing on a visit to his niece at her husband’s residence. There was an ill-suppressed ring of triumph in his voice, which warned me that he was on the eve of some new

stroke. Perhaps even then, if I had comprehended the nature of his designs, I might have interfered. But as it was, I could do nothing except to express in delicate and guarded terms my hope that his visit would contribute to the peace and happiness of the Schwartzefeldt household.

"On rising to go he lifted the mask for one instant.

"'I have been greatly distressed by the unfortunate result of this marriage of the Crown Prince's,' he said, 'and especially when I reflect on the grief it must cause to her Majesty my late mistress.'

"As he spoke I positively saw the faded scar of the whip leap into sight upon his dark skin. I drew back, and clenched my teeth firmly to prevent myself from making the reply that rose to my lips. But you will realise the difficulty of my position. As the representative of a great Government, I could not afford to enter into a quarrel with a private nobleman at the Court to which I was accredited.

"I suppressed my indignation, and allowed him to depart on his fatal errand. The event which followed has become the property of the world."

His Excellency turned his eyes upon me as if to

ascertain whether I desired to hear more. I entreated him to complete the narrative.

"The public press," he observed, "always misinformed in these matters, put forth a thousand different explanations of what had taken place, all of them sufficiently incorrect. I will tell you the actual sequence of events as I learnt it soon afterwards from the confession of Magratz himself.

"It appears, then, that this monster commenced by insinuating his sympathy with the poor young Prince in his unhappy union. From that he passed to lamenting his own action in having given his niece's hand to Count Schwartzefeldt.

"Having excited the Prince's mind sufficiently by hints of this sort, he at length went on, with pretended reluctance, to depict the young Countess as a victim of intolerable persecutions on the part of a jealous and tyrannical husband, and to bitterly accuse himself for being unable to devise a means for her deliverance.

"It is needless to say how the agitated lover received these tidings. His own sufferings he might have schooled himself to bear, but as soon as it became a question of the life-long wretchedness of the woman he loved more than life itself, all thoughts of submission were thrown to the winds.

In a frenzy of passion he swore to put an end to this state of things, and implored Magratz to assist him.

“After some well-acted hesitation the tempter professed himself won over. He furnished the Prince with the direction of a certain hunting lodge in an out-of-the-way corner of his own estates.

“The Prince was to travel secretly to the spot at a certain date, by which time the Baron undertook that his niece should be there to meet him. Then the two lovers were to lie concealed until Magratz had succeeded in pacifying the outraged husband, and bringing about an accommodation with the Emperor’s sanction.

“This understanding arrived at, the worthy uncle departed to the Schwartzenfeldt castle. The first part of the arrangement he carried out in the manner agreed upon. The love of the poor young Countess for the Prince was no less intense than his for her; her married life had not been happy, and, in fine, she was persuaded to accept the part assigned to her. She fled from her home with the Baron’s secret assistance, and the lovers were speedily united.

“Now Magratz proceeded to execute his real design. He had stayed on at the castle after his niece’s flight, pacifying the furious Count, not in

the way he had promised the Crown Prince, but by undertaking to discover the fugitive's retreat. As soon as he knew that the pair had met, he boldly announced to Count Schwartzenfeldt that he had received private intelligence of his niece's whereabouts, and offered to conduct the other to the spot. They set out together.

"But it would not have suited the Baron's purpose to bring the rivals face to face. The Crown Prince's high rank might have overawed the husband, and the whole affair have been hushed up. He therefore sent on a secret warning to his victim, managing so that it should reach him too late to afford any chance of escape. In this warning he pretended to the Prince that the elopement was known publicly, and that the Count was coming to take signal vengeance on both.

"The resolution thereupon taken by the unhappy lovers is a matter of history. When the deceived Count and his conductor entered the lodge, they found the two young people lying dead in each other's arms."

The Ambassador again interrupted himself, under the pretence of loosening his cravat. He went on presently, in a firm voice:

"When all was over the author of this dreadful

catastrophe had the assurance to return to the capital, and to pose as the disconsolate uncle whose efforts to save his niece from the consequences of a fatal passion had unhappily miscarried.

“Two persons knew or suspected something of the truth. One was the stricken Empress, who sat in her palace, tearless, beside the corpse of her only son. The other was myself.

“I do not doubt that this man had been tortured in his wicked heart all these years by the recollection that I had been a witness of his well-merited chastisement. The moment he had, as he conceived, wiped out the stain in blood, he came to me to boast openly of what he had done.

“It may be that long brooding on his vengeance had so warped his mind that he could not realise in what light his conduct would present itself to another.

“When I sat and heard this terrible creature unrolling the awful story of his crimes, in the perfect confidence that he was beyond the reach of human justice, and then thought of that Imperial mother whose life had been rendered desolate for ever, I realised that there are occasions when the duel becomes the most holy of sacraments.”

The Ambassador closed his lips, and leant back

in his seat with the air of one who had no more to say.

I waited a few moments to see whether he was going to resume of his own accord. Then I inquired :

“And what did you do then ?”

‘ His Excellency transfixed me with a gaze of fine scorn.

“Ask yourself, as a man of honour, what I could do. I waited merely till that carrion was gone, to telegraph to Paris for a week’s leave of absence. It was granted. I crossed the frontier as his Excellency the French Ambassador, and returned the next morning as plain M. le Baron. Then I sought out Magratz.

“I found him in a club to which we both belonged. I offered him a game of piquet, and he accepted with a smile, and at the first card he played I said :

“ ‘ Monsieur, you cheated. I saw you mark that queen.’

“That was all. You see, there was no scandal. There could be no suspicion of any other cause for our quarrel.”

“And the result ?”

A faint flush came on his Excellency’s face.

“Our encounter was not prolonged. Within ten seconds after our swords had crossed I had passed my blade through his heart—and I have never wiped off the blood to this day.”

As we were coming down the steps of the club, I put a question over which I had felt some hesitation :

“Is it permitted to ask whether the high personage you have referred to is aware of the motives which prompted your action?”

The Ambassador drew himself up with a severe air.

“My friend, I regret that you should have asked me that. From whom was her Majesty likely to learn the secret? You do not suspect that I should have so far violated the delicacy of the sentiment which I entertain towards that illustrious lady as to allude to the matter?”

But as we were parting he added :

“It is true that when I was recalled some time after, I received an autograph letter from the Empress, in which her Majesty deigns to bid farewell, not to the Ambassador, but to the personal friend whose devotion will never pass from her mind.”

A Seraglio Secret.

IT is a remarkable thing, this persistence of some hereditary feature in the members of a reigning House. The Hapsburg lip is by no means the only instance, though it is, perhaps, the best known."

We had been discussing the subject of heredity, and I had alluded to the prominent under-lip which characterises the members of the Austrian Imperial family. The Ambassador absently rolled up his table-napkin in his hand, and laid it down on the table, as he continued :

"The Bourbon chin is a trait with which every one is familiar. But there is another case of a transmitted peculiarity in a royal race, which is even more remarkable, though from its nature it has remained a profound secret from the public."

"You arouse my curiosity," I observed. "I feel certain that you will be indulgent enough to explain what it is that you refer to."

The Ambassador frowned with seriousness before replying :

"The matter is one of some delicacy, and my knowledge on the point was acquired under circumstances of a very distressing, and even horrible nature. Still, if you really wish to hear this story, I do not know that there now exists any reason why I should not confide it to your discretion."

"My dear Ambassador! Before, I thought you were going to be merely interesting; now you are becoming positively fascinating. Let me intreat you to go on."

"But this place is too warm," he objected—we had been dining together in the Café Brühl. "I propose that we take our coffee on the Boulevard. It amuses me to sit among these Parisians, and to imagine that I am a young man."

"In fact, your Excellency is one," I replied, rising to accompany him,—“a little disguised, perhaps."

"I am very sure of that," retorted the Ambassador, who, however, did not appear to be displeased.

We came out into the open air and seated ourselves in front of a small table with a marble surface, which a waiter diligently wiped with his napkin, before proceeding to bring us our refreshments.

The night was mild, and the numerous lights of the boulevard were muffled by a faint mist, which softened the voices of the passers-by. The Ambassador leant forward with one arm resting on the table, and his hat set back from his forehead.

“It was on a night like this,” he began, “only more close and sultry, that I had what is perhaps the most bizarre experience of my life. It was when I was attached, in the capacity of secretary, to our Embassy in Constantinople.”

“In Constantinople!” I exclaimed. “But that must have been many years ago?”

“In fact, it was twenty years ago. Abdul Aziz was still on the throne. But permit me to remark that these details will admit of discussion when I have finished.”

I acknowledged the justice of his Excellency’s rebuke with a bend of my head.

“It was at a time when the affairs of Turkey were about to attract the attention of the civilised world. Russia was already preparing to draw the sword, and it was believed in some quarters that England would not consent to remain a passive spectator of the struggle. The entire weight of France was being thrown into the scale to avert this contingency, and I have reason to believe that

it was the services which I was able to render to the Republic during this crisis, which led to my being intrusted with my first embassy.

“Our desire, of course, was to keep Russia strong, to act as a restraint on Prussia; and in this task I found myself pitted against your celebrated Minister, Lord Beaconsfield. He was a great man, let me tell you, who succeeded in obtaining for himself a European vogue second only to that of Bismarck. But of my labours in this direction I must not speak.

“To return to the night which I have already referred to: I had sauntered out from the Embassy quite late, and after walking through the streets of Pera for an hour, I was seized by an impulse to cross over the Golden Horn and explore old Stamboul. It was perhaps a rash proceeding at such a time, but I had accustomed myself to these nocturnal rambles, in which, for greater safety, I wore a Mahommedan costume.

“Doubtless, you have read those delightful *Arabian Nights*, and can figure to yourself the enchantment of wandering through an Eastern city in the silent hours, when the moonlight falls softly on the tapering minarets, and on the high walls of mysterious gardens in which veiled beauties recline

beside marble fountains, and listen to the songs of divine birds."

Carried away by these reminiscences, my companion allowed his voice to sink into a murmur, and appeared to have forgotten his surroundings, until he was aroused from his reverie by the loud rattle of a passing omnibus. He straightened himself up, and gazed out at the bustling stream of civilisation which flowed past us, with the air of one to whom it was unfamiliar. It was the hour when the theatres commenced their performances, and the pavements were crowded with gaily chattering playgoers.

"Pardon my abstraction," said the Ambassador at length, in a more ordinary tone. "You amuse yourself, doubtless, with the belief that it was not merely to indulge in poetical meditations that I made these excursions. Ah, well! You will permit me to say that some of those Circassians are charming women, and less cruelly disposed towards the Feringhee than their brutal and suspicious husbands.

"The fact is that the scenes which I am about to describe present a contrast so complete to this in which we find ourselves, that I begin to fear that my story will have an improbable air."

"Not in the least," I answered reassuringly. "I am myself a man of strong imagination. Besides, your Excellency's reputation for exactness is so well known."

The Ambassador bowed with complacence.

"You wish me to proceed? It is well.

"I made my way, as I have told you, into the Turkish quarter. Avoiding the region of the bazaars, which at this hour were closed, I turned my steps into that in which the Pashas have their superb residences, a region intersected at long intervals by narrow and solitary lanes, running between blank walls, with here and there a little postern gate artfully introduced beneath the ivy. I was sauntering slowly down one of these lanes, when I perceived in front of me, at a point where the shadow of a tall ilex fell across the white surface of the road, a group of those dogs which infest Constantinople. They were quarrelling over some object which lay on the roadway in the centre of the black patch of shadow. Save for the presence of the dogs, the whole neighbourhood appeared to be absolutely deserted.

"I advanced towards the spot, endeavouring to make out the nature of the object which had attracted these carnivorous brutes. As I got nearer, I perceived it to be a slipper of the pattern usually

worn in Turkey. My curiosity was now strongly roused. I stepped into the midst of the growling curs, and drove them off with a few blows of a stick which I carried. Then I stooped down to pick up this mysterious object.

“No sooner had my hand touched it than I started back with a veritable thrill of horror. The slipper contained a human foot !

“My first impulse on making this terrible discovery was to turn and fly from the place. But a dreadful fascination, which I could not overcome, rooted me to the spot, and even compelled me to make a closer examination. I stooped down, peering in the dim light, and asking myself with a beating heart how this severed foot had come to be exposed there on that lonely path, as if it were the damning evidence of some strange crime.

“As I gazed at it thus, I became aware that the foot had for some time ceased to bleed. It had been cut off at the ankle, and the dry blood was beginning to congeal over the severed veins and arteries. I looked on the ground beside it for stains of blood, but not one was visible. I extended my circle, and scrutinised all round it with care, but the result was the same.

“Of one fact I was now positively assured. This

foot which I beheld on the ground had not been cut off the human being to whom it belonged at this place, nor perhaps anywhere in the neighbourhood. It had been brought here, doubtless, under the influence of some strong fear, by one who felt it necessary to rid himself of its possession without a moment's delay.

“Profoundly excited by these reflections, I began to try and put together for myself the circumstances of the tragedy to which this ghastly relic was the index. I asked myself what had become of the man on whom so barbarous an outrage had been inflicted. If he had been murdered, it was his corpse which I should have found lying in the roadway. It was therefore clear to me that he must be still alive, that he had escaped, probably by the aid of others, from the scene of his maiming, and that it was perhaps the dread of his future vengeance which had instigated the hurried and secret disposal of the object which I had found.

“Under what circumstances, then, had this savage act been perpetrated? To this question it was more difficult to find an answer. I could only surmise that the man who had suffered so dreadful a punishment had been engaged in some secret and unlawful enterprise, in the course of which he had

found himself fatally entrapped, and had been obliged to pay this penalty for his escape. This was not the first time for me to learn of the barbarity of Oriental customs; there were dark stories floating about Constantinople, beneath the surface, of men, some of them foreigners of high rank, who had ventured into forbidden precincts, and suffered the most horrible retaliation at the hands of eunuchs in the service of a revengeful Moslem.

“But it seemed to me that there was something more in this affair, on the traces of which I had fallen, something peculiar, around which I was, as it were, groping without a clue. Why, *why* had the author of this vengeance hastened to bear his horrid trophy to this lonely spot? What was the something about this foot, the something which distinguished it in an unusual manner from any other foot, which had made those who found it in their hands anxious, with no common anxiety, to rid themselves of it in such guilty haste?

“I could picture the avenger—perhaps some highly-placed Pasha—who had found a masked intruder in his harem at midnight, and had left this terrible mark upon him, stricken with dismay by the discovery that his victim had been no ordinary being, and bidding his slaves hurry forth with the

thing whose presence had all at once become a moral peril, and cast it away in some lonely spot to be devoured by dogs.

"Strangely agitated, almost before I realised what I was doing, I bent down, and picking up the slipper, carried it out of the shadow of the ilex tree, into the full moonlight, and drew forth the piece of human carrion it contained.

"Do not ask me to describe the sight which met my eyes, and which completed the horror of the entire incident. The foot which I held in my hand *was* unlike any other foot which I had ever seen—unlike any human foot. One glance at it was sufficient to overcome me with a feeling of the most deadly nausea. I dropped the frightful thing on to the ground, and the brutes I had driven away flung themselves upon it with hideous sounds. I averted my eyes, and fled from the accursed place."

At this point the Ambassador interrupted himself to order the waiter, who had already served our coffee, to bring cognac as well.

"I had retraced my steps almost as far as the Golden Horn," he proceeded, "when I discovered that I was still carrying the slipper in my hand. Thinking that it might yet prove to be of importance, I thrust it hastily inside the folds of my

Turkish robe before proceeding. At the same time I began to observe that there was a certain movement in the streets, which was not common at that hour of the night. I saw soldiers about, and, unless my eyes deceived me, there were more lights than usual on board the Turkish warships anchored opposite the Dolmabacheh Palace.

“I might have stopped to investigate these symptoms of disturbance, but for a sudden change which now took place in the atmosphere. The great black clouds which had been gathering from one corner of the sky massed themselves overhead, and then suddenly split in a blinding fissure of forked lightning, while a crash of thunder shook the towers and roofs of Stamboul like an earthquake. Immediately the rain began to descend with the weight of an avalanche, and huge pools instantly formed themselves along the roads. I rushed through the storm as best I could, and reached the Embassy in safety.

“Even then, however, the alarms of that fearful night were not at an end. I had been lying in bed, unable to sleep, for an hour or two, when all at once I heard the well-known boom of cannon answering the thunder overhead. I listened, and again and again the sound was repeated, till a hundred cannon

had gone off in the darkness ; and, finally, the storm passed away like a routed army, and the grey dawn came stealing over the Black Sea.

“That night has since become historical. It was the night of the 29th of May.”

The Ambassador broke off, and leant back in his chair, as if he had explained everything. At this moment the waiter returned with the cognac.

“That is the worst of these northern climates,” remarked his Excellency, as he lifted the glass between his finger and thumb, and scrutinised the liqueur ; “it is necessary to take these things to keep up the temperature of the blood. Now in the south the sun does all that for one, and consequently Mohammed was quite right to forbid wine to his followers.”

“Pardon me, my dear Ambassador,” I said, “but my knowledge of the almanac is less profound than you imagine. The only event connected in my mind with the date you have named is the concealment of King Charles II. in an oak from the pursuit of Cromwell’s soldiery, an event which it was my custom as a boy to commemorate by wearing a sprig of oak-leaves in my cap. Be good enough to tell me more.”

His Excellency regarded me with a look of pity for my shortcomings, as he replied :

“The night I have described was that on which Abdul Aziz Khan, the Refuge of the World and the Shadow of God, was forcibly deposed from the Sultanate, and made a captive in his own palace.

“As soon as morning had come, the news of what had taken place was all over Constantinople. It did not take the diplomatists in Pera wholly by surprise. For some time past Abdul Aziz had been unpopular with his subjects. To him had been attributed the misfortunes which were gathering round Turkey, and which seemed to threaten the dissolution of the Empire. There had been more than one armed outbreak in the capital, Ministry after Ministry had been set up only to be thrown down, and a feeling of unrest was in all men’s minds.

“It appeared that this state of things had culminated in the meeting of a secret council of the great Pashas at the Seraskierate, which is, as you are aware, the headquarters of the army.

“The council had been called suddenly, in the dead of night, by Mehemed Rushdi Pasha, the Grand Vizier, but for whom, it was said, the revolution would have taken place before.

“At this council the principal ulemas of the

Moslem faith attended, and the head of their body, the Sheik-ul-Islam, officially pronounced that a Commander of the Faithful might be lawfully deposed. Thereupon, the agents of the conspiracy received their orders, the Palace was surrounded with troops, and the men-of-war, which I had seen illuminated, prepared to cut off all egress on the water side.

“These arrangements completed, messengers were sent secretly into the quarter of the Palace in which Mehemed Murad Effendi, the Sultan’s nephew, was kept a prisoner by his suspicious uncle. The Prince was smuggled out in safety, escorted to the Seraskierate, and there proclaimed as Sultan, to the sound of a hundred guns.

“In this way was the monarch of a great empire dethroned, and his crown given to another, without the loss of a single life, and with hardly a commotion in the street. Believe me, my friend, we have yet much to learn from these Oriental peoples.

“Constantinople was settling down again after its excitement, and I was beginning to believe that nothing more would happen, when the news of the catastrophe arrived. About midday a steam launch left the Dolmabacheh Palace, and came down the Bosphorus, stopping at the residences of the ambas-

sadors, and bearing Suleiman Bey, the secretary of the Grand Vizier, who communicated to each of the foreign representatives in turn the tragic tidings that Abdul Aziz had refused to survive his deposition, and had died by his own hand.

“I was with my chief when Suleiman Bey reached the French Embassy, and as the ambassador had no secrets from me, I remained while he delivered his message. He appeared much agitated, a thing which is most unusual in an Oriental.

“The ambassador and I were of course overwhelmed by the announcement which he made to us. While the Bey was speaking my chief glanced at me, and I read in his eyes the suspicion which had already formed itself in my own mind. This sudden death of an inconvenient and dangerous prisoner was an event which it was easy to understand in an Eastern Court.

“Evidently the Grand Vizier had anticipated the feeling with which this intelligence would be received. The secretary went on to say :

““My master has thought it his duty to communicate the fullest particulars of this affair to the representatives of the Powers at once. The body of the late Sultan is still lying in the room in which it was

discovered by his attendants. He appears to have taken his life by means of a pair of Persian scissors, with which he is believed to have cut open a vein in the left arm, and then bled to death.'

"The ambassador rose to his feet with a severe frown.

"'This is a remarkable story which the Grand Vizier has sent you to tell me,' he said with a distrust which was not intended to be concealed. 'I trust, for the new Sultan's own sake, there will be a proper investigation, which will confirm the view the Powers are asked to take of this affair.'

"The Bey showed no resentment at these remarks.

"'It is the Vizier's earnest desire that the Powers should satisfy themselves as to what has taken place,' he replied. 'He has desired me to invite you to send a representative at once to the Palace, who will be admitted to a sight of the dead body, and given every facility for satisfying himself as to the facts.'

"This sounded sufficiently correct. My chief turned to me with a look of inquiry, and I at once volunteered to accompany Suleiman Bey to the Dolmabacheh Palace and make the enquiries which the Grand Vizier invited.

“Accordingly, after going to my own room for a moment, with a purpose which you will readily understand, I left with the Bey, and quickly arrived at the scene of the Imperial tragedy.

“The streets, it is needless to say, were lined with people, all of them wearing exultant and fierce looks, which were not rendered more amiable by the sight of a Giaour being admitted through the Palace gates. However, a very strong force of troops had been brought together by the Vizier with a promptness which in itself was capable of an evil interpretation, and there was no open disorder.

“In the Palace I found members of the staff of all the principal foreign embassies, prominent among them being, of course, the representatives of Russia and England. As soon as we were all gathered, we were taken into the presence of Mehemed Rushdi, who received us with a great display of sincerity, and who appeared, moreover, to be really affected by this sad event.

“After making a little statement to us, which was practically a repetition of what he had said already through his messenger, he handed us over to Said Pasha, the Imperial Chamberlain, who conducted us to the apartment in which, so he assured us, the Sultán's body had been discovered.

“It was a small and meanly furnished chamber, immediately adjoining the women’s apartments, and looking out on a deserted courtyard. On a divan against the wall lay the body, covered as far up as the chest with a cloth or pall of black silk embroidered with gold. The left arm was bare, and hung down by the side, showing a deep wound above the elbow, evidently made by some pointed instrument. The scissors with which, according to Said Pasha, the unfortunate monarch had taken his life lay, still caked with blood, upon a small table by the head of the corpse.

“‘His Majesty,’ explained the Pasha, ‘sent across to his mother early this morning—as soon as he had risen, in fact—for these scissors, on the pretext that he wished to trim his beard. No sooner had he received them than he appears to have retired into this room, where he was not likely to be disturbed by his attendants for some time. It was two hours before his strange absence excited attention. A search was instituted, and he was discovered lying in the posture which you see, with an immense pool of blood upon the floor, in which these scissors were lying.’

“While the Pasha was giving us this explanation I had withdrawn a little apart from the others, and

was closely examining this corpse, which represented the monarch of a vast empire. As my eyes travelled slowly over the object on the divan, they were suddenly arrested by an extraordinary feature.

“I have said that the lower part of the body was covered by an embroidered cloth. You will easily picture to yourself the folds which this drapery would naturally have assumed in resting on the body's upturned feet. What I now perceived was the dreadful and startling fact that the cloth in this place rested upon only one point, instead of two.

“I waited to make sure that no one was observing me. Then I stepped swiftly to the side of the divan, and pressed my hand upon the place. My terrible suspicion proved to be correct. The corpse which lay before me had been deprived of a foot!

“I rejoined my companions, who were now leaving the apartment, and strove to banish from my face all signs of the emotion caused to me by the discovery which I had just made. Returning to the presence of the Grand Vizier, the various representatives of the Powers expressed their satisfaction with the explanations they had received, and prepared to depart to their various embassies. I waited till the last had gone out, and then requested

the favour of a few minutes' private conversation with the Vizier.

"Mehemed readily yielded to my request, thinking no doubt that I desired to urge upon him some point in connection with the interest of France, and little suspecting of what secret knowledge I had become possessed.

"As soon as we were alone, I fixed my eyes upon his, and said :

"'Before I make my report to my ambassador, there is a question which I am compelled to ask your Excellency to clear up. Can you explain to me how, if Abdul Aziz voluntarily took his own life, he came to lose his left foot ?'

"Not all the skill which Orientals possess in concealing their emotions enabled him to disguise from me the terror with which I inspired him by this question. He turned pale, and his eyes literally protruded from their sockets.

"Nevertheless he began by attempting to deny everything.

"'You have made an assertion which takes me by surprise,' he said, speaking with an effort. 'On what grounds do you state that so horrible a thing has happened ?'

"'Pasha,' I replied sternly, 'this is not the tone

to adopt towards one who approaches you as a friend. Had I wished to do you injury, I should have blurted out my discovery in the presence of the gentlemen who have just left; they would have verified the fact for themselves, and the scandal would have become public property. As it is, provided that you take me fully into your confidence, I may be able to propose a bargain to you. I will engage to keep the affair a secret from every living soul, merely asking in return that you will use your influence on behalf of French interests in the questions which are now under discussion between the Powers.'

"He heard me out with great attention, looking at me all the while as if to ascertain how much I really knew or suspected. When I had finished he observed :

"'But suppose I tell you I am in reality as ignorant as yourself of the cause of this strange mutilation?'

"I returned a sarcastic smile.

"'I should answer that I myself am not altogether ignorant on the point, as you will perhaps believe when I show to you this object, which I discovered under circumstances you will hardly ask me to explain.'

"And I produced the slipper, which I had brought with me from the Embassy.

" 'When I found this slipper,' I added, 'it contained a human foot.'

" 'A foot!' he ejaculated.

" 'And this foot,' I continued with a stern glance, 'was rendered remarkable by a certain deformity—'

" 'Ah!'

"He sprang to his feet and clutched at his beard, while he paced the room with irregular strides. I watched him keenly. Presently he turned to me with a searching gaze.

" 'Feringhee, can I trust you?' he demanded firmly. 'If I tell you everything, what security do you offer me for my life?'

" 'The honour of a Frenchman!' I replied with a superb gesture.

" 'It is enough!'

"And with those words he sank down upon a couch, exhausted by his agitation. Finally he recovered himself sufficiently to relate the circumstances."

At this point the Ambassador drained the remaining drops of his cognac, and remarked:

"It is dull sitting here. What do you say, my friend, shall we walk along the Boulevard?"

"Not at all," I answered with firmness. "I do not find it in the least dull; on the contrary. Do not let us speak about moving until you have concluded your story."

His Excellency shrugged his shoulders with well-acted regret at my decision.

"Very well. It is sufficient if I do not bore you," he observed with resignation. "But I am afraid that you find my reminiscences more tedious than you are willing to confess."

I merely shook my head by way of answer, and he presently resumed:

"Mehemed Rushdi gave me the story, as nearly as I can recollect it, in these words:

"You cannot be ignorant of the intense feeling which prevailed against Abdul Aziz in this capital, a feeling which is sufficiently shown in the demeanour of the mob since his death has been announced. But like most foreigners, you have perhaps attributed this feeling to political motives. The truth of the matter is, however, different.

"During the last years of his reign, the Sultan was guilty of outraging his subjects in the Mussulman's most sacred feelings. He had acquired the custom of going out from his palace at night, dressed in some mean disguise, and wandering through the

streets in search of adventures. In so far he may have proposed to himself the model of the Caliph of Baghdad, but unlike Harun the Just, his adventures were all of a certain kind.

“Although this was known to me, and I had frequently tendered to him my respectful warnings on the subject, I had, nevertheless, done my best to repress the seditions which his conduct continually provoked. My colleagues in the Ministry will bear witness that I have on all occasions stood between Abdul Aziz and the consequences of his folly. Had I listened to the solicitations which were addressed to me, he would have been dethroned long ago. But I was loyal to my master, and up to last night I had believed that he was not ungrateful.

“A month or two ago I made an addition to my harem in the person of a Georgian lady, of distinguished birth and brilliant accomplishments, and who was, besides, strikingly beautiful. Knowing the disposition of the Sultan, I had imported her with the greatest precautions, through a merchant who is devoted to me. She was brought up the Golden Horn in a covered galley, and carried to my residence in a closely curtained litter. I carefully refrained from boasting of my acquisition to my friends, and warned Dekapoulous (the merchant) to be equally silent.

““ Having handed over my treasure to the care of my head eunuch, who possessed my entire confidence, I imagined myself secure. For some weeks, indeed, all went well. The Georgian was submissive and affectionate, and my wives were not unduly jealous of my new purchase.

““ But at the end of this time I began to perceive a change in Zara's manner. She became exacting and haughty, and had frequent fits of temper, in one of which she even uttered a threat to leave me. These words caused me the most profound alarm. I suspected that she had been approached from outside, and racked my brain to discover the manner in which I had been betrayed.

““ You know how things are when one is no longer able to depend on one's eunuchs. They are all in a league together, and it requires torture to arrive at the truth. I am naturally humane, and rather than resort to those cruel measures which are usual in such cases, I resolved to employ strategy. I affected to have become tired of the Georgian's society, and even dropped a hint that I thought of bestowing her on a friend. At the same time I loaded the chief eunuch with favours, and pretended to let him into my inmost thoughts.

““ Meanwhile, I was engaged in secretly collecting

through various sources a body of fresh slaves, who could have had no communication with the old ones, and on whom, therefore, I felt I might rely. As soon as I had obtained the number I thought sufficient, I armed them, and introduced them secretly into the garden at night. There I posted them behind some shrubs, with instructions to watch for the entrance of any stranger, and if any such appeared, to instantly seize him and detain him till I arrived.

““ These arrangements completed, I gave out to my regular household that I was going to sup with a friend, and should not return for some hours. I took my departure, spent an hour away, and then returned by way of the garden.

““ As I approached the postern I heard loud cries, and a group of men came rushing away down the road. I noticed that they were supporting one in the centre, who was closely wrapped up, and who appeared to be unable to walk by himself. I also observed that the gate from which they were hastening was standing an inch or two ajar. The next moment it was flung wide open, and my men streamed out in pursuit of the fugitives.

““ A secret intuition warned me to restrain them, and to let that veiled figure go in safety. Filled with vague forebodings, I led the way inside, and as soon

as the door was closed and locked, I made them tell me what had taken place.

“‘It appears that immediately after my own departure the head eunuch, on whom I had so blindly relied, had gone out by the postern gate alone. At the end of an hour he returned, letting himself in with the key with which he was intrusted. Behind him entered a muffled-up stranger, who paused to give some directions to a body of men outside.

“‘Hardly was he well within the door when the slaves whom I had posted, carried away by their zeal, rushed forward to take him. He turned to flee, and would have escaped entirely had not some one in the confusion pushed the door to in time to catch him by the left foot.

“‘His friends outside began frantically attacking the door to release him, and then it was that one of the slaves, fearing that the intruder would get clear away, gave a sudden blow with his sword, and cut clean through the ankle with one stroke. Thereupon the wounded man had been dragged off in the manner I had witnessed.

“‘In proof of their story the men held up the still bleeding foot. Impelled by the dread which had taken possession of me, I drew off the slipper. You,

who have seen that horrid sight, know what it was that made me shudder as I looked !

“ ‘ Years ago, I had heard of a dark tradition in the Palace that the foot of the Sultan was not like a natural foot, that there was some revolting blemish hereditary in the House of Osman, which had to be concealed from all eyes. The moment I had looked upon this foot, I realised my dreadful situation. That Abdul Aziz had been mutilated by my household was little ; but I had stumbled upon the knowledge of one of those Palace secrets which even the mothers of sultans hardly dare to whisper to each other ; at the bare hint of which eunuchs stop their ears and turn pale ; to be suspected of knowing which means death.

“ ‘ There was only one alternative. It was the Sultan’s life or mine. I departed instantly to the Palace, and sought a secret audience of the mother of Prince Murad.

“ ‘ We arranged the matter swiftly. Every moment was heavy with peril. Fortunately, everything was ripe for this revolution, which I had too long delayed, and you are no doubt already acquainted with the steps by which it was carried out. As soon as Prince Murad had been proclaimed, and the oaths of allegiance had been taken, I summoned the officer

of the guard and a dozen picked soldiers, and under their escort, accompanied by the Sultana, I forced a way through the terrified eunuchs into the presence of Abdul Aziz. He had just set his seal to a paper as we entered. I snatched it up, and read. It was my death-warrant!’

“The Vizier trembled as he came to this point. It was an experience to unnerve even a brave man.

“‘I then informed Abdul Aziz that he had ceased to reign. He received the news in perfect stupor. I pointed to the soldiers and invited him to escape the degradation of death at their hands. He understood the situation, and cowered down on his couch, shrinking from us in a peculiar and dreadful way. Then the Sultana spoke to him.

“‘She had long intrigued for his downfall, and knew that her son would not be safe while Abdul Aziz lived. She urged him to preserve his honour.

“‘Still he hesitated, and finally muttered something about not having a weapon. Instantly the Sultana snatched a sharp pair of scissors from her waist, and thrust them into his unwilling hands. Still he hung back. It was becoming shocking.

“‘Finally I was compelled to order one of the soldiers to advance with his sword drawn. Then at

last, with a sob, the Sultan thrust the steel points into his arm at the place you saw—and the soldier was allowed to finish the work.’

“This was the Vizier’s account. In a country like Turkey such things are done every day. Nevertheless the affair impressed me unpleasantly. I parted from Mehemed Rushdi with perfect courtesy, but I did not take his hand.

“However, as I have said, I was able, in consequence of the secret which I possessed, to exert a powerful influence over the course of events, and on the occasion of my meeting Lord Beaconsfield at the conclusion of the Berlin Treaty, he even went so far as to say to me :

“ ‘ If it had not been for you, Baron, the Russians would not have had Batoum.’ ”

I regarded the Ambassador in silence for a few minutes. Then I observed :

“I suppose you yourself do not entertain any doubt as to the truth of the Grand Vizier’s account ? ”

His Excellency drew himself up, and looked at me with a pained expression.

“ But, what is this ! Surely you do not suppose that such a man would attempt to impose on me at a time when his life was in my hands ? Without

doubt, the story told to me by Mehemed Rushdi was true in every particular."

And he rose from his seat with some abruptness, and led the way out on to the crowded Boulevard.

"Ah, my friend, it is this atmosphere of Paris which is fatal to romance. By the way, did I tell you that I afterwards saw that admirable Georgian? She was, indeed, all that the Vizier had painted her."

Prince Bismarck's Fall.

‘THEY call that situation improbable,” observed the Ambassador, turning round in his chair as the curtain fell on the first act of Sardou’s *Cherchez la Femme*—we were in his Excellency’s box at the Comédie Française. “Yet in what is it more extraordinary than some of the scenes which I have myself witnessed during my diplomatic career ?”

“For instance ?” I suggested, seeing that he was in a communicative mood.

“For instance, in the affair which led to the downfall of the Bismarck family, regarding which so many absurd accounts have appeared in the ill-informed press. Some of those accounts,” the Ambassador added, taking up his opera-glass, “have no doubt been inspired by those who had their own reasons for not desiring the truth to be known ;

nevertheless, they ought not to have imposed on persons of intelligence."

He directed his glass towards a box on the opposite side of the theatre in which were seated two ladies, apparently mother and daughter, attired in the latest confections of M. Worth.

"I gather that you are possessed of better information," I murmured.

"That is a fine woman," remarked his Excellency, laying down the glass. "The daughter is pretty, but without style. Believe me, my young friend, it is not till she is forty that a woman becomes truly interesting."

"You were saying something about Prince Bismarck," I ventured to remind him.

"Ah, yes! Do you care to hear the story? There is, perhaps, time for it before the next act."

"It would give me the greatest pleasure."

I settled myself comfortably to listen; and the Ambassador, after tapping thoughtfully with his fingers on the ledge of the box for a few moments, began:

"It is tolerably well known that ever since the Prince von Bismarck perceived the marvellous recovery of France from the disasters of 1870, he has lived in perpetual terror of the revenge we might

be inspired to take. It is this which has caused him to cherish the idea of again attacking France at a disadvantage, and finally crushing her by a dismemberment, which would reduce her to the rank of a second-class Power.

“M. de Blowitz, the correspondent of the *Times*, and a man who must not be despised, has already told the world of the scheme which this Prussian conceived for falling upon us in 1875, while we were still weak from the effects of his former crime, a calamity which was only averted by the personal intervention in our favour of Alexander II. of Russia.

“The relations between the two countries were consequently still very strained when, shortly after the accession of the present German Kaiser, our Foreign Office was agreeably surprised to receive an intimation that this policy of hatred inspired by fear was to be abandoned, and that the Imperial Government was now anxious to work cordially with ours in the field of European politics.

“The portfolio of Foreign Affairs was at that time in the hands of M. Fleuriot, a worthy and patriotic man, but liable to fits of imprudence. He has not held a post in any recent Cabinet.

“M. Fleuriot was charmed to receive the assur-

ances tendered to him by the German ambassador, assurances which were confirmed by Bismarck himself in a confidential interview with our representative in Berlin. The German Chancellor explained, with characteristic bluntness, that this change of front must not be attributed to him, but to the personal initiative of Wilhelm II.

“These admissions of the Chancellor convinced M. Fleuriot that Bismarck’s influence on the foreign policy of Germany was on the decline. He therefore embraced, with all the more confidence, the offers of friendship and alliance which were made to him by the Imperial ambassador. This personage even went so far as to hint to our Minister that it was not intended that Bismarck should be privy to all the details of future negotiations between the two Governments.

“Matters having arrived at this stage, the ambassador commenced to throw out suggestions that the friendly understanding arrived at should be put upon a practical footing. He invited M. Fleuriot to indicate some object which Germany might co-operate in securing for France, as the price of her definite abandonment of Alsace-Lorraine. M. Fleuriot at once thought of Egypt, that prey so treacherously seized upon by the British lion.

"You, my friend, are well aware that I do not share in the general feeling of my fellow-countrymen towards Great Britain. On the contrary, I lament the hatred with which your nation has pursued us ever since their defeat at Waterloo."

"Defeat, M. l'Ambassadeur?" I ventured to interject.

"Defeat, without doubt," returned his Excellency, with firmness. "Do you pretend that, if the Prussians had not arrived, a single one of your countrymen would have been left alive?"

I preferred to waive this discussion.

"It is this recollection, so galling to a brave people, that has doubtless prompted the incessant intrigues of your Government against the greatness of France. Fortunately, a Frenchman knows how to be magnanimous in the face of provocation. Surrender Egypt to us, and we consent to overlook the other aggressions of Albion."

The Ambassador paused, and glanced round the theatre before resuming his narrative.

"The English ambassador in Paris at this time was a close personal friend of mine. Being at the moment unattached to any foreign mission, I was living here, and it was my custom to dine every Sunday at the English Embassy. To this circum-

stance is owing the salvation of Europe from the most desolating war in history.

“On a certain Sunday about the time I have indicated, I was dining at the Embassy as usual. During the meal I observed that my host was very distracted ; and, as soon as it was over, he rose up and, taking me by the arm, led me into his private study. I at once guessed what was coming, and, while accepting a cigar, determined that nothing should be extracted from me respecting the negotiation I have described, and of which M. Fleuriot had kept me partly informed.

“Lord Soames came to the point with the directness of his countrymen.

“‘My dear Baron,’ he commenced, ‘you and I are old friends. We should both be equally distressed if war were to break out between our two countries.’

“‘Without doubt,’ I replied, affecting to consider the remark a mere chance observation. ‘Let us be thankful that such an event is not in the least likely to take place.’ And I added to myself: ‘Unless you refuse to give up Egypt.’

“He glanced at me with some suspicion.

“‘How far you are in the confidence of your Foreign Office,’ he said, ‘I neither know, nor do I

ask you to tell me. I desire to give you information, not to receive it.'

" 'You are too good,' I murmured, more on my guard than ever.

" 'I hope, at the same time,' he went on, 'that what I have to say to you may cause you to take action in what I believe to be the interest of both countries. I am sure that if you use this information you will not allow its source to be discovered.'

" 'That is understood of course,' I replied, beginning to be really interested.

" 'Thank you. Let me say at once then that I have reason to believe that your Government has recently proposed to the Court of Berlin an offensive alliance against England, with a view to compelling us to evacuate Egypt in your favour.'

" 'I was thunderstruck at the accuracy of his information.

" 'But, my lord, this is some chimera, some delusion!' I cried, affecting the utmost incredulity. 'Such an idea is too extravagant for a *feuilleton*!'

" Lord Soames smiled coldly.

" 'I have already said that I do not ask you to commit yourself, my dear Baron,' he replied. 'I will assume, if you prefer it, that all this is news to you. But you have not yet heard what I wanted to tell

you. As you know, Great Britain has hitherto steadfastly refused to join the Triple Alliance for fear of being dragged by Germany into a war against France. It is to your interest, I think you will admit, that we should continue to hold aloof.'

"I shrugged my shoulders without expressing any opinion on this point.

"'Now,' pursued Lord Soames, 'we suddenly find ourselves placed in this dilemma. Prince Bismarck has informed our ambassador in Berlin that he will accept your proposal unless England accedes to the Triple Alliance within a week from to-day, and undertakes to employ her navy in a blockade of the French coast as soon as war is declared.'

"I was overwhelmed. The revelation of this atrocious duplicity on the part of Bismarck completely stunned me. Knowing what I did of his character, it was impossible to doubt the truth of Lord Soames's disclosure. It was evident that the whole of the negotiations with our Foreign Office had been a deliberate ruse in order to obtain the means of discrediting us in the eyes of Great Britain. It was the Belgian trick of 1870 over again!

"I could have wept. It was with the utmos

difficulty that I concealed my consternation from the keen eyes of the Englishman.

“‘You have been deceived, my friend,’ I answered, in a tone of great confidence. ‘That Bismarck should make such assertions does not surprise me in the least. But it is a mere invention of his own, believe me. If such a thing had been on the carpet, I am the first person with whom M. Fleuriot would have communicated.’

“Lord Soames listened to me with an air of indulgence, as if I had been a child.

“‘Again permit me to remind you that I am simply giving you a warning for your own benefit,’ he said. ‘I have only to add that the Prince has promised to show our ambassador the written French proposal, signed by M. Fleuriot, next Saturday. Unless you can reclaim that document by then, England will join the Alliance, and war will be declared within a fortnight.’

“It was useless for me to make further protests. They were wasted on this man of ice.

“‘I am obliged to you for your kindness,’ I said, rising. ‘No doubt the whole story is some clumsy fabrication of Prince von Bismarck’s, which it will be easy to disprove. If I should chance to meet M. Fleuriot, however, I will inform him of these slanders.’

"We returned to the drawing-room, and I chatted with Lady Soames for twenty minutes, in order to show that my mind was at ease. I then announced that I had a headache, and took my leave.

"I refused to allow the servants of the Embassy to call me a cab, lest they should overhear my destination. I walked down the street for a hundred yards, jumped into the first empty one I met, and drove furiously to the Quai d'Orsay.

"I was lucky enough to find M. Fleuriot there, and at once communicated to him the terrible news which I had just heard.

"The Minister was absolutely stupefied.

" 'Did Lord Soames tell you this?' was his first question.

" 'Lord Soames! No, I have not seen him for days,' I answered, remembering the caution I had received. 'The intelligence reached me direct from Berlin, by a channel which I am not permitted to disclose. But you may rely upon its absolute truth.'

"M. Fleuriot tore his hair.

" 'Beast that I am!' he cried despairingly, 'I ought to have suspected that this pretended alliance was one of Bismarck's vile traps. And I believed in the faith of that Prussian!'

“‘Then there is such a document?’ I exclaimed, little less dismayed than he was.

“‘Alas, yes! Their ambassador insisted that the first written proposal should come from us. I placed it in his hands four days ago, and doubtless it is by this time in Bismarck’s possession. I have betrayed my country to that wretch!’

“I exerted myself to soothe him. Finally I said :

“‘Give me a letter to our ambassador in Berlin, and I will go there myself and regain this paper from Bismarck’s clutches.’

“You will? Baron, you are an angel! Do this, and you shall have the Grand Cross of the Legion, I swear it. Your Fleuriot will regard you as his saviour! His children shall be taught to introduce your name into their prayers!’

“He embraced me with tears. Then he wrote the letter at my dictation, and also another document which I thought it well to have in reserve. Armed with these papers, I left him.

“On the second day I arrived in Berlin. My first step was to see our ambassador there, an upright and painstaking diplomatist, but a man who was by no means a match for the infernal craft of Bismarck. It was necessary for me to obtain

certain information from him before proceeding to carry out the plan which I had formed in my mind.

“My sudden appearance naturally caused him the greatest astonishment, which was changed into chagrin as I explained to him how he, like M. Fleuriot, had been duped by the perfidious Chancellor.

“‘But what you tell me is impossible,’ he exclaimed. ‘I know the character of Wilhelm II. too well. That he should conceive the idea of transforming the foreign policy of Germany does not surprise me, but that he should have the cunning to contrive a plot of this kind is incredible. He is a Charles XII., not a Machiavelli.’

“This was the very point on which I desired to sound the ambassador. I fixed on him an ironical smile.

“‘And what part has the Kaiser taken in this affair, then?’ I asked him.

“He gazed at me in bewilderment.

“‘Why, Prince von Bismarck informed me’—he began, and stopped short, chilled by the sarcasm of my look.

“‘Bismarck informed you that he was acting under the Kaiser’s instructions. But what assur-

ance have you that this was not part of the trick?' I retorted. 'Has the Kaiser himself spoken to you on the subject? Have you any proof that he has heard one word about this affair?'

"This time he grasped my point. He passed his hand across his brow, as if striving to recollect the events of the last few weeks.

"'You must be right,' he exclaimed at length. 'The Kaiser never has referred to the matter, though I have twice conversed with him since it was broached.'

"I was satisfied. It only remained for me to put in execution the design which I had conceived. I parted from my colleague, merely warning him to be careful not to betray the least distrust in any dealings with the Chancellor.

"The following morning found me at the Imperial Palace."

At this moment the curtain rose on the second act of M. Sardou's play. My companion hesitated, and half turned towards the stage. But we had both witnessed the performance before, and for my part I felt more interested in the political comedy which my friend was unfolding than in the somewhat mechanical plot of the dramatist.

"Go on with your story, I beg of you," I urged.

“There is nothing of importance occurring on the stage.”

His Excellency appeared flattered by my interest. He took another glance through his lorgnette at the lady who had already interested him, and then returned to his tale.

“I had not seen the young ruler of Germany since he was a mere prince. At that time he had honoured me with a slight degree of his intimacy, and we had even shared in certain adventures—but all this has nothing to do with my narrative.

“As soon as I had sent up my name, I was ushered up the great main staircase of the Palace to the first landing stage, and brought into his Majesty’s private cabinet. The Kaiser, as I entered, started up from a table on which lay the design of a battleship, and welcomed me with effusion.

“‘I am charmed to see you once more,’ he exclaimed. ‘You behold me just making some final alterations in the plan for a new cruiser, on some details of which I find myself in disagreement with my naval constructor. Now’—he consulted his watch—‘in fifteen minutes I am due at the theatre to superintend the rehearsal of Goethe’s “Faust,” in which I am making certain improvements. Till then let us chat. Will you sit down here, or come

out into the park and see my new petroleum carriage, which I invented myself, with a little assistance from Herr Maxim ?’

“‘I think, sire, I should prefer to remain here,’ I replied, as soon as he gave me an opportunity to speak. ‘The fact is I have come on a rather delicate mission, not exactly official in its character, but one to which my Government attaches much importance.’

“‘The Kaiser’s manner changed at these words. He threw at me a quick glance of suspicion, and prepared to listen with an air of reserve.

“‘I thought it well to commence by administering a compliment.

“‘My Government,’ I observed, ‘entertains sentiments of the most profound respect for your Majesty, and it believes that you cherish no hostile feeling towards France.’

“‘Your Government is right,’ he interjected. ‘So long as France conducts herself with propriety, and refrains from indulging in disturbing projects, she may assure herself of my goodwill.’

“‘I affected to receive this condescension with delight.

“‘Ah, sire,’ I exclaimed, ‘if my countrymen could only hear those gracious words ! Such kind-

ness makes my present mission easy. It is no doubt an irregular thing for my Government to communicate with your Majesty, except through the official channels. Our excuse is the high regard in which France holds your Majesty personally, and the belief that, in matters of foreign policy, it is no longer the Prince von Bismarck who exercises sole control.'

"The Emperor drew himself up.

"‘I am the only person who exercises sole control in my empire,’ he remarked with haughtiness. ‘My Chancellor simply acts under my instructions.’

"‘So my Government was assured, sire, and that being so, it entertained a negotiation which, had it proceeded from the initiative of Herr von Bismarck, we should have unhesitatingly declined.’

"‘What negotiation do you refer to?’ asked the Emperor, surprised.

"‘I assumed my most innocent expression.

"‘To your Majesty’s proposal of a joint war against England, with the object of restoring Egypt to France.’

"The Kaiser bounded in his seat.

"‘I propose a war with England! To restore Egypt to you! I never heard of such madness! Who has dared——’

"He broke off, evidently realising that he was committing himself. I affected to be equally astounded with his Majesty.

"'But this is incredible!' I cried. 'Can the Prince have dared to commit Germany to this undertaking without even consulting you? This is worse than the time of the old Kaiser. And my Government was assured that this new policy was due to your Majesty's direct initiative.'

"The Kaiser sat like one thunderstruck. It was easy to see that he was struggling between his rage against Bismarck, and his dread of letting it be publicly known how the Chancellor had slighted his authority.

"I had now, of course, satisfied myself that Bismarck was acting without his master's knowledge. It remained for me to secure the Emperor's confidence, and deprive the Prince of any chance of winning his approval for this audacious intrigue.

"I turned to Wilhelm II. with an expression of deep regret.

"'Sire, I am overwhelmed to think that you, as well as my Government, have been deceived by this Minister, who has acquired the habit of overstepping his powers. But I know my Government too well to believe it capable of taking advantage

of this situation. I was sent here to obtain your Majesty's personal confirmation of this treaty. I learn that the entire negotiation has been without your sanction, and, however disappointing to France this may be, I have no hesitation in saying, on behalf of my Government, that it will consent to treat the affair as if it had not taken place.'

"'You are very good, M. le Baron,' murmured the Emperor, evidently relieved by this declaration, but still embarrassed by the consideration that I had penetrated the state of his relations with the Chancellor.

"'It only remains for me to satisfy you of the truth of my words,' I resumed, 'and to afford you an opportunity of terminating a scandalous situation. Let me propose to you, sire, a little conspiracy against this gentleman, who has so nearly made us dance to his music.'

"The Kaiser smiled, and listened with approval while I unfolded the plan which I had formed, and which I think was not without ingenuity. You will bear in mind that it was of the last importance to prevent any explanation between Wilhelm II. and Bismarck until I had reclaimed the document fraught with so much danger to France.

“During the time of my connection with our Embassy in Berlin, I had become well acquainted with the Chancellor’s habits. Among other things, I was aware that when he had any documents to which he attached special importance he did not leave them in the safe at the Chancellory, but carried them about in a certain yellow dispatch-box, which never left him day or night. It was in reliance on this fact that I had proposed to myself the little scheme to which I now sought the Kaiser’s assent.

“As soon as he understood what I proposed, he requested me to ring the bell, and despatched a messenger to request the instant attendance of the Chancellor at the Palace. I remained conversing with the Kaiser until Bismarck was announced, and then withdrew into a small room adjoining, from which I could hear and see everything that passed.

“The old Chancellor came puffing into the room, carrying his eternal yellow dispatch-box under his arm. He did not appear to have changed in the least during the six years since I had seen him; his figure was not less burly, and his eyebrows not less bristly than of old. He carefully deposited his yellow box upon a table, before advancing to greet his Majesty.

“ ‘ Well, Prince, how is the rheumatism to-day ? ’
inquired the Kaiser.

“ ‘ Bad, very bad, sire, ’ grumbled the old Minister.
‘ But at my age what can I expect ? I have served
your House faithfully for forty years, but the time is
coming when you will have to look out for a younger
man. ’

“ ‘ Do not let us speak of it, my dear Bismarck, ’
returned the Kaiser, not very heartily, I thought.

“ He then, without inviting the Prince to be
seated, put a question to him about some pending
commercial treaty with Russia, which necessitated
a reference to the contents of the yellow box. The
Prince fumbled for his keys, unlocked the box, and
took out the paper which his master had inquired
for. The Kaiser, after barely glancing at it, sud-
denly took the old man by the arm, and commenced
to draw him out of the room.

“ ‘ Come upstairs for a moment, ’ he cried ; ‘ you
must positively hear the Empress play my last com-
position. The Court are enraptured with it, and
the Royal organist tells me it will replace the “ Wacht
am Rhein ” as the National Anthem of Germany. ’

“ The Prince hesitated, and glanced at his dis-
patch-box, which still lay unlocked on the table.

“ ‘ That will be all right, ’ said the Kaiser, impa-

tiently. 'See, I will lock the door of the room from outside.'

"Too much accustomed, no doubt, to these sudden freaks on the part of Wilhelm II. to suspect anything, the old courtier yielded, and suffered himself to be dragged away.

"The instant the door closed behind them, I darted from my hiding-place and pounced on the yellow box. There, lying close to the top, was an envelope bearing the French official seal, and torn open at the end. I snatched it up, and the next moment the fatal document was in my hands.

"While I was drawing it out of the envelope, the key turned in the door, and the Kaiser burst in. As had been arranged between us, he had left the Chancellor half-way up the stairs, in the confidence that the old man's movements would not be quick enough for him to interrupt us for a minute. The Emperor's pretext for returning was that he had forgotten his musical manuscript.

"I had just time to unfold the paper and point to the words by which it was headed: 'Proposal for an Offensive Alliance between France and Germany,' and to the signature, 'Jules Fleuriot,' at the foot, when we heard the ponderous footsteps of Prince Bismarck outside.

“Now was the time for my great stroke. Before the astonished Kaiser could tell what I was about to do I had swiftly crumpled the all-important document into one pocket, while from another I drew a paper similar in appearance, and coolly slipped it into the envelope, which I restored to the dispatch-box under his very eyes. There was just time for me to regain my hiding-place before the door was burst open and the old Chancellor stalked in.

“He was panting from the exertions he had made, and looked angry and disgusted. By this time Wilhelm II. was busily turning over some papers in a drawer at the other end of the apartment. Casting an indignant glance at his back, the Prince went straight up to his precious yellow box, locked it, and restored the keys to his pocket, at the same time tucking the box under his arm. Then, and not before, he growled out to the absorbed Kaiser :

“‘If your Majesty can’t find the music, I will come to hear it another time.’

“The Kaiser turned round.

“‘Do not do that, Prince. Go up to the Empress, who has not seen you for some time. I shall join you in two minutes.’

“The Chancellor could not well refuse, and

stumped away, pretending to groan at his rheumatic pains as he went.

“Now the time had come for an explanation with the Kaiser, my abstraction of the document having been an unrehearsed effect for which I had not prepared him. He directed a stern look at me as I came out into his presence.

“‘Sir,’ he began angrily, ‘why did you take that paper?’

“I gazed at him as if in pained surprise.

“But, sire,’ I exclaimed, ‘you have just repudiated the treaty which Prince von Bismarck proposed in your name, and I have agreed that my Government shall accept your decision. Naturally it is my duty to reclaim this document, obtained from my Government by fraud, and to which your Chancellor is no longer entitled.’

“‘That is all very well, M. le Baron, but it is not the way to go to work,’ returned the Kaiser, still angry.

“‘Perhaps not, sire. But if it comes to that, neither of us has much to gain by proclaiming this morning’s work,’ I replied boldly. And seeing that the shaft had gone home, I continued: ‘The document which I have substituted bears a similar heading and is equally in the writing of M. Fleuriot, so

that the exchange is not likely to be detected just at present. In the meantime if you, sire, will overlook my having possessed myself of this paper, I will tell you beforehand of another little measure on which, perhaps, this faithful Bismarck has forgotten to consult you.'

"The Kaiser's face flushed darkly.

" 'I will say no more about that paper. What else do you refer to? '

" 'Simply this, sire, that on Saturday next the Prince expects to receive England's adherence to the Triple Alliance. In that I have reason to think he will find himself deceived.'

"And before Wilhelm II. had time to take in the bearing of this piece of news, I had bowed myself out and left the Palace.

"I drove straight to the telegraph office, whence I despatched the following message to Lord Soames:

" '*You have been misinformed. There is no such letter.*'

"And I was right. For on the way from the Palace I had torn up the paper into a hundred fragments, and had swallowed them every one."

The Ambassador stopped abruptly, and made as if he would turn his attention to the stage.

"Surely that is not all?" I said. "Can you not tell me what occurred on the Saturday?"

His Excellency smiled pleasantly.

"I had the account some time after through my friend Soames, who got it from his colleague in Berlin. It appears that Bismarck never once looked inside the envelope till he and the English ambassador met in the Kaiser's presence at the time appointed.

"The old Chancellor had not informed his master of the precise nature of the business to be transacted. He resented this young monarch's attempts at an interference in the affairs of his department, which poor old Frederick William never dreamed of. Accordingly he had conceived the idea of crushing Wilhelm II. by a grand stroke of diplomacy carried out entirely without his knowledge. He relied, of course, on England's accession to the Triple Alliance as a triumph which would atone for everything.

"Prince Bismarck opened the interview, therefore, by explaining to the Kaiser the purpose for which he had summoned the meeting. Then turning to the British envoy, he added with confidence:

" 'Well, sir, what is your answer? Will England join us?'

"The Englishman kept perfectly cool. He had of course been warned by Lord Soames how matters stood.

" 'Before you have any right to demand my answer,' he said, 'you must fulfil your undertaking to produce some evidence that France contemplates an attack on us.'

"Thereupon the Prince tapped his famous yellow box.

" 'I have here,' he returned, 'a written proposal from the French Government for an offensive alliance against you.'

"This was the first hint to the Kaiser of the real significance of the mysterious document he had allowed me to recover. He drew back in his chair and began to gnaw his moustache.

"But the Englishman merely smiled.

" 'Excuse me, Prince, but I really think you have been imposed upon,' he replied quietly. 'I cannot believe that the Government of the Republic would be guilty of such folly.'

"Bismarck now smiled in his turn, and with an air of triumph took out the paper from its envelope, and passed it to the other. The Kaiser looked on, helpless, and divided, no doubt, between anger at the manner in which I had outwitted him, and

pleasure at the mortification in store for his overbearing Minister.

"The Englishman unfolded the paper and read aloud :—

" '*Proposal for an Offensive Alliance between France and Germany*——'

" 'Ha ! What did I say !' interrupted the Chancellor.

" '——The French Government, after according due consideration to the proposal laid before it on behalf of the German Government, has decided to absolutely decline entering into any such alliance as——'

"He had got to there when the overwhelmed Chancellor, uttering a cry of rage, snatched the paper from his hand, and fastened upon its contents, with his eyes starting from his head, and his features wrinkled up in a look of positively ludicrous consternation.

"Then Wilhelm II. saw his chance.

" 'Herr Prince,' he said sternly, 'what is the meaning of this comedy ? What are these proposals which you have made without my authority, for an alliance against the Government of a country which I regard with friendship ?'

"The Prince flung down the paper with a growl like that of an infuriated mastiff.

“‘For the first time in my life, sire, my dispatch box has been tampered with,’ he rapped out in surly tones. ‘At this moment I can only assure you and the ambassador here that the proposal came, not from me, but from the French Government.’

“At this point the Kaiser turned away and ceased to listen. The Englishman shrugged his shoulders with an incredulous air, and rose to go.

“The audience broke up. England remained outside the Triple Alliance, and before a month was over all Europe was astonished to hear that Prince Bismarck was no longer Chancellor of the German Empire.

“You understand,” added my friend, after a minute, “that it is only because of the recent death of poor Soames that I am able to tell you all this.”

“I understand perfectly.”

As I was helping his Excellency on with his overcoat at the conclusion of the performance, my eye happened to fall upon the decorated buttonhole.

“By-the-by, M. l’Ambassadeur, did M. Fleuriot fulfil his promise about the Grand Cross?”

The Ambassador turned round with a momentary look of annoyance.

“My friend, you should restrain your too great

curiosity. Believe me, it is a detestable vice. No, unfortunately, he did not. But it was scarcely his fault. The fact is that, during the few days I was absent in Berlin, there occurred a change of Government. Poor Fleuriot lost his portfolio, and my services were forgotten."

He sighed with a noble air of resignation. Suddenly his glance became fixed on a point on the other side of the crowded corridor into which we had just plunged.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, beginning to detach himself from my side and take an oblique course through the moving throng. "Pardon my leaving you so abruptly, but I see a friend coming out to whom it is imperative that I should speak."

It was the lady opposite.

“ Prince Citron.”

WE were strolling past the Madeleine, on our way back from the Odéon Theatre, when all at once the Ambassador broke off in the midst of an animated dissertation on the decline of the French drama, and slackened his pace, glancing at the broad flight of steps which leads up to the imposing front of this church.

“ I never pass this spot at night,” he observed in regretful tones, “ without recalling the fate of poor ‘ Prince Citron.’ ”

“ Prince Citron ! ” I exclaimed, completely puzzled, and imagining him to refer to a character in some burlesque. “ And who was this prince of fruits, if one may ask ? ”

His Excellency turned and glanced at me in grave surprise.

“ Is it possible that you have never heard of this nickname, which Paris, in a jesting moment, bestowed

upon the late Prince of Orange? I thought that you were too old a boulevardier not to be familiar with it. But it is only another proof of how quickly such things are forgotten."

"Now you speak of it, I remember having heard something about this Prince," I murmured.

"He was, of course, the heir to the throne of the Netherlands," remarked my companion, beginning to walk on again, "and, if he had lived, would have succeeded to William III., instead of this little Queen Wilhelmina."

"But was he not a young man with a terrible reputation, who was compelled to live abroad on account of the scandal created by his proceedings?"

The Ambassador frowned, and jerked his shoulders impatiently.

"Wrong, quite wrong," he replied with warmth. "That is rather the effect which vulgar gossip has mistaken for the cause. I know well what the Parisians, so easily deceived by appearances, thought of this unhappy young man, who exposed himself so freely to harsh judgments during the years which he spent on the boulevards. But chance led me into relations with him which caused me to learn the trouble underlying that wrecked life, a tragedy to which only three persons possessed the key.

However, we are nearly at my *hôtel*. Pay me the compliment of coming in for a short time, and as I well know your insatiable curiosity, I will in return tell you the true story of 'Prince Citron.'

"It was on just such a night as this, some years ago," began the Ambassador, as soon as we were comfortably settled in the smoking room of his luxurious mansion, "and King William's first wife was still alive. You are aware that it was his second wife who is the mother of Wilhelmina?"

"I had forgotten it, but no matter."

It is, on the contrary, a fact which must be borne in mind," retorted his Excellency. "I was returning home from the theatre, but, having lingered to chat with one of the performers—this was while I was still a bachelor—the crowds had had time to clear away, and I found the streets almost deserted. It was, in effect, past midnight, an hour at which the true boulevardier is seldom abroad, as by that time he has selected the restaurant in which he intends to sup, and has settled down for the remainder of the night.

• "It was therefore with some surprise and curiosity that, as I approached the Madeleine, I observed a small crowd collected at the foot of the steps.

Crossing over to find out what had taken place, I found myself on the outside of a ring of women, the most abandoned wretches of the quarter, who had gathered round the figure of a man lying on the bottom step of the flight, apparently intoxicated beyond the power to move.

“The spectacle of this unfortunate seemed to have strangely excited the women, who were hurling at him the vilest insults in their horrible vocabulary. Incensed at the behaviour of these hags, I roughly pushed my way through them to the side of their victim, whose clothes, disordered and covered with mud as they were, seemed to be those of a man of position. The wretched creature was lying on one side, his left hand outstretched, with which he seemed to be trying feebly to ward off the foul epithets of his tormentors. I stooped down over him, and lifted his head to the light.

“It was ‘Prince Citron.’

“You will easily figure to yourself the horror of discovering the heir to a famous monarchy, the descendant of William the Silent, in this deplorable situation. I had not failed to hear some of the dark reports as to this young man’s career ; nevertheless at such a moment the only sentiment which inspired me was that of the most profound pity.

“Sternly rebuking the filthy hags, who slunk away before my reproaches, I raised the Prince to his feet, and supported him down to the edge of the pavement, where I perceived an empty fiacre coming up. Into this I assisted Alexander—to give him his proper name—who instantly fell like a log upon the cushions. Then I gave the driver my own address, and we proceeded to the house near the Rue de Rivoli, in which I at that time occupied a small flat.

“During the short drive, Prince Alexander lay absolutely motionless, and without uttering a sound. But from time to time I caught a gleam of dull intelligence in his bloodshot eyes, which were turned towards me, as if he were trying to comprehend who I was, and what accident had brought him into my company.

“When we got to the house, it was necessary for me to engage the services of the concierge to get the unfortunate youth upstairs to my apartment, which was on the third floor. There I found that my valet had retired, a circumstance which I did not regret. I got my strange visitor comfortably settled upon a couch; I loosened his collar and necktie for him, removed his boots, and spread a warm rug over his feet. Then I sat down to wait till he should recover from his lethargy.

"While I watched his uneasy repose, I strove to recall the various things which I had heard about the heir of William III. He was of course well known to me by sight, for the incident I speak of took place at a time when I was attached to the staff of the Foreign Office in Paris, and when, as you may have heard, there was some talk of making me Deputy and Minister.

"But I preferred a diplomatic career to a parliamentary one, and I do not regret my decision. In a country like France, which is ruled over by the bourgeoisie, politics reduce themselves to a terribly prosaic level. I can only find the romance for which my disposition craves in the courts of those countries where the will of a monarch still counts for much, and where the course of the greatest events may be decided by a nod given at the right moment, or by a sentence whispered in the intervals of a waltz."

The Ambassador paused, an absent look came into his eyes, and a subtle smile overspread his features, as if called forth by some recollection which pleased him.

"You were saying?" I ventured to observe.

"A thousand pardons! I had lost myself," he exclaimed, rousing himself from his abstraction.

"Yes, I was about to say that, though I never before had any intercourse with 'Prince Citron,' I was familiar with the scandalous stories which were in circulation about him. It was generally believed that his residence in Paris was not altogether voluntary—that, in fact, he had been compelled to leave the Hague in consequence of some terrible misunderstanding with his father; and there were those who asserted that the old King of the Netherlands had sworn that his son should never return so long as he himself was alive. But, though there were a hundred different versions of the cause of this exile, the truth of the matter had remained a secret from every one, and even in his most reckless moments no allusion to it ever passed the lips of the Prince.

"In the meantime, the manner of his life since he had come to reside in Paris was unhappily only too well ascertained. From the moment of quitting his own country he seemed to have cast aside all restraint, and abandoned himself to all kinds of excesses, without even attempting to keep up that outward decorum which is the morality of princes.

"There were few crimes which had not been laid to the charge of this degenerate scion of the House of Orange, who appeared to take a delight in out-

raging public opinion. The worst things which were said about him it would be impossible for me to repeat, and I firmly believe they were unfounded: but enough was known or suspected to make his friendship considered a doubtful honour; and, in short, but for his exalted rank, the doors of society would have been long ago shut in his face.

“Such was this miserable being, on whom, nevertheless, the eyes of European statesmen had long been anxiously fixed, and whose life, by a strange turn of events, had become of the greatest value to France.”

“To France? But I fear I do not follow you, M. l’Ambassadeur,” I exclaimed.

“It is a very simple matter. If you will cast your eye over the map of Europe you will perceive, nestling between the frontiers of France, Germany, and Belgium, the little State of Luxemburg. At the time of which I speak, Luxemburg was united to the Dutch kingdom by a similar tie to that which formerly connected Hanover with Great Britain; that is to say, William III. of the Netherlands was also Grand Duke of Luxemburg.

“As in your case, however, the laws regulating the succession were different in the two countries. In Holland the crown was capable of being inherited

by a female in the absence of direct male heirs, whereas in Luxemburg the Salic constitution prevailed, under which no female can ever inherit. Consequently in the event of William III. dying without leaving a son, the Grand Duchy was destined to be separated from the Netherlands, just as Hanover became separated from your country on the accession of Queen Victoria. Do I make myself clear? "

"Admirably clear, my dear Ambassador. In fact, the severance of which you speak has now taken place, has it not? "

"Perfectly. King William died, leaving a daughter who inherited the Dutch crown, while Luxemburg passed to the House of Nassau. But at this time there was a prospect of the union of the two territories being maintained in the person of the young Prince who had so strangely come beneath my roof. France was interested in this question, because it was feared that if Luxemburg passed from under the sway of a Dutch monarch, it would fall into the system of the German Empire, to which it had formerly belonged, and thus increase the power of our relentless enemies. The German Government on its side earnestly desired this event, which has since come to pass. You will now comprehend what

important interests centred in the life of 'Prince Citron,' this disreputable waif of the boulevards.

"You will acquit me, I feel certain, of any intention to profit by the accident which had caused me to become the protector of the Prince. So little did I expect that I was about to become the possessor of a secret sufficient to have lighted the flames of war, that I was merely waiting till my guest was sufficiently recovered to offer him my escort to his own residence.

"The first sign I had that he was coming to himself was finding his eyes obstinately fixed upon me in a long gaze. No sooner did he perceive that his look was returned, however, than a deep flush suffused his face, he threw up his hands with that pathetic gesture I had observed when I first came upon him, and uttered a sorrowful groan.

"I sprang to my feet and approached him.

"'I fear your Royal Highness is unwell,' I said, exaggerating the deference of my manner in order to soothe his self-respect, so cruelly wounded by the events of the night. 'If there is anything which it is in my power to do, I respectfully request that you will honour me with your commands.'

"Re-assured, no doubt, by the cordiality of my expressions, the Prince withdrew his hands from

before his face, and again regarded me steadily for about half a minute.

" 'Who are you ? ' he asked, with reserve.

" I explained to him, dwelling on my connection with the Quai d'Orsay, in order to inspire him with confidence. I went on to add :

" 'Accident caused me to come up at the moment that your Royal Highness was overcome by illness on the Boulevard, and I took the liberty of bringing you to my apartment to recover, as I had not the honour to know your address.'

" He sat up on the couch, and thrust his disordered hair back from his forehead, while he retorted morosely :

" 'I was not ill ; I was drunk. You found me lying on the steps of the church, surrounded by those horrible women.'

" And he groaned afresh at the recollection.

" 'It is not for me to contradict your Highness,' I responded mildly ; 'but should there ever be a question raised as to this affair—which I do not anticipate—I shall adhere to my opinion all the same.'

" As I said this I observed a milder expression coming over his features. He gave me a wistful, questioning look which went to my heart.

“‘Why do you treat me like this?’ he asked, speaking less abruptly. ‘You know what I am—an outcast for whom no one pretends to feel respect.’

“‘Pardon me,’ I returned, ‘the race you represent, and the exalted destiny to which you have been born, must always command respect. Concerning your private life, I have not presumed to form an opinion; but I am not so ignorant as not to perceive that the benefits conferred on nations by personages of your rank, and the peculiar temptations which assail them, enable them to claim justly a certain toleration which is not extended to everybody.’”

I had long suspected the Ambassador of being but a lukewarm adherent to the Republican *régime* in his country, for I had observed in him a tone of old-world reverence in speaking of the members of Royal houses.

At this open display of Royalist sentiment, I could not forbear inquiring :

“But surely, M. l’Ambassadeur, I am right, am I not, in supposing you to be a Republican ?”

His Excellency drew himself up, frowning, and replied with some formality :

“You are right in supposing me to cherish feelings of loyalty towards those institutions which the French people has adopted, and which are suited

to its genius. But I am not a fanatic; and it appears to me that there are many nations which depend for their prosperity upon the monarchical system. But all this is beside the mark. In what I said to Alexander, it was simply my object to set him at his ease, and if you will reflect, you will see that I could not have spoken otherwise than as I did."

I felt that I had been let off lightly, and allowed him to proceed without further interruption.

"Not to weary you with the details of our conversation, I succeeded more quickly than I could have hoped in winning the regard of my guest, and convincing him that I was sincere in my desire to serve him. But when I ventured to allude to the value which his life possessed for France, I was astonished to see a bitter smile cross his lips, and he made an impatient gesture which checked my words.

"By this time he had roused himself up sufficiently to partake of a cup of chocolate which I insisted on preparing for him, and which restored him to fresh life. His clothes, which were soiled with the mud of the pavement, I persuaded him to exchange for a suit of my own, our figures being sufficiently alike to permit of the substitution.

"While all this was going forward, I observed

that he relapsed from time to time into fits of abstraction, during which he would study my face as if hesitating whether to address to me some important communication. I carefully refrained on my part from any clumsy overture, and contented myself with talking in a cheerful strain about the ordinary topics of the day.

“Finally he spoke.

“‘M. le Baron,’ he said, in deliberate tones, ‘your conduct to-night has made me desire greatly to possess your friendship. If you feel enough interest in me to care to hear the secret of my miserable career, I should like to tell to you that story which I have never yet confided to a single creature.’

“‘M. le Prince d’Orange,’ I replied with gravity, ‘the sentiment of respectful friendship with which you have inspired me is so profound that I am overwhelmed with gratification at the honour which you propose to confer on me. But it is right that I should remind you that as yet I am hardly known to you sufficiently for you to repose in me so great a trust. Permit me to suggest that you should wait till another occasion before you yield to an impulse which you may perhaps afterwards regret.’

“‘No, I will not,’ he replied, with resolution.

'The delicacy which you show in making such a suggestion confirms the opinion I had already formed of your character. Besides there are political reasons which assure me that my secret is safe in your hands. I merely ask that what I am about to say to you shall not be repeated so long as my father and I are alive.'

"I hastened to give the required assurances, which Alexander received with melancholy indifference.

"'From your official connections,' he began, 'you are no doubt aware of the state of things as regards the Luxemburg succession.'

"'Certainly, M. le Prince,' I replied. 'The circumstances to which you refer are perfectly familiar to me. There is no Frenchman in my position who does not earnestly hope that you may long live to preserve the connection between the Grand Duchy and the Kingdom of the Netherlands.'

"He shook his head mournfully.

"'Wait till you have heard my confession before you express a sentiment which may afterwards appear to you in the light of a mockery.'

"He drank off the remainder of his chocolate, threw himself down again upon the couch, and proceeded to frame his narrative in words which I will repeat to the best of my power,

“Of my father—as I suppose I must continue to call him—King William, it is difficult for me to speak without appearing to give way to resentment. As a patriot and a sovereign the independence of the Netherlands is the thing dearest to his heart, and hence the strength of that hatred with which he has always regarded the threatening march of Germany.

“The Germans covet the wealth of our people, our flourishing seaports, and our fine mercantile marine. Above all, they have cast hungry eyes upon our magnificent colonies in the East Indies. In short, the rulers of that empire have fully made up their minds to annex the Netherlands at the first opportunity, and only the influence of France and England restrains them from carrying out their intention, and reducing us to the condition of Sleswig and Alsace.

“The knowledge of these unscrupulous designs, which were not too well concealed by Von Bismarck, caused the greatest indignation to King William, who was in consequence especially anxious that Luxemburg should not fall into German hands.

“But you will ask me what all this has to do with me. It is in his character as a father rather than as a sovereign that you will expect me to speak

of William III. Unhappily, it is precisely that which I am unable to do. I was destined to learn, even at an early age, that to him I was not so much a son as an heir who would retain Luxemburg under the Dutch Crown.

“‘I cannot fix the period at which I first became aware that, between my father and myself, there was none of that familiar affection which ought to prevail between child and parent. This melancholy knowledge must have grown within me. Children do not analyse their sensations, but they are quick to perceive coldness and neglect, and they suffer in silence. It was with a singular bitterness that I used to listen to my instructors when they sought to inculcate on me the duty of filial affection. How often have I yearned as a child to lavish proofs of my regard on that proud and impenetrable nature, and how often have I felt myself silently thrust back, and retired to my own apartments to weep in solitude.

“‘At that age, you will admit, I could have done nothing to forfeit a father’s love. Then, at all events, I had not been guilty of those follies and crimes which have since made my name a byword, and dragged me down to the depth which you have witnessed.’

“As he spoke these words the young man cast at me an appealing look, and I ask you to believe that I was not unmoved. Yet I was still far from anticipating to what this pitiful relation tended.

“‘As I grew older,’ proceeded Alexander, I ceased to torment myself with the vain idea of conquering my father’s regard. As a result, I became indifferent to his good opinion, and finally embittered against him and against my circumstances. I cursed the evil fortune which had separated me from the common lot of my fellow creatures, and while crushing me with the pomp and state of royalty, had deprived me of far more precious possessions. It was not long before the restraints imposed upon me by my high rank galled me to an unbearable degree.

“‘It became my favourite resource to elude the watchfulness of my attendants, to quit the Palace in disguise, and to seek adventures in the streets of the Hague, or on the beach of Scheveningen. At such moments I could forget that I was a prince, and revel in the freedom which is so dear to boys.

“‘When the news of these escapades reached the King, his frigid demeanour towards me was exchanged for anger. He reproached me in bitter terms for what he called my low and unprincely tastes, and

ordered my governor to maintain over me a guard more suited to a prisoner than a youth of royal blood. This governor, faithful to his instructions, was never tired of lecturing me on the duties of my station and remonstrating with me on my unworthy inclinations.

“‘The only result of this was to confirm me in my own bent. The Bohemian instinct was too strongly planted in my nature for them to root it out. I loathed the strictness of Court life more and more, and as soon as I felt myself old enough, I defied the restraints which had been imposed on me, and sought companions outside the Palace. Many of these were in a humble class of life, young artists, struggling journalists, and even sailors and fishermen, with all of whom I fraternised, and in whose society I lounged away the hours in taverns, or made long excursions by land and sea. You are perhaps aware that I hold the rank of captain in the Dutch navy, the only distinction which I prize.’

“I listened to this confession with amazement, merely bowing from time to time to show that I comprehended what my companion was saying. That the Prince had indulged in bad habits I was well aware, but that he should have stooped to the society of persons so much his inferiors, came to me

as a shock. I fancied he observed my consternation, for he remarked :

““You see I conceal nothing from you, M. le Baron. I rely on your kind heart, when you have heard me to the end, to extend to me what sympathy you can. From my father I received none. His anger was redoubled, on the contrary. He sent for me time after time, told me that I was disgracing my rank, and asked me whether I should prefer the station of a peasant to that of a prince.

““On one occasion, stung by these taunts, I boldly answered that I should, since in that case I might have a father who cared for me. I was startled by the effect which this reproach produced on him. He turned pale, stammered out some unintelligible words, and then signed to me to leave him alone.

““This state of things could not last. Why should I seek to excuse myself? Neglected by those who ought to have watched over my childhood, outraged in the tenderest part of my nature, I will admit to you that I did become hardened and depraved. I took to play, and plunged heavily into debt ; I drank, and in short I indulged in dissipations which speedily became a public scandal.

““One day affairs came to a crisis. The King had sent for me to confront me with the claims of

certain creditors who had sent in their accounts to him, and insolently demanded payment. I was not in the Palace ; a search was made for me, and they discovered me in the parlour of a tavern in a disreputable quarter of the city. I was even slightly intoxicated, and in this state they brought me before William III., one of the most decorous of men.

““ His language quickly restored me to my senses. As soon as we were alone together, he used to me expressions so degrading that I exclaimed indignantly:

“““ Remember, sire, that I am of the race of Orange equally with yourself.”

“““ You are nothing of the sort !” he retorted fiercely, and then suddenly checked himself, and trembled all over like a man who has just committed a desperate deed, and realises the consequences when it is too late.

““ It would be idle to describe the shock which was caused to me by these words. As soon as I could collect myself sufficiently to speak, I insisted on an explanation. Whether he saw that he had gone too far to draw back, or whether he hoped that the knowledge of the truth would work a change in my future conduct, he gave way, and revealed to me the terrible secret which has blasted my life.’

“This secret,” continued the Ambassador after

a moment's pause, "which I learnt on that night from the lips of 'Prince Citron,' I have never communicated to a human being. Though the death of William III. some years ago released me from my pledge, I have felt that it was too grave a matter to be lightly spread abroad. It is for you, my friend, to say whether you are prepared to share with me the responsibility of a secret which will otherwise go down with me into the grave."

"Now that you have gone so far, my dear Ambassador, I think you had better tell me all," I responded, with the utmost gravity. "I might otherwise do an injustice to the memory of your young friend by imagining something worse than the reality."

His Excellency nodded, as if to admit the force of my reasoning.

"It shall be as you please. There can be no longer any object in giving you the Prince's own words; I will therefore briefly tell you the facts as I ascertained them from him at this time. At a subsequent period I was at the Court of the Hague, which was then thrown into profound excitement over the celebrated affair of the Ruby of Bhurâni—a story which you must ask me to relate to you at another time. I then made a guarded attempt to approach

King William himself, and sound him on the subject, but he was too cautious to allow me to see that he understood my hints.

"It is necessary to recall the interests which turned on the birth of an heir to the King, in order to prepare yourself for what took place. It was in the year 1851 that the people of the Netherlands were agitated by the intelligence that Queen Sophia, who had been married to William III. for twelve years, was about to give birth to a child. It was felt that if this child should prove to be a boy, the long-vexed question of Luxemburg would be set at rest, and hence the anxiety which prevailed.

"The King himself, as you will gather from what I have already repeated, was not less concerned than his subjects. In short, the Queen's bedside became the centre of the most terrible suspense. The King could hardly be induced to leave her for a moment, the chief physician of the Court took up his residence in the Palace, and the Prime Minister was constantly in attendance.

"In spite of every precaution, however, the birth took place prematurely at an unexpected moment, when only the physician and a single nurse were present in the royal chamber. The doctor, a man of great resolution, instantly despatched the woman to inform

the King that he was a father, and to request him to come immediately to the spot.

“His Majesty, who was in an adjoining room, hastily obeyed the summons, and the physician, shutting the nurse into another apartment, broke to him the fearful intelligence that the child just born was of the feminine sex, while, owing to the unhappy circumstances of the case, it was impossible that the Queen could ever again become a mother.

“The dilemma in which William III. now found himself was indeed a desperate one. This girl, his only child, must clearly succeed to the throne of the Netherlands. As clearly, she could never occupy that of Luxemburg. In order to secure the Grand Duchy it was necessary that King William III. should have a son; the possibility of his having one had now practically disappeared.

“In his extremity the unfortunate King even sounded the physician as to the prospect of life for his Queen, to whom he was much attached. But the reply was to the effect that her Majesty would certainly recover, and might very likely outlive her husband. The next idea that presented itself to him was to declare the new-born child a boy, and to bring her up in that character. But the physician pointed out that such a course, beside being fraught

with peril, would only put off the evil day for another generation, as marriage and offspring would be out of the question for such a successor.

"While they were still deliberating, the Prime Minister arrived at the Palace, and, on being informed of this by an attendant, the King sent for him to join their conference. His daring mind suggested a bolder expedient. He had just learned, on his way through the park, of the birth of a boy to one of the royal lodge-keepers, and he now proposed that this child should be secretly taken from its parents and substituted for the royal infant.

"Incredible as it must seem to you—as it still seems to me—this monstrous scheme was adopted, the physician himself undertaking to carry it out. He took away the tiny princess, without being detected, gained admittance to the keeper's wife under the pretext of being sent by the King to offer his services, exchanged the infants, and brought back the plebeian child to be reared in the Palace as the heir to the Netherlands and Luxemburg.

"Thus was this extraordinary plot carried out with the most complete success. The early death of the unhappy little daughter of the Royal house, from a congenital cause, seemed to condone the King's treachery to his wife, and effectually stopped

all fear of discovery. The King and his two accomplices preserved their secret, till the moment when a fit of rage led to the revelation of it to the person most concerned."

"And what did the Prince of Orange do, when the King informed him of all this?" I asked, as the Ambassador made a long pause.

"That is the very question which I put to him on the occasion when he took me into his confidence. He replied :

"My first feeling, on learning that I had no title to the position that I occupied, was one of sheer dismay. But this feeling deepened into one of fierce resentment as I realised what these men, this King and his ministers, had made of me. I was a living falsehood, the most colossal impostor in the world, robbed of my very manhood, and unable thenceforth to look my fellow creatures in the face.

"If my adoptive father had hoped to crush me by the disclosure of my true position, he must have been sadly disappointed. My first impulse was to reject the lying *rôle* he had thrust upon me, and to publicly renounce my borrowed rank. The first hint of such an intention, was enough to bring him to reason. For the first time, some faint notion of the deadly injury he had done me appeared to penetrate

his mind. In his humiliation, he condescended to implore me not to expose him in the eyes of Europe.

"I could not entirely resist these prayers. Had any other person than myself been the victim, I could not have withheld all sympathy from the scheme, which was intended to baffle the enemies of Holland. As it was, the evil was now past mending. Miserable as my life had been in the oppressive atmosphere of a Court, I had sense enough to know that it was too late in the day for me to accustom myself to the obscure poverty of a peasant's life. I even forbore to ask the King for the names of my unknown parents.

"Yet I could not face the prospect of continuing to play a part which I found so intolerable. I discussed the matter with my father—as I have continued to call him—and in the end it was decided that I should live abroad in a semi-private manner, a substantial pension being assigned to me on the condition that the secret of my birth was strictly kept.

"Such I am, such is my career. You perceive in me a monster of the moral world, a creature to whom every virtuous and noble aspiration has been forbidden before he was born, a wretch whose life is

a prolonged crime, and who will render the only atonement to society which is in his power by hastening his progress to the grave.' "

As the Ambassador repeated these pathetic words of the Prince, his voice shook. It was indeed necessary to believe that his recollections had caused him genuine emotion.

"I endeavoured to soothe this young man, so miserably situated, but without any real success. By this time dawn was approaching, and he decided to return to his own residence, where he pressed me to visit him. To gratify him I consented, but I did not fulfil my promise. With every sentiment of pity for this 'impostor in spite of himself,' I did not care to associate with him ; and, besides, his circle, you understand, was not one of those in which one gains reputation by mixing."

"You do an injustice to your kind heart, my dear Ambassador, in assigning such a reason," I remonstrated. "I am positive that you are concealing something from me."

His Excellency blushed.

"Ah, well, my friend, I see that you are insatiable. In effect I did meet 'Prince Citron' once again, shortly after the night I have described to you. He was in the company of some of his friends, together

with several ladies, in a restaurant which I chanced to enter.

"Although somewhat excited by drink, he readily recognised me, and insisted on my joining his party. This I was most unwilling to do, but rather than create a scene, I consented, and sat down at the table. The conversation was decidedly indelicate, and in fact the whole atmosphere was such that I was seeking for an excuse to take my departure, when Alexander suddenly got up to propose my health.

"In words which were fortunately rendered indistinct by the effect of his intoxication, he proceeded to relate at great length, and with many bewildering pauses and digressions, the story of my rescue of him on the former occasion. But to my horror, he did not stop there, but began to show an intention of reproducing our conversation, including the terrible disclosure which he had made to me.

"I sprang to my feet, and endeavoured to silence him. At the same time I looked round, and gladly perceived that his other guests had ceased to pay any attention to what he was saying. I had some difficulty in checking the wretched young man, who, I firmly believe, had repented of the confidence he had placed in me, and hoped, by turning the affair

into ridicule, to make me disbelieve the entire story.

"In this, of course, he failed. But I so far respected his feelings that, perceiving my presence to be an unwelcome reminder to him of his indiscretion, I avoided him for the future. And as shortly afterwards I entered upon the series of foreign employments which have since filled up my life, it so happened that we never met again.

"When did the Prince die?" I asked presently.

"I think it was in the year 1884," was the reply. "Queen Sylvia died six or eight years before that, thus enabling the king to marry again. But destiny seemed to have decided that Luxemburg should no longer belong to the Netherlands, for the only child of this second marriage was, as you know, a daughter, who is now the reigning Queen."

"The Prince of Orange himself never married, did he?"

"No. There was at one time a rumour which connected his name with an English Princess. But it came to nothing; and, of course, after the Prince had learned his true position, he would no longer have entertained the idea of any such alliance.

"King William himself has died, six years after his adopted son, and the Prime Minister and the

physician have long ago passed away. It is therefore alike impossible to prove or disprove the story of this extraordinary but useless crime. Nevertheless I shall always have the conviction that on that night which he spent in my rooms, 'Prince Citron' spoke for the first and last time the truth concerning his strange life."

It was time that I should tear myself from the Ambassador's hospitable hearth.

"By the way," he said, with a sudden smile, as I regretfully rose from my seat, "there is another anecdote about 'Prince Citron' which I ought to tell you before you go. But it is, perhaps, a little too intimate for general repetition."

The anecdote was a little too intimate.

A Royal Freemason.

I HAD called at the Ambassador's at a rather late hour, and, learning that he was out at a Masonic function, I was turning away from the entrance to his hotel, when I ran into the arms of his Excellency himself, returning from the scene of his mysterious celebrations. He insisted that I should retrace my steps.

"You are the man of all others whom I could have wished to see," he was good enough to observe, as he gave his overcoat to his man and led the way into the inner retreat reserved for his intimate friends. "I have been reminded to-night of a truly thrilling adventure which I passed through many years ago at a northern Court, and which I had just resolved to relate to you at our next meeting. But what a pity that you are not a Mason!"

"But why do you conclude that I am not one?"

I demanded, attempting to borrow a touch of diplomatic caution from my host.

He turned round from the cabinet out of which he was taking a box of choice Pedro Murias, and regarded me with the amused pity of a father who watches the innocent but awkward gambols of his infant.

“Permit me to inform you,” he replied gravely, “that it is impossible for two Masons to associate together for a day without discovering that they are members of the same craft. Even this fatal schism, which separates the lodges of your country from ours, would not have interfered with your recognising those elementary signs which are common to the whole brotherhood, and which I exhibited to you at the time when I first had the pleasure of making your acquaintance.”

I perceived the necessity of abandoning my ill-conceived attempt at reserve. Accepting the cigar which the Ambassador pressed upon me, I responded:

“You will find me deplorably ignorant of Masonry, I fear, if I confess to you that I never heard of this schism of which you speak. If it is not some secret of the craft, perhaps you will consent to enlighten me on this subject.”

“Ah! I am not surprised,” exclaimed his Excel-

lency with bitterness, as he struck a vesta to light his own cigar. "You, who are so truly French in many respects, will pardon me if I pronounce that it is the degraded state of Masonry in England and other northern countries which is responsible for the cleavage. With us Masonry is an enthusiasm, a holy mission, in which we are united to combat the odious principles of Legitimacy and Ultramontaniam; with you it is merely an affair of banquets and of orphanages.

"The schism about which you ask me is due to the influence of your Lutheran clergy, who have imposed a profession of religious belief on the neophytes of the order. It is in the interests of respectability that your Masons, ruled by their Prince of Wales, have consented to this odious test, to which we have replied by forming the Lodge of the Grand Orient, to which are affiliated the lodges of the Latin races in Europe and America. But I am going to weary you with these tedious explanations?"

"Not in the least," I murmured. "You were about to tell me of some remarkable adventure?"

"True. It is to this that I am coming." And the Ambassador relit his cigar, which he had suffered to go out under the influence of his emotion, and

dropped into one of the luxurious smoking chairs which give his rooms almost an English air.

“It was during my residence in Stockholm, where I represented France at the Court of Oscar II., that I became involved in the affair of which I have promised to give you an account. You will no doubt recollect that it was this King who presided over the initiation of the Prince of Wales into the Masonic order, in which he occupied an unusually advanced position. Unfortunately he had placed himself at the head of the revolt which I have described, and was in consequence included in the excommunication launched against these traitors by the Oriental Masons.

“For this reason I was unable to hold any Masonic intercourse with the King, with whom I was nevertheless on very friendly terms. The sovereign of Sweden and Norway is indeed a man of the most amiable character, and is besides distinguished in his own country as an author. I was frequently honoured by being admitted to those select gatherings at which he was accustomed to read aloud his literary compositions.

“My knowledge of the barbarous language of Scandinavia did not always permit of my comprehending what he read ; but this fact did not prevent

me from expressing the profoundest admiration for his genius. I even solicited his Majesty's permission to translate some of his works into French, with a view to their publication in Paris, a compliment which completely won his heart.

"It was not long after this incident that I received an unexpected invitation to the Palace one evening. I hastened to obey the summons, and was shown into the King's private cabinet, where I found him surrounded by an immense quantity of printed volumes and manuscripts.

"'Come in, my dear Ambassador,' he exclaimed, greeting me with that elegant cordiality which distinguishes the descendants of Bernadotte. 'I have sent for you, not as the diplomatist, but as the friend and critic, to consult you regarding a most important literary project.'

"Overwhelmed by this gracious condescension, I accepted the seat which his Majesty offered me, and prepared to listen.

"'You will remember,' he began, 'that a short time ago you were good enough to suggest that some of my writings were worthy of a wider audience than they can hope for so long as they are confined to those who understand Swedish. I will confess to you that I have permitted myself to share this view,

and I have often regretted that fortune should have denied me that wide circle of readers enjoyed by other authors perhaps not much superior to myself.'

"I perfectly understood the King's allusion. It was a singular feature of his character that, while most generous towards the class of professional writers, he was exceedingly jealous of the literary reputations of other crowned heads. He was accustomed, in private, to disparage the charming romances of my friend the Queen of Roumania; and I recollect his complaining to me once of the popularity achieved by Queen Victoria's Highland diaries, whose success he pretended was due rather to the exalted position of the authoress than to the real merits of the book itself. I therefore responded :

"'You have too much reason for your regrets, sire, though the loss is in reality that of those nations who have not the good fortune to be included among your subjects. But I trust that it will not be long before a remedy is found for this unfortunate state of things.'

"The King directed at me a smile of triumph.

"'What shall you say if I tell you that your friendly offers have already been repeated from another source, and that I am at this moment

engaged in going through my works in order to select the most suitable for publication abroad ? ’

“ I was so much taken by surprise by this announcement that it was with the utmost difficulty I preserved a suitable composure.

“ ‘ I am not astonished to hear that your Majesty’s fame has attracted other, and no doubt more able, admirers,’ I replied. ‘ In fact, the only wonder is that your writings are not already as widely known throughout Europe as they are in Sweden. Nevertheless, I offer you my respectful congratulations.’

“ ‘ Come, my dear Ambassador, you must not be jealous,’ retorted the King, who perhaps detected some insincerity in my tone. ‘ I promise you that if there is any particular book which you desire to translate, I will reserve it from those which I am going to give to the syndicate which has approached me.

“ ‘ Yes,’ he continued, observing my surprise at the word *syndicate*, ‘ the application which I have received comes from a representative syndicate of three gentlemen, one of them a countryman of your own, who have come to Stockholm to negotiate for the copyright of my works on behalf of the publishers of Europe and South America. They propose to

translate them into French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, and issue them in all these countries at the same time.'

"While I was listening to this great scheme, I could not forbear from inwardly remarking the curious circumstance that these publishers who had shown so sudden a desire to acquire the works of Oscar II. should all belong to the Latin nations. It was at least singular that no proposal had come from Germany or Great Britain, countries so much more closely allied in language and modes of thought with King Oscar's own dominions.

"I was careful to keep these reflections to myself, however. I merely answered :

" 'The publishers who have formed this idea have given a proof of their good sense. No doubt the terms which they offer your Majesty are very handsome ones.'

"I said this because I knew that all royal authors are extremely proud of making money by their productions, and, as a rule, show the utmost greed in their dealings with publishers.

"The King blushed slightly as he answered :

" 'That is the very point on which I desired to consult you. In their letter to me these gentlemen make no allusion to the question of terms.'

“ ‘Doubtless that is because they feared to seem presumptuous,’ I said quickly. ‘They will, of course, accept any terms which you, sire, think fit to impose.’

“ ‘Ah! You think that is so?’ he demanded nervously.

“ ‘Without question, yes, sire.’

“ ‘But does it not seem to you that there might appear to be some indelicacy in my being the first to raise such a question?’ persisted his Majesty. ‘Would it not be better if some discreet friend, acting on my behalf, were to interview these gentlemen and ascertain their intentions?’

“ ‘It was impossible for me to remain any longer in doubt as to the King’s meaning.

“ ‘You could propose no office which I should feel it a greater honour to discharge,’ I exclaimed with enthusiasm. ‘Permit me, sire, to see these men, and to arrange those business details which are beneath the attention of a man of letters.’

“ ‘I saw that he was charmed by this last phrase. His eyes sparkled as he replied :

“ ‘I dare not so far impose on your good nature. It is true that you possess a knowledge of French methods of business which I could not hope to find elsewhere.’

“ ‘Say no more, sire, I intreat you. I shall feel

hurt if you refuse to intrust me with this important task.'

"With these words I closed the discussion, and shortly afterwards I took leave of His Majesty, and returned home with the address of the members of the syndicate whom I was to interview. Their names were Monsieur De Rochemort of Paris, Signor Calvetti of Turin, and Dr. Ruy Blanco of Rio de Janeiro, and they were staying at one of the principal Stockholm hotels.

"On arriving at the Embassy I was met in the hall by my Secretary of Legation, the Comte d'Hervé, a young man whom I regarded as a son. His mother, the late Countess, was indeed a woman of extraordinary attractions, of whom my wife once condescended to be jealous. Ah, these women, what creatures they are!"

The Ambassador removed his cigar from his lips and leant back with his eyes cast up in a species of ecstasy. I ventured to recall him to a less pleasing train of thought.

"I believe you were about to mention something in connection with this Count d'Hervé?" I suggested.

"Ah! Again pardon me!" he exclaimed, descending from the clouds as rapidly as he had

mounted. "In effect you are right. The Count intercepted me on my return with a strange piece of intelligence. He informed me that three strangers, one of whom was a Frenchman, and gave the name of De Rochemort, had come to the Embassy to see me, and were at that moment waiting in the library for my return. They had positively refused to disclose the nature of their business, but had insisted on being allowed to see me that night.

"It required very little discernment to connect these mysterious visitors with the syndicate who had been in communication with King Oscar. I rushed to the natural conclusion that my fellow-countryman had come to solicit my influence with the King, but I could not help feeling surprised and a little annoyed at this show of persistence. Filled with these ideas, I walked straight into the library, and found myself in the presence of the three men.

"They rose to their feet as I entered, and saluted me with grave courtesy. De Rochemort was a middle-aged man of imposing appearance, and apparent respectability, who evidently acted as the spokesman of the party. The Italian was more elderly, of noble bearing, but with a certain sternness in his gaze which affected me uncomfortably. Dr. Ruy Blanco, the third man, was more difficult to

describe. He might have been any age from forty to sixty, so little had time marked his bold and inscrutable countenance. His eyes he kept half closed most of the time, but when he opened them to their full width they glowed with a fierceness and intensity which was positively startling. In short, it was easy to see that the three were no ordinary men.

“I motioned to them to sit down, setting the example myself, and opened the conversation by saying:

“‘I have already heard of your arrival in Stockholm. His Majesty King Oscar, whom I have only just left——’

“At his point I made a sudden pause. De Rochemort, to whom I was addressing my remarks, had quietly made a sign which filled me with astonishment. You may have heard that in Masonry there are thirty-three degrees or stages of initiation. The highest degree to which any ordinary man can hope to attain is the thirtieth, and the number of those who attain to that may almost be reckoned on the fingers of one’s hands. De Rochemort had indicated to me, by the sign of which I speak, that he was himself an adept of the thirtieth degree.

“Hastily recovering from my confusion, I proceeded :

“‘The King has been graciously pleased to consult me with regard to the proposal you have addressed to him, and which he is disposed to——’

“Again I had to break down in the middle of a sentence. Signor Calvetti had seized the opportunity of my turning a glance in his direction to make another sign which caused me even a greater shock. I have spoken of thirty-three degrees. The three last have always been reserved for the secret Masters and Governors of the Order, men who seldom reveal themselves to their disciples. Only one man in each generation is admitted to the thirty-third and last degree, and his identity never transpires below the numbers of the next two grades.

“There are usually four adepts in the thirty-second degree, corresponding to the four quarters of the world. The number of those in the thirty-first degree is not much greater, never exceeding one for each nation. The last initiate of the thirty-first stage in Great Britain was an Earl, whose name I am forbidden to reveal, but who has since renounced Masonry and embraced the Church of Rome. King Oscar himself represented this degree in Sweden. My consternation may be imagined, therefore, when

I realised that Calvetti had announced himself as an initiate of the thirty-first degree.

“It was with a beating heart that I strove to go on, while my eyes wandered with dread towards the grim countenance of the third of these companions.

“‘He is disposed to take your offer into favourable consideration,’ I said, ‘but as the matter must involve some discussion of business details——’

“This time I stopped, thunderstruck. The Brazilian doctor had at last made a sign in his turn. I beheld myself, with terror, in the presence of the secret master of a continent, an initiate of the thirty-second degree.

“It was useless to indulge in any further pretence. These three men, who held over me the dreadful power of the Brotherhood, and whose orders I was bound by the most sacred oaths to obey, had not come to me from the end of the earth merely to discuss a question of copyrights. I waited in silence for their commands.

“De Rochemort had evidently been charged to communicate them to me.

“‘Enough, brother,’ he said gravely. ‘I see that you are a man of intelligence. It is not King Oscar, the amateur author, that we are here to deal

with, but Brother Oscar, the perjured Mason. The Masters of our Order, two of whom now honour you with their presence, have sat in judgment upon him, and they have condemned him as the principal cause of the fatal schism which has rent the sacred ark in twain.

“‘To this course he has been prompted, as we believe, by disappointed ambition. It was his hope to attain, not merely to the thirty-first, but to the thirty-third and last degree, and thus to become the supreme head of Masonry throughout the world. This wish was not gratified, and therefore he has promoted the rebellion, and placed himself at the head of the seceding lodges. For this crime he has been judged worthy of death.’

“So far I had listened with feelings of dread and horror. The conclusion made my blood run cold.

“‘Of death!’ I gasped out.

“‘That is his doom,’ returned De Rochemort sternly. ‘There is, moreover, another reason for the sentence. When the schism took place, the Masters resolved that the excommunicated lodges should be deprived of the final knowledge shared among the three last degrees. Of these there were only three initiates among the rebels.

“‘One, an Englishman, has saved himself by

renouncing our order, and solemnly pledging himself to let his knowledge die with him. Another, a German, defied us, and was put to death six months ago. Now it is the turn of Oscar II. He has openly declared his intention of initiating others, and imparting the sacred knowledge to them. For this, too, the Masters have adjudged him to be worthy of death.'

"I sat petrified. To know that so fatal, so relentless, a conspiracy had been formed against the life of this monarch whom I so much esteemed, was enough to overpower me, but I knew that I had not yet heard the worst. These men would not have bestowed on me their terrible confidences unless they intended to make me an instrument in carrying out their designs. It was this presentiment which so unnerved me.

"My fears were quickly justified. As soon as De Rochemort had finished expounding the reasons why King Oscar's death had been determined on, he demanded my assistance in the name of the Secret Tribunal of the Masters.

"Of course I demanded the proofs of his authority, though I well knew this request to be a mere form. It was Calvetti who produced the solemn and alarming ensigns of that authority which

all Masons are bound at the peril of their lives to obey. I could only bow my head in respectful submission.

“But, though I am a sincere Mason, I am not the less a man. It was impossible for me to calmly give my aid to the murder in cold blood of a sovereign from whom I had received so many tokens of goodwill.

“I therefore ventured to remonstrate with my Masonic superiors. I pleaded for the life of the King, and urged them to postpone their design till the Masters had had an opportunity of reconsidering their severe sentence. I reminded them that the foundation of all Masonry was benevolence and the love of our fellow-creatures, and that its progress ought not to be stained with blood. I became eloquent, reproachful, menacing.

“At the end of my address the doctor, Ruy Blanco, opened his lips for the first time :

“‘Have you done, Brother? Then now, Brethren, we will explain to the Baron what it is that we require of him.’

“I was crushed by this cold and brutal apathy. But I did not lose heart. I resolved to feign a submission which I did not really feel, in order to obtain a knowledge of their plans, with the intention

of secretly thwarting them. I listened, therefore, while they explained to me, by the mouth of De Rochemort, various schemes for securing a private interview with the King, at which they hoped to be able to assassinate him undisturbed, and leave the country before suspicion was aroused against them.

“ ‘There is now lying in the harbour of Norrköping a steamer, laden with wheat, the captain of which is lingering on various pretexts, and keeping up steam night and day, ready to start at a moment’s notice. Immediately we have executed the condemned’—it was thus that De Rochemort spoke of it—‘we shall make the best of our way thither, get on board the *Aesir*, and proceed to sea. After that we have no fear of pursuit. Should you become in any way compromised by the event, you will, of course, have the privilege of sharing our escape.’

“It was all I could do to restrain myself at this insolent proposition. I, an Ambassador of France, the associate of kings and chancellors, was calmly invited to exchange my position for that of a wandering outlaw, the companion, or rather the servant, of a South American desperado. It was difficult to realise that these men were serious, and

that they really intended to exercise the frightful powers which they possessed.

“However, I feigned to listen to them with the greatest deference, though I raised some fatal objection to every one of the plans which they proposed. Finally I saw Ruy Blanco dart a frowning glance at Calvetti, who interposed this remark:

“‘It is evident that our brother, who is familiar with the Swedish Court, is the best person to arrange a suitable scheme. We will leave you, M. Le Baron, to turn the matter over in your mind, and to elaborate such a plan as seems to you most likely to be successful.’

“With these frigid words he rose from his chair, and the three companions silently took their departure, leaving me in a state of truly pitiable dismay.

“Torn between the conflicting duties of humanity and loyalty to my Order, I resolved upon a middle course, which I believe will commend itself to you. I resolved that, while doing nothing to betray my Masonic brethren, I would secretly watch over their victim, and if possible protect him from their vengeance. Say, then, my friend, would you have had me to act otherwise?” And his Excellency looked at me with stern inquiry.

"By no means, my dear Ambassador," I responded, with earnestness. "Your conduct in this affair, as in every circumstance of your career, seems to me to have reconciled the nicest dictates of honour with the imperative demands of conscience."

"It is well. I rejoice that you take that view, which consoles me for many slanders and misrepresentations which my enemies have wished to propagate." And the Ambassador sighed eloquently.

"The whole of the night which followed this interview which I have described I spent in considering my plans. I arrived finally at the conclusion that it would become necessary for me to assume a disguise in order to watch the proceedings of the three emissaries, and that which I selected was the costume of a Swedish gendarme. I took great trouble to alter my face by means of paint and a false beard, so as to defy recognition, since I had no wish to find the daggers of the secret tribunal turned against myself.

"I made these preparations with the assistance of young D'Hervé, whose name I have already mentioned to you. My next step was to cause it to be announced to my household that I was indisposed, and should probably not leave my bedroom during

the next few days. These details arranged, I was able to go forth from the Embassy unsuspected, and devote myself to my task.

“My first experience was an amusing one. As I was approaching the hotel, the Carlskrona, where the trio were staying, I perceived two of them coming out, De Rochemort and Calvetti. I hung back and allowed them to pass by me, after which I turned and followed them. It was not long before I discovered that they were on their way to my own residence.

“I crept slyly up as the door was opened, and heard the porter inform them of my illness. The two men turned and exchanged chagrined looks, and as they came away I heard De Rochemort muttering the most offensive epithets between his teeth, for which, but for my disguise, I should have challenged him upon the spot.

“I continued to watch the movements of the conspirators during the day. It was my constant expectation to see them setting out for the Palace, in order to interview the King; and I had arranged an elaborate scheme for intercepting them, of which, as things turned out, I had no occasion to make use.

“But instead of that, the only movement that

occurred was a solitary expedition of De Rochemort, this time to the railway station. I followed him as closely as I dared. It had evidently not occurred to these men that they were likely to be watched, for De Rochemort observed no precautions. He proceeded straight to the ticket office, and I got near enough to hear him demand three tickets to Norrköping.

"I was seriously alarmed at this, as it clearly indicated to me that the conspirators expected to complete their work that very day. Completely baffled by the secrecy of their movements, I could only follow De Rochemort back to the hotel, where I remained on guard. My movements began to attract the attention of the hotel-keeper, whom I had to pacify by pretending that I had received instructions to watch his foreign guests, on suspicion of smuggling. Meanwhile the hours dragged on till night without my vigilance being repaid by any fresh discovery.

"I was beginning to fear that I should have to return to the Embassy, when, as I was pacing to and fro in the street in which the Carlskrona is situated, I caught sight of a muffled figure approaching, about whose walk it struck me that there was something which I recognised. Unable to trace this curious

association in my mind to any particular person, I turned round and watched the mysterious stranger proceed straight to the door of the hotel, through which he passed.

“My suspicions instantly aroused, I hurried stealthily in after the new-comer. I heard a voice inquiring in low and indistinct tones after the three foreigners, and immediately afterwards the visitor, his features still closely obscured, was led up to the door of the private apartment which they occupied. I waited till he had gone inside and the door was closed behind him, and then crept up and laid my ear to the panel. The sound which I heard caused me to start back, and clutch at the doorpost for support.

“It was the voice of Oscar II.!”

The Ambassador spoke these words with dramatic emphasis, and gazed at me as if he would read my thoughts.

I assumed an expression of the deepest concern.

“What a terrible situation!” I exclaimed. “They had of course lured the King there, with the intention of killing him?”

His Excellency nodded seriously.

“It was impossible for me to doubt it. While I had been engaged in watching the movements of

his two comrades, the terrible doctor of Rio de Janeiro had been secretly at work. No doubt his acute and suspicious mind had detected my lurking enmity to his schemes on the previous night, and he had determined to go to work without me.

“As I subsequently learned, he had caused a private message to be conveyed to King Oscar, in which he pretended that, to defeat the rivalry of other publishers, it was necessary for their literary negotiations to be carried out with the profoundest secrecy. He had stipulated that the King should come to them at the hotel under a strict *incognito*, and had artfully sought to inspire confidence by telling his Majesty that I was to be present at the conference.

“You will realise,” pursued his Excellency, “the fearful predicament in which I found myself. Every moment of delay might mean the death of his Majesty. On the other hand, if I attempted to give the alarm I should involve myself in the charge of treachery to the Masonic Order, and it would no longer be merely the life of another which I should be called upon to defend.

“It was on my own resources that I had to rely in this extremity. I considered for a few moments—it is well-known with what rapidity the mind

moves in such circumstances—and then decided on a plan. I listened once more at the door, and heard De Rochemort beginning to speak. Then I tapped softly on the panel.

“The knocks which I gave formed a Masonic signal, which I am not permitted to indicate more clearly, but which I knew the persons I had to deal with would not dare to disregard. The event justified my expectations. There was a dead silence within the room, then a muffled whisper, and immediately after I heard footsteps stealing towards the door.

“I drew back a couple of paces, and waited. The next moment the door was cautiously opened, and the anxious face of De Rochemort peered out. He perceived me, but my disguise, together with the obscurity of the passage, made it out of the question that he should recognise who I was. I made a well-known sign, and at the same time beckoned him to come a few paces down the corridor.

“He appeared to be overwhelmed with astonishment, as he well might be. Stepping out into the passage, he softly shut the door behind him, and followed me. As soon as he was close up, he whispered:—

“‘Who are you, brother? What is it?’

“‘Beware!’ I whispered back. ‘Everything is known. I am here at the peril of my life to warn you. Go instantly to the train, and do not feel safe till you are on board the *Aesir*, at Norrköping.’

“He stared at me aghast.

“‘But who are you then?’ he asked again.

“‘Do not inquire,’ I said sternly. ‘Enough that I sacrifice my loyalty as a Swede to my honour as a Mason. Go instantly, before you are interrupted by the police.’

“He turned pale, and made a step forward.

“‘But the others, my comrades?’ he murmured, drawing back.

“‘I will see to them,’ I replied. ‘I charge myself with their safety. They shall rejoin you in the train. Now hasten; every moment may mean death.’

“This time he showed no further hesitation. He rushed away, and I heard him passing downstairs and out of the hotel.

“As soon as I was satisfied that he was out of the way, I returned to the door of the room, and repeated the same signal. I felt assured that the others would not proceed with their deadly business till they knew what had drawn their comrade away, and I was right.

“This time it was the Italian whose dark face

appeared in the doorway. I made the same sign to him that I had done to De Rochemort, and he, too, stepped out into the passage and closed the door after him. But his manner showed more distrust of me than De Rochemort's, and I quickly realised that I was dealing with a man who would not be so easily got rid of.

“‘Where is M. De Rochemort?’ he commenced by demanding.

“‘He is on his way to Norrköping, to embark on a certain steamer which is waiting there,’ I answered. ‘I have come to warn you to do the same. Your intentions have been discovered and your plot foreseen. Your only safety lies in immediate flight.’

“While I spoke I edged my way gradually down the passage, to increase the distance between us and the fatal room. But Calvetti saw through this manœuvre, and remained standing within a few paces of the door.

“‘What does all this mean?’ he demanded in low but threatening tones. ‘What guarantee have I of your good faith?’

“‘Simply this, that I have incurred the guilt of high treason in order to save your life. This house is already surrounded by officers of the police. In a

few moments I shall be obliged to give the signal, and they will rush in and arrest you.'

"He gazed at me darkly, as if still sceptical. Finally he exclaimed :

"'But the King is inside. At all events, there is time to complete our work.' And he made a movement back towards the door.

"The perspiration broke out on my brow. I ask you to believe that, for an instant, I was at the end of my resources. At once, however, I recovered my composure, and answered with coolness :

"'That is not the King at all. He is a substitute sent to deceive you.'

"It was a fatal artifice. Instantly Calvetti's brow became black with rage, and he seized me by the arm.

"'Now I know that you are lying!' he cried fiercely, under his breath. 'King Oscar is well known to me by sight. Traitor, you shall not save him!'

"There was not another moment to lose, as you will perceive. It was Calvetti's life or the King's. Like lightning I had drawn forth my trusty revolver, with which I had been careful to arm myself, and thrust the steel barrel against his head.

“‘Come with me without a sound, or I will blow out your brains!’ I hissed.

“At my words and the touch of the cold steel his firmness deserted him. He dropped his clutch on my arm and submissively accompanied me down the passage. At the end of a dozen paces, however, he whispered earnestly :

“‘On the faith of a Mason, will you swear that we shall all three be allowed to reach the *Aesir* in safety?’

“‘On the faith of a Mason, yes.’

“Satisfied with this assurance, he allowed me to escort him to the main entrance of the hotel, and I saw him go off in the direction of the railway station.

“But though I had thus disposed of two of the confederates, I felt that I had the most formidable still to deal with. By this time, moreover, I knew that his suspicions must be keenly on the alert, owing to the successive disappearance of his two comrades, and I dreaded whether he might not be led to execute his desperate purpose at any moment. I proceeded noiselessly but swiftly back to the famous door in the passage, and again gave the symbolic knocks.

“This time it was longer before there came any response, and I stood trembling with expectancy,

and dreading the sight which I should witness if I made my way into the room.

“You will ask me, perhaps, why I did not now boldly walk in, as the odds were now against this Brazilian. I was, however, still hampered by the same consideration which had been present to my mind all along. It was not merely necessary to rescue the King of Sweden from his assassins, but also to rescue my brother Masons from the vengeance of Oscar II. To do this it was necessary to keep his Majesty in ignorance till the three men were beyond his reach, and hence my anxiety to get them away without giving any alarm.

“At length the door was opened for the third time, and, to my astonishment, the face which met my gaze was that of King Oscar himself. The idea that Ruy Blanco, in the exercise of his Masonic superiority, would compel a sovereign to act as his doorkeeper had not occurred to me, so that I was for the moment bewildered. But I did not hesitate long. Drawing his Majesty out into the passage by the same artifice I had already employed twice, I hastily whispered :

“ ‘Sire, you have been deceived in the characters of these men whom you have visited. The police have found it necessary to take certain steps with

regard to them, and they entreat that your Majesty will at once return to the Palace. It will then be possible to keep secret the fact of your presence here to-night.'

"Oscar II. showed considerable annoyance and chagrin, as was natural, on receiving such an intimation. He plied me with questions as I escorted him respectfully down to the street, and I had considerable difficulty in satisfying him with the vague explanations I was compelled to invent. I fell back on my theory of smugglers, and in the end I succeeded in seeing him safely off the premises.

"I now returned to deal with the formidable chief of the conspiracy. I approached the room where I had left him with trepidation, and took the precaution to display my revolver as I threw open the door and walked in.

"But I alarmed myself without cause. The apartment was empty."

"Then what——?" I began, as the Ambassador assumed an air of having finished.

"There is one more incident which I have to tell you," he said quickly, forestalling my question. "My mission having been discharged, I returned home. When I reached the Embassy, I contrived, with the assistance of my young friend, to get rid of

my disguise, and to resume the rôle of invalid which I had adopted that morning.

“D'Hervé mentioned to me, as I was changing my costume, that there had been a caller for me shortly before my return, who had been shown into the library, while the servant ascertained whether I was disposed to receive him. The Count had been careful to intercept the card which the stranger sent up, and to cause him to be sent away. This card my friend now handed to me.

“I received it with a swift guess at the name which I should read upon it. My idea proved to be correct. The card bore the inscription: ‘*Dr. Ruy Blanco, Rio de Janeiro,*’ to which was added in writing the significant expression, ‘*Au revoir.*’

“Drawn by an irresistible impulse, I went down into the library. There, arranged in a certain order upon my desk, I found a key, a coin, and a skull. I had no longer any doubt. This fearful man had penetrated the secret of my double dealing. The emblems which I beheld spoke to me in the mystic language of the craft the most awful of sentences. It was my death-warrant!”

This time I allowed an interval to elapse after the Ambassador had finished speaking before I exclaimed:

“Thank Heaven your Excellency is still alive! But have these monsters ever attempted to execute their wicked threats?”

He shook his head with a rebuking air.

“Do not apply such language to those men, who, after all, were faithful to their ideas of duty. But no, there has been no such attempt as you speak of, for a reason which, perhaps, I ought to mention. The three men whose schemes I had been obliged to defeat arrived in safety at Norrköping, as I had promised them, and set sail upon their steamer the same night. But the *Aesir* has never been heard of since. She went down in the Baltic with all hands; do not ask me to tell you how, or why.”

Although I have set down this narrative exactly as I received it from the Ambassador's lips, I have since been informed by an English Mason of high standing that my friend's statements with regard to the Order, and in particular his description of the degrees, must not be taken literally. Whether this is one of the differences between the English and Continental lodges, or whether the Ambassador purposely misled me with regard to mysteries into which he did not think me worthy of complete initiation, is a question which I have not yet dared to put to his Excellency.

A Scandal at the Elysée.

HOW is it, M. l'Ambassadeur, that while you have confided to me so many surprising incidents connected with foreign Courts, you have not yet related to me some history of which Paris has been the theatre?"

We were in the charming little billiard-room which forms one of the attractions of the Ambassador's residence. I had been permitted the privilege of dining like one of the family with my friend and his beautiful and distinguished wife, and after dinner he had insisted on my trying his table, though I knew that I was no match for my host at the game as played in France.

He was just preparing to make a stroke of unusual difficulty when I put my question. He at once interrupted himself, and turned round to reply:

"It is very simple. Since I have been engaged

in the diplomatic service my time has been chiefly spent abroad ; I have therefore had few opportunities for taking part in the political intrigues of my own capital. In effect, I could relate to you more than one curious episode of recent French Governments, but in doing so I should be obliged to rely upon information which has reached me from others. I fear that you would not feel the same confidence in the anecdotes which I have thus acquired, as that which you are good enough to place in my narratives of affairs which I have witnessed myself."

His Excellency gave me a questioning glance as he made this explanation, from which I gathered that he was not unwilling to be pressed. I answered accordingly :

"The objection you speak of is by no means a fatal one. It is the friendship which you allow me to cherish for you which causes me to be so strongly interested in the accounts of those intrigues in which you have been personally concerned. Do not believe, I beg of you, that I am capable of scepticism with regard to any other incidents which you feel disposed to relate to me."

The Ambassador appeared to listen to these sentiments with approval. He allowed a minute to pass, during which he turned again to the billiard

table, and skilfully achieved the cannon he had been about to attempt. Uttering an exclamation of triumph, he paused to chalk the tip of his cue before continuing the break, and at the same time murmured, as though considering with himself:

“There was the MacMahon affair, which was not without interest, and to which, moreover, those miserable journals never really obtained a clue.”

I caught eagerly at this name of the great Marshal, whose sudden and unexplained resignation of the French Presidency had formed one of the most startling episodes of modern history.

“Is it possible that you are in a position to throw light on the events which brought about the fall of this President?” I ventured to exclaim.

The Ambassador glanced thoughtfully from me to the surface of the table, on which the balls had assumed a more difficult position than ever.

“It is precisely that of which I was about to speak,” he answered. “But it is my duty to warn you that this story is one of great delicacy, involving the honour of a lady—one for whom I cherish a peculiar esteem. It will, therefore, be necessary for you to promise me beforehand that you will not allow yourself to entertain any ideas regarding the

conduct of this lady which are not consistent with the most scrupulous respect."

"But, M. l'Ambassadeur!" I was beginning, when he stopped me with a gesture.

"It is enough. I know well that you do not possess the gross mind of your countrymen. One more stipulation: I did not receive the particulars of this strange affair from the late Duke of Magenta, but from a person who is still alive, and whose name must, therefore, not be mentioned between us. Swear that you will respect my reserve on this point also!"

I renewed my assurances, with increased warmth.

My host leant across the table and made another stroke, which this time was unsuccessful. Indicating with a sweep of his cue the ball which it was my turn to play with, he gave himself up to his narrative.

"The late Duke of Magenta, as you know, without doubt, was an Irishman by descent, and was not free from the impulsive temper of his truly generous countrymen, who have always been so much esteemed by France. He was at the same time a sincere patriot; and in spite of the fact that he owed his Marshal's batôn and his dukedom to the

Third Napoleon, he remained faithful to the Republic of the Fourth of September. History will recognise this when the death of living persons permits an explanation of the remarkable circumstances which brought about his fall, and which have left so melancholy a shadow upon his name.

“Everyone who knows anything about Mac Mahon is aware of the extreme fondness for flowers which always distinguished him. During his tenure of the Presidentship the gardens of the Elysée received more attention, perhaps, than has been bestowed upon them at any time since; and all about the rooms occupied by the President were to be seen vases filled with choice specimens of the florist’s merchandise.

“Aware of this amiable weakness on his part, MacMahon’s friends frequently sent him offerings of flowers. It did not cause him any particular surprise, therefore, on taking his seat at the breakfast table one morning towards the latter part of his term of office, to perceive on his plate a tiny bouquet of lilies. These exquisite flowers had evidently been chosen with great care, and they were arranged with an elegance in which the President quickly divined the agency of a woman.

“But when he came to look for the card which

usually accompanied such tributes, he was disappointed to find that the donor had chosen to remain anonymous. Beyond the white satin ribbon with which the stalks of the flowers were bound together, and which pointed to a certain degree of aristocratic refinement on the part of the sender of the bouquet, there was no clue to the source from which it came.

“Distracted by another matter which claimed his attention, the President laid aside the delicate offering after a few moments, and dismissed the incident from his mind.

“But on the following morning, at the same hour, he was at once astonished and charmed to find a second bouquet, similar in all respects to that of the day before, awaiting his acceptance. Again the most careful search failed to bring to light any indication of the quarter from which the flowers had come. But this time the Marshal, piqued by the mystery, made enquiries among his servants, in order to ascertain by what means the bouquet had found its way on to his table.

“At first no one seemed able or willing to furnish any information; but on the President becoming insistent, a favourite page at length confessed that he had been bribed to place the flowers

on his master's plate, without disclosing the source from which they were received.

"The Marshal was now thoroughly interested. He questioned the page further, and in the end the lad betrayed the fact that he had received the two bouquets from a lady who had contrived to intercept him each morning in the Champs Elysées. The lady, it appeared, had been closely veiled, but had nevertheless impressed the boy with the idea that she was both young and beautiful.

"No more was needed to complete the fascination of the old Marshal, who retained to the end of his life that ardent devotion to the fair sex which is the distinguishing mark of a soldier and a Frenchman—a foible of which I who speak to you have also sometimes been accused, and of which I am not, perhaps, sufficiently ashamed."

The Ambassador rose from the billiard-table, on which the game was still languidly proceeding, as he said this, and straightened himself up with an expression impossible to describe, but which I am confident that Madame the Ambassadors would have disapproved.

"MacMahon gave the page strict orders to look out for the lady again the next morning, in case she should mean to repeat her delicate attention.

“‘Do not allow her to know,’ he continued, ‘that you have said anything to me, but be careful to tell her of the extreme pleasure with which I have received her bouquets, and describe the anxiety I have displayed to learn the identity of my unknown benefactor, for whom I already cherish the most tender sentiments in advance. In the meanwhile, if, without causing annoyance to this lady, you can ascertain any particulars about her, be sure and do so. Above all, impress her with the conviction that I should be ravished to make her acquaintance.’

“The page faithfully carried out his instructions. The next morning a new bouquet of lilies, even more elegant than the former two, rewarded the impatience of the Marshal. But the page was unable to gratify his curiosity with any fresh details with regard to the mysterious donor. She had listened, it was true, while the page had repeated his lesson, but without any sign of approval, and at its close she had turned away, entered a hired carriage which appeared to be waiting for her, and driven off rapidly in the direction of the Place de la Concorde—that is to say, into the heart of Paris.

“Thus repulsed, the President was compelled to stifle his eagerness, and to await the pleasure of the fair unknown. The following two days saw the

offering of the bouquet renewed in the same manner, but on the third morning MacMahon's hopes were roused to the highest pitch by the detection of a tiny piece of paper, secreted among the bells of the flowers. He snatched it forth, and deciphered with some difficulty the perfect but microscopic penmanship :

“ ‘ *Why do you not wear my flowers ?* ’ ”

“ This was the whole message. But, laconic as it was, the Marshal perceived that it contained a promise of something more. It was evident that these lilies were to be regarded as a signal of communication, and that his obedience to the hint conveyed in the note would be taken as an evidence of his wish to gratify the unknown.

“ Every day, towards four o'clock, it was the custom for the President to drive out in public to the Bois de Boulogne, where his carriage led the procession of fashion around the famous lake. On this afternoon MacMahon drove forth as usual, but it was observed that, contrary to his usual habit, the President wore in the buttonhole of his coat a superb bouquet of flowers, which completely concealed his Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour.

“ These flowers, it is needless to say, were the

mysterious lilies. As he drove along, the Marshal eagerly scanned the occupants of the other carriages. But though most of them gave some sort of salute to the Head of the State, he failed to distinguish anything like a recognition of the token which he wore on his breast. At last, however, after he had rounded the lake for the last time, and was preparing to return home, he saw a small but handsome carriage approaching, drawn by a single horse, in which a lady closely veiled was seated by herself. The panels of the carriage displayed no crest, and there was nothing distinctive about the livery of the coachman. As she came opposite the Presidential equipage, the occupant of the carriage raised a small bunch of flowers, corresponding to that worn by the gallant Marshal, in her hand, as though to inhale their fragrance. The President started forward on his seat, and at the same moment the lady turned her head slightly, and allowed him to perceive that she was imprinting a kiss on her bouquet. Before he could respond, or do anything further to challenge her attention, the two carriages had passed each other, and the lady of the lilies was lost to view.

“Conscious that the eyes of his suite were upon him—to say nothing of the crowd through which

they were passing,—the President sank back in his carriage, and endeavoured to conceal his agitation. The tender character of the lady's action had aroused his most ardent feelings, and it was with difficulty that he consoled himself for his forced inaction with the assurance that his charmer would not allow the affair to rest at its present stage.

“The following morning he received another bouquet, to which a morsel of paper was attached, inscribed with the one word—‘*Thanks!*’

“Encouraged by so much, the President again wore his flowers during the afternoon drive; but this time he was better prepared, and the moment the carriage of the unknown appeared in sight, he detached his lilies from his buttonhole, and raised them to his lips with eagerness as she came opposite to him. He was rewarded by a faint but perceptible bow from the lady, who had drawn up her veil far enough to disclose a chin of exquisite delicacy, and lips of perfect shape and redness.

“It was with the most intense eagerness that the President descended to breakfast on the following morning. He had a presentiment that the affair was about to take a more practical turn, and he was not deceived. Accompanying the flowers which again adorned his plate, was a note, exquisitely

scented, and sealed with the impression of a dove bearing an olive-leaf in its beak.

“Dismissing his attendants, lest they should observe his agitation, the Marshal cut open the missive with the utmost care, and read the contents :

“If you care to accept my flowers from my own hand, let your page bring me a key to the small gate of the Elysée gardens; and expect me to-morrow night at ten. I confide in the honour of an officer of France.”

“That was all; but it was enough. Overcome with joy at the prospect of so soon meeting and conversing with the siren who had bewitched him from a distance, the Marshal took care to procure the desired key, which he entrusted to the page, with the necessary instructions.

“It only remained to pass away the time as best he could until the following night. He drove again in the Bois, but this time there was no lady of the lilies, nor did her offering make its appearance at the usual time the next day. At length, however, the hour of the meeting approached, and the impatient Marshal made an excuse to get rid of his suite, and sallied forth into the gardens alone.

“He had not long to wait. The clocks of Paris had barely ceased striking ten when he heard the

key thrust into the lock from the other side of the door. It was turned, and the next moment the lady of the lilies stood before him.

“You will not expect me to enter into the details of this meeting. On her arrival the lady again wore a veil, but in response to the pressing solicitations of MacMahon, she at length consented to lift it so far as to disclose the lower half of her face, the charms of which more than fulfilled the expectations of the enamoured Marshal. At the same time, she contrived by an astonishing display of tact to convince him that he must preserve towards her a manner of the most perfect respect. In fact, she quickly let him see that it was not merely to listen to compliments that she had made her mysterious appointment with him.

“‘M. le Maréchal,’ she said, addressing him by his military title, instead of as Chief of the Republic, ‘although the steps which I have taken to obtain this interview may wear a romantic aspect, I beg you to believe that I have some serious reasons for wishing to converse with you.’

“‘Nay, Mademoiselle,’ returned the President, ‘what can there be more serious than the feeling with which you have inspired me? It is my “lady of the lilies,” whom I have so anxiously desired to

meet ; do not, in the first moments of our encounter, seek to destroy the romance with which you have so adorably invested yourself.'

"The young lady—for of her youthfulness there could be no doubt—gave a smile which allowed the Marshal to see two perfect rows of teeth, as she replied :

"'You have called me the "lady of the lilies." Have you not remembered by this time that the lily is a flower to which a certain political significance attaches itself ?'

"The President started, and an expression of anger and chagrin showed itself on his face, as the truth of the situation flashed upon him. The lily was, of course, the badge of the royal House of France, the emblem assumed on all occasions by the partisans of the Comte de Chambord. In effect, his companion was entitled to say, if she pleased, that she had given a sufficient indication of the character of her overtures by selecting this blossom, whose traditions were as well known as those of the violet of the Napoleons or the shamrock of old Ireland. And it was the fact that he, the official head of the French Republic, had openly paraded during three days these Royalist emblems in the midst of Paris, where their significance had

without doubt been eagerly noted by thousands of spectators. He beheld himself fatally compromised.

“As these reflections passed through his mind, MacMahon ground his teeth, and uttered a savage ejaculation under his breath. The lady of the lilies drew back, with a gesture of despair.

“‘Alas! what have I done?’ she exclaimed, in pathetic tones. ‘I meant merely to convince you that I was not a woman who had abandoned her self-respect, and I have offended you beyond recall.’

“As she spoke she raised her veil another inch, and the Marshal beheld two lustrous eyes, as beautiful as sapphires, which gleamed through the darkness as though they were about to be filled with tears.

“MacMahon was the President of France, but he was at the same time a man. Overcome by this touching spectacle, he forgot the graver aspect of the situation, and remembered only that he had caused distress to a woman. He instantly stepped to the side of the young girl, as he now perceived her to be, and began to reassure her.

“‘Believe me,’ he said, in a voice which combined respect with a certain tenderness, ‘when I tell you that I regret nothing which has procured me

the pleasure of your charming acquaintance. It is, on the contrary, I who ought to ask pardon for my presumption in daring to imagine that an old man like myself could inspire any interest other than a political one in a person so young and exquisite as yourself.'

"There was a moment's pause. Then the beautiful eyes brightened again, and a low musical laugh rippled from the lady of the lilies.

"'Do you know, M. le Maréchal, when you talk like that, you do not look so very old!'

"The Marshal could not restrain a thrill of gratification.

"'It is because you are one of those goddesses who have the power of renewing youth in us mortals,' he responded with a gallant air.

"The girl before him blushed, and pretended to turn her eyes away in embarrassment.

"'But you must consider that I have deceived you,' she murmured. 'I have obtained access to you under false pretences. Take back this key, which you will no longer be willing that I should avail myself of.'

"The Marshal waved back the key which she held out to him, with a gesture of reproach.

"'Ah, Mademoiselle, do not inflict on me so

great a punishment! Do not tell me that my society has already become intolerable to you!’

“‘Then you are willing to continue to receive me—even in the character of a conspirator?’ she cried.

“‘Oh, as for that, it is not for us mortals to complain of the character in which our goddesses may choose to reveal themselves to us.’

“The ‘lady of the lilies’ thanked him with her most bewitching smile. Then she made a movement to go.

“‘At all events, I have no right to ask you to listen to me now, when it may be merely your politeness that prevents you from requesting me to withdraw.’

“‘Mademoiselle!—’

“She raised her hand to silence him, still smiling.

“‘I will give you time for reflection, M. le Maréchal. When you desire to meet me here again at this hour, you have only to repeat the same signal.’

“‘And that is?’

“‘A bouquet of lilies in the Bois.’ And she glided towards the garden door.

“‘One moment before you go!’ interposed the

Marshal. 'May I not have any other name by which to dream of you than "the lady of the lilies"?'

"If you like you may reproach me as "Made-moiselle Fleur de Lys."

"And with these words she was gone. The door closed behind her, and immediately afterwards he heard the sound of a carriage rolling away.

"MacMahon returned more infatuated with his unknown charmer than ever, and he contrived, in delightful reveries on her fascinations, to forget the serious nature of the intrigue in which she evidently wished to entangle him.

"But in the meantime the affair had already produced its grave consequences. The spectacle of the President of the Republic driving out day after day with a Royalist emblem in his buttonhole had created the most profound impression in Paris.

"The fact was that MacMahon had never been looked upon as an extreme Republican. At the time that our statesmen were engaged in constructing a new Government after the terrible events which brought about the fall of the Second Empire, there was a question, as you may have heard, of restoring the ancient dynasty in the person of the Comte de Chambord. The chief obstacle which presented

itself, in the course of the negotiations which took place, was the question of the flag. The Comte, actuated by a sincere belief in his hereditary rights, demanded that the lilies of the Valois should again be recognised in the national standard of France. It was MacMahon himself who, speaking in the name of the army, insisted on the retention of the tricolour, that flag so gloriously associated with the great memories of Austerlitz and Jena. This obstacle proved fatal; the Third Republic was constituted, and 'Henri V.' was left without a throne.

"Nevertheless this affair had left behind it a general impression that MacMahon was not strongly opposed to the Monarchy; and his election to the Presidentship a few years after was owing largely to the support of the Royalists in the Assembly. After his election, however, he seemed to have resigned himself to faithfully playing the part of the Chief of the Republic, and the hopes of the Royalists had gradually died away, when they were suddenly revived by the incidents I have described. A remarkable activity instantly displayed itself in their ranks, followed by a corresponding depression on the part of the friends of the existing régime. You know the electrical atmosphere of Paris, that

city which in the course of a century has witnessed ten revolutions. Sinister rumours coupled with the name of the President were on every lip, and men went about not knowing from hour to hour whether they might not hear of the overthrow of the Republic, and the proclamation of Henri V. at the Elysée.

“The President himself was, of course, the last person in Paris to whom these whispers were likely to penetrate. Carried away by his desire to meet his ‘lady of the lilies’ again, he did not hesitate to fulfil her instructions by once more driving out with the fatal signal in his buttonhole. While all Paris was reeling under this fresh shock, the unconscious Marshal sought his reward at the little door of the garden.

“The unknown was faithful to her appointment. She was again veiled, and greeted him at first with a shy reserve, which did not prevent her from allowing him to bestow a kiss upon her delicate fingers.

“‘Are you beginning to overcome your repugnance to my poor lilies, M. le Maréchal?’ she asked, as soon as they had exchanged greetings.

“‘It has never been your lilies for which I have felt repugnance,’ protested the Marshal; ‘but only

for those with which the Comte de Chambord has sought to replace our glorious tricolour.'

" 'Ah, Monsieur,' pleaded the girl, 'will you not indulge me so far as to say "Henri V." ? Remember that to me he is the King of France.'

" 'As your King, Mademoiselle, he is certainly worthy of his title,' answered the Marshal discreetly.

" 'I accept the compromise. But to return to our lilies; must I tell the King that I have failed to reconcile you to my flower?'

" 'The Marshal temporised.

" 'You appear to be very much interested in your King,' he said, with a slight accent of reproach. 'Henri V. is indeed fortunate to have inspired so much devotion in his emissary.'

" A gay smile became visible beneath the veil, and reassured the Marshal.

" 'Do not mistake my feelings for the King, I entreat you,' said the girl, and she lifted the obnoxious veil as if to let him read her sincerity in her beautiful eyes. 'I love no one—except him who wears my lilies!'

" Enraptured by this confession, the President made a movement to seize her hand. Instantly her manner underwent a provoking change; she drew herself up haughtily, and said, in freezing tones:

“‘Pardon, Monsieur, but you forget that I am your guest!’

“Abashed, in spite of his age and experience of the sex, the gallant Marshal shrank back, and answered respectfully :

“‘It is you who must pardon the enthusiasm which you naturally inspire. But tell me, is it necessary that we should always meet under these restraints? Will you not give me the opportunity of cultivating your friendship in some situation in which I shall not embarrass you by the expression of my sentiments?’

“The lady of the lilies became gracious again.

“‘But that is what I desire. It is for you to say whether you are willing to be seen entering the house of a conspirator.’

“‘I will enter any house which contains you, Mademoiselle,’ was the gallant response, ‘though it should be the castle of Henri V. himself!’

“Another smile flashed across the face of his companion.

“‘I believe I shall make a convert of you in the end,’ she observed. ‘Well, you will find me at the “Fleur de Lys.”’

“The President could not repress a gesture of dismay. She had named a hotel which was known to all Paris as the headquarters of the Royalist

party, the one at which the emissaries of the Comte de Chambord invariably lodged while on their visits to the capital. It was the place he might have expected her to designate, nevertheless the idea of having to enter it gave him a shock.

"But things had now gone too far for him to hesitate. He accepted a rendezvous for the next day, and the unknown made her adieus in a manner which completed his enchantment.

"The following morning France was surprised to find itself still a Republic. But the Ministers in office had by this time taken the alarm. Thoroughly convinced that the President had made up his mind to betray the Constitution, it did not occur to them to give him an opportunity of explaining his strange conduct. They therefore concerted their measures without consulting him, and he was left to walk blindly to his doom.

"Absorbed in his dreams of the bewitching stranger, whom he now began to see, as it were, within his reach, the infatuated President left the Elysée after dinner unattended, got into a passing fiacre, and boldly drove up to the very door of the 'Fleur de Lys.'

"It was evident that his arrival was expected, for before he had time to explain the object of his

visit, he found himself greeted by the obsequious proprietor, who eagerly led the way upstairs.

“ ‘ This way, M. le President, if you please. The lady has given orders that you were to be shown up directly you should arrive. She is on the first floor. What a distinction for my house ! ’

“ Thus babbling, he conducted the President to the door of an apartment on the floor in question, and flung open the door, with the announcement :

“ ‘ Monsieur le Maréchal MacMahon ! ’

“ Noticing with a momentary annoyance this dropping of his official rank, MacMahon walked in, and found himself in the presence of the young girl who had so strangely fascinated him. It was the first time they had met in the light, and he looked eagerly at her face. But the lady of the lilies was evidently not yet prepared to abandon her incognito, for she wore a little velvet mask, through which her eyes flashed provokingly. Her mouth and chin were the only other features visible, but they were enough to make it evident that the unknown had nothing to fear on the score of admiration from the complete revelation of her charms.

“ ‘ Welcome, M. le Maréchal ! ’ she cried, as he approached respectfully, and she again permitted him to salute her hand.

“‘But, Mademoiselle,’ remonstrated the Marshal, ‘surely it is not carrying out our compact for you to conceal your charming features like that!’

“She laughed, and shook her head.

“‘You must allow me to keep something as a bribe to offer you,’ she responded archly. ‘Remember that I am charged with a mission, and that you have not yet allowed me to overcome your enmity to my beloved lilies.’

“This was scarcely the reception he had anticipated. He began to see that he had been guilty of a serious blunder, and that the charming stranger evidently believed that she was in a fair way to seduce him from his allegiance to the Republic.

“‘Pardon me,’ he said gravely, ‘but I should do wrong if I permitted you to remain under any delusion. Patrick MacMahon, Duke of Magenta and Marshal of France, has nothing to restrain him from yielding to any conditions you may choose to impose; but the President of the French Republic cannot betray his oath.’

“The lady of the lilies made a gesture of rage.

“‘Why did you not tell me this in your garden?’ she cried passionately. ‘You ask me to let you visit me, you come here, I receive you alone, and after

you have compromised me beyond recall, you tell me that you have been mocking me!’

“‘Ah, Mademoiselle, do not speak so harshly! It is I who am compromised, on the contrary, by my presence in this house.’

“‘Not at all, Monsieur. If our meeting is not political you are not compromised at all—and I am compromised unless it is political.’

“It was impossible to escape from this cruel dilemma. The Marshal tore his moustache.

“‘Listen!’ he exclaimed. ‘In a year my term of office will have expired, and I shall be free to accept your commands.’

“The girl waved her hand impatiently.

“‘And when you are no longer President, what assistance can you render to us? Do you think it is merely the Duke of Magenta whom I have risked so much to——’

“She had got thus far when they were interrupted. A hasty knock came on the door, it was thrown open, and the host of the ‘Fleur de Lys’ rushed in.

“‘Pardon, your—Mademoiselle! Pardon, M. le President, but the Chief of Police has just arrived with a body of men to search the house, and they are coming upstairs!’

"The girl uttered a horrified cry. The President sprang to his feet. It was necessary to decide at once how he should act.

"‘A thousand pardons, Mademoiselle,’ he whispered in her ear, ‘but you see how it is. You are masked—the French police are gallant men,—you will allow me to save my honour?’

"She rose to her feet with the dignity of a queen, and, withdrawing her mask, looked MacMahon full in the face.

"‘Monsieur, I am the daughter of your sovereign.’

"‘The Princess ——!’ gasped the horrified Marshal.

"The Princess bowed, and quietly replaced her mask, just as the Chief of Police made his way into the room.

"The Chief had received his instructions two days before. A watch had been set upon the President, and it had been ascertained that he was holding secret communications with a mysterious woman who had been traced to the Royalist hotel. The sole question which the Ministry had to determine, before they proceeded to decisive measures, was whether this affair was in fact a political conspiracy or a mere intrigue. If it should be the former it would become necessary to publicly accuse the

President to the nation. If the latter, it was a very different thing, and it would be unnecessary to take any step, except perhaps to hint to the head of the State that it was undesirable to create a scandal at the Elysée. It was in order to satisfy the doubt in their minds that the Chief of Police had forced his way into the presence of the suspected President.

“It was of course his part to feign the utmost surprise at the meeting.

“‘Pardon, M. le President, but I hadn’t the least notion of finding you here!’ He glanced from the lowering brow of the fierce old Marshal to the shrinking form of the masked Princess. ‘It’s my duty to inform you, M. le President, that we believe this lady to be conspiring against the Republic.’

“The President looked at him. It was a frightful moment. If he expressed the least surprise, the honour of the Princess would be reflected on. Without permitting himself so much as a glance in her direction, he forced himself to say, in steady tones :

“‘I know it. The meeting between this lady and myself has concerned a question of politics.’

“The Chief bowed, and replied :

“‘In that case, M. le President, it’s my duty to report to the Minister of Justice that you are in communication with Royalist plotters.’

“‘Do your duty, Monsieur,’ returned MacMahon.

“And he followed the bewildered Chief out of the room, not staying to receive the thanks of the stricken girl, whose rash adventure had brought him to dishonour in his old age.

“The next day the resignation of President MacMahon was in the hands of the President of the Senate. The National Assembly was convened, and M. Grévy became President of France.”

The Ambassador took up his cue to resume the game, from which he had allowed himself to be distracted by his relation.

“And the Princess? Did she do nothing further?” I demanded incautiously.

His Excellency gave me a formidable look.

“That is one of the questions which you must not ask me,” he said sternly. “But here is a stroke which I should like you to watch.”

However, I have not found it impossible to make a guess at the mysterious source from which the Ambassador received his information.

The Ghost of the Winter Palace.

"CHECK!" proclaimed the Ambassador, with a threatening air, as he advanced the king's bishop to the one square I had omitted to guard. And he leant back in his seat, and smiled as if he considered the game already won.

I sat silently studying the position. But my opponent was not a man who played chess merely by moving the pieces on the board. He did not neglect the opportunity to distract my attention by conversation.

"The game of chess is an admirable one for men of my calling," he observed. "There is something truly instructive in the lessons which it conveys. Look, for instance, at the pawn, a piece which in its earlier career scarcely repays the trouble of capture, but to which, later on, even the queen may have to be sacrificed."

Unconsciously swayed, perhaps, by these remarks, I pushed forward a pawn between my king and the attacking piece. The Ambassador affected hardly to notice the move.

"Consider again how delicately the king's dignity is preserved," he went on, taking up a knight with elaborate carelessness, and setting it down dangerously near my pawn. "You advance upon him, you threaten him, you prepare for him the certainty of capture, but you never remove him from the board. How different from that barbarous game of draughts, in which kings are seen playing leapfrog with one another, like so many arabs of the street!"

"And the moral of this?" I suggested, as I vainly sought a way out of the difficulties in which my own king was involved.

"The moral is perhaps contained in a story which I would relate to you if I were not certain that you would refuse to believe it."

"But why?" I remonstrated. "Do you mean that it requires one to credit the existence of the supernatural, for example?"

A look of the deepest, the most pained, disgust overspread his Excellency's face.

"My friend, have I by any chance led you to

mistake me for a romancer, a poet? Rest assured that the facts I shall narrate to you are perfectly authentic, and are known to several persons in the inner circle of the Russian Court. I merely observe to you that my story is incredible; I do not say that it is absurd."

I resigned myself to the prospect of losing the game, and prepared to listen.

"The peoples of Western Europe do not understand Russia. It is, of course, of official Russia, the Russia of the Government, that I speak. During the whole time that I spent at our Embassy in St. Petersburg I could always perceive that I was a mere spectator, allowed to see no more of the true condition of affairs than it suited the purpose of the officials to display to me. Nevertheless, I flatter myself that I penetrated farther behind the scenes than they were aware.

"Outwardly, as everybody knows, the Government of this empire is an autocracy, the absolute power being vested in the hands of the Tsar. But the true Government of Russia is a secret society, the mysterious *Tchin*, which includes the whole of the official class, and in whose hands the Tsar is often no more than a puppet, powerless to exert his

own will. How burdensome this position is, may be estimated from the fact that only sixty years ago the Grand Duke Constantine deliberately refused to ascend the throne, which passed to his younger brother, the Emperor Nicholas I.

“Nor has the *Tchin* ever shrunk from asserting its supremacy by the most deplorable deeds. It is not the Nihilists who have set the fashion of assassinating Tsars. It is by the hands of their own ministers and courtiers that the monarchs of Russia have most often perished.

“It is necessary to bear these facts in mind in order to understand the incident I am about to relate.”

His Excellency stopped short. I had taken advantage of his political lecture to return to the game, in which I thought I had at length discovered a chance of escape from my threatened defeat. Sharply replying to my new effort by the capture of a rook which I had been obliged to expose, my opponent returned to his tale.

“It is not long since the attention of Europe was concentrated upon the death of Alexander III. Occurring as it did in a remote corner of his dominions, on the shores of the Black Sea, the accounts supplied by the newspaper correspondents,

who flocked like vultures to the spot, were as circumstantial as if each one had been admitted to the bedside of the dying monarch. The interest taken in this event was moreover enhanced by the romantic circumstances of the marriage of the present Tsar, Nicholas II.

“It was natural that the press, ever ready to give itself up to transports over those incidents in which royalty is concerned, should have lavished its powers of description upon the sudden summons to the Princess Alix of Hesse, her hurried and desolate journey across the frozen continent, her marriage with the Tsarewitch, celebrated, as it were, in the very death chamber, and then the gradual passing away of the Emperor, consoled in the happiness of his son, and fortified by all the rites of his Church.

“Shortly after these events the new Tsar returned to St. Petersburg with his bride, and took up his quarters in the Winter Palace. As is usual on the accession of a new monarch to the throne of Russia, hopes of a reform in the Government were extensively entertained. The progressive party talked with confidence of the mild and enlightened temper of the young Tsar, and augured much from the way in which he had formerly held himself aloof from the repressive measures of his

father's Ministers. Fools! As if the *Tchin* ever died, or its policy could be changed by the mere replacing of one royal figurehead by another!

"However, the result of all this was that the Nihilists relaxed their activity, and for a time there was absolute repose in the Russian capital. This repose was broken by a strange and disturbing rumour, which circulated, observe, merely among the exclusive circles of the Court. This rumour was to the effect that the Winter Palace had become haunted.

"It was stated that a ghost had been seen walking in one of the corridors at midnight. And there were those who asserted that the spirit in question was that of the dead Tsar.

"As you may imagine, such a report could not be long in attracting the attention of the secret police. The result was very soon apparent. The rumour itself had hardly been abroad a few days when it became silently understood in the society of the Russian capital that any allusion to it would be indiscreet, and might in fact subject the person making it to an unpleasant journey across the Ural Mountains.

"Never was the marvellous power of the police exerted with more crushing effect. The rumour died

out as swiftly and suddenly as it had arisen. It never penetrated beyond the inner circle of society, and, above all, never reached the ears of a single correspondent of any journal outside the Russian Empire. In the Russian press, of course, it was impossible for anything to pass the stern scrutiny of the censorship.

"It is for this reason that the public of Europe has never had even an inkling of a secret of which, outside the immediate Court circle, I am perhaps the sole possessor. That mere curiosity is not one of my failings, you have doubtless long ago observed. But in the interests of France I deemed it necessary to penetrate to the bottom of this extraordinary affair, and circumstances fortunately put it in my power to do so."

"Then you were in St. Petersburg at this time?" I remarked, in a tone midway between that of an assertion and a question.

"Did I not say so?" returned my friend, at the same time casting a glance over the chess-board to see whether I had replied to his last attack. "I was not there in any political capacity. The President had requested me to be the bearer of his personal congratulations to Nicholas II., and I prolonged my visit at the request of some of those

friends whom I had left behind me after my former residence in Russia."

I apologised for the interruption.

"But you are quite right to interrogate me," said the Ambassador blandly. "I should otherwise fear that my story did not interest you. As I was about to tell you, I was favoured in my investigation by the accident of my friendship with a very charming woman, the Princess Nestikoff, whose son, Prince Boris Nestikoff, was an Imperial Page, at that time on duty in the Winter Palace.

"I had formed the acquaintance of the Princess during my former official residence at the Embassy, and, though some years had elapsed since I had seen her, she received me with unabated friendliness on my return. Do not, I beg of you, allow yourself to put a false interpretation on the sentiments which subsisted between this lady and myself. The Princess, although left a widow at an early age, was a woman of the most delicate propriety, and my attentions to her partook of an almost paternal character.

"I chanced to be dining at her mansion on the Nevsky Prospect, on the day after the royal apparition was said to have made its appearance. We were enjoying a *tête-à-tête* after dinner, before

proceeding to a ball given that night at the Palace, when we were interrupted by the arrival of the young Boris, dressed in the imposing uniform of his office. He was quite a lad; indeed, when I had formerly known him he was a mere child, and had been accustomed to consider me in the light of a father.

“He entered the room in which we were seated more abruptly than was, perhaps, consistent with his filial respect, but the agitation under which he evidently laboured furnished some excuse.

“‘Mother,’ he cried out as soon as he was inside the door, ‘have you heard about the event of last night?’

“The Princess, with a gesture full of dignity, drew his attention to my presence.

“‘Boris!’ she exclaimed in a voice of reproof. ‘You have omitted to pay your respects to the Baron.’

“The young Prince blushed, and hastened to make his apologies, with that grace which he inherits from his parent.

“‘Say no more,’ I commanded; ‘it is easy to see that you have something of importance which you wish to communicate to your mother. With Madame’s permission, I will withdraw.’

“But this neither of them would hear of, both mother and son assuring me that there was no secret which they would not intrust to my discretion. I know not how it is”—pursued the Ambassador, extending his hands with an air of the most touching humility—“but there appears to be something in my character which inspires confidence in all those with whom I come in contact, and induces them to entrust me with their most delicate affairs, in which I have really no desire to participate.”

To such an observation it was obviously my duty to make one reply.

“The fact is, my dear Ambassador, that they do right. It is the strictness with which you guard these confidences of which you complain, that leads people to presume upon your amiability.”

Having said this, I took advantage of the interruption to make another desperate move on the chess-board. His Excellency, affecting not to notice what I had done, continued his revelations.

“It was then that my young friend proceeded to disclose the reason for his sudden appearance, and to astound us with the intelligence that he was himself the author of the rumour which had so perturbed the society of St. Petersburg. It will,

perhaps, save time if I repeat the substance of his story in my own words.

“You must know that the Winter Palace is one of the most colossal buildings in the world. Whole suites of apartments in it are never used even, but, in order to guard against all danger from the odious attempts of the Nihilists, a certain watch is maintained even in the most deserted quarters of the Palace.

“In those portions which are given up to the members of the Imperial household this duty is performed by sentinels, selected from the Imperial Guard, but in the neighbourhood of the Tsar’s own apartments the task of keeping guard is undertaken by the corps of Pages, of whom Boris was one.

“The Imperial suite, comprising eight principal rooms, is traversed throughout its length by a corridor which opens at one end on the first landing of the grand staircase, at which point two of the Pages are always on duty, day and night. At the other end the corridor is closed by a door which is always kept locked. On the further side of this door is a disused gallery, overlooking a garden in the rear of the Palace, and leading to a suite of rooms which has not been used for vrey many years. Nevertheless, in accordance with the strict rule

already mentioned, an Imperial Page has always been stationed in this gallery, to prevent the possibility of access to the locked door. It was at this spot that the young Prince had been on duty the preceding night.

“You will understand that the task of keeping guard at night in a deserted gallery was by no means a pleasant one, although no one Page was required to be there for more than three hours in the twenty-four. Moreover, a small room opening out of the gallery had been suitably furnished for the lads to relax themselves in during their solitary watch. In spite of this the duty had remained an unpopular one, so much so that the new Tsar, on taking up his quarters in the Palace, had earned the gratitude of the Pages’ corps by decreeing that from the hour of midnight to six in the morning the watch in the gallery should no longer be kept up.

“On the night in question Boris had repaired to the gallery to relieve his comrade at nine o’clock. He had simply to remain there till twelve, and then, as soon as the clock struck, he was at liberty to retire to his own quarters.

“It wanted very few minutes to the hour, and he was pacing the gallery, impatiently waiting for

his release, when he happened to stop opposite one of the windows, and look out into the grounds. It was a bright moonlight night, and every tree and shrub in the garden stood out with startling distinctness.

“He gazed idly, letting his eye roam over the expanse, when all at once his attention was arrested by a sight calculated to disturb anyone living in the alarmist atmosphere of the Russian Court. This was a tall and closely muffled figure, stealing along in the broken shadows of the trees, and making its way towards the nearest corner of the building.

“It was inevitable that the startled Page should at once connect this figure with the audacious intrigues of the dreaded secret society whose plots constitute a perpetual menace to the Imperial throne. His impression that he was watching a Nihilist emissary was confirmed when he saw him confidently approaching a door in the wall of the Palace, which was never used, and was supposed to be securely fastened against ingress and egress. This door, on the contrary, appeared to yield to a touch of the mysterious visitor, who disappeared from sight beneath its arch.

“Greatly disturbed by what he had seen, Boris kept his station in the gallery, considering what it

was advisable for him to do. The clock struck the hour for his release, but he paid no attention, absorbed in the thought of how to deal with the dangerous intruder."

"I should have thought it a simple matter to give the alarm," I ventured to remark.

His Excellency regarded me with a look in which pity and rebuke strove for the mastery.

"My friend, it is evident that you do not know Russia. To have given this alarm of which you speak might have been of the greatest danger to the Prince. The first person whom he approached with the news might have been a secret Nihilist, and have repaid such a communication with a knife-thrust. The whole Court is honeycombed.

"Even if Boris had succeeded in bringing about the arrest of the person whose movements had roused his attention, this might have turned out to be some high functionary, perhaps a General or a Chamberlain, who, after easily explaining away his mysterious proceedings, would have privately exerted his influence to have my young friend removed to Tobolsk or Tiflis. Believe me, in Russia, to be too zealous a courtier is hardly less dangerous than to be an actual conspirator, as you will perhaps realise when you have heard my story.

“While the Prince was still hesitating, he suddenly became aware of an unusual sound, coming from the far end of the gallery, where it ended in the disused apartments I have described. The sound appeared to be that of a door slowly turning on its hinges. In an instant Boris realised, or thought he realised, the situation. The personage of the garden had arrived in the vacant suite by means of a secret stairway from the garden door, and was now about to pass through into the gallery, with the object, no doubt, of making his way finally into the Imperial corridor.

“There was not a moment to lose. Unarmed, as he stood there, Boris fortunately recollected that in the little chamber, which I have spoken of as set apart for the use of the Pages, there were a pair of loaded pistols and a sword. He darted in through the open door of the room, snatched up the sword and one of the pistols, and had got back nearly as far as the threshold, when he was arrested, and his very limbs were rooted to the ground, by the sight of the figure which passed noiselessly along the corridor outside.

“Imagine a tall and sombre apparition, with long black robes sweeping the floor, the head shrouded in a deep cowl, from whose recesses

gleamed out, pallid and spectral in the light of the moon, the features of the dead monarch, Alexander III.!"

At this point his Excellency pretended to perceive for the first time the change which had taken place in the position of the chessmen.

"Ah! You have moved your king," he exclaimed, and promptly shifted his attacking bishop so as to give me a fresh check. Then he returned to the narrative.

"A moment passed. The first shock of terror over, the awe-struck Page ventured to the door of the chamber and glanced out into the gallery. The ghost had disappeared, as suddenly and as mysteriously as it had come."

"Were there no other rooms off the gallery into which it might have passed?" I demanded, not to appear too credulous.

"There were none. The only other door in this part of the gallery was that which I have already described as closing off the Imperial corridor.

"Be sure that I put the same question myself when my young friend told me the story. His manner convinced me that he was not lying, and that he really believed himself to have seen the spectre he described.

“As you know, I am not a believer in the supernatural. I sought to shake the boy’s superstitious state of mind.

“‘What you saw was some illusion, some trick of the imagination,’ I said to him.

“He shook his head mournfully.

“‘I am as certain of what I saw as if it were before me now,’ he replied. ‘My mother will tell you that I am not subject to idle fancies.’

“The Princess confirmed this statement with a nod of her head.

“‘I am sure that my son must have seen something like what he describes,’ she said to me, ‘though it is evident to me that it must have been some living person, masquerading as the ghost of the Tsar. The question is for what purpose such a disguise could have been assumed, and on this point I confess I feel uneasy. What do you say, my friend?’

“I shook my head.

“‘I fear that the first suspicions of Boris were correct,’ I replied, ‘and that the enemies of his Majesty have resumed their infernal schemes. It appears that they have obtained a key to the garden door, and who knows that they have not secured another to the door of the Imperial apartments,

that door from which the guard was to have been removed last night for the first time. Surely it is not by a mere coincidence that this strange figure presents itself in the corridor immediately after midnight, that is to say, at the hour when the conspirators had every reason to expect that the Page on guard would have just quitted his post ?’

“Both mother and son appeared struck by this view of the circumstances. But Boris was by no means prepared to abandon his belief in the supernatural character of what he had seen.

“‘I can understand that it is difficult for my mother and you to share my opinion,’ he remarked, ‘but I cannot believe that any conspirator could have succeeded in assuming so close a resemblance to Alexander III., with whose features I was so well acquainted. Besides, if your theory were correct, and he had disappeared through the door into the Imperial corridor, why is it that nothing has happened, and that no one seems to have seen or heard anything of the intrusion ?’

“It was, of course, difficult to answer this objection, but I reiterated my determination to take a common-sense view of the occurrence.

“‘It may very well be that this was merely a first visit,’ I added, ‘a reconnaissance, to discover

the nature of the ground, before introducing some explosive machine or other, and the villain may easily have kept himself out of sight for a few minutes. Doubtless he returned immediately, only you had then left the gallery.

“‘But there is an easy way of putting the matter to the proof. If I am right in my suspicions this creature, whoever he may be, will infallibly return at the same hour another night. To-night, on account of the presence of everybody at this ball, will be his most favourable opportunity, as he may confidently expect to find the Imperial suite deserted. I propose to you that we repair to this little room of yours together, at the moment when the Page who has replaced you to-night comes off duty, and if this mysterious personage again presents himself, I will compel him to disclose his identity.’

“Boris welcomed this idea. I could see that he was secretly ashamed of the ridicule which attached to him for his story of ghost-seeing, and that he was anxious to re-establish his character. The Princess was good enough to express her opinion of my courage and devotion in terms which it would not become me to repeat to you. In the end we arrived at an understanding, and departed to the Palace together.

“Throughout the progress of the ball—during which the Grand Duchess Olga condescended to become my partner in a waltz—I kept my eyes and ears open, and observed that Boris’ adventure of the night before was a general topic of conversation. The more highly-placed officials were evidently in a conspiracy to treat it as a mere boyish delusion, but among the general body of the guests I found there were not a few who shared my suspicions. I ventured to approach the Tsar’s confidential Chamberlain at an interval between the dances, and to sound him delicately on the subject. His reply was characteristic of his nation and Government.

“‘My dear Baron, he said sharply, ‘there is nothing so detestable as Court gossip. It is most annoying to his Majesty to have his late father’s name connected with the wanderings of a moon-struck boy. Take my advice, and dismiss the affair from your mind.’

“His manner convinced me that more importance was attached to the incident than he pretended. However, I feigned to be perfectly satisfied, and returned to the Grand Duchess, who was anxious to know whether her robe would have been approved in Paris. But the hour agreed on for the rendezvous was approaching, and I had to make the best

excuse I could think of to tear myself away from the Imperial lady. You are, of course, familiar with her portraits?"

I was obliged to confess my ignorance of the features of the Grand Duchess Olga, of whom I had never previously heard, though, of course, I did not dare to say this.

The Ambassador glanced at the chess-board for a moment, as if meditating a move, before he resumed.

"Ah! Well, I will not attempt to describe her to you. After all, it is not mere beauty of face which attracts one in a woman of that rank. It is the charm of manner, the graciousness, one ought perhaps to say the tenderness—but I am keeping you waiting for the sequel of my adventure.

"Boris met me, as we had arranged, in a small passage leading out of the anteroom, and we made our way unobserved up a back staircase into the famous haunted gallery. The Page on duty was just leaving as we arrived. He grinned when he saw Boris, who explained to him that he had brought me to see the Pages' room. Fortunately the other lad was impatient to get down and take part in the dancing. No sooner had the great clock of the Palace commenced to boom forth the strokes of

midnight than he hastily departed, and Boris and I were left in possession of the gallery.

“I had come armed with my revolver, which I had loaded carefully with my own hands. I took advantage of the interval, while we were waiting for the approach of the apparition, to make my companion provide himself with a similar weapon out of the Pages’ room. Lest our presence in the gallery should serve as a warning to the mysterious visitor, and prevent his approach, we concealed ourselves in this room, which was plunged in profound darkness. We sat facing the door, which we had left open, so as to perceive the passage of anyone who should come along the gallery.

“Half an hour passed in this way, without anything occurring. I began to grow impatient, and to accuse Boris in my own mind of having invented some fable. But when I hinted this to him he became so indignant that I was compelled, in spite of myself, to believe that the boy had really some grounds for his story.

‘At last, tired of this useless performance, I rose from my seat and moved cautiously out into the gallery. I glanced up and down it without perceiving anything in the least resembling the

figure of the previous night. All at once, however, I did see something which caused my heart to give a great bound. Looking at the far end of the gallery, where the deserted apartments of which Boris had told me were situated, I distinctly perceived a faint glow of light along the floor.

“Instantly I turned to the threshold of the room in which I had left the young Prince, and beckoned to him to come out into the gallery. He saw by my manner that I had made some important discovery, and obeyed my gesture with shaking limbs. No sooner had he emerged from the doorway, and followed with his eyes the direction in which I pointed, than he gave a great gasp of terror.

“‘The deserted suite!’ he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper. ‘There has never been a light there in all the years that I have known this part of the Palace!’

“I nodded my head.

“‘It is what I expected you to tell me,’ I whispered back. ‘But do not give way to nervousness. You must see that this confirms my theory of the circumstances which we are about to investigate. A spirit, such as you were deceived into thinking you saw, would not need a light for its

purposes. It is evident that we are on the track of a more real and dangerous secret. The person or persons who are engaged in it have obtained possession of these vacant rooms, in which they are probably now engaged in developing their schemes.'

"The young Prince no longer combated the soundness of my conclusions.

"'But what is to be done?' he murmured. 'Shall I summon the guards, or inform Velovitch, of the secret police?'

"I considered well before answering. One of those subtle intuitions which are born of a long experience in secret politics warned me that I stood on the threshold of some discovery of no ordinary kind, one which I might perhaps regret having to share with the secret police, and which, for many reasons, it might be better that Boris himself should not be made acquainted with.

"'No,' I said at last, 'we have no right to act precipitately. Whatever we may suspect, we as yet know nothing that would warrant us in communicating with the authorities. It is a duty which I feel that I owe to myself and to you to ascertain the real nature of this mystery on which we have stumbled. You are a young man, and, moreover, a

Russian, and therefore I do not ask you to expose yourself to peril in the matter. As the envoy of a foreign Power, my person is inviolable, and I can therefore afford to risk an indiscretion.

“‘Remain here, I beg of you, while I go forward and effect an entrance into the apartment from which that light proceeds. Should I not return by the end of fifteen minutes, I authorise you to go to M. Velovitch and inform him of the affair.’

“The lad was at first disposed to be indignant at my thus proposing to exclude him from the perils of the enterprise. But by dint of an appeal to the authority of his beloved mother, I succeeded at length in winning his consent to the plan I had suggested. He then consulted his watch so as to measure the lapse of the fifteen minutes, and I advanced with noiseless steps down the gallery.

“The light I had observed streamed out under an ancient and massive door, set in a deep stone arch at the extreme end of the passage. My first impulse was to knock at this door, but as I got close to it another idea suggested itself to me. It was evidently through this door that the personage beheld by Boris had made his approach the night before, and it was just possible that he might have omitted to lock the door on his return.

"I laid my fingers on the oaken handle, and turned it with infinite delicacy and slowness. As soon as it ceased to revolve under the pressure of my hand, I gave a gentle push to the door. To my delight it yielded. I gave another push, equally slight, and the door responded with a horrible grating sound. Further concealment was useless; I boldly flung the door open, and stepped through.

"The first glance was sufficient to tell me that I had merely gained an ante-chamber, forming a sort of general approach to the various rooms of which the suite was composed. This anteroom was deserted, but immediately on the right lay a room of which the door was partly open, and from which proceeded the light that had filtered out into the gallery. Hastily closing the outer door behind me, I made two steps into this inner room.

"Never shall I forget the thrill, the absolute stupor of amazement, which overcame me at what I beheld. There, half-risen from the chair on which he had doubtless been seated when aroused by the creaking of the door, I saw the very figure which Boris had described to me, the tall form, the dark robes, and, above all, the pale and terrifying countenance of the monarch whose death had cast half Europe into mourning."

The Ambassador seemed to think this a suitable moment for returning to the consideration of the game, in which it was again his turn to move.

"Let me beg of you to continue," I exclaimed, unable to restrain my impatience. "I will resign."

"By no means," returned his Excellency with indulgence ; "you have several moves to make before I checkmate you. But I will, if you prefer it, conclude my adventure before I devote myself to your overthrow.

"What exclamation I uttered when I first caught sight of this startling apparition I do not recollect. But when the personage before me thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out a revolver, it was impossible for me to doubt that I was dealing with a man of flesh and blood. Like lightning I produced my own weapon, which I levelled at his breast, at the same time exclaiming :

"'Hold! I am the envoy of France! In the name of the Tsar, who are you?'

"He lowered his revolver, took a steady look at my features which he no doubt began to recognise, and replied in mournful tones :

"'*I am Alexander III.*'

"At the same time he sank down again into his

chair, while my pistol dropped from my hand, and I had to cling to a table for support.

“‘Sire!’ was all I could gasp out. ‘But—but—pardon this intrusion, I imagined your Majesty to be——’

“‘Dead? Yes, I know it,’ he responded, still in the same melancholy voice. ‘But sit down. Since you are here, and chance or fate has put you into possession of my secret, you had better know all. Sit down, M. le Baron, I am no longer an emperor.’

“I obeyed, still struggling with my astonishment.

“‘First of all tell me by what means you have penetrated to my hiding-place, in which I imagined myself secure from all mankind,’ said the ex-Tsai.

“In as few words as possible I related to his Majesty the incidents which I have been telling you. He listened with deep attention.

“‘Ah, well, Baron, I remember you of old,’ he remarked, with a faint smile, when I had finished. ‘You always had the reputation for worming out more secrets than any other man in Europe, and I ought to have foreseen that it would be necessary to take you into my confidence. It is fortunate that you have come alone, and that your rigid honour is not less celebrated than your dexterity.’

"I bowed deeply at these compliments. His Majesty continued:

"The only return I can make to you for a fidelity of which I assure myself beforehand, is to explain to you my reasons for what must seem to you an extraordinary state of things. The fate of my father, Alexander II., slain by a bomb in the streets of St. Petersburg, is, of course, familiar to you. But it is not easy for you to realise the effect produced by that fearful event on my mind.

"The perils of a battlefield may be faced by a brave man, in the enthusiasm which battle calls forth. But the perpetual secret peril which dogs one day after day and year after year, and never slackens for a single moment,—that is a very different thing.

"I am not ashamed to confess to you, Baron, that from the moment I ascended the bloody throne of Russia, my life was one long haunting agony. Never once did I have one hour of perfect freedom from care. And I could do nothing. I was helpless, a martyr bound to the stake of my autocracy. They prated to me of reforms. You are a man who knows Russia as few men know it, and you can tell me whether the first step in the direction of reform would not have drawn down on my head the

vengeance of men beside whom the Nihilists are bungling apprentices?'

"I could only bow my acquiescence in this sorrowful truth.

"'For years,' proceeded Alexander, 'I had secretly set my heart on abdicating. I only waited till my son Nicholas was of an age to face the dangers and difficulties of his task. But by the time that the hour of release drew near, I had learned that abdication would earn me no respite from the hatred with which I was pursued.

"'I had acquired the knowledge that there were those who had sworn that, on the throne or off it, I should not be allowed to die a natural death. To give up my Imperial state would simply be surrendering my safeguards, without for a moment disarming the enmity of those who sought my life. It was these considerations which ultimately forced me to entertain the idea of a deception which I lament, but to which I owe the first peaceful days I have spent for twelve years.

"'I resolved, as you have gathered by this time, to go solemnly through the forms of death and burial, and thus acquire the right to retire to some unsuspected retreat, where I might pass the remainder of my days, shielded from the vengeance

of my relentless pursuers. In order to carry out this design it was necessary that I should take five persons into my confidence, my wife, my son, two physicians of whose personal loyalty and friendship I had had many proofs, and an old trusted body-servant on whom was cast the duty of arranging for my future privacy, and attending on me in it. He is at this moment away procuring supplies of food.

“‘The deception was carried out with a success which was doubtless due to the very boldness of the design. The world, stupefied in its narrow routine, is never willing to believe in the existence of anything unfamiliar to its everyday experience. Your young friend, the Page of whom you have spoken, was more ready to credit that he had seen a spirit, than that Alexander III. could still be in the flesh. Your ingenuity will, I feel sure, easily discover some means of allaying any suspicions he may have formed since.’

“‘These words of his Majesty reminded me that Boris was impatiently awaiting my re-appearance. I glanced at my watch. Twelve minutes had already passed.

“‘I must leave you now, sire,’ I exclaimed, rising hastily, ‘or my comrade will be seeking for me. Rest assured that I shall not prove unworthy

of the trust you have deigned to repose in me. But I venture to advise your Majesty to discontinue your visits to your son's apartments for the present. Should you desire to lay your commands upon me at any time, I shall be found at the French Embassy.'

"With these words I took a respectful but hurried leave of the ex-Tsar, who bade me a cordial farewell.

"I rejoined Boris just as he was about to set off and give the alarm, and was successful in putting a stop to any questions on his part by a few judicious words.

"'I am forbidden to tell you what I have discovered,' I said, with a slightly jocular air, 'but I may tell you in confidence that I think you must have mistaken the son for the father. Next time you intercept his Majesty on a midnight excursion, you will perhaps be able to assign reasons of a less mysterious character for his visits to the very charming bachelor apartment which I have just explored.'

"The young Prince accepted this explanation readily enough, and its effect was confirmed the next day by the issue of an order discontinuing the guard in the gallery altogether. As I have told you,

all trace of the incident quickly disappeared from the society of St. Petersburg. And at the end of a few weeks the unlucky Page received the honour of a lieutenant's commission in a regiment which happened to form part of the garrison of Vladivostock on the coast of the Pacific."

His Excellency stopped, glanced at the board, and made the move which I had been dreading for some time :

"Checkmate ! "

"But surely," I remonstrated as the Ambassador rose from his chair and stretched himself, "you heard something more of this strange business ? "

His face instantly became grave.

"There is nothing more which I feel at liberty to mention, even to you. Had his Majesty been still residing at the Winter Palace, I should not have told you the story. He honoured me so far as to avail himself of my services in providing himself with an asylum in which his enemies are not likely to reach him, and which is, indeed, outside the borders of the Russian empire. But what do you say ? Will you play me another game, and let me try M. Lasker's celebrated attack ? "

The Tomb in the Vatican.

IT is a statement which you will constantly see repeated in the vulgar press," said the Ambassador with marked intonation, "that Monaco is the smallest State in Europe. It is nothing of the kind."

We were driving in his Excellency's carriage in the Bois de Boulogne, and had just lifted our hats to the future daughter-in-law of the Prince.

"Indeed!" I answered with some interest. "Do you mean that San Marino is smaller? or perhaps Andorra?"

"I mean neither," he returned with complacency. "The smallest State in Europe at present is the Vatican."

"The Vatican! But that is an abode—a building!"

"Precisely. And it is for that reason that it is smaller than any of those others you have

named." And the Ambassador lay back in his corner of the carriage, enjoying my astonishment.

"You are a Protestant," he resumed presently, "and therefore of course ignorant of matters which are of vital interest to two-thirds of Europe. Nevertheless you must surely be aware that the Holy Father, under the Italian law of Papal Guarantees, retains his rank as a Sovereign, and that the inviolability of the Vatican is expressly recognised. No official of the Italian Government can enter its doors for any conceivable purpose without the Pope's permission. It is not considered part of the Italian territory; in other words it is an independent State, within whose limits Leo XIII. is as absolute as the Tsar of Russia."

"But this is a burlesque," I retorted. "To speak of Sovereignty in such circumstances is absurd."

The Ambassador cast at me a glance of crushing rebuke.

"You permit yourself to talk stupidly, my friend," he answered. "Within his narrow dominions the Sovereignty of the Pontiff is a very real one. I, who speak to you, should know, for I have had the honour to represent France at the Court of his late Holiness, Pius IX."

As the Ambassador said this, I perceived by the

expression of his face that he had a story to which he expected me to listen.

"Doubtless you had some interesting experiences in that capacity?" I suggested.

"I had one at least which would cause surprise to the civilised world were it made public," he responded. "But you shall hear for yourself."

By this time we had passed the more crowded part of the Bois, and his Excellency was able to proceed with little interruption.

"The Catholic powers of Europe, it is well known, are represented at the Papal Court by ambassadors, who are entirely distinct from those accredited to the Quirinal. France, although governed by freethinkers, has continued to observe this custom, which is due to her position as protector of the Latin Christians in the East; and I assure you that during my mission to the Vatican I was a most devout Catholic, and regularly attended mass."

He pronounced these words with a Voltairean grimace, as though anxious to clear himself from the suspicion which attaches to him in some quarters of being less a freethinker than he pretends.

"It was my good fortune to be honoured with the particular confidence of Pio Nono, for it is by

that name that Pius IX. was universally known in his lifetime. He was a remarkable Pope. Believe me, no one but a very great man could have maintained the prestige of the Papacy unshaken as he did through the misfortunes which afflicted it during his long reign. The worst thing that his enemies could find to say against him was that he had formerly been a Liberal and, as they pretended, a Freemason. But this slander did not prevent his dealing at the Order some of the most crushing blows which it has received, and for my part I was most careful never to let his Holiness suspect that I had been connected with that body.

“It has been said that Pio Nono suffered from illusions—that he exaggerated the importance of his Temporal Power. It is true that he could not forget that he was a reigning Sovereign who had been unjustly stripped of his dominions by brigands in the service of Piedmont. But in the very tenacity with which he asserted his rights there was something admirable, and which provoked respect. Nevertheless, on one occasion—but you are going to accuse me of having forgotten my story. Is it not so?”

“Not in the least, my dear Ambassador. You ravish me by your historical reminiscences. Besides,

the character of Pius IX. is one for which I have always felt a true esteem."

"It is well. I am going to commence.

"The only thing which embarrassed me in Rome was the necessity which I was under, in my character of ambassador to the Holy See, of strictly avoiding all intercourse with the Court of King Victor Emanuel. The severe estrangement which prevailed between the Papacy and the Kingdom of Italy has recently been illustrated by the adventure of the poor King of Portugal, who found himself obliged to quit Rome without visiting either the Pope or the King, as he could not show respect to one without giving umbrage to the other.

"In spite of these restraints I formed the acquaintance in private of several persons who were in touch with the Quirinal. Among these persons was a certain Count Gulielmo Vescaro.

Vescaro was a man who appeared to be of good family, and he was sufficiently polite and well-informed to be an agreeable companion. He was also moderately well off for an Italian, where the people are poorer than anywhere else in the world, except in Athens. But in spite of these advantages, I perceived before very long that he was unpopular. You know how difficult it is for a foreigner to appre-

ciate those shades which are of such importance in society. To me the Count appeared plausible enough, and I could learn nothing positive against him, except that he drew a pension from the Royal Government, about the source of which there appeared to be some mystery. I therefore found no reason for dropping his acquaintance, especially as he possessed a very charming wife who showed me much kindness.

“One taste Vescaro and I possessed in common, this was a passion for gems of all kinds, but especially cameos and intaglios. The members of the Italian nobility are distinguished for their interest in curiosities of this sort. The heirs of two thousand years of civilisation, they find the same fascination in a rare medal or antique that our young men find in a new dancer at the theatres, or that you English do in a bulldog or a prize fight.

“It was inevitable that I should take advantage of my mission, to study the famous collections of the Vatican. There is no other museum in Europe to be compared with this of the Popes, in which they have been accumulating treasures for centuries, and which is continually being added to at the present day. I spent many hours every week in exploring its recesses, and in conversing with

Monsignor Perratti, a very learned Jesuit, who had the superintendence of the department of antiquities.

“On several occasions I happened to meet my friend the Count as I was on my way to the Museum, and pressed him to accompany me. But he invariably declined.

“‘I have reasons, which I do not care to speak about, for not wishing to be seen in the Vatican,’ he said to me on one of these occasions, when I had permitted myself to be rather importunate. ‘During the period before the Holy Father was deprived of the Temporal Power, I served in the Papal troops, and his Holiness has perhaps resented my subsequent adhesion to the House of Savoy. At all events I am not willing to expose myself to the risk of being told that my presence in the Vatican is considered an intrusion.’

“I could not but respect Vescaro for his delicacy, though it seemed to me misplaced, as the Museum of the Vatican was quite a public place, to which the whole world was in the habit of coming. In my next conversation with Monsignor Perratti I referred to the subject.

“‘I have a friend who is as strongly interested in these things as myself,’ I said—we had just been examining a cabinet of very beautiful intaglios,—

‘and who is, besides, far more of a connoisseur. Unfortunately he suffers from a morbid fear that you might resent his coming here, on account of political reasons.’

“The Jesuit gave a benevolent smile.

“‘Surely you know us better than that, Signor. We poor priests are not so uncharitable. But what is the name of your friend?’

“‘Count Gulielmo Vescaro.’

“‘Ah!’ He gave a perceptible start, and regarded me curiously for a moment. ‘Do you know anything about this gentleman?’ was all he said.

“‘Nothing except what he has told me, that is to say, that he formerly held a commission under the Holy Father.’

“‘True, I remember the name. But the Count is entirely mistaken. He is perfectly at liberty to come here whenever he pleases.’

“I thanked the good father for his permission, which I did not fail to communicate to Vescaro the next time I was in his house.

“He appeared somewhat surprised at it.

“‘Thank you for your kind intentions,’ he said stiffly, ‘but all the same I do not propose to avail myself of Monsignor Perratti’s permission. At least I will think it over.’

“There was nothing more to be done, and I did not refer to the subject again. Monsignor Perratti was good enough to ask me, when he found me in the museum a few days after, why my friend had not come with me, but I put him off with an excuse.

“Some weeks had passed, and I had forgotten all about the incident, when, as I entered the museum one afternoon, I was met by the worthy Jesuit in a state of great excitement.

“‘Ah, Excellency!’ he exclaimed, as soon as he caught sight of me, ‘I have something to tell you which will give you the greatest delight. A new treasure has just arrived; it is a collection of ancient seals, some of them most exquisitely engraved, which Cardinal Salvatierra has presented to the Pope. You must positively come and see them at once.’

“Charmed by this intelligence, I hastened to place myself at his disposal. He led me a long way into a part of the building where I had never before penetrated. After going through innumerable rooms, all filled with valuable curiosities of different kinds, we arrived at last in a long deserted gallery with bare walls, to which light was admitted by means of a skylight overhead. The obscurity of the gallery

was further relieved by the entire end wall being made a mirror, which reflected back the light from the roof. All down this gallery were ranged tables, supporting the cases with glass lids usually seen in museums, and in these cases were displayed sets of coins and other interesting objects.

“But my conductor would not let me pause to examine them. At the far end of the gallery—whose apparent length was increased by the mirror I have described—I perceived a man standing in front of one of the cases, the contents of which he appeared to be setting in order.

“‘It is the Cardinal himself!’ exclaimed Monsignor Perratti. ‘We are fortunate. He is just arranging the seals.’

“His Eminence, with whom I was already acquainted, turned round to greet me as I came up, and kindly offered to show me his famous collection. But how can I describe these things to you? They were indeed priceless. One in particular, an onyx engraved with the head of Vespasian, was one of those objects for the sake of which one commits murders!”

“But my dear Ambassador! You terrify me! I begin to fear a tragedy.”

“It is nothing. You do not understand the

feelings of a connoisseur. Figure to yourself how it would be if you were to behold some bulldog of unexampled ferocity, which you despaired of ever possessing."

I smiled, but said nothing. To have attempted to undeceive him as to my passion for bulldogs would have been to forfeit his friendship for ever; and, besides, he would not have believed me.

The Ambassador continued:

"I thought I should never have torn myself away from the gallery. But the Cardinal, who was all goodness, promised to meet me there again, and to renew his lecture on these fascinating gems. At the same time Monsignor Perratti remarked:

"‘You ought really to bring that poor Count of yours to inspect these seals. Without doubt they would interest him as much as they do you.’

"‘The Count; who is that?’ inquired Salvatierra, turning to me. I explained the allusion. His Eminence at once became interested.

"‘I remember Count Vescaro very well indeed,’ he said in a tone of marked cordiality. ‘He is indeed a man to whom these gems ought to be shown. There is no more accomplished judge of such things in Rome. I should like you to assure

him that such is my opinion, and that I shall feel it a particular favour if he will honour my little collection with a visit.'

" 'I will give him your kind message, Cardinal,' I replied. 'Without doubt it will remove his last scruples.'

" 'Very good ; I shall expect to see him here within the next few days.'

"I bowed and took my leave, feeling, perhaps, a little chagrin at the importance which appeared to be attached to Vescaro's opinion.

"However, I found myself at his house that night, and just before I came away the Count himself joined us——"

"Us !" I incautiously ejaculated. "But then ——"

"Joined the Countess and myself," pursued his Excellency sharply. "I faithfully repeated the flattering messages with which I had been charged by Cardinal Salvatierra. Vescaro listened with a certain preoccupation.

" 'Salvatierra ?' he murmured, thoughtfully. 'That is not a name which I remember.'

" 'The Cardinal did not say that you were known to him personally, but merely that he had heard of your reputation,' I explained.

“‘Yes, but that was not what I was thinking of. You have not told me what the seals were like.’

“I saw that he was hesitating, and at once commenced an eloquent description of the Cardinal’s treasures. When I came to the onyx of Vespasian, I could see that he was moved. All men have their fatal weakness; Vescaro’s was the mania of a connoisseur of antiques. By this time I had learned something of his base character from his injured wife. He was unworthy of that noble woman, whom he would have sold for the worst of Salvatierra’s seals.”

The Ambassador spoke with real indignation. It was in a calmer tone that he continued :

“Vescaro ended by deciding to go and see the gems. But he made it a stipulation that I should go with him, and he attached a strange importance to this condition which I could not understand.

“A day or two after he called at the Embassy, as had been arranged, for me to take him to the museum. It so happened that I was overwhelmed with business at the moment, owing to a quantity of correspondence which had just arrived from the Propaganda, bearing, I think, on the appointment of a new bishop at Damascus. I therefore excused myself to Vescaro, but urged him to go without me.

"He darted at me a strange look.

"'No, Signor Ambassador, I do not enter the Vatican except in your company.'

"'But why, then? Surely these scruples need not affect you any longer after the Cardinal's invitation?'

"'My reasons for not wishing to cross the threshold of the Vatican, except on your arm, have been strengthened by the Cardinal's invitation. But it is enough that you are busy. Let us put off our appointment to another day. The Countess desired me to ask if she might hope for the pleasure of seeing you this evening?'

"At these mysterious words I was provoked into abandoning the affairs of the bishop of Damascus.

"'I will come with you now, Count,' I said, getting up. 'After all, my other business can wait. I am anxious to convince you how different your reception will be from what you expect.'

"He shrugged his shoulders without replying, and we set forth together.

"On the threshold of the Vatican he literally carried out his stipulation of taking my arm, and I could even feel his own trembling as we passed before the Swiss guard who were on duty at the entrance. More than ever astonished at these fears,

I drew him on through the building towards the distant quarter in which the gallery was situated.

“‘Where are you taking me?’ he demanded in a tone of uneasiness, after we had crossed at least a dozen saloons and corridors.

“‘To the gallery in which the seals have been placed, of course,’ I returned, irritated at so much caution. ‘Did you not wish to see them?’

“The Count made no answer, except to mutter a curse on the gallery for being in such an inaccessible spot.

“However, we reached it at length, and were fortunate enough to find Salvatierra there, with a Dominican friar, who held a delicate camel’s-hair brush in his hand, and appeared to be assisting the Cardinal in dusting his gems.

“I at once presented Vescaro to his Eminence, who received him with well-bred ease. Vescaro was obliged to quit his hold of my arm to return the Cardinal’s bow, but he seemed to do so with decided reluctance; and I observed him subjecting the Dominican to a scrutiny of which the good father appeared to be perfectly unconscious.

“But no sooner had Salvatierra led the way to his case than Vescaro’s uneasiness disappeared in an overmastering transport of admiration. He bent

over the table, he lifted each of the seals separately and examined it with the minutest care. I, who had seen them before, took advantage of his absorption to glance at some of the other objects in the gallery. There was a large Egyptian statue placed against the wall opposite, which I had not observed on my last visit, and I also noticed a curious little Buddhist idol fixed on a bracket further down towards the end of the gallery.

“While I was idly gazing at these things, I heard an exclamation from Vescaro.

“‘But, your Eminence, this is a forgery!’

“I looked and saw him holding up to the light the famous Vespasian onyx. Salvatierra almost snatched it from him.

“‘Never! What you say is impossible!’ he exclaimed. ‘Come this way; there is more light.’

“And he moved down the gallery towards the mirror, followed by the excited Vescaro and the Dominican.

“At this moment I felt a soft touch on my arm. I turned round with a start, and perceived Monsignor Perratti, who had come up so noiselessly that I had not heard his footsteps.

“‘My dear Ambassador, I have made a discovery which I have been waiting to show you for days,’ he

murmured in a low voice. 'Come this way. It is a great secret. It is an illuminated French manuscript of the eleventh century, and I believe the only one in existence.'

"While he was making these observations he had drawn me to a cabinet standing in an alcove off the gallery. This cabinet he unlocked with feverish haste, and produced the manuscript. It appeared to be as great a treasure as he supposed, but I am no judge of such things, and I was obliged to confess my ignorance.

"He pretended not to believe me at first, and expressed great disappointment when he found I was really unable to decipher it for him. At last he reluctantly put the manuscript away again, and I turned round to look for my companion.

"To my surprise, he was not to be seen. The Dominican was there in front of the case of seals, using his little brush, and the Cardinal was advancing towards me with a vexed look upon his face.

"'I cannot think how your friend can believe my onyx to be a forgery,' he said. 'I suppose it will be perfectly safe in his hands?'

"'What does your Eminence mean?' I exclaimed. 'Where is Vescaro?'

"Salvatierra gave a stare of surprise.

“‘Did you not see him go away? Tell me, was it by any chance imprudent to entrust him with my Vespasian seal?’

“‘Your Eminence has entrusted him with the onyx! That man!’

“I could say no more. The Cardinal’s face reproached me too strongly for not having warned him against the Count. I parted from them hurriedly, left the museum, and went straight to Vescaro’s address.

“I cannot say that I was surprised to find that he had not returned. I waited for him till the hour grew so late that I feared to compromise the Countess, and then came away, unable to disguise from myself the suspicions which were in my mind.

“The next day nothing was heard of Vescaro. The affair began to get wind, and I was dismayed to find how easily every one assumed that he had been guilty of embezzling the Cardinal’s priceless gem. The Countess sent for me a dozen times in the day; but the consolations I invented for her were insincere; I had a presentiment that we should not see the Count again.

“On the second day a new and startling development occurred. A nephew of Vescaro, whom I had scarcely heard of, arrived at the house where I was

closeted with the Countess, endeavouring to soothe her grief, and broke in upon us with an insolent air.

“He produced a holograph will in the Count’s handwriting, dated the day after his disappearance, which he proceeded to read to us. It was the most audacious document which it is possible to conceive. After announcing that he was fully aware that he was about to die, Vescaro went on to leave the whole of his disposable property to this nephew. He then maliciously bequeathed twenty lire to his widow to purchase a wedding ring in case she should wish to make a fresh marriage, and immediately after he added these words :

“‘To his Excellency, the French Ambassador to the Vatican, I give twenty lire to purchase an onyx seal ring, to wear in memory of the friend to whom he showed so much fidelity.’

‘I gnashed my teeth as I listened to this insulting bequest, which evidently cast upon me a suspicion of the most horrible kind.

“‘Silence, Signor!’ I cried out. ‘I command you to leave this house!’

“Brantiano, the nephew, looked at me with an infamous leer.

“‘Pardon, Excellency, but I think you are not yet entitled to speak in my aunt’s name.’

“ ‘Signor! You shall answer for this! I will waive my ambassadorial privilege, and fight you.’

“ ‘For an instant he cowed beneath my anger. Then he muttered :

“ ‘Before I meet you, Excellency, I have to ascertain the circumstances of my uncle’s death.’

“ ‘And not daring to face me any longer, he slunk away, leaving me to the task of pacifying the distracted Countess.

“ ‘The next day I learnt that the matter was in the hands of the police, who no longer believed that Vescaro had disappeared of his own accord, but entertained the idea that he had been secretly murdered. A strict investigation was made. Cardinal Salvatierra and the Dominican volunteered their evidence as to the circumstances under which the missing man had left the Vatican, and I added my testimony to theirs.

“ ‘For some days the police pursued their inquiries with great zeal, but without throwing any fresh light upon Vescaro’s fate. Then an extraordinary change took place in their attitude. They dropped the investigation as suddenly as they had taken it up, and seemed content to let the whole affair sink into oblivion.

“ ‘All this time you must not suppose that I

suffered any real uneasiness. I was assured of my own integrity towards the missing Count, and besides, as an Ambassador, my person was of course inviolate. Nevertheless, I did not choose to remain exposed to the malicious insinuations of young Brantiano, and for my own sake I was determined to have the mystery solved.

“When, therefore, I learnt of the strange behaviour of the Italian authorities, I saw that it was necessary for me to take the matter into my own hands. This was by no means the first investigation of the kind which I had undertaken, as you know. Aided by my past experience, I resolved to set about it in a calm, methodical manner.

“I began by recalling the circumstances of the Count’s disappearance, and the events which immediately preceded it. Here I at once found myself face to face with a coincidence which demanded to be taken into account. Vescaro, on more than one occasion, had shown a remarkable reluctance to enter the Vatican. It was in the Vatican that he had been seen for the last time.

“The more I considered these two facts, the more painfully they impressed me. It was true that the Count had assigned a perfectly harmless reason for his avoidance of the Papal residence,

but it was a reason which had struck me at the time as unreal. Pursuing my train of thought, I began to perceive the importance of another fact. Vescaro had positively refused on that very morning to go to the museum except in my company. Why, then, had he so strangely left it, not merely by himself, but without even letting me know of his departure?

"It was not as if the alcove in which I had stood to examine the illuminated manuscript were in any way concealed from the rest of the gallery. On the contrary, the Count must have seen me clearly as he went by on his way out. In fact this circumstance had impressed me at the time, but I had accounted for it by the idea that he was hastening away to dispose of the onyx seal with which he had been intrusted by Cardinal Salvatierra.

"It now occurred to me for the first time as singular that no one had been able to testify to having seen the Count as he left the Vatican. Surely one of the Swiss guards on duty at the entrance must have witnessed his departure? Here again I perceived that I had been thrown off the scent by the theory of a robbery of the onyx. The key to the situation now flashed upon my mind. The truth was that I had no evidence that Vescaro had ever left the Vatican at all!

"The first step in my investigation was now clear before me. It was necessary that I should dismiss for the moment all theories turning on the loss of the seal of Vespasian. All the other circumstances in the case pointed to an entirely new solution of the mystery, namely, that Vescaro had some secret enemy in the Vatican, and that this enemy had seized the opportunity of the Count's presence to inflict the vengeance which he had evidently dreaded beforehand. I now understood the language of Vescaro's testament. It was my persuasion which had induced him to cross the fatal threshold, and he had evidently believed that I was a deliberate instrument in his enemy's hands.

"More than ever resolved to sift this frightful affair to the bottom, I set out that very afternoon to the scene of the Count's disappearance. I entered the museum, traversed the apartments I have already described, without being perceived by any one, and quickly found myself in the fatal gallery.

"I went straight to the case containing the Salvatierra collection. My first glance at its contents made me turn pale. There, reposing in a place of honour in the centre of the other gems, was the onyx engraved with the profile of Vespasian!

"It was now for the first time that a light began

to break in upon my mind. To you, who hear only the circumstances which I have been obliged to mention in making my story clear, it has, no doubt, been easy to guess the solution all along. I can only say that till I saw the seal there in its place, as if nothing had happened, not the faintest suspicion of the truth had entered my mind.

“The person who had restored that seal to its place must, of course, be in possession of the secret of Vescaro’s fate. And that person could be equally only one man—Cardinal Salvatierra.

“At last I began to perceive the manner in which I had been duped. The last I had seen of Vescaro was when he was walking towards the end of the gallery with the seal in his hand, followed by Salvatierra and the Dominican. I had only the Cardinal’s assurance—his suggestion rather—that the Count had ever returned!

“Stunned by this blow, I turned a glance towards the end wall, which I have already described as being covered with a mirror, which gave a deceptive appearance to the length of the gallery. I started, and gave vent to a stifled cry. This wall was close to, almost touching the case which contained the seals.

“I rubbed my eyes and stared. How, if this

were so, could I have seen Vescaro and the two others walking off in that direction? I gazed round distractedly, searching for something to enlighten me. I observed the Egyptian statue still in its place, though it, also, now appeared to be standing close up against the end wall. I looked further for the Buddhist idol on its bracket. It was nowhere to be seen!

“Figure to yourself the terrible thoughts which overwhelmed me! I strove to recall the impressions left by my former visits to the gallery. On the first occasion, when I came without the Count, I remembered that the Salvatierra case had appeared to stand at the extreme end, and I had observed neither the statue nor the idol. On the second occasion I had noticed, first the statue, and then the Buddhist image. I thought again; I became positive—yes, the bracket supporting the idol was further along the wall than the Egyptian. In other words, the wall which I now beheld was a false one, which could be withdrawn at will, leaving a space beyond!

“I staggered before the terrible conclusion which now forced itself upon my mind. If my suspicions were correct, I had unconsciously assisted at one of those fearful tragedies of which we read in the

annals of the Inquisition. The entire affair must have been carefully premeditated. I saw the chain before me link by link ; my unlucky mention of Vescaro's name to Monsignor Perratti, the gems so skilfully provided as a bait, the Cardinal's pressing invitation, the artful substitution of a forgery for the true seal of Vespasian, which I had so much admired, in order to awaken Vescaro's interest and throw him off his guard, the leading him away beyond the place at which the false wall could be interposed, and finally the intervention of the Jesuit with his manuscript to divert my attention while the wall was being noiselessly slipped into its place, and the victim caged beyond the possibility of escape. The trap once closed, no doubt there had been men waiting to rush out and secure the prisoner, while Salvatierra and the Dominican—perhaps a familiar of the Holy Office—had made their way back by some secret passage.

“I made a brief examination of the walls of the gallery, and found what I expected. Immediately behind the Egyptian statue was a panel, which sounded hollow to my knock. It was no doubt opened by a secret spring, and the statue had been placed there to conceal the opening.

“There was no more for me to do in the gallery,

and I came away. But I had not yet ascertained Vescaro's ultimate fate. The holograph will pointed to his having been put to death, but I felt that I must have better evidence than that before I could come to the conclusion that men like the Cardinal and Perratti had been guilty of so grave a crime.

"The evidence was supplied to me almost by accident. On quitting the museum I turned into the grounds of the Vatican, where I had special privileges as an Ambassador to the Court, and which I had never properly explored. The vast extent of these grounds is well known, and I wandered on idly till I came to what appeared to be a disused cemetery, hidden in a remote corner. Guided, perhaps, by an intuition, I passed into this little burial ground, in which I had not walked far before I perceived in front of me what had the aspect of a newly-made grave. I stepped hastily forward, and on a small stone which had been placed at the head I read the inscription in Latin :

‘PRAY FOR THE SOUL OF
G. V.’

"There could be no longer any doubt. I beheld the tomb of Gulielmo Vescaro ! "

By this time our carriage had got back into the

full stream of traffic returning from the Bois, and, busied in exchanging salutes with the numerous acquaintances who were passing us, the Ambassador seemed indisposed to complete his story. I was compelled to give him a respectful hint.

“Pardon, my dear Ambassador, but it seems to me that you forget that I do not possess your analytical mind. You have left me still in doubt as to the real significance of this extraordinary affair.”

“True. I apologise. But perhaps you would not easily guess the step which it occurred to me to take after I had made the discoveries I have described?”

I could only assent to this remark by a shrug.

“I will tell you. I went straight to the palace of Cardinal Salvatierra, and requested his Eminence to hear my confession.

“At first he seemed to think that I had taken leave of my senses.

“‘But, Signor Ambassador, the members of the Sacred College do not receive confessions,’ he said with haughtiness. ‘It is some pious Jesuit to whom you require to go.’

“‘On this occasion it is not so,’ I responded firmly. ‘The sin which I have to confess is a very

heinous one. I have been guilty of suspecting a Prince of the Church of a terrible crime.'

"I saw the Cardinal change colour. He hesitated for a moment, and then said :

"'The sin which you have committed is indeed heinous. In this case I agree to hear your confession.'

"Without waiting for more I commenced, and related the whole affair exactly as I have done to you. The Cardinal listened to me in perfect silence. At the close he assigned me a nominal penance, pronounced the usual absolution, and dismissed me.

"I came away, with the feeling that I had gained nothing by my bold step. My intention, of course, had been to give him the opportunity of making an explanation. However, I reproached myself without reason.

"The next morning an officer of the Noble Guard arrived at the Embassy, bearing the Pope's command for me to wait upon his Holiness forthwith. I was plunged into confusion by this message, which I did not know whether to regard as favourable or the reverse. I could only obey ; and as soon as I had exchanged my ordinary dress for my Court uniform, I got into the state carriage of the Embassy, and drove to the Vatican.

“There I was received, to my astonishment, by Cardinal Salvatierra himself, who greeted me with distinguished cordiality, and conducted me straight into the presence of the Pope.

“Only those who have had the privilege of being received by that great Pontiff, can realise the awe which it was in his power to inspire on such occasions. No other monarch whom I have ever met was capable of such extremes of dignity and urbanity. When it pleased him he could be the most fascinating of companions, at other moments his frown struck like death.

“I advanced trembling, and knelt respectfully before his Holiness, who was surrounded by a gorgeous suite. As soon as he had received my formal homage, and had inquired after the health of the French President, the Pope dismissed everybody except Salvatierra. He then commanded me to rise, and addressed me :

“‘I have sent for your Excellency,’ he said, ‘not in your capacity as Ambassador of France, but in that of a son of the Church. I have been informed that you were an acquaintance of a certain man called Count Gulielmo Vescaro, and I have believed it possible that you may be uneasy in your mind with regard to his fate. Am I right in this?’

"I bowed, and darted a look at Salvatierra. But his Eminence remained without any sign of consciousness. The Holy Father proceeded :

" "I have, therefore, determined to give you certain information which, as a loyal Catholic, you will know how to respect. To begin with, have you been told that the man Vescaro was formerly an officer in my service ? "

" I bowed once more.

" "Do you know how he came to quit my service, and to be in receipt of a pension from the King of Sardinia, who styles himself King of Italy ? "

" "I do not, your Holiness."

" "It is that which I desire to tell you. You are familiar with the circumstances under which the King obtained possession of the city of Rome, which has belonged to the Holy See for fifteen hundred years. The moment the garrison of your brave countrymen was withdrawn in consequence of the misfortunes of the year 1870 the brigands employed by Victor Emanuel marched against my territories. In the exercise of my rights as a sovereign, I resolved to resist them, and I ordered my troops to defend the gates of Rome. Vescaro was that one of my officers in whom I placed the greatest confidence, and I assigned to him the most important post,

the Porto del Popolo. Under him was a lieutenant, by name Andrea Chigi, a cadet of one of the most illustrious Roman families.

“‘These two officers, with their men, were on duty when the advance guard of the enemy appeared in front of the gate. Chigi demanded the word to fire. Vescaro refused to give it, and at once proposed to hoist the white flag in token of surrender. Enraged at this cowardice, Chigi turned to the men to invite them to fire, when Vescaro, drawing his sword, ran the brave young man through the heart. The next moment the white flag was hoisted, the Sardinian troops entered Rome without a shot having been fired, and the dominions of the Holy See were reduced to this palace.

“‘Directly afterwards it was discovered that Vescaro’s conduct was premeditated. He had accepted a bribe from the Sardinian Government to betray my capital into their hands.

“‘Now, Signor, what is the correct term to apply to the conduct of this Vescaro?’

“‘In making this demand, the Pope directed at me a stern glance.

“‘Without question his conduct amounted to high treason, your Holiness,’ I answered, ‘and of the most aggravated kind.’

“‘And what is the penalty of high treason in every State with which you are acquainted?’

“‘It is death, your Holiness,’ I faltered.

“‘You have answered well. The traitor Vescaro has been put to death!’

“‘There was a solemn silence for a few moments. Then the Pope spoke again :

“‘We have lost Rome, but within these walls the Pope is still a sovereign. Immediately after the events I have referred to, I constituted a tribunal to judge Vescaro, and he was summoned to take his trial. He refused to come, and from the nature of his offence I could not require the usurping Government to hand him over to me. The process was therefore adjourned, till such time as Vescaro should place himself within the jurisdiction of the Court.

“‘This occurred the other day. He entered my territory of his own accord, and was duly arrested, certain precautions being taken to avoid provoking scandal, and to give the Sardinian Government no excuse to interfere. Vescaro was at once brought to trial, an advocate was assigned to him, such of the witnesses as are still living were produced, and he was pronounced guilty of treason, murder, and desertion on the field. The crime was a secular one, and

the sentence was executed, after Viscaro had made a full confession and admitted the justice of his doom.

“‘Is there anything in these proceedings which you can complain of as irregular?’

“‘Nothing, your Holiness.’

“His manner all at once changed. He addressed Cardinal Salvatierra :

“‘Cardinal, we have had enough of punishments; now let us speak of rewards. What does a man deserve who, when he finds himself in possession of the most dreadful proofs against a Prince of the Church, instead of bruiting his suspicions abroad, goes to the man he is obliged to suspect, and candidly confesses everything?’

“‘Your Holiness, he deserves to be honoured by the Church.’

“‘That is my opinion,’ said the good Pope with a kind smile. ‘Give our son what we have designed for him.’

“I looked round, bewildered. The Cardinal advanced towards me and, in his Holiness’s name, invested me with the Order of the Cross Keys.”

The carriage had just reached his Excellency’s door as he finished.

“Come in, my friend, and I will show you something which I prize even more than the Order. It is a portrait of Pio Nono, signed with his own hand. By-the-by, if we should meet my wife, be careful not to make any reference to the Countess Vescaro.”

The White Thread.

'PARDON, M. l'Ambassadeur, but there is a piece of thread on the back of your coat."

We were about to go forth for a stroll on the boulevards—I had just helped his Excellency on with his overcoat. As I bent forward to remove the strand of white cotton which had attracted my attention, the Ambassador turned his head with a startled movement. I even fancied that he gave a slight shiver as I picked off the thread and cast it away.

"A thousand thanks," he murmured mechanically, glancing after the thread with a strange expression. But he realised that I had observed his singular agitation, for he immediately went on to say :

"You ask yourself, perhaps, what it is that has disturbed me so much in this trivial circumstance? Do me the justice to believe, notwithstanding, that I have not been agitated without a real cause."

"I shall be desolated if I have permitted myself to display any curiosity," I responded.

But he cut me short:

"I forbid you to make excuses. It is not for nothing that I have consented to feel emotion. It is because the service which you have just rendered to me has caused me to recall a terrible experience through which I once passed, and the memory of which has never been able to efface itself from my mind."

I was in doubt as to what reply to make, and we walked on in silence for a minute. Then the Ambassador resumed, speaking in a more familiar tone:

"But I foresee that you will compel me to explain my allusions. There is, however, one restriction which I am compelled to impose on myself. It is on account of the character of the events which I shall relate to you, some of the actors in which are by no means without influence at the present time. Do you consent to my refraining from the use of actual names?"

I gave the required consent with cheerfulness. The Ambassador and I understood one another.

"It was not long after the mysterious affair,

which I have related to you, in connection with the death of Abdul Aziz," began his Excellency, "and I had just been promoted to the rank of *Chargé d'Affaires*. In this capacity I was entrusted with the French mission to the Court of one of those barbarous principalities in the south-east of Europe, which have hardly yet recovered from their centuries of vassalage to the Turks. In these unsettled societies acts of lawlessness and violence are rendered possible at which more civilised countries would be dismayed.

"At the time of my arrival in the Principality to the Court of which I had been accredited, I found things in a very disturbed condition. As is always the case in these petty states in the region of the Danube, Russia and Austria were intriguing for the predominance, and the whole population was rent into factions accordingly, which pursued each other with the bitterest hatred.

"This rivalry between the two Powers I have named had even extended to the Palace, where the Austrian inclinations of George, the reigning Prince, were counterbalanced by the Russophile sympathies of his consort, Catherine, a Princess of Russian extraction.

"While I was preparing to walk warily among

the pitfalls which surrounded me, I was surprised one day shortly after my arrival by a visit from the Russian Minister, Baron Dourenski.

“‘I have come,’ he said, as soon as he had taken a seat and exchanged the usual compliments, ‘to inform you that I am obliged to leave for Russia in two days’ time. The business which requires my presence is important, and will, perhaps, detain me four or five weeks.’

“I bowed, and murmured a polite expression of regret at the idea of losing the society of the Minister for so long a period.

“‘That is not all, however,’ he proceeded to say. ‘I have at the Legation no one whom I can trust to take my place properly while I am away. Shall I be trespassing too much on your good nature if I ask you to take charge of the interests of Russia for these few weeks?’

“I was not altogether surprised by this request. At these petty Courts, where there are no experienced Secretaries of Legation to act during the absence of their chiefs, it is not unusual for diplomatists to undertake these services for each other. It was, moreover, a compliment to me to ask me to act on behalf of a Minister, whose rank in the diplomatic body is above that of a *Chargé d’Affaires*, as you perhaps know.”

"Yes, a Minister ranks next to an Ambassador, does he not?" I said, as his Excellency appeared to pause for an answer.

"Exactly. It is only the greater Powers which are represented at each other's Courts by Ambassadors. Smaller States send and receive Ministers, and those below them are satisfied with *Chargés d'Affaires*. As a matter of fact only Austria and Russia thought it necessary to be represented by Ministers at the Court of which I am speaking, a circumstance due to their conflicting interests in the Balkan peninsula. But I perceive that I am becoming excessively tedious."

I shook my head, out of complaisance. But the Ambassador had already gone on.

"Some of these details were, perhaps, necessary. As I have said, Baron Dourenski's proposal was natural, and even gratifying. Nevertheless I did not at once give my consent.

"'I am too much honoured by the confidence you place in me,' I said, 'but recollect, if you please, my dear Dourenski, that I have only recently arrived in this country, and know nothing of the political situation. Had you not better apply to some colleague of older standing—to Sir Graham, for instance, the British *Chargé d'Affaires*?'"

“He made an emphatic gesture of disapproval as I pronounced this name.

“‘Not for worlds, my dear fellow! That man is a mere tool of the Austrian Minister’s. No, I must have some one whom I can trust, some one of real independence and judgment. Besides, our two countries are friendly; I should leave the affairs of my Legation in your hands with the same confidence as in those of a fellow-countryman.’

“Thus pressed, I could find no excuse for declining the honour which Dourenski proposed to confer on me. He went on to add:

“‘There is one thing about which I must ask you to preserve the strictest secrecy. In the mail-bag of the Legation you will from time to time find letters addressed to M. Starovitch, which you will without doubt find means to transmit to him in a private manner. If the packages are sometimes heavy, that is merely because they contain a little gold which it is necessary to distribute among our friends.’

“Used as I was to the tangled paths of political intrigue, I could not altogether conceal my astonishment at hearing him pronounce the name of M. Starovitch. This was the Prime Minister, the head of the Prince’s Government, and although I had

heard it whispered that he was less favourable to Vienna than his master, I was certainly not prepared to find him in receipt of Russian gold.

“Dourenski smiled at my look of surprise.

“‘The Premier is a discreet man,’ he observed cynically. ‘Should any unexpected difficulty arise while I am away, involving the interests of Russia, you would not do badly to consult him.’

“The matter was thus arranged. In due course the Russian handed over the care of his Legation to me, and took his departure.

“Shortly after he had left the capital a banquet was given at the Palace, to which I received an invitation. The affair was not one of State, but a good many distinguished functionaries were present, including the Austrian Minister and M. Starovitch.

“I was received graciously by Prince George, and with still more cordiality by his beautiful and distinguished consort. When we sat down to dinner I found myself on the left of the Princess, who sat between me and the Prince, while the Prime Minister was on my other side. The Austrian Minister occupied the post of honour on Prince George’s right. I mention these details for a reason which you will perceive presently.

“I have said that the banquet was not a State

one. Nevertheless the presence of so many high functionaries imparted to it a more or less political air. As the evening advanced, I even began to perceive something in the atmosphere which warned me that this gathering had some hidden significance. The Prince, who was drinking freely, had hardly exchanged a word with his wife since we sat down, while he kept indulging in long confidential whispers with the Austrian Minister.

“The Princess, on her part, was evidently not at her ease. Whether or not she suspected that something contrary to her wishes was on foot, I am unable to say. But she continually glanced at the Prince with an anxious air, and then turned and conversed with me in a light tone which was evidently artificial. At the same time M. Starovitch, on my left, was growing visibly nervous and depressed, while the faces of the other guests displayed either triumph or apprehension, according to their secret sympathies.

“I had not long to wait for the key to all this. As soon as the dessert was placed before us, Prince George rose to his feet with an abrupt air, and filling his glass to the brim, called out with marked intonation :

“ ‘ Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to drink the

health of my very good friend and cousin, the Emperor Francis Joseph !’

“It was a demonstration. It was impossible to mistake the significance of these words. They meant that Prince George had arrived at an understanding with the Court of Vienna, and that the friends of Russia in the Principality were crushed.

“I turned from the exultant face of the Austrian envoy, who saw this triumph of his diplomacy, to the Princess Catherine. She had turned deadly pale as she rose from her seat in compliance with the Prince’s example, and slowly lifted her glass to her lips, as if each drop that it contained were the most deadly poison.

“The Prime Minister managed to conceal his chagrin with more skill. He drank the toast as though it were a meaningless ceremony, and quietly resumed his seat by my side. But as soon as the attention of those near us was diverted for a moment, he whispered softly in my ear :

“‘Baron Dourenski is a prudent man. His absence has been well timed.’

“This was the first suggestion to me that any hidden strategy underlay Dourenski’s departure. I began to feel slightly uncomfortable, and to wish that this astute Russian had not made me the

channel of his suspicious remittances to the Prime Minister.

“My uneasiness was not removed by Starovitch’s next words, uttered in the same low tone :

“ ‘There are certain precautions which the Baron foresaw might become necessary in the event of anything of this kind taking place. The necessity having now arisen, I am compelled to ask you, as his representative, to come to my assistance. I have in my pocket at this moment an envelope containing certain papers of the highest importance, which it is essential that I should entrust to your care for a time.’

“I could not restrain a look of annoyance at this suggestion. It was by no means pleasant to find myself involved in the tortuous mazes of Russian underground diplomacy, a diplomacy of which I had heard a good deal, but with which I had not previously come into direct contact.

“However, I had accepted Dourenski’s confidence, and there was nothing to be done but to consent to the Prime Minister’s request.

“ ‘You may bring the packet you speak of to my residence to-morrow, if you please,’ I answered coldly. ‘I will put it in a place of safety till my colleague returns.’

“M. Starovitch gave a slight frown.

“‘I dare not wait till to-morrow,’ he returned quickly. ‘The papers are of too much importance, and it is impossible to foresee what may follow this move. I must beg you to let me pass this envelope to you now, under the shelter of the table. We do not know who may be observing us.’

“Much annoyed at being asked to take part in these paltry manœuvres, I was nevertheless obliged to give my consent. Thereupon Starovitch pretended to turn his back on me and engage in conversation with his left-hand neighbor, while I saw his hand slowly creeping towards the pocket of his coat.

“Following his example I also turned, and made a show of paying renewed attention to the Princess. But the Prince, who had perhaps remarked my whispered conference with his Minister, now neglected the Austrian envoy, and commenced to engage me in a friendly discussion, in which the Princess also took part.

“While I was endeavouring to give my attention to their Highnesses, I became conscious of a light touch on my knee. Affecting to play with my serviette, I gradually allowed my left hand to descend out of sight beneath the table, and my

fingers at once came in contact with the envelope of which Starovitch had spoken. I carefully took hold of it, and seizing the first moment when the Prince's eyes were turned away, I managed to get the packet up under my coat and into my breast pocket. Whether any one else at the table perceived the movement it was impossible for me to tell.

"Shortly afterwards his Highness gave the signal to rise, and giving his arm to his consort, led the company into the drawing-room. Here we separated into small groups, and I observed the Austrian Minister approach the Princess as though to pay court to her. But she received him with a disdain which served to accentuate the opposition between the sentiments of the royal pair.

"As soon as she had got rid of the Austrian, I saw her Highness fix her eyes upon me with a look which plainly intimated that she had something of importance to say to me. Accordingly I contrived to shake off the Minister of Justice, who had button-holed me directly we left the table, and edged my way cautiously towards the Princess.

"She received me at first with well-acted indifference; but as soon as a slight movement of the crowd had left us alone for a moment, she bent towards me and addressed me in these significant words :

“‘Pardon me, Monsieur, but if you have anything which you wish to put away in safety, do not remain here another moment.’

“I was overwhelmed, as you may imagine, at this proof of her acquaintance with the transaction at the dinner-table, and it was with difficulty that I restrained myself from allowing my dismay to be visible. At the same time the serious character of the warning which she had given me served to increase the uneasiness which I had laboured under for some time. I bowed gravely to show that I understood what to do, and after allowing a short time to elapse, so as to prevent remark, I made my way to where Prince George was standing, and asked permission to retire.

“The Prince was engaged at the moment in talking to Starovitch himself. It was of course a breach of etiquette for me to leave before his Highness himself withdrew, but he graciously accepted the excuse which I had prepared, and made no effort to detain me.

“I fancied that I caught a look in the Prime Minister’s eye, as if he would have liked to accompany me, but it was of course impossible for him to make the suggestion; and I went out of the room, escorted by an equerry.

"In the vestibule of the Palace I paused to put on an overcoat. It was a cold night, one of those nights in that part of the world which remind one of Ovid's description of the frozen Danube—doubtless you are familiar with the lines?"

"I have forgotten them, but it is not of the least consequence. You can repeat them to me when you have concluded your story."

The Ambassador smiled at my impatience, with which it was easy to see that he was not displeased.

"As I was drawing on my overcoat," he continued, "the equerry who had followed me made the remark—almost in the same words which you have used this evening:

"'Pardon, Baron, but there is a white thread on the back of your coat.'

"I thanked him, and turned the coat over to look for it. On the back I found a long piece of cotton. It was ordinary enough in appearance, but when I took hold of one end to remove it, I found to my surprise that it was firmly attached to the material of the coat.

"'My tailor must be a very careless fellow,' I muttered, as I broke it off short. 'It must have come through from the lining.'

"I drew the coat on again, thinking no more of this trivial incident, said 'good-night' to the equerry, and started to walk home by myself. There was a bright moon, but the streets were deserted, unusually so, considering that the hour was by no means a late one.

"When I had proceeded some distance, however, I perceived in front of me a miserable-looking creature on crutches, with a bandage over one eye, who boldly stopped me, and began to beg for alms. I gave him a stern refusal, for I never encourage these pests; nevertheless he continued to plant himself in my path and renew his demands.

"While I was trying to shake him off, another man came up from behind. He paused a moment, as if to ascertain what was the matter, whereupon the beggar left me, and commenced to assail the new-comer. I seized the opportunity to make my escape, and reached my house without further incident.

"But the events of this night were not over. As soon as I got in, I went straight to my safe, and locked away the mysterious packet which had been confided to me by M. Starovitch. As I did so I observed that the envelope was sealed with yellow wax, bearing the Russian Imperial arms. I then

sat down to a quiet game of chess with my attaché, to tranquillise my nerves before going to bed.

“We had been playing for some time, and I was just developing my final attack on his position, when we were disturbed by a loud commotion in the street outside. I cannot explain why it was, but this noise caused me the most dreadful shock. I sprang to my feet, pushing away the board, and commanded the attaché to go out and ascertain the meaning of the disturbance.

“He came back in a minute or two, looking as white as the chessmen he had been playing with.

“‘Sir,’ he cried hoarsely, ‘M. Starovitch has just been assassinated! They are carrying the body home.’

“A groan of horror escaped my lips. Hardly conscious of what I was doing, I snatched up my hat and coat and began to put them on.

“‘Where are you going?’ demanded Montalembert, in surprise. Montalembert was the young man’s name.

“‘I must go round there at once, and find out how this happened,’ I answered distractedly. ‘I shall be obliged if you will come with me; the streets may not be safe.’

“He gave me an incredulous look.

“‘At all events they will do well to remember that we are members of the diplomatic body,’ he protested, drawing himself up with the pride of an ambassador.

“I made no reply, and he quickly prepared himself. We left the house arm-in-arm, and ten minutes’ walk brought us to the Prime Minister’s official residence.

“The street outside the building was blocked by an immense crowd, which broke out every moment into fierce groans. As I came nearer I could make out that one part of the crowd was groaning for Austria, while the other was groaning for Russia. On one point they were evidently agreed, namely, the political significance to be attached to the crime which had just taken place.

“This circumstance increased my determination to force my way in, and to speak with the unfortunate victim, if he had not yet expired.

“The police on guard at the entrance were at first reluctant to let me pass, without consulting their chief, who had not yet arrived. But I knew the character of these men, and a handful of roubles soon gained me admittance.

“Inside the spacious entrance hall I encountered a frightful spectacle. On the floor, in the centre of

a crowd of attendants, lay the man who had sat at the dinner-table with me an hour before, still extended on the shutter on which he must have been brought there from the scene of the crime, and literally weltering in his blood. Some of his clothes had been removed and flung into a corner, when I arrived, and a doctor, who must have preceded me by barely a minute, was turning over the body of the unconscious man, in his search for the fatal wound.

“I was just in time to see it—a hideous pit in the back, into which I could have thrust my two fingers, and from which the thick black blood began to ooze afresh as the doctor shifted the position of the victim.

“I turned my eyes away, with a feeling of sickness, while the doctor began to call for lint and warm water. A child could have seen that no remedies were destined to be of the slightest avail. As my averted gaze wandered round the hall, it was arrested by the pile of clothing which I have already mentioned.

“Something which I could not understand drew me towards these bloodstained garments with a horrible fascination. The overcoat, coat, and waistcoat of the murdered man had apparently been stripped off together, and lay on the floor at the foot

of the stairs in a confused heap. I stepped towards the spot slowly and looked round. No one was observing my movements ; every eye was turned on the dying man. With my foot I softly turned over the clothes, till I came to the overcoat. As I did so, I suddenly caught sight of something which caused me to gasp and reel back as if I had been struck a blow.

“There, on the back, within an inch of the bloody rent made by the assassin’s knife, was a long white thread, identical in every respect with the one which I had found on my own coat within the very hour!

“Urged by a terrible suspicion, I bent down hastily and snatched at the thread. It was firmly fastened to the cloth!

“My first impulse was that which was natural to a man accustomed to live in a civilised society. I turned round to look for the Chief of the Police with a view to communicating my discovery. But the Chief was still on his way, and the time for reflection thus afforded me convinced me that it would be more prudent to say nothing for the present.

“In the meantime a commotion had arisen among those who were surrounding the body. I pressed through the ring and saw that poor Staro-

vitch had at length unclosed his eyes. The next moment his glance fell on me, and he showed unmistakably his anxiety to address me.

"I stepped hastily to his side, and knelt down to catch the faintest whisper.

"'Can you speak?' I asked. 'If so, tell me how this happened?'

"He made a feeble movement as though to rise. I bent over him with my ear close to his lips.

"'The cripple—the papers——' he gasped, and ceased.

"That was all. I was destined to hear no more. Corpses make no confessions."

The Ambassador allowed a decent interval to pass, as if to proclaim his respect for the memory of the murdered statesman. Then he resumed:

"Poor Starovitch had hardly drawn his last breath when the Chief of Police rushed in, at the head of a staff of officers. He frowned when his glance encountered me there by the side of the dead man; but instantly softening his expression, he advanced respectfully, and said to me:

"'I perceive that I have arrived too late. Perhaps, M. le Baron, your friend was able to give you some hint as to the author of this abominable crime?'

“I looked him steadily in the face, and replied with the most perfect coolness:

“‘No, unfortunately. M. Starovitch expired, on the contrary, just as he was on the point of commencing a declaration.’

“The truth of this assertion was confirmed by the doctor and the other persons who had been present during the scene.

“‘In that case,’ said the Chief, preserving his composure, ‘I must proceed to make my investigation from the clues which are already in my possession.’

“I bowed in silence, and took my departure, returning home with Montalembert, to whom I said nothing about the anxieties which were torturing me.

“The moment I had reached my own house, however, I sat down and wrote an order to a certain manufacturer in Vienna with whom I had formerly had dealings, to forward me without delay one of those shirts composed of steel links which are sometimes worn by officers engaged in warfare among savage tribes.

“You have no doubt already perceived the conclusion at which I had been forced to arrive?”

His Excellency turned an inquiring look at me

as he uttered these words, but continued without giving me time to reply :

“The two words uttered by Starovitch before he expired had been sufficient to reveal to me the frightful plot to which I had narrowly escaped falling a victim. There could no longer be a question that the white thread which I had twice come across on this night, first on my own clothes and then on those of the unfortunate Minister, was a signal of the most terrible kind. It was not for nothing that I had found my path so obstinately blocked by that cripple, till his confederate had time to catch me up from behind. But for the accident of the equerry’s having drawn my attention to it, the assassin, I could not doubt, would have found on my back the token which he sought, and I should have shared the fate of the man whom I had just seen breathe his last.

“To the motives of the assassins, Starovitch had also given me a clue. It was evident that he had connected his murder with the mysterious packet which he had confided to me during the banquet. It was impossible to resist the idea that this packet contained something which rendered it fatal to its possessor; and in my excitement I even went as far as to accuse Baron Dourenski in my own mind of

having foreseen this danger and purposely escaped it by a diplomatic retreat.

“In the meantime I saw myself confronted by an unseen peril, at whose nature I could only vaguely guess. You will have recognised, of course, my motives for saying nothing to the police officials. Where political considerations are involved, the police are not to be depended on. If the crime which had just been committed were the work of private individuals, on the other hand, I had no doubt that the police would prove equal to the task of bringing them to justice.”

“You did not find it necessary to open the Prime Minister’s envelope?” I ventured to interpose, as his Excellency allowed a few moments to pass without speaking.

“By no means, my friend. Recollect, if you please, that this envelope was sealed, and that its safety had excited the interest of the Princess Catherine. All this time I had not forgotten the remarkable warning which she had given me, and this element in the affair alone would have restrained me from placing any imprudent confidence in the officials.

“All I did was to despatch a telegram to Dourenski, in the cipher which he had requested me

to employ, informing him of what had occurred, and urging him to return immediately.

“The news of the tragedy must in any case have reached him within a few hours. The most profound impression was created all over Europe by this assassination of a statesman whose name was as familiar to the public as that of Prince George himself. The views taken of the event by the newspapers were conflicting, some hinting that the Austrian faction had had a hand in it, some attributing it to the secret influence of Russia, and others again affecting to consider it a matter of some private revenge. For my own part I remained in doubt, and anxiously waited for Dourenski's return for an explanation.

“It is needless for me to describe the sensation produced in the Principality itself. So great was the agitation and alarm in the capital, that the Government gave orders that the funeral of the murdered Premier should take place at night, and should be attended by no one except a few public functionaries, and the immediate relatives and friends of the deceased.

“The funeral was fixed for the second night after the murder, and it was of course necessary that I should be present. In accordance with the

custom of the country, there were to be no carriages, the coffin being carried by friends, and the other mourners following on foot. This was the first time that I had ventured outside my door since the events I have described, and before putting on my overcoat I could not forbear glancing fearfully at the place where I had discovered the white thread.

“Judge of my consternation, when I tell you that I beheld the fatal token there once more! The assassins had foreseen that I should be obliged to attend the funeral, and had conceived the atrocious idea of despatching me on my return.

“My first feeling was one of overpowering horror; my next, of truly ungovernable rage. Leaving the thread in its place, I swore that I would keep the assignation which these wretches had prepared for me, and teach them the danger of attacking a brave man.

“Luckily my mail shirt had arrived from Vienna that very day; and I congratulated myself on having had it sent to me from a quarter the least likely to provoke suspicion. I retired to my room instantly and put it on. While I was adjusting it, I sent for my attaché and told him everything,—that is to say, everything except what bore on my suspicions as to the real motive of the conspiracy.

“Montalembert was a young man who had real courage and intelligence. As soon as I had explained my intentions, he eagerly consented to accompany me, and to assist me in the manner which I pointed out to him. We then left the house together and arrived in time to join the funeral procession just as it was setting out for the cemetery.

“It was a solemn and impressive spectacle. Under a cloudy sky, the procession slowly wound its way through the silent streets, its course lit up by a long line of torches, carried by servants, the flames of which fluttered wildly in the night wind, and cast a flickering glare on the black drapery of the coffin, on the solemn garb of the mourners, and on the barbaric uniforms of the soldiers who formed an escort for the train. It was in this manner that there were carried to their last resting-place the remains of that man who had been struck down from the height of his power by the dagger of a secret traitor.

“As soon as the service was over, and the coffin had been lowered into the earth, the torches were all extinguished, and the crowd prepared to disperse. At this moment I gave the last whispered direction to my companion and turned my steps slowly homeward, leaving him to drop gradually behind.

“By degrees the various members of the crowd separated from each other, every one going in his own direction. On my part I was careful not to allow myself to be joined by any chance acquaintance, so that I soon found myself walking alone, though I fancied I could hear the cautious footsteps of Montalembert dogging me from behind.

“Carefully refraining from any backward glance, I pursued my way till I came to a long and rather narrow street which led directly into the one in which my house was situated. As I turned into it, I saw something which caused my heart to beat violently. Advancing towards me in the obscurity, from the far end of the street, was the figure of a man. The next moment the moon penetrated the clouds which had muffled it, and I perceived that the approaching figure was my cripple of the night of the murder.

“Striving to maintain the same calm pace, I walked slowly on down the street. The cripple continued to shamle along towards me, and we were within twenty paces of each other when my senses, keenly on the alert, warned me of the presence of something unusual in one of the doorways I was passing on the left. Not daring to turn so much as an eyelash in that direction, for fear of

betraying myself, I walked steadily past, and came up to where the cripple had taken his stand so as to intercept my advance.

“Peering up into my face with the one eye which was not hidden by the bandage, the fellow commenced to demand money in the usual whine of his class. I affected to hesitate, stopped, and put my hand into my pocket. At the same moment my intent ears caught a light, swift footfall on the road behind me.

“I can hardly describe how the rest happened. I felt something strike me violently in the back, then came a crash of splintered steel, an oath, and a loud cry in Montalembert’s voice as he came running up from the rear. Leaving him to deal with the ruffian behind me, I sprang forward and clutched the one in front.

“As I had anticipated, his lameness was a feint. Instead, I found myself engaged with an active powerful man, who let fall his crutches, and struggled so desperately in my grasp that it was all I could do to prevent his escape till Montalembert came to my assistance.

“The other man, it appears, had been too quick for him. He had taken to his heels the moment he heard Montalembert approaching, and being a good

runner, had soon made pursuit hopeless. Nor did I ever find out who he really was, though I imagine him to have been a mere subordinate instrument.

“With regard to his companion it was different. By our united efforts we succeeded in securing him and dragging him into the house a prisoner. There, his bandages torn off and some false hair removed, his identity was quickly disclosed. It was the Chief of Police himself!

“I need not repeat the expressions which I addressed to him, and which he received with obstinate silence. But it did not take me long to realise that it was useless to talk of punishing him for his crimes. The only advantage I could gain from my victory was to extort a confession of the real authors and motives of this villainy.

“As soon as I had exhausted myself in reproaches, therefore, I said to him:

“‘But it is not you with whom I am concerned, but those from whom you received your instructions. Your fate is in your own hands. Tell me the whole of the circumstances frankly, and you shall go unharmed; refuse, and I will take you back to the spot where you attempted my life and shoot you down as I might have done at the time.’

“He turned pale at this threat, which he had

evidently not expected. These gentry who undertake to play fast and loose with the lives of others, always attach an extraordinary value to their own miserable existences.

“‘ M. le Baron, I swear to you that I am speaking the truth when I say that I know absolutely nothing of this affair beyond the orders which I received. Those orders were to waylay M. Starovitch and you, and if either of you should be wearing a white thread on his back, to kill him. You know yourself that the first time, two nights ago, I let you go, because my agent failed to see the white thread ; and I have been severely blamed for it since. The thread must have come off.’

“‘ Yes, I took it off that night, because it was not convenient to me to deal with you then,’ I said, seeking to impress him with the idea that I knew everything. ‘But now you have not yet told me from whom you received these orders you speak of.’

“ He glanced at me with a sullen expression.

“‘ Come, M. le Baron, you know as well as I do.’

“‘ I daresay I do,’ I retorted, ‘but I should like to have the pleasure of hearing it from you.’

“ I took out my revolver and laid it on the table.

“‘ Well, then, if I must say it—from Prince George himself.’

“‘Thank you, that is enough. Now as soon as you have written that down and signed it in the presence of this gentleman and myself, you may go home.’

“He drew back at this and scowled. No doubt he had counted on being able to deny everything as soon as he found himself in safety.

“‘I refuse to sign,’ he muttered at length.

“‘I took up my revolver.

“‘Montalembert, may I trouble you to take this person by the left arm,’ I said quietly.

“The man uttered an oath.

“‘Give me the paper, then, since you insist.’

“Ten minutes later he had gone, leaving me in possession of a document which I regarded as not less valuable than the papers entrusted to me by poor Starovitch.

“The following morning, just as I was about to start for the Palace, a carriage drove up to my door at a furious pace, and Baron Dourenski sprang out.

“‘Thank Heaven, I am in time to save you!’ he exclaimed, as he caught sight of me.

“‘Not at all, my dear Dourenski,’ I retorted coolly; ‘I have managed to save myself.’”

“And afterwards?” I demanded, as the Ambassador assumed an air of having finished.

"Afterwards, the affair passed out of my hands. You may imagine that I had had enough of Russian diplomatic methods to last me my lifetime. I simply gave Dourenski his packet, with the seal unbroken, together with the written confession of the Chief of Police.

"Dourenski went straight to the Palace. What exactly transpired between the Prince and him I cannot say. But the following week Europe was startled by the news that Prince George had abdicated in favour of his son, a boy of thirteen."

This time I felt that his Excellency had really finished, and we had walked on some little way before I ventured to put a question to him.

"And the sealed packet? Did you never learn its contents?"

His Excellency regarded me with pity.

"No. Dourenski did not offer to tell me."

"And you did not ask him?"

His Excellency regarded me with reproach.

"Certainly not. In his place, should I have permitted any one to ask me such a question? There are moments, my friend, when you almost make me fear that you are wanting in delicacy."

And it was not till we were parting, an hour

later, that the Ambassador consoled me by saying :

“ I have sometimes suspected that the contents of the packet were not political, and that this clever Dourenski had laid a little trap for the Prince, and had omitted to take Princess Catherine into his confidence. But, for the honour of the diplomatic body, I prefer to think that he did not foresee the extreme measures to which Prince George would resort.”

The Perfidy of Monsieur Disraeli.

“**A**H, my friend, so it has happened to you also to have business with these financiers!”

I turned in surprise, and beheld the Ambassador coming down the steps of the Bourse. He was alone, and carried in his hand with some ostentation a small leather case, which appeared to be bursting with share certificates. I stopped and waited for his Excellency to reach the pavement.

“You flatter me too much,” I said, answering his remark. “I was not about to trouble MM. de Rothschild. In fact, I was on my way to the office of the *Temps*; but I am in no hurry, if you should desire my escort as a protection for the vast sums which I see you are bringing with you.”

The Ambassador affected to glance at his pocket-book as if he had remembered it for the first time,

and at once proceeded to stow it inside the breast of his coat.

"You will at least consent to breakfast with me in one of those cafés which are patronised by the gentlemen of the Bourse, and which I am told are not so bad," he said, putting his arm in mine. The spring sun shone brightly on the pavement and the fronts of the houses, and the approach to the Bourse was crowded with flower-girls, who offered us their nosegays as we moved away.

"The business which I have transacted this morning has reminded me of an affair of which I believe we have never spoken together," the Ambassador continued, "and which I only hesitate to tell you about because of the disagreeable light in which it places a celebrated Minister of your country."

"Do not refrain any longer on that account, I beg of you," I responded, as we walked along in search of a café worthy of his Excellency's patronage. "Whether it is Lord Salisbury or Mr. Gladstone whom you refer to, it will be indeed strange if you have anything to tell me worse than I have been accustomed to read every day in the party newspapers of England."

The Ambassador smiled.

"You are right in what you say," he returned.

"It is not a question of either Gladstone or Salisbury, however, but of the famous Beaconsfield."

Before I could make any reply, he stopped abruptly in front of a restaurant whose appearance seemed to inspire him with confidence. We entered, and the Ambassador, who was evidently in a generous mood, ordered a sumptuous repast, to be ushered in with a bottle of Veuve Clicquot. As soon as the waiter had departed, bowing to the very ground, his Excellency took up his napkin and his parable.

"You, who have not taught yourself to associate me with ideas of finance, will perhaps be astonished when I tell you that I was formerly the agent in a transaction which concerned one hundred million francs—that is to say, in your money, four million pounds sterling. It arose in this way:

"In the autumn of the year 1875 I was sent for by M. Buffard, who at that time held the portfolio of Foreign Affairs, to his private residence. On my arrival I found him closeted with M. de Lesseps, that great man to whom France forgives the mistakes of his old age, in consideration of the glory which he shed upon her in the past.

"I had already made the acquaintance of De Lesseps, whose former connection with the diplo-

matic body had naturally increased the interest with which I regarded him. On this occasion he received me with great cordiality, as did the Minister, who at once introduced the subject on which they wished to consult me.

“‘I have invited you here,’ he said, ‘not on political business, but in order to ascertain if you are disposed to accept a private mission which the Vicomte de Lesseps wishes to entrust to you. Although in the execution of this mission you will be acting without instructions from my Department, yet I believe you will find that the services which you render to M. de Lesseps will by no means displease the French Government.’

“Bewildered by this strange exordium, I looked at De Lesseps for some explanation. The old man returned my look with one of the utmost unconsciousness.

“‘I will put the matter before you in two words,’ he said. ‘The Khedive of Egypt is the possessor of 176,000 shares in the Suez Canal Company, which it is believed that he may be willing to dispose of. A syndicate of capitalists has been formed here, which is anxious to acquire these shares, and it has been suggested that you should be asked to proceed to Cairo as their agent, to sound the

Khedive on the subject, and if possible to negotiate the purchase.'

"I still failed to thoroughly understand the situation. I could not permit myself to suppose that they were asking me, a member of the diplomatic body, to become the broker for a set of private Parisian bankers. I proceeded to question the veteran :

"'Is the syndicate of which you speak connected with the Canal Company, by any chance?' I asked.

"He shook his head decidedly.

"'I am not even myself interested in it,' he answered, 'except from the point of view that, as Chairman of the Company, I desire to see these shares placed in the hands of the Company's friends. However, I have provided myself with a list of the members of the syndicate.'

"He handed me a document containing about a dozen names. Two or three were those of bankers of some repute; the remainder were absolute nobodies of whom I had never heard.

"I stared at him in absolute consternation.

"'But my dear Vicomte,' I exclaimed, 'have you any assurance that these persons command the necessary funds to carry out so enormous a trans-

action? This will be an affair of a hundred millions!’

“‘I answer for that part of it,’ interposed the Minister, before De Lesseps had time to speak. ‘There will be no question of the money being found.’

“‘And in case the Khedive should require guarantees?’ I persisted, beginning to feel my way towards a solution.

“‘If it should become absolutely necessary, you may offer him the guarantee of the French Government. But that is a point which you must avoid raising, if possible; and in any case you must be extremely careful not to let it reach the ears of Colonel Warton, the British representative in Cairo.’

“At length I thought I could understand something of the situation. Turning again to De Lesseps, I inquired:

“‘And you, M. le Vicomte, am I to be equally careful that your interest in this matter does not transpire?’

“The old man smiled, and shook his head again, but with less energy.

“‘There is no reason that the Khedive should not be informed that I interest myself in the negotiation from the point of view I have spoken of.

The fact is,' he went on, assuming a more confidential tone, 'that a difficulty has already arisen between the Suez Canal Company and the Khedive, of which I should be glad to avoid the repetition. Last year, owing to certain differences with the British Government on a question of tolls, the Company was obliged to threaten to close the Canal to their ships of war. No sooner was this threat made known, than Ismail Pasha took it upon himself to interfere, in his character of the principal shareholder, and to strenuously forbid the Company to adopt any such course. We have reason to think that this action was the result of representations by the British Government through their envoy; and you will agree with me that this is a form of pressure which could no longer be brought to bear if the shares of the Company were held by private Frenchmen.'

"I nodded my head. Everything was now clear to me.

" 'Let me see if I rightly understand this affair,' I said, looking from one to the other of my two companions. 'I am to proceed to Cairo as a private individual, the agent of the gentlemen whose names are written on this paper, on whose behalf I am to induce the Khedive to transfer to them his shares in

the Canal. Should it become necessary, I am to offer to his Highness in confidence the guarantee of the French Government. At the same time, as a patriotic Frenchman, I may permit myself the pleasure of thinking that this transaction will deprive Great Britain of the opportunity of making any effectual remonstrance, should the Suez Canal Company at any future time find it necessary, for *financial* reasons, to close the Canal to her men-of-war.'

"De Lesseps smiled and nodded. The Minister gave me a look of intelligence.

" 'You have exactly comprehended the position,' he was good enough to say, 'and I see that we did not do wrong to select you. Now go and make your preparations to start as quickly as possible—and be careful not to come near the Quai D'Orsay till the whole thing has been arranged.'

"I bowed, and made my adieu. Within a week I was in Cairo."

At this point we were interrupted by the arrival of the soup, which his Excellency attacked with a gusto which left him no time for conversation. As soon as he had despatched it, he renewed his narrative :

"I was provided with letters of introduction

which speedily obtained for me a private interview with Ismail Pasha. The character of this Khedive is well known. His reckless extravagance had reduced his country to bankruptcy, and it was on this extravagance that I relied as the motive for inducing him to accept the offer which I was empowered to make.

“The Palace at Cairo, in which he received me, was a strange mixture of European and Oriental luxury. Figure to yourself marble courts surrounded by myrtle-trees and fountains, leading into saloons which might have been upholstered from Paris. This bizarre combination reproduced itself in the person of Ismail Pasha, whose swarthy Eastern features contrasted strangely with his Western attire.

“He had received no previous intimation of the offer I had come to make, and which I was therefore compelled to introduce with the greatest circumspection.

“‘I have the honour to wait upon your Highness,’ I said, as soon as the ceremonial salutations had been exchanged, ‘on behalf of an influential syndicate of bankers in Paris, who have charged me to lay before you a proposal of some magnitude, and which relates to the Suez Canal.’

"I saw his dark eyes glitter as I pronounced this name. He responded morosely :

" 'I am tired of the Suez Canal, M. le Baron. It has not fulfilled the expectations I was led to form from it, and it is, besides, a cause of many political embarrassments. But go on ; explain your proposal.'

" 'It is one which, if you accept it, may relieve your Highness of some of those embarrassments of which you speak,' I answered respectfully. 'At the same time the political susceptibilities which are aroused by every transaction relating to the Canal compel me to ask that this negotiation may remain a secret entirely between your Highness and the persons for whom I act.'

"A frown crossed his face as I made this request, which it was easy to see provoked his suspicions.

" 'If it is a mere question of private finance on which you approach me, there can be no objection to what you propose,' he replied cautiously. 'But if it should turn out to involve political considerations, it will evidently be necessary for me to consult with my advisers before giving you an answer. However, I will hear what you have to say.'

"Thus encouraged, I came boldly to the point.

" 'It is above all a question of private finance,'

I declared. 'As the Khedive of Egypt, your Highness enjoys certain rights over the Canal which passes through your territories. It is these rights which constitute your political relation to it, and they are not affected by the scheme we are discussing. In addition, you are the personal proprietor of certain shares in the Company which owns the Canal, and there is nothing to prevent your transferring these shares to a suitable purchaser, with the same freedom as any other member of the Company.'

"'Ah!' he interrupted, 'I see what it is you want. You propose to make me an offer for some of these shares?'

"'For the whole of them, your Highness,' I returned, bowing.

"'What! Do you mean what you say? These shares are worth at the very least one hundred millions!

"'That is the sum which is mentioned in my instructions.'

"Ismail Pasha gazed at me in consternation.

"'But I have never even entertained the idea of parting with these shares! It is true that I find them unremunerative. Are you aware that the interest on them is deferred?'

“‘I have understood something of the sort,’ I said carelessly. ‘My duty, however, is merely to ask if your Highness will accept for them the sum which you have just named. My principals have believed that in consequence of the unfortunate state of the Egyptian finances, you would probably sooner or later consider the question of realising the value of this property, and their enterprise has led them to make what is perhaps a premature effort to secure it.’

“‘But I do not say that it is premature.’ He stopped, and bent his eyes thoughtfully on the ground for some moments.

“‘I have made no attempt as yet to ascertain the value of my shares,’ he said, presently, regarding me with a searching look. ‘Perhaps I might obtain better terms in London, if I were to make it known that I was willing to dispose of them.’

“I drew myself up with an aggrieved air.

“‘I venture to remind your Highness that such a step would be a violation of our compact of secrecy. Unless you find anything unsatisfactory in the terms offered by the syndicate which I represent, they have the right to expect that you will not enter into negotiations elsewhere.’

“My remonstrance appeared to impress him.

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He listened thoughtfully, and nodded his head once or twice.

“ ‘Very well, I will consider your offer. But I must know with whom I am dealing. Has M. de Lesseps anything to do with this?’ ”

“ ‘I pretended to misunderstand him.

“ ‘M. de Lesseps is not one of the syndicate,’ I replied, with an air of reluctance, ‘but if you regard his approval as important, I am certain that it can be obtained.’ ”

“ ‘No, no; that is all right,’ he said quickly, and smiled to himself. ‘Who, then, are the persons who have deputed you?’ ”

“ ‘I produced a copy of the list supplied to me by De Lesseps, and handed it to the Khedive. He glanced over it with some confusion.

“ ‘I do not recognise these names,’ he muttered. ‘Surely you will see that before entering on such a negotiation I must have satisfactory assurances that this immense sum will be forthcoming.’ ”

“ ‘I assumed an offended demeanour.

“ ‘There has never been a question of the solvency of these gentlemen,’ I returned with warmth. ‘The moment your Highness says the word, one-fourth of the purchase money shall be deposited in the Grand Bank of Cairo. In addition, I am

empowered to offer you, if necessary, the guarantee of my Government.'

"I caught a quick glance from the Khedive's eye as I mentioned the Government. He instantly resumed his cautious air.

"'That is satisfactory enough,' he remarked quietly. 'Well, leave this paper with me for the present, and I will let you have my answer in a few days.'

"Thus dismissed, I returned to my hotel. But I was not satisfied with the result of this interview. The Khedive had shown far less eagerness in the matter than I had been justified in expecting, from the notorious state of his exchequer, and I perceived that it would be necessary to take some decisive step in order to force his consent.

"My previous experience had taught me that every difficulty which one encounters in the countries of the East resolves itself into a question of 'back-sheesh.' It remained for me to discover the quarter in which this irresistible lever might be most profitably applied.

"Do not ask me to enter into details with regard to this point. It is sufficient to say that I ascertained that great influence was wielded over Ismail Pasha by a beautiful odalisque in his harem, whose

name was Fatimeh, and who turned out to possess a mania for the jewellery of the Palais Royal. The negotiation was attended with some risk, on account of the rigorous precautions which are observed in guarding the access to the apartments of the women of the East; nevertheless I succeeded in obtaining an interview with the Khedive's adorable favourite, with whom I got on marvellously, though I have often wondered since how she accounted to Ismail for the quantities of brooches and earrings which she did not scruple to accept from my hands.

"I had no reason to complain of the good faith of this charming creature. Within two days I was sent for to the Palace, and found myself received with the greatest cordiality by the Khedive. He informed me that he had decided to close with the offer of the syndicate, subject merely to a question of terms. He seemed to consider the price of the shares should be increased by another ten million francs, and I undertook to communicate this counter-proposal to Paris at once, and to let him know the result.

"As I was passing through the gates of the Palace on my way out, I ran almost into the arms of the one man in Cairo whom I was anxious to avoid—Colonel Warton. We were old acquaint-

ances, and he recognised me instantly, though I at first feigned not to remember him.

“‘My dear Baron, well met!’ he shouted in his brusque English fashion. ‘What good wind blows you here? I see you have been “tackling” old Ismail: nothing fresh about the Canal, I hope?’

“‘Pardon, my dear Colonel, but you are under a misapprehension,’ I replied, with a little reserve. ‘It is not the diplomatist whom you see in me at present. I am in Cairo simply as a private visitor, and if I have paid my respects to the Khedive, it is not on behalf of the Quai D’Orsay that I have been to see him.’

“He glared at me with some suspicion.

“‘Well, have it your own way, my dear fellow; though you are the last man I should have expected to come to Cairo as a matter of pleasure. The hotels here are vile, and the cookery amounts to a deliberate crusade against the lives of the Giaours. Of course you will dine with me to-night?’

“‘Certainly,’ I answered, summoning up a show of cordiality. ‘As soon as I have despatched a little correspondence, I am at your disposal.’

“‘Good; tell me the name of your hotel, and I will come and fetch you in half-an-hour.’

“I gave him the name, and broke away from

him in order to despatch my telegram to Paris. I felt some disquiet at seeing him march straight into the Palace, as soon as I had turned away, and I resolved to hurry on the completion of my affair without an hour's unnecessary delay.

"The dinner which the good Colonel gave me that evening was of the best. He made no further attempt to draw from me the cause of my presence in Cairo, but spoke as if he thoroughly recognised the character of tourist which I had assigned to myself.

" 'I tell you what it is, Baron,' he said, at a late stage of the repast, and after the second bottle of champagne had been opened, 'you must see some of the sights of Cairo, now you are here. I am not very busy at present, and you must let me take you about. I can't promise you much in the way of theatres, but there are some charming women here whom you ought to know.'

"I smiled discreetly as I thought of Fatimeh. However, I professed the utmost anxiety to meet the Colonel's friends.

" 'Yes,' he went on, 'I have been here for some time, and I flatter myself I know everyone who is worth knowing in Cairo. Of course you will hear a great deal about Oriental seclusion, and the impossi-

bility of seeing anything of the inner life of the higher classes, but, between you and me, all that is very much exaggerated. Egypt is not what it used to be; this Canal of yours has done a lot to Europeanise it. Why,'—he dropped his voice to a confidential whisper,—‘even the Khedive’s harem is not impregnable. I am not sure that I could not manage an introduction to one of the odalisques!’

“I permitted myself another smile.

“‘You think yourself a great man, Colonel,’ I said to myself, ‘but I, who have only been in Cairo a week, perhaps know almost as much as you do about the odalisques!’

“The Colonel put his own construction on my smile.

“‘You do not believe me!’ he exclaimed roughly. ‘Very well, you shall see for yourself as soon as dinner is over.’

“He rang the bell violently, and gave some whispered instructions to his man, who nodded with an air of intelligence, and went out. At the end of an hour, when we were sipping our coffee in the smoking-room, he returned, and gave a look at his master, which appeared to announce the success of his mission.

“‘Now,’ cried the Colonel, springing to his feet,

‘come along, and you shall see whether I can fulfil my undertakings.’

“I followed him out, and we proceeded, by a route which was less novel to me than he supposed, to a certain door situated in the rear of the Khedivial residence. We were admitted by a eunuch, and led along a succession of passages, some of them familiar to me, to an apartment which I did not recognise. No sooner had we reached it, however, than a bell was sounded, and the curtain which concealed an adjoining chamber was lifted to admit the odalisque whom my friend had promised me.

“It was Fatimeh herself!

“If this meeting had been the result of a deep-laid plan to entrap me, instead of a pure coincidence, which I firmly believe it was, the result could not have been more disastrous. Overwhelmed with confusion, I had no time to give a warning sign to this intelligent woman, before she had advanced towards me, and pronounced my name with the most gratifying ardour.

“As for the poor Colonel, he was simply struck dumb at perceiving that my acquaintance with the inner arrangements of the Egyptian Court was not less than his own. I enjoyed my triumph over him with trepidation, however, for I dreaded every

moment lest Fatimeh should make some reference to the motive of my former visit.

“Fortunately she was a woman of penetration, no doubt acquired by long training in the subtle intrigues of a harem, and she quickly understood the glances which I gave to her, to implore silence. Nevertheless the interview was an embarrassing one, and I was not sorry when we were permitted to take our leave, after enjoying the usual refecton of fruit and sweetmeats, and promising to renew our visit at the first opportunity.

“The Colonel maintained an obstinate silence as we came away together. Probably he accused me in his own mind of having deceived him, but he said nothing, and we parted on friendly terms; though he did not renew his offer to become my cicerone in the Egyptian capital.

“The next day I received this message from Paris—of course in cipher :

“*‘Tell Khedive we consider our first offer represents the value of shares, but do not break off negotiation.’*

“Much annoyed at this imprudent haggling at such a moment, I hastened to the Palace to see what I could do. Whom should I see coming out as I entered but Colonel Warton !

“He greeted me with a dry smile.

“‘I see you are constant in your friendly attentions to Ismail,’ was all he said as he passed on.

“To compensate for this mortification, I found the Khedive in a yielding mood. I represented to him that the hundred millions was the utmost that my syndicate felt justified in paying, and after a very few words he gave way, and definitely agreed to accept that amount.

“Delighted with this success, I hastened to the telegraph office, where I again had the vexation of encountering the Englishman.

“‘I hope you are not writing to inform your friends of your return?’ he had the bad taste to say as we met in the doorway.

“‘I am not so easily got rid of,’ I retorted with significance.

“I despatched my message, and then took a stroll through the town. I had nothing more to do in Cairo but to wait for the arrival of the money, and to receive the formal assignment of the shares.

“Late in the afternoon, on returning to my hotel, I found a telegram marked ‘Urgent’ waiting for me in my room. It was from M. Buffard himself, and contained these words:

“‘*British Government has heard of intended purchase and objects. Return to Paris at once, en route for London.*’

"I knew in an instant to whom I was to attribute this frightful blow. Whether it was the beautiful Fatimeh, or the Khedive himself, who had betrayed me, it was evident that Colonel Warton had fathomed the secret of my mission, and had instigated this interference of his Government.

"On my arrival at the Quai D'Orsay, six days later, M. Buffard explained the situation to me.

" 'What has happened,' he said, 'is this. Lord Derby, who holds the portfolio of Foreign Affairs, has verbally informed M. Gavard, our representative, that the Queen's Government understand that the Khedive has been asked to transfer his shares to a syndicate acting on behalf of the French Government, and it is to this that they object. All that is necessary is to convince them that the negotiation proceeds from a private syndicate, entirely independent of us, in which case we may hope that their prohibition will be withdrawn. You must proceed to London at once. Do not trouble yourself with Lord Derby, who is a mere instrument. Go straight to M. Disraeli, the Premier; it is to him that we must address ourselves. Explain to him on whose behalf you are acting, and the affair may yet be terminated satisfactorily.'

"I could do nothing but obey. On the evening

of the following day, the 25th of November, I reached London, and as soon as I had changed my dress, drove straight to Downing Street.

“The English Premier at this time had failed to achieve for himself a real reputation. In his own country he was still rather tolerated than esteemed by his party, who found in him their ablest debater in the House of Commons, but who, many of them, distrusted his principles, and gave him no credit for statesmanship. In short, he was regarded by the public as a brilliant adventurer and a man of theories, who compared unfavourably with the stolid John Bulls of the past. To Europe he was still a mere name ; it was not till the great crisis of the Russo-Turkish war, in which he was seen standing with the lighted match in his hand, ready to precipitate a conflict which would have involved half the world, that European statesmen became so impressed with his personality, which his own followers have since erected into a cult.

“You will understand, therefore, that on the occasion of this visit which I paid to M. Disraeli, I by no means believed myself to be meeting the Beaconsfield of the Berlin Congress.

“He received me with an urbanity worthy of the Faubourg St. Germain, and insisted on my lighting

a cigar and refreshing myself with a brandy and seltzer, before he would permit me to say a word.

“‘You must not think you are a stranger to me,’ he was good enough to say. ‘I am not ignorant of the distinguished reputation you have earned among the European chancelleries.’

“‘It appeared to me that this was an unfortunate opening. I hastened to disclaim the compliments of the Premier.

“‘I fear you have been deceived,’ I said with earnestness. ‘My diplomatic experience has been quite a subordinate one. It is, on the contrary, I who ought to respectfully congratulate you on the exalted prestige which your administration is going to acquire abroad.’

“‘He shook his head with an air of incredulity.

“‘Ah, no, Baron, your goodness leads you to pay these compliments, which are not deserved. I understand but little of foreign politics, my policy is before all things one of peace and repose. Let me assure you, however, that one of the chief objects which I set before me is to cultivate the friendship of your brave nation.’

“‘I seized the opportunity to deliberately repudiate the diplomatic character with which he had sought to invest me.

“‘Your sentiments do us too much honour, M. le Premier,’ I responded. ‘I only regret that I am not in a position to repeat them to the French Government.’

“‘But I authorise you to repeat them, I even request it,’ he exclaimed, failing to understand me.

“‘Alas! that is impossible,’ I explained. ‘I am not here in any official capacity, and therefore I could not take it on myself to repeat expressions addressed to me as a private individual.’

“‘An expression of apparent bewilderment passed over M. Disraeli’s face, to be succeeded by one of cordial friendliness.

“‘Then you are not here on behalf of your Government!’ he cried out. ‘This is a visit which I owe to your personal regard for me! I insist that you shall allow me to refill your glass.’

“‘You distinguish me too much in consenting to place me on such a footing,’ I answered, slightly confused. ‘In effect, I have ventured to come here to ask of you a favour on behalf of a certain financial syndicate with which I am associated, and which I feel sure that you will not refuse.’

“‘You would do wrong to doubt it, my dear Baron,’ he returned with undiminished cordiality.

‘Rest assured that if this favour is in my power it is already yours. But explain yourself.’

“‘A thousand thanks, M. le Premier. The affair is one of the simplest. The syndicate I refer to is composed of certain well-known capitalists, whose operations have received a check in consequence of a misapprehension created in the mind of Lord Derby.’

“‘You astonish me!’ M. Disraeli spoke in a tone of surprise. The next moment he lay back in his chair and smiled good-naturedly, as he added:

“‘But after all it is not only you who have had to face the disagreeable task of combatting misapprehensions in Lord Derby’s mind. You will doubtless tell me the particulars?’

“‘But that is what I desire. The syndicate of which I have spoken, and which has prevailed on me to act as its agent, has conceived the idea of operating in the shares of the Suez Canal Company. You know these gentry of the Bourse—when they perceive the chance for a favourable stroke, politics are the last consideration which enters into their heads. Well, it appears that Lord Derby objects to their proceedings, for a reason which it is not easy to understand, and he has even forbidden the poor Khedive to entertain an offer which I was

empowered to make to him on behalf of the associates.'

"The countenance of the English Premier assumed an expression of the most profound annoyance.

"'Ridiculous!' he muttered. 'It is incredible! What reason could he possibly have had for this absurd prohibition?'

"'It seems that they have persuaded him that there was a political significance in this transaction, that these shares were to be acquired for the French Government, in a word.'

"M. Disraeli turned on me a look of the most perfect surprise.

"'But surely that is not so?' he inquired. 'I have just understood you to tell me that there is a question here simply of a private speculation?'

"'Without doubt. The Government of France holds itself entirely aloof from the affair, on the contrary.'

"'I understand. Then what you ask of me is, to inform Lord Derby that he is mistaken in supposing that the French Government interests itself in your negotiations?'

"'Perfectly,' I answered, a little disconcerted,

however. 'In that case, am I forbidden to hope that you will prevail on him to withdraw his prohibition?'

"'There will no longer be any reason for maintaining it,' was the reply. 'It is rather a question how he could ever have been deceived into a belief so groundless. Perhaps you can suggest a cause for this strange mistake?'

"Thus encouraged, I ventured to pronounce the name of Colonel Warton, which M. Disraeli received with a frown.

"'It happened that this officer met me in Cairo,' I explained, 'and became aware that I was in communication with Ismail Pasha. I did not believe myself obliged to take him into my confidence, and it is doubtless this reserve which has provoked his interference.'

"'It is perfectly shameful!' the Premier exclaimed with immense indignation. 'You have done right to complain to me of this person, whose unjust suspicions have inflicted a serious injury upon your friends.'

"'It is true that the Colonel had formerly made my acquaintance over a diplomatic transaction,' I added, 'and this may have caused him to connect my proceedings with the idea of politics.'

“M. Disraeli smiled, and shook his head playfully at me.

“‘Ah, Baron, you see that your terrible reputation pursues you,’ he observed. ‘How can you be surprised if people refuse to recognise in the most astute diplomatist of Europe, the innocent traveller of a harmless commercial syndicate?’

“I felt uneasy at these compliments, which were capable of a double meaning. Assuming an air of raillery to correspond with the Premier’s, I observed :

“‘There was perhaps another reason which provoked Colonel Warton’s jealousy. It is not only in politics that he has found cause to dread my reputation.’

“And I proceeded to relate the affair of Fatimeh.

“This incident appeared to afford M. Disraeli the utmost amusement. Our conversation ceased to turn on matters of business, and he detained me to a late hour with a succession of the most agreeable reminiscences, which acquired an added charm from the lips of one of the wittiest men in Europe.

“When I finally tore myself away he insisted on accompanying me to the door, where he renewed his expressions of regret at Lord Derby’s unfortunate mistake, and warmly assured me of his own perfect

belief in the indifference of the French Government."

The Ambassador heaved a sigh, and commenced rolling up his napkin as if he had nothing more to tell me.

"But you have not finished your story," I remonstrated, seeing him beckon to the waiter for his bill.

His Excellency regarded me with stern surprise.

"Is it possible that you have neglected to bear in mind the date which I have assigned to this conversation?" he demanded.

"My dear Ambassador, you forget that all have not your extraordinary memory for these dates you speak of," I returned with some impatience. "At least consent to remind me of what happened on this occasion."

His Excellency shrugged his shoulders.

"You compel me to resume? Good.

"The following morning a copy of the *Times* was laid before me at breakfast. I opened it, and the first thing on which my eyes fell was this passage:

" 'We have to-day to make a somewhat startling announcement. The British Government have bought from the Khedive shares of the Suez Canal to the amount of £4,000,000 sterling. In the complete secrecy with which this transaction has been

carried out, a transaction which it is impossible to separate in our thoughts from the question of England's future relations with Egypt, we trace the hand of Mr. Disraeli.'

"And so on. I had been deliberately, shamefully, deceived. While M. Disraeli was pretending to grant me everything I wished, he actually held the Khedive's assignment in his pocket. It has been the most humiliating experience of my career."

I tried to look as though I shared his Excellency's indignation.

"And did the French Government take no action?" I inquired respectfully.

"How could they? I have related what passed between us. This astute man had carefully set himself to draw from me an explicit assurance that my Government were without interest in the disposal of these shares. If I had dared to remonstrate he would have replied that he was perfectly entitled to bid against a syndicate of private speculators. This heartless intrigue was too skilfully planned to leave any opening for protest."

The Ambassador rose abruptly, flung down a gratuity for the waiter, and stalked out of the café.

As we walked away, the influence of the sunshine

and the balmy air seemed to soften his excited mood.

"After all, it was poor Fatimeh who came off the worst," he remarked in a mournful tone, as we returned past the Bourse. "She did not live long to enjoy the little gifts which I had presented to her."

"How? Do you mean to say——"

"Her fate has remained a mystery. But I have always feared that it was a question of the bow-string—and that Colonel Warton stooped to obtain this diabolical revenge!"

Madame the Ambassadors.

'**W**HAT is this that I find, faithless one! So, while I have been imparting to you my most sacred confidences, you have allowed yourself to reproduce them in a magazine which is read by all the world!"

I had called to take leave of the Ambassador on my approaching departure from Paris. He received me with a display of indignation which was most impressive, and proceeded to overwhelm me.

"You have even suffered these libels to be translated. All Paris is reading them. In the clubs, for example, they talk of nothing else."

"But, M. l'Ambassadeur," I pleaded, "if I have been indiscreet in the use I have made of your fascinating reminiscences, at least I have scrupulously concealed your name."

"But of what use is that?" he retorted with severity. "The public has not been slow to identify

me as the hero of the episodes which you have related. I cannot walk down the boulevards without being overwhelmed by the congratulations of my friends."

I began to resume my courage.

"After all, what is there in this which you ought to resent?" I demanded boldly. "It appears to me that I have merely performed an act of justice in causing the world to render homage to your genius. It is no longer Prince Bismarck whom the public now perceives to have been the mainspring of European history during a generation. History will pronounce that I have done right to make these revelations of your personality."

His Excellency continued to hold out for some time against these blandishments, but in the end he permitted himself to be appeased.

"Say no more, my friend," he said graciously. "I am willing to believe that you have acted thoughtlessly, and that you will not repeat the indiscretion of which you have been guilty. In proof of my forgiveness, I am going to insist that you shall stay here and dine."

"If you promise to excuse my frock-coat to Madame, I accept with pleasure," I answered. "But on one condition—before I leave, you must

relate to me that story of your experiences in the Quirinal, which you have sometimes hinted had a more than usually romantic ending."

The Ambassador smiled at me indulgently.

"Well, I will do so, my friend; and all the more because there is no longer any one who can be injured by the circumstances becoming known."

And this time I remarked that he made no attempt to renew the stipulation of secrecy.

"In the first place," he began, "it is necessary that you should understand that I am speaking of the time when I was in Rome as Ambassador to the Kingdom of Italy, which you will not confound with my former mission to the Vatican. It was now that I began to perceive that difference between the 'black' and 'white' worlds of which our good M. Zola has spoken in his book. The change was not altogether an agreeable one. I had ceased to be the friend of the Pope, but owing to the strained character of our relations with Italy, I had not been admitted to the intimacy of Umberto.

"You will say that I had no right to expect this. That is true; nevertheless other sovereigns of rank not inferior to the King of Italy have deigned to

extend to me a friendship which I believe I have not abused."

"What you tell me stupefies me," I murmured, as his Excellency appealed to me by an eloquent glance. "It is true that this Italian monarchy is a recent affair—these parvenus are always exclusive."

I had said the wrong thing. The Ambassador drew himself up, and darted a haughty look at me.

"Monsieur, I believe you are in error. At least I have not attributed this coldness of the Italian King to any personal reason, but to those political influences which I have indicated."

I hastened to excuse my stupidity in the most abject terms. When I had abased myself sufficiently, his Excellency consented to proceed.

"The affair of which I have promised to speak occurred some years ago, not long after my arrival in Rome, in fact. A State ball was being held one night at the Palace, a function to which my position, of course, made it necessary that I should be invited. The scene was a brilliant one. Italy had not yet embarked upon her disastrous adventure at Massowah, which was destined to cast so deep a gloom upon the destinies of the young nation.

"In the centre of the principal saloon stood

King Umberto, his bluff mien of a country gentleman contrasting strangely with his elaborate military costume. Round him were grouped the officers of his Household, sparkling with uniforms and orders, and the members of the Government, with Signor Crispi at their head.

“I approached to pay my respects to his Majesty, prepared for the formal greeting with which he usually received me. To my surprise, his manner exhibited a striking transformation. He assumed a cordial smile as soon as he caught sight of me, stepped forward two paces—an honour usually reserved for the Princes of reigning Houses—and extended both hands in a hearty clasp of welcome.

“Amazed at this reception, I let my eye rove round mechanically, noting the impression produced by this condescension upon the other members of the group. The result was curious. Most of these witnesses were evidently surprised at what they saw; but Signor Crispi and one or two others were looking on with smiling faces, like the approving spectators of some comedy.

“Not satisfied with this display of cordiality, Umberto insisted on detaining me by his side for some minutes, chatting familiarly about a boar-hunt which had just taken place at his castle in the mountains.

“ ‘You must positively join us next time,’ he said; ‘it is a sport which you ought not to miss. And besides, I cherish the hope of seeing more of you than has yet been possible in this wretched Rome, where one has not a minute that is one’s own.’

“ ‘You are too good, sire,’ I responded. ‘The honour which you propose for me would be of all things that which I should most desire.’

“As I said these words, I again glanced round me. My previous impression was confirmed. On the brow of Signor Crispi I even thought that I detected a slight shade of anxiety. The fact is that the worthy King was overdoing his part, and the Sicilian was keen enough to see it. An old diplomatist like myself, who has passed his whole life in the atmosphere of Courts, is not to be imposed upon by such shallow artifices. Before I had parted from the Royal group I had become convinced that there was some intrigue on foot which could not be viewed with indifference by France, and that an attempt was being made to overcome my watchfulness.

“I passed on to tender my formal homage to Queen Margharita. Her Majesty, who on other occasions had treated me with an almost mortifying coldness, confirmed my suspicions by altering her manner

almost as much as King Umberto had done. At the same time I detected a certain embarrassment beneath this assumed friendliness, which told me that this Queen—a really superior woman—was not altogether satisfied with the part she had been instructed to play.

“Filled with apprehension, and vainly trying to form some guess as to the nature of the mystery, I was moving distractedly through the crowded ball-rooms, when I suddenly caught sight of one of my few friends in the Italian Court. This was Madame la Contessa D’Urbino, one of the ladies in waiting to Queen Margharita.

“This distinguished lady, who was believed to stand high in her Majesty’s confidence, was at this time a widow, having lost her husband, General D’Urbino, about a year before. She was besides a woman of extraordinary fascination, possessed of beauty which would have commanded homage in any station. When I tell you that I, who am as you know indifferent to women, was not prepared to resist this charming Italian, you will perceive what she must have been.

“It is true that I had a particular motive for cultivating her friendship. In the isolated position in which I found myself, I foresaw that she might

be able to render me the greatest services. A diplomatist has no scruples, and perhaps I did not sufficiently reflect on the fatal consequences which my attentions might have for the susceptible nature of the General's widow.

"You will easily imagine that I was not long in making my way to her side, on this occasion. She greeted me with tenderness, and made room for me to sit down by her side.

"'Welcome, M. l'Ambassadeur!' she exclaimed—we always conversed in French—'I began to fear that you had been prevented from coming.'

"'Did you believe it possible that I could keep away?' I responded with a glance of homage, while I wondered to myself whether she knew anything of the intrigue which I had come to suspect.

"The Countess smiled gracefully. Her teeth were indeed perfect.

"'I know so well what you men are,' she said archly. 'Confess you are wishing yourself at home in your smoking-room at the Embassy, with a cigar and perhaps a novel of Daudet.'

"I shook my head with an air of resignation.

"'Alas! I have no one to share my smoking-room with me,' I replied mournfully. 'But what pity for my loneliness can I expect from you, who

are perpetually in the midst of a crowd of worshippers?’

“‘Ah, you do not know me, I perceive,’ she answered, drooping her head gracefully. ‘It was formerly my greatest happiness to sit in just such a smoking-room as you speak of, with no society but that of my dear husband, for whom I was accustomed to roll innumerable cigarettes.’

“‘I saw that the moment had come to change the conversation.

“‘That is a charming waltz which the band has just commenced,’ I said. ‘Will you do me the honour to dance it with me?’

“‘She assented, and we took one turn round the floor. But my mind was still absorbed in the problem I had to solve, and Madame D’Urbino quickly perceived my abstraction.

“‘You are fatigued this evening, are you not?’ she observed, pausing near a window which opened out into the gardens. ‘Shall we rest for a little?’

“‘I assented gratefully, and we passed out together into the open air, where the coolness made a refreshing change from the stifling atmosphere within.

“‘The gardens were illuminated in honour of the festivity, but we found our way to a secluded corner

where there was a bench under the shadow of an olive, and sat down.

“By this time I had resolved upon my course of action. This was to enlist Madame D’Urbino on my side, if possible, and through her to ascertain the truth as to the danger which I believed to threaten France. The situation, as you realise, was a delicate one. In order to make an ally of the beautiful Italian, it was first of all necessary to establish between us a relation of a more intimate kind than mere friendship. In the interest of France I prepared to make this sacrifice, and to assume for a time the tender character of a lover.”

The Ambassador gave me a questioning glance at this point, as if desirous to know my opinion on the morality of such a manœuvre.

I returned his glance by one of sympathetic admiration.

“This proof of your devotion which you gave was indeed a great one,” I observed. “Still, no doubt it had its compensations. I think you told me that this lady was not without attractions?”

His Excellency looked at me with a momentary suspicion. But the respectful expression which I continued to preserve must have reassured him, for he answered with seriousness :

“I repeat it; she was the most fascinating woman I have ever met. I have never shared the taste for young girls fresh from the convent which distinguishes so many of my countrymen. There is about women like Madame D’Urbino a seductive manner which can only be acquired by experience, and which constitutes their greatest charm. But you are about to remind me that I cannot expect you to share the tender pleasure which I derive from these recollections.”

My friend sighed gently as he forced himself to resume the thread of his story.

“The opening which I sought was furnished by Madame D’Urbino herself, who had evidently perceived that something was weighing on my mind.

“‘You are silent this evening, my friend,’ she remarked. ‘Perhaps you have had news which has distressed you.’

“‘You are too good to interest yourself in me,’ I responded, assuming a melancholy tone. ‘But how can I expect you to sympathise with an anxiety which is caused by my belief that the Italian Government entertains some project hostile to my country. Without doubt you have accustomed yourself to consider Frenchmen as your enemies.’”

“‘Do not say that,’ she cried with real feeling.

‘At least you do not believe that I regard you in any other light than as a cherished friend?’

“I took her hand respectfully and raised it to my lips.

“‘Your friendship will always remain my most prized possession,’ I answered, ‘even if the troubles which I foresee between our countries should force me to resign the hope of ever obtaining a warmer place in your regard.’

“Madame D’Urbino turned on me a look of consternation. It was easy to see that she was ignorant of whatever was on foot.

“‘But, my friend, what you say is incredible!’ she exclaimed. ‘What are these troubles which you apprehend?’

“‘Ask Queen Margharita,’ I retorted with bitterness. ‘Her Majesty is in the secret of this affair, of which as yet I have been able to learn nothing definite.’ I affected to hesitate for a moment, and then, as if yielding to an impulse, I cried out: ‘Ah, if you could enable me to understand, and perhaps to remove this peril, what a service you would render to the cause of peace—and to our friendship!’

“The beautiful widow retained enough shrewdness to perceive the seriousness of my remark.

“‘It would be difficult for you to ask me any-

thing which I should be capable of refusing,' she murmured, with some reluctance.

"I pressed her elegant hand which I had omitted to relinquish.

"'Ah!' I whispered, 'what you say encourages me to look forward to the time when I shall ask something of real importance.'

"She wavered.

"'But are you not asking me, in effect, to aid you against my own country?' she said, as if in doubt.

"'And if I were?' I demanded, taking possession of her other hand. 'Do I not at the same time ask if you have a regard for me which is stronger than political considerations?'

"And I again ventured upon a tender salute."

The Ambassador was so much overcome by these touching reminiscences that it was some time before he could continue.

"In a few minutes everything was arranged. Lucia—that is to say, Madame D'Urbino—undertook to penetrate the secret of what was going forward, and to assist me in the struggle which I foresaw.

"We decided that it would be imprudent for her to communicate with me by letter. Instead, we

arranged that every afternoon at five o'clock, when she was relieved from her attendance on the Queen, she should drive up and down the Corso, the most crowded street in Rome, where a meeting between us would have the appearance of chance, and would thus provoke no suspicion.

"A code of signals was easily arranged. The Countess was to carry every day a bouquet of flowers in her hand. If these flowers were yellow, I was to understand that she had as yet discovered nothing, and that the affair remained in suspense. If they were white, it was to signify that everything had been explained, and that my fears were groundless. If, on the other hand, I beheld a bouquet of red flowers, I should know that my ally had found out something serious, and that it was necessary for us to meet.

"I passed the next few days in a state of the keenest anxiety. Each afternoon at the hour agreed I took my way to the Corso, only to see the charming Countess drive by with her yellow bouquet, leaving me to renew my conjectures.

"In the meanwhile, however, I had taken certain steps of a different kind with the same end in view. I had sent my Naval Attaché on a tour round the dockyards, to see if he could detect any signs of

unusual activity. And I had called secretly on my colleague, who represented France at the Vatican, and asked him to make use of all the means of information he could command.

“You think, perhaps, that all these precautions were unnecessary, and that it would have been simpler to wait till Crispi showed his hand, before taking action. But let me tell you that in modern diplomacy everything depends on getting in the first blow. The forces of the Powers are too equal for them to venture upon war, and hence in their dealings with each other they all seek to avoid creating situations in which war might appear necessary to the self-respect of either side.

“If, for instance, France had learnt of this last expedition to the Soudan before it had been actually announced, we should have formally forbidden it, and England would have had to accept a diplomatic defeat, in order not to place us in the position of being obliged to make our protest good. As it was, France found herself confronted with the fact of the expedition at a stage when it would have been impossible for England to draw back without loss of prestige, and hence we were obliged to allow you to proceed.

“It is for this reason that most of the proceed-

ings of the Powers to-day are accompanied by so much secrecy and suddenness, like our own seizure of Tunis. When a great Power has made a definite display of its intentions, it becomes like the rolling cannon-ball which cut off the foot of the man who thrust out his leg to stop it. Diplomacy dares not thrust its foot in front of the cannon-ball after it has begun to roll; but if, on the other hand, it can place its foot in the way beforehand, it is the ball which dares not start."

The Ambassador paused to allow me to digest these explanations, and then went on:

"Four days passed without the situation undergoing a change. It was on the afternoon of the fifth that I beheld the anticipated signal. As my carriage entered the Corso Madame D'Urbino drove towards me with the fatal red bouquet in her hand.

"It was impossible for us to stop our carriages in this narrow and crowded thoroughfare. I therefore alighted from mine, and walked along to meet that of the Countess as she turned. In this way our encounter excited no attention from the passers-by. My friend caused her carriage to halt for a moment and invited me to enter, and then, as I placed myself by her side, we drove slowly on, exchanging bows with our acquaintances along the route.

"In the meantime we conversed in tones too low to be overheard. Like all women, Madame D'Urbino commenced by demanding flattery as the price of her services.

"'It is easy to see that it is not for the sake of our friendship that you have made your way to me so eagerly,' she said, as I fixed a questioning look upon her.

"I changed my look to one of tenderness.

"'And how do you know that this anxiety with which you reproach me is not assumed,' I retorted, 'as an excuse to cultivate your friendship—perhaps to test its strength?'

"She lowered her superb eyelashes.

"'There was no necessity for that,' she murmured softly.

"I caught at her hand, but she withdrew it swiftly, and at once gave the conversation a practical turn:

"'I have discovered two things, my friend; it is for your sagacity to detect the connection between them. In the first place, the Duc d'Ural is secretly in Rome as the envoy of the Comte de Chambord; in the second, a military expedition is preparing for some place abroad.'

"This was sufficiently alarming. I knew the

restless character of the late Pretender to the French throne too well not to suspect at once that some serious conspiracy underlay these circumstances.

“‘I must know more than this,’ I answered, frowning. ‘I must ascertain the object of the Duke’s mission, and also the destination of this expedition.’

“Madame D’Urbino regarded me gravely.

“‘I anticipated that you would say so,’ she answered, ‘and I have thought of a way by which you may achieve your object. But, in the first place, does the Duc D’Ural know you?’

“‘I believe not,’ I replied, wondering what was in her mind. ‘But in any case I should have no difficulty in sufficiently altering my appearance to deceive an ordinary observer.’

“‘That is enough; I will tell you what I propose. The Duke’s negotiation is being carried on through the medium of Queen Margharita, who has appointed me to receive him and introduce him privately into her Majesty’s apartments. He will come there to-night at half-past ten. What I propose is this: that you should come there beforehand, and let me admit you into one of the anterooms. Then on the Duke’s arrival I will bring him into you. He will be made to think that you have been deputed by the Queen

to draw up the heads of an agreement, and in this way you will be able to extract from him everything he knows.'

"'Ah, my friend, what brilliance, what invention!' I exclaimed, as she unfolded her admirable plan. 'Depend upon my using this opportunity to the best advantage. But, in the meantime, is there no way of discovering the truth about these military preparations?'

"'I have thought of that, too. I have a nephew in the army, a lieutenant in the Sardinian Cuirassiers. I will approach the Queen with a request that he may be given a chance of winning glory on this expedition, and I may be able to extract some hint as to its destination.'

"I could do nothing but press the hand of this admirable woman in silent gratitude. She was indeed born for the diplomatic service.

"Shortly afterwards we separated. On returning home I found waiting for me a cipher despatch from the attaché, who had by this time got to Genoa. He reported that a large number of transports were being equipped, but that the use to which they were to be put was being kept a profound secret. So far, therefore, the intelligence of the Countess was confirmed.

“A little before half-past ten that night I presented myself at one of the side entrances to the Quirinal, which Madame D’Urbino had indicated to me. A porter in plain clothes admitted me, and brought me up a private staircase into my friend’s presence. After a brief conversation, of a character which would not interest you, she led me into another room, and left me to wait for the arrival of the Comte de Chambord’s emissary.

“A few minutes passed in profound silence, and then a curtain was lifted and a second personage came in. No sooner had I caught sight of his face than I gave a start which it was fortunate that he did not perceive. The fact is that the Countess had been frightfully imposed upon. The man whom I saw before me was ‘Henri V.’—the Comte de Chambord in person!

“It was indeed fortunate that I had disguised myself, for I was perfectly well known to the Count, with whom I had once had an extraordinary adventure. Fortunately he was not in a suspicious mood. He bowed slightly as I rose at his entrance, and placed himself in a chair, giving me permission by a nod to do the same.

“‘I understand that the Queen has appointed you to settle the preliminaries of the contract, Signor,’ he began in very good Italian.

"I replied in the same language, the better to disguise my voice. Of course I had not the faintest idea what contract he referred to.

"'Her Majesty has commanded me to receive your instructions in the matter,' I replied, avoiding the use of any title, as I was uncertain whether to address him as Duke or King. 'It occurred to her that there might be details which you would rather communicate to her Majesty through me.'

"He nodded.

"'I understand. There is of course the question of the dowry.'

"Again I could scarcely conceal my agitation. So there was a question of a marriage beneath this mysterious visit to Rome—and of a marriage which the French Republic could not view with indifference.

"The Count proceeded :

"'The sum which I authorise you to mention to the Queen is twenty millions of francs. But you will no doubt remind her Majesty that the real dowry which my daughter brings to the House of Savoy is the friendship of the Catholic Legitimists of Europe.'

"I began to understand. It was, without doubt, the beautiful Princess Clotilde, the belle of Europe, whose marriage was in agitation. Nor had I any

real doubt as to the bridegroom who was proposed for her, when I said :

“‘I shall repeat your observations, sire. But the amount you name is liberal. The Duke of Naples is not an extravagant Prince.’

“By the way in which this name was received I saw my guess must be correct. This young man, the heir to the Italian throne, had not yet found a bride, owing to the stubborn veto imposed by the Pope on any attempt to ally him with one of the reigning Catholic families. I could only suppose that the Count de Chambord had resolved to brave the Pope’s displeasure, under some powerful temptation—perhaps the aid of an Italian army!

“I went on to add :

“‘Am I to say anything to the Queen upon the subject of the Holy Father?’

“‘You may say that I shall see his Holiness to-morrow,’ was the reply. ‘But I am still of the opinion that he should be kept in ignorance of what we have in view. After all the Pope is not everybody. I also have some influence with the Catholic world.’

“He drew himself up haughtily. But he had put a weapon into my hand by this admission that he did not dare to ask the Pope’s consent. The

only question that remained was of the motives of the Italian Court in making this alliance. Was their idea merely to hallow their dynasty in Legitimist eyes—in which case I had no ground for interference—or did they seek to gain a weapon against the French Republic by this connection with its enemy?

“It was necessary to push my questioning further, though the Comte was evidently growing impatient.

“‘Doubtless you will desire me to say something to the Queen on the subject of France?’ I asked respectfully.

“‘It is unnecessary. I am satisfied with the moral support which my cause will derive from this union with the Italian monarchy.’

“This answer gave me fresh food for thought. If the military preparations of which I had heard were not connected with the project of this marriage, what was their object? And again, what was the motive of this marriage? The Comte de Chambord might believe that it was a mere question of Legitimist sympathy, but I knew the wily Sicilian nature of that man Crispi too well not to suspect some deeper aim beneath all this.

“However, there was clearly nothing more to be extracted from my companion. I therefore made

no further effort to detain him, and he left the Palace as secretly as he had entered it.

“Scarcely had he gone when Madame D’Urbino presented herself before me in a state of considerable agitation.

“‘I have found out the object of the expedition!’ she cried out, giving me no time to question her. ‘I have just left Queen Margharita, who has allowed me to know that it is to land in Tripoli.’

“This news came on me like a flash of lightning, revealing all that had hitherto remained obscure in this tortuous intrigue. The whole of Signor Crispi’s little plot stood clear. By marrying the Prince of Naples to the daughter of the French Pretender he would furnish the Republic with a new and most powerful motive for not desiring war with Italy, and would thus place himself in a position to deal an effective counterstroke to our occupation of Tunis by carrying out a similar annexation in the neighbouring territory of Tripoli.

“France held in check, there was no other power which would or could interfere. England was no doubt a consenting party to the scheme, which would provide her with a friendly buffer between the French in Tunis and her own troops in Egypt.

“There was no time to lose in frustrating this

design. I took a hurried farewell of Madame D'Urbino, and returned to the Embassy. Thence, after resuming my ordinary appearance, I hastened round to my colleague at the Vatican Embassy, and poured out the whole tale into his startled ears. Together we rushed off to wait upon the President of the Sacred Congregation, Cardinal Fratella.

"The Cardinal received us with evident surprise, it being contrary to all etiquette that an Ambassador to the Quirinal, as I was, should hold direct communication with the Vatican. But it did not need many words for me to justify my intrusion.

"To-morrow, I understand, the Holy Father will receive in secret audience a certain Duc D'Ural,' I began, when the Cardinal checked me by an exclamation of astonishment.

"How did you learn that?' he demanded.

"You must allow my source of information to remain a secret,' I answered gravely. 'But be satisfied that no one connected with the Papal Court has proved a traitor. This Duc d'Ural, as of course you also know, is in reality the Comte de Chambord.'

"Again the Cardinal uttered a cry of surprise. I smiled sarcastically as I went on:

"This visit, however, is not of so much importance as to call for all this secrecy, because I happen

to know that the Comte intends to keep Leo XIII. in the dark as to the true reason of his presence in Rome.'

"Cardinal Fratella bit his lip, and leant forward eagerly to listen.

"'I have come here to put your Eminence in possession of the Comte's secret, in order that the Pope may have the advantage in the conversation which will take place between them. To come to the point, the self-styled King of France is here to betroth his daughter to the son of the King of Italy.'

"The Cardinal fell back in horror.

"'Never! such black duplicity!' he gasped out. And then, bringing down his clenched fist upon the arm of his chair, he added: 'I thank you, M. l'Ambassadeur, for your information. Rest assured that the marriage shall not be carried out, even if his Holiness has to excommunicate the bride and bridegroom!'

"Satisfied with this emphatic declaration, I took my departure. It was not without a certain amount of malicious amusement that I pictured to myself the meeting next day between the Pope and 'Henry V.'

"But my task was not yet done. I had to see Signor Crispi, and prevent this Tripoli expedition

before it was too late. I parted from my colleague, and drove alone to the residence of the Prime Minister.

“Late as was the hour, there were still some people in the street, and a solitary newsboy tried to sell me his last paper as I dismounted from my carriage. I bought it out of compassion for the starving wretch, and, crumpling it up in my hand, made my way up the steps of the *Palazzo*.

“Fortunately Signor Crispi had not yet retired, and on my name being announced, he at once ordered me to be admitted.

“I found him in a small, plainly furnished room, where he sat on a cane-seated chair before a table littered with papers. He was reading these while he devoured his frugal supper of a radish and a roll of bread. I knew the man. He made poverty an ostentation, and pretended that he was still one of the people who accidentally found himself ruler of Italy.

“‘Well, M. l’Ambassadeur,’ he said, rising to shake hands with me, ‘I trust it is nothing untoward which procures me the pleasure of this visit at such an hour?’

“‘Not in the least, my dear Signor Crispi,’ I replied with my most friendly smile. ‘On the

contrary, I have come here to give you a piece of information for which I expect you to thank me.'

"With these words I sat down in the chair which he had placed for me, and crossed my legs with the air of having come for a friendly chat.

"But the Sicilian was not deceived. I saw a quick look of apprehension come into his eye and depart again as he forced himself to assume an indifferent air.

"'It is too good of you to give yourself this trouble,' he muttered, glancing at a document which lay before him, and over which he had thrust a piece of blotting-paper at my entrance.

"By the way," remarked the Ambassador, diverging an instant from his narrative, "were you aware that the black blotting paper so universally in use among diplomatists was the invention of your countryman, Lord Beaconsfield?"

"I had not heard it," I replied with some impatience.

The Ambassador nodded with an approving smile.

"Yes, it was one of those clever and yet simple ideas which one wonders that one did not think of oneself. It is now no longer possible to decipher important secrets from a Minister's blotting-pad.

"But to return to Signor Crispi.

"Is this information of which you speak of such a nature that it will not keep until to-morrow?' he inquired with an affectation of weariness which concealed a very real anxiety.

"That depends on how far things have gone,' I answered cautiously. 'However, you know me, and you know it is my character to be open to a fault.'

"Here Crispi gave me a sly glance.

"I have to tell you that this marriage which you are arranging for the Prince of Naples will not be permitted to take place.'

"Crispi in vain endeavoured to conceal his consternation. He had evidently not expected to find me so well informed.

"Explain yourself, M. l'Ambassadeur,' he said curtly, as soon as he had recovered himself. 'This marriage of which you speak——'

"This marriage between the Prince and the daughter of the Comte de Chambord,' I put in, completing his unfinished sentence. 'This marriage which has been endeavoured to be concealed from Leo XIII., but of which his Holiness is fully aware, and which he has announced his intention to frustrate at all costs.'

"The Minister's face fell. He gave me a

despairing glance, and for one instant permitted his secret thoughts to escape him :

“ ‘Why did you not come to me first, before going to the Pope? Perhaps we might have made a deal.’

“The next instant he had resumed the official mask.

“ ‘I do not of course admit that any such marriage was in contemplation,’ he observed. ‘Nevertheless I note what you say as to its impossibility. Is there anything which you desire to add?’

“ ‘Merely this, my dear Signor Crispi, that the discovery of such an intrigue has made me take a view perhaps unduly suspicious of the armament you are preparing for service abroad.’

“This time the Sicilian showed no confusion. He had no doubt suspected all along that this was the object of my visit. At the same time he made no attempt to disclaim the existence of these preparations, a circumstance which I noted with some alarm.

“ ‘Let me assure you that this armament covers no purpose hostile to France,’ was all he said. ‘It is exclusively an affair of the private interests of Italy.’

“‘I am glad to hear it,’ I said gravely. ‘Then I may assure my Government that the expedition which you are fitting out is not destined for Tripoli?’

“A deep frown crossed his face as I pronounced this word.

“‘M. le Baron, you know too much!’ he exclaimed harshly. ‘Your spies are too ingenious: do not let me catch them!’ Then, calming himself by an effort, he went on :

“‘In any case, it is too late to make objections. By this time the fleet is already entering the straits of Messina.’

“I trembled as I listened to this audacious declaration. You will perceive the gravity of the crisis. It was, as I have said already, the case of the cannon-ball and the leg. Signor Crispi’s object was to convince me that the cannon-ball had commenced to roll; it was for me to establish on the contrary that it had not, and that France had put her foot down in the way.

“‘The fleet may have started, but it is not too late to alter its destination,’ I replied with firmness. ‘It will be necessary for you to telegraph at once. I notify you that France will look upon an invasion of Tripoli as an attack upon herself.’

“Crispi turned pale. He saw the prize of his

stealthy preparations slipping from his grasp. But his resources were not yet exhausted.

“‘I implore you to withdraw your notification,’ he said earnestly. ‘The object of the expedition is already public. The *Gazette of Rome* has received the official intimation, and it is no doubt already in type.’

“‘Are you sure of what you say?’ I responded with a meaning glance directed at the half-hidden document upon the table. ‘You have no doubt prepared the official notice, but perhaps it has not been despatched?’

“Crispi started.

“‘You are indeed omniscient,’ he murmured with bitterness. ‘But after all the *Gazette* is of no consequence. The secret of the expedition is already public property; a paragraph on the subject appeared in the last edition of the *Bocca di Roma* this evening.’

“For a moment I was staggered. If this were so the cannon-ball had indeed begun to roll, and to stop it would mean war. While I was hesitating I suddenly recollected the paper which had been thrust upon me by the newsboy outside. I unfolded it and glanced at the name. It was a copy of the *Bocca di Roma*.

"Then ensued a strange scene. With trembling hands I spread out the badly-printed sheet, casting my eye down column after column, while the Prime Minister of Italy sat back in his chair watching me, the beads of perspiration rolling down his forehead. And war between two mighty nations, a war perhaps involving half Europe and the lives of millions of men, hung on the outcome.

"At last I found the miserable paragraph on which so much depended. No sooner had my eye fallen upon the heading than I drew a deep sigh of relief. It read: '*Expedition to AFRICA.*'

"I read the paragraph through, laid down the paper, and looked Crispi in the face.

"'It is not too late to alter the goal of your expedition, after all,' I said. 'There are other places in Africa besides Tripoli, and the invasion of which will not mean war with France.'

"For half-an-hour longer he resisted, argued and implored. But I stood firm as a rock. At last he gave way. A wire was sent that night to Reggio to intercept the squadron, and in the morning the people of Italy learned that they were to acquire a colony on the shores of the Red Sea."

The Ambassador stopped and heaved a sigh.

"Of course I did not then foresee the disasters

that were in store for this colony, on which I persuaded Crispi to seize as an alternative to Tripoli. But I had done my duty, and am not responsible for the results."

"Surely that is not all you have to tell me?" I remonstrated, as my host showed no sign of proceeding. "What of that charming Madame D'Urbino, in whom you have interested me so strongly?"

His Excellency first frowned, and then smiled.

"You have done well to remind me of the sequel to this adventure," he remarked graciously. "I have already repeated to you the Prime Minister's savage threat. It appears that my friendship for Madame D'Urbino had already excited attention among the busybodies of the Quirinal, and it was not difficult for our enemies to guess something of the truth.

"In effect, a few days later I received a message from the Countess requesting my attendance at the Palace. On my arrival I found my beautiful friend in tears. She had just left the presence of the Queen, who had upbraided her bitterly with her friendship for the enemies of her country.

"The Queen will never forgive me, I am certain,' said the unhappy Countess, after describing the scene to me. 'Moreover she has made it

impossible for us two to meet again. Her Majesty went so far as to say that she could no longer consider me an Italian.'

" 'Her Majesty is right,' I answered boldly, 'and there is only one remedy for such a state of things. You must acquire French nationality.'

" 'And how can I do that?' she murmured in confusion.

" I took her hands in mine.

" 'By becoming the wife of a Frenchman!'

" And this time it was not merely her hand which I kissed."

Hardly had his Excellency pronounced these words when the door opened and a graceful and accomplished woman came smiling in.

" Allow me to present to you," said the courtly old man, " Madame the Ambadress—formerly Madame D'Urbino! "

And turning round, he added :

" I had saved France, as you see, but I had lost my heart."

It was my last night in Paris, and the hour grew late before I could tear myself away from the house of my hospitable friend.

" After all, what are these national differences of

which we make so much?" he said, as he retained my hand at parting. "During these months that we have known each other, I have learned to look upon you as if you were in all respects a Frenchman, and you, I believe, would not consider that I should make a bad John Bull. Believe me, my dear friend, beneath all these wars and intrigues, these plots and scandals of which we have talked so much, the sound heart of the people beats the same in every land, and those things which we have in common are greater than those which separate us. You must come back to our beautiful Paris; this is merely *au revoir!*"

THE END.

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