

MR. MEDHURST AND THE PRINCESS.

I.

THE day before I left London, to occupy the post of second secretary of legation at a small German Court, I took leave of my excellent French singing-master, Monsieur Bonnefoy, and of his young and pretty daughter named Jeanne.

Our farewell interview was saddened by Monsieur Bonnefoy's family anxieties. His elder brother, known in the household as Uncle David, had been secretly summoned to Paris by order of a republican society. Anxious relations in London (whether reasonably or not, I am unable to say) were in some fear of the political consequences that might follow.

At parting, I made Mademoiselle Jeanne a present, in the shape of a plain gold brooch. For some time past, I had taken my lessons at Monsieur Bonnefoy's house; his daughter and I often sang together under his direction. Seeing much of Jeanne, under these circumstances, the little gift that I had offered to her was only the natural expression of a true interest in her welfare. Idle rumor asserted--quite falsely--that I was in love with her. I was sincerely the young lady's friend: no more, no less.

Having alluded to my lessons in singing, it may not be out of place to mention the circumstances under which I became Monsieur Bonnefoy's pupil, and to allude to the change in my life that followed in due course of time.

Our family property--excepting the sum of five thousand pounds left to me by my mother--is landed property strictly entailed. The estates were inherited by my only brother, Lord Medhurst; the kindest, the best, and, I grieve to say it, the unhappiest of men. He lived separated from a bad wife; he had no children to console him; and he only enjoyed at rare intervals the blessing of good health. Having myself nothing to live on but the interest of my mother's little fortune, I had to make my own way in the world. Poor younger sons, not possessed of the commanding ability which achieves distinction, find the roads that lead to prosperity closed to them, with one exception. They can always apply themselves to the social arts which make a man agreeable in society. I had naturally a good voice, and I cultivated it. I was ready to sing, without being subject to the wretched vanity which

makes objections and excuses--I pleased the ladies--the ladies spoke favorably of me to their husbands--and some of their husbands were persons of rank and influence. After no very long lapse of time, the result of this combination of circumstances declared itself. Monsieur Bonnefoy's lessons became the indirect means of starting me on a diplomatic career--and the diplomatic career made poor Ernest Medhurst, to his own unutterable astonishment, the hero of a love story!

The story being true, I must beg to be excused, if I abstain from mentioning names, places, and dates, when I enter on German ground. Let it be enough to say that I am writing of a bygone year in the present century, when no such thing as a German Empire existed, and when the revolutionary spirit of France was still an object of well-founded suspicion to tyrants by right divine on the continent of Europe.

II.

ON joining the legation, I was not particularly attracted by my chief, the Minister. His manners were oppressively polite; and his sense of his own importance was not sufficiently influenced by diplomatic reserve. I venture to describe him (mentally speaking) as an empty man, carefully trained to look full on public occasions.

My colleague, the first secretary, was a far more interesting person. Bright, unaffected, and agreeable, he at once interested me when we were introduced to each other. I pay myself a compliment, as I consider, when I add that he became my firm and true friend.

We took a walk together in the palace gardens on the evening of my arrival. Reaching a remote part of the grounds, we were passed by a lean, sallow, sour-looking old man, drawn by a servant in a chair on wheels. My companion stopped, whispered to me, "Here is the Prince," and bowed bareheaded. I followed his example as a matter of course. The Prince feebly returned our salutation. "Is he ill?" I asked, when we had put our hats on again.

"Shakespeare," the secretary replied, "tells us that 'one man in his time plays many parts.' Under what various aspects the Prince's character may have presented itself, in his younger days, I am not able to tell you. Since I have been here, he has played the part of a martyr to illness, misunderstood by his doctors."

"And his daughter, the Princess--what do you say of her?"

"Ah, she is not so easily described! I can only appeal to your memory of other women like her, whom you must often have seen--women who are tall and fair, and fragile and elegant; who have delicate aquiline noses and melting blue eyes--women who have often charmed you by their tender smiles and their supple graces of movement. As for the character of this popular young lady, I must not influence you either way; study it for yourself."

"Without a hint to guide me?"

"With a suggestion," he replied, "which may be worth considering. If you wish to please the Princess, begin by endeavoring to win the good graces of

the Baroness."

"Who is the Baroness?"

"One of the ladies in waiting--bosom friend of her Highness, and chosen repository of all her secrets. Personally, not likely to attract you; short and fat, and ill-tempered and ugly. Just at this time, I happen myself to get on with her better than usual. We have discovered that we possess one sympathy in common--we are the only people at Court who don't believe in the Prince's new doctor."

"Is the new doctor a quack?"

The secretary looked round, before he answered, to see that nobody was near us.

"It strikes me," he said, "that the Doctor is a spy. Mind! I have no right to speak of him in that way; it is only my impression--and I ought to add that appearances are all in his favor. He is in the service of our nearest royal neighbor, the Grand Duke; and he has been sent here expressly to relieve the sufferings of the Duke's good friend and brother, our invalid Prince. This is an honorable mission no doubt. And the man himself is handsome, well-bred, and (I don't quite know whether this is an additional recommendation) a countryman of ours. Nevertheless I doubt him, and the Baroness doubts him. You are an independent witness; I shall be anxious to hear if your opinion agrees with ours."

I was presented at Court, toward the end of the week; and, in the course of the next two or three days, I more than once saw the Doctor. The impression that he produced on me surprised my colleague. It was my opinion that he and the Baroness had mistaken the character of a worthy and capable man.

The secretary obstinately adhered to his own view.

"Wait a little," he answered, "and we shall see."

He was quite right. We did see.

III.

BUT the Princess--the gentle, gracious, beautiful Princess--what can I say of her Highness?

I can only say that she enchanted me.

I had been a little discouraged by the reception that I met with from her father. Strictly confining himself within the limits of politeness, he bade me welcome to his Court in the fewest possible words, and then passed me by without further notice. He afterward informed the English Minister that I had been so unfortunate as to try his temper: "Your new secretary irritates me, sir--he is a person in an offensively perfect state of health." The Prince's charming daughter was not of her father's way of thinking; it is impossible to say how graciously, how sweetly I was received. She honored me by speaking to me in my own language, of which she showed herself to be a perfect mistress. I was not only permitted, but encouraged, to talk of my family, and to dwell on my own tastes, amusements, and pursuits. Even when her Highness's attention was claimed by other persons waiting to be presented, I was not forgotten. The Baroness was instructed to invite me for the next evening to the Princess's tea-table; and it was hinted that I should be especially welcome if I brought my music with me, and sang.

My friend the secretary, standing near us at the time, looked at me with a mysterious smile. He had suggested that I should make advances to the Baroness--and here was the Baroness (under royal instructions) making advances to Me!

"We know what that means," he whispered.

In justice to myself, I must declare that I entirely failed to understand him.

On the occasion of my second reception by the Princess, at her little evening party, I detected the Baroness, more than once, in the act of watching her Highness and myself, with an appearance of disapproval in her manner, which puzzled me. When I had taken my leave, she followed me out of the room.

"I have a word of advice to give you," she said. "The best thing you can do, sir, is to make an excuse to your Minister, and go back to England."

I declare again, that I entirely failed to understand the Baroness.

IV.

BEFORE the season came to an end, the Court removed to the Prince's country-seat, in the interests of his Highness's health. Entertainments were given (at the Doctor's suggestion), with a view of raising the patient's depressed spirits. The members of the English legation were among the guests invited. To me it was a delightful visit. I had again every reason to feel gratefully sensible of the Princess's condescending kindness. Meeting the secretary one day in the library, I said that I thought her a perfect creature. Was this an absurd remark to make? I could see nothing absurd in it--and yet my friend burst out laughing.

"My good fellow, nobody is a perfect creature," he said. "The Princess has her faults and failings, like the rest of us."

I denied it positively.

"Use your eyes," he went on; "and you will see, for example, that she is shallow and frivolous. Yesterday was a day of rain. We were all obliged to employ ourselves somehow indoors. Didn't you notice that she had no resources in herself? She can't even read."

"There you are wrong at any rate," I declared. "I saw her reading the newspaper."

"You saw her with the newspaper in her hand. If you had not been deaf and blind to her defects, you would have noticed that she couldn't fix her attention on it. She was always ready to join in the chatter of the ladies about her. When even their stores of gossip were exhausted, she let the newspaper drop on her lap, and sat in vacant idleness smiling at nothing."

I reminded him that she might have met with a dull number of the newspaper. He took no notice of this unanswerable reply.

"You were talking the other day of her warmth of feeling," he proceeded. "She has plenty of sentiment (German sentiment), I grant you, but no true feeling. What happened only this morning, when the Prince was in the breakfast-room, and when the Princess and her ladies were dressed to go out riding? Even she noticed the wretchedly depressed state of her father's spirits. A man of that hypochondriacal temperament suffers acutely, though he may only fancy himself to be ill. The Princess overflowed with sympathy, but she never proposed to stay at home, and try to cheer the old man. Her filial duty was performed to her own entire satisfaction when she had kissed her hand

to the Prince. The moment after, she was out of the room--eager to enjoy her ride. We all heard her laughing gayly among the ladies in the hall."

I could have answered this also, if our discussion had not been interrupted at the moment. The Doctor came into the library in search of a book. When he had left us, my colleague's strong prejudice against him instantly declared itself.

"Be on your guard with that man," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

"Haven't you noticed," he replied, "that when the Princess is talking to you, the Doctor always happens to be in that part of the room?"

"What does it matter where the Doctor is?"

My friend looked at me with an oddly mingled expression of doubt and surprise. "Do you really not understand me?" he said.

"I don't indeed."

"My dear Ernest, you are a rare and admirable example to the rest of us--you are a truly modest man."

What did he mean?

V.

EVENTS followed, on the next day, which (as will presently be seen) I have a personal interest in relating.

The Baroness left us suddenly, on leave of absence. The Prince wearied of his residence in the country; and the Court returned to the capital. The charming Princess was reported to be "indisposed," and retired to the seclusion of her own apartments.

A week later, I received a note from the Baroness, marked "private and confidential." It informed me that she had resumed her duties as lady-in-waiting, and that she wished to see me at my earliest convenience. I obeyed at once; and naturally asked if there were better accounts of her Highness's health.

The Baroness's reply a little surprised me. She said, "The Princess is perfectly well."

"Recovered already!" I exclaimed.

"She has never been ill," the Baroness answered. "Her indisposition was a sham; forced on her by me, in her own interests. Her reputation is in peril; and you--you hateful Englishman--are the cause of it."

Not feeling disposed to put up with such language as this, even when it was used by a lady, I requested that she would explain herself. She complied without hesitation. In another minute my eyes were opened to the truth. I knew--no; that is too positive--let me say I had reason to believe that the Princess loved me!

It is simply impossible to convey to the minds of others any idea of the emotions that overwhelmed me at that critical moment of my life. I was in a state of confusion at the time; and, when my memory tries to realize it, I am in a state of confusion now. The one thing I can do is to repeat what the Baroness said to me when I had in some degree recovered my composure.

"I suppose you are aware," she began, "of the disgrace to which the Princess's infatuation exposes her, if it is discovered? On my own responsibility I repeat what I said to you a short time since. Do you refuse to leave this place immediately?"

Does the man live, honored as I was, who would have hesitated to refuse? Find him if you can!

"Very well," she resumed. "As the friend of the Princess, I have no choice now but to take things as they are, and to make the best of them. Let us realize your position to begin with. If you were (like your elder brother) a nobleman possessed of vast estates, my royal mistress might be excused. As it is, whatever you may be in the future, you are nothing now but an obscure young man, without fortune or title. Do you see your duty to the Princess? or must I explain it to you?"

I saw my duty as plainly as she did. "Her Highness's secret is a sacred secret," I said. "I am bound to shrink from no sacrifice which may preserve it."

The Baroness smiled maliciously. "I may have occasion," she answered, "to remind you of what you have just said. In the meanwhile the Princess's secret is in danger of discovery."

"By her father?"

"No. By the Doctor."

At first, I doubted whether she was in jest or in earnest. The next instant, I remembered that the secretary had expressly cautioned me against that man.

"It is evidently one of your virtues," the Baroness proceeded, "to be slow to suspect. Prepare yourself for a disagreeable surprise. The Doctor has been watching the Princess, on every occasion when she speaks to you, with some object of his own in view. During my absence, young sir, I have been engaged in discovering what that object is. My excellent mother lives at the Court of the Grand Duke, and enjoys the confidence of his Ministers. He is still a bachelor; and, in the interests of the succession to the throne, the time has arrived when he must marry. With my mother's assistance, I have found out that the Doctor's medical errand here is a pretense. Influenced by the Princess's beauty the Grand Duke has thought of her first as his future duchess. Whether he has heard slanderous stories, or whether he is only a cautious man, I can't tell you. But this I know: he has instructed his physician--if he had employed a professed diplomatist his motive might have been suspected--to observe her Highness privately, and to communicate the result. The object of the report is to satisfy the Duke that the Princess's

reputation is above the reach of scandal; that she is free from entanglements of a certain kind; and that she is in every respect a person to whom he can with propriety offer his hand in marriage. The Doctor, Mr. Ernest, is not disposed to allow you to prevent him from sending in a favorable report. He has drawn his conclusions from the Princess's extraordinary kindness to the second secretary of the English legation; and he is only waiting for a little plainer evidence to communicate his suspicions to the Prince. It rests with you to save the Princess."

"Only tell me how I am to do it!" I said.

"There is but one way of doing it," she answered; "and that way has (comically enough) been suggested to me by the Doctor himself."

Her tone and manner tried my patience.

"Come to the point!" I said.

She seemed to enjoy provoking me.

"No hurry, Mr. Ernest--no hurry! You shall be fully enlightened, if you will only wait a little. The Prince, I must tell you, believes in his daughter's indisposition. When he visited her this morning, he was attended by his medical adviser. I was present at the interview. To do him justice, the Doctor is worthy of the trust reposed in him--he boldly attempted to verify his suspicions of the daughter in the father's presence."

"How?"

"Oh, in the well-known way that has been tried over and over again, under similar circumstances! He merely invented a report that you were engaged in a love-affair with some charming person in the town. Don't be angry; there's no harm done."

"But there is harm done," I insisted. "What must the Princess think of me?"

"Do you suppose she is weak enough to believe the Doctor? Her Highness beat him at his own weapons; not the slightest sign of agitation on her part rewarded his ingenuity. All that you have to do is to help her to mislead this medical spy. It's as easy as lying; and easier. The Doctor's slander declares that you have a love-affair in the town. Take the hint--and astonish the Doctor by proving that he has hit on the truth."

It was a hot day; the Baroness was beginning to get excited. She paused and fanned herself.

"Do I startle you?" she asked.

"You disgust me."

She laughed.

"What a thick-headed man this is!" she said, pleasantly. "Must I put it more plainly still? Engage in what your English prudery calls a 'flirtation,' with some woman here--the lower in degree the better, or the Princess might be jealous--and let the affair be seen and known by everybody about the Court. Sly as he is, the Doctor is not prepared for that! At your age, and with your personal advantages, he will take appearances for granted; he will conclude that he has wronged you, and misinterpreted the motives of the Princess. The secret of her Highness's weakness will be preserved--thanks to that sacrifice, Mr. Ernest, which you are so willing and so eager to make."

It was useless to remonstrate with such a woman as this. I simply stated my own objection to her artfully devised scheme.

"I don't wish to appear vain," I said; "but the woman to whom I am to pay these attentions may believe that I really admire her--and it is just possible that she may honestly return the feeling which I am only assuming."

"Well--and what then?"

"It's hard on the woman, surely?"

The Baroness was shocked, unaffectedly shocked.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "how can anything that you do for the Princess be hard on a woman of the lower orders? There must be an end of this nonsense, sir! You have heard what I propose, and you know what the circumstances are. My mistress is waiting for your answer. What am I to say?"

"Let me see her Highness, and speak for myself," I said.

"Quite impossible to-day, without running too great a risk. Your reply must be made through me."

There was to be a Court concert at the end of the week. On that occasion I should be able to make my own reply. In the meanwhile I only told the Baroness I wanted time to consider.

"What time?" she asked.

"Until to-morrow. Do you object?"

"On the contrary, I cordially agree. Your base hesitation may lead to results which I have not hitherto dared to anticipate."

"What do you mean?"

"Between this and to-morrow," the horrid woman replied, "the Princess may end in seeing you with my eyes. In that hope I wish you good-morning."

VI.

MY enemies say that I am a weak man, unduly influenced by persons of rank--because of their rank. If this were true, I should have found little difficulty in consenting to adopt the Baroness's suggestion. As it was, the longer I reflected on the scheme the less I liked it. I tried to think of some alternative that might be acceptably proposed. The time passed, and nothing occurred to me. In this embarrassing position my mind became seriously disturbed; I felt the necessity of obtaining some relief, which might turn my thoughts for a while into a new channel. The secretary called on me, while I was still in doubt what to do. He reminded me that a new prima donna was advertised to appear on that night; and he suggested that we should go to the opera. Feeling as I did at the time, I readily agreed.

We found the theater already filled, before the performance began. Two French gentlemen were seated in the row of stalls behind us. They were talking of the new singer.

"She is advertised as 'Mademoiselle Fontenay,'" one of them said. "That sounds like an assumed name."

"It is an assumed name," the other replied. "She is the daughter of a French singing-master, named Bonnefoy."

To my friend's astonishment I started to my feet, and left him without a word of apology. In another minute I was at the stage-door, and had sent in my card to "Mademoiselle Fontenay." While I was waiting, I had time to think. Was it possible that Jeanne had gone on the stage? Or were there two singing-masters in existence named Bonnefoy? My doubts were soon decided. The French woman-servant whom I remembered when I was Monsieur Bonnefoy's pupil, made her appearance, and conducted me to her young mistress's dressing-room. Dear good Jeanne, how glad she was to see me!

I found her standing before the glass, having just completed her preparations for appearing on the stage. Dressed in her picturesque costume, she was so charming that I expressed my admiration heartily, as became her old friend. "Do you really like me?" she said, with the innocent familiarity which I recollected so well. "See how I look in the glass--that is the great test." It was not easy to apply the test. Instead of looking at her image in the glass, it was far more agreeable to look at herself. We were

interrupted--too soon interrupted--by the call-boy. He knocked at the door, and announced that the overture had begun.

"I have a thousand things to ask you," I told her. "What has made this wonderful change in your life? How is it that I don't see your father--"

Her face instantly saddened; her hand trembled as she laid it on my arm to silence me.

"Don't speak of him now," she said, "or you will unnerve me. Come to me tomorrow when the stage will not be waiting; Annette will give you my address." She opened the door to go out, and returned. "Will you think me very unreasonable if I ask you not to make one of my audience to-night? You have reminded me of the dear old days that can never come again. If I feel that I am singing to you--" She left me to understand the rest, and turned away again to the door. As I followed her out, to say good-by, she drew from her bosom the little brooch which had been my parting gift, and held it out to me. "On the stage, or off," she said, "I always wear it. Good-night, Ernest."

I was prepared to hear sad news when we met the next morning.

My good old friend and master had died suddenly. To add to the bitterness of that affliction, he had died in debt to a dear and intimate friend. For his daughter's sake he had endeavored to add to his little savings by speculating with borrowed money on the Stock Exchange. He had failed, and the loan advanced had not been repaid, when a fit of apoplexy struck him down. Offered the opportunity of trying her fortune on the operatic stage, Jeanne made the attempt, and was now nobly employed in earning the money to pay her father's debt.

"It was the only way in which I could do justice to his memory," she said, simply. "I hope you don't object to my going on the stage?"

I took her hand, poor child--and let that simple action answer for me. I was too deeply affected to be able to speak.

"It is not in me to be a great actress," she resumed; "but you know what an admirable musician my father was. He has taught me to sing, so that I can satisfy the critics, as well as please the public. There was what they call a great success last night. It has earned me an engagement for another year to come, and an increase of salary. I have already sent some money to our good old friend at home, and I shall soon send more. It is my one consolation--I feel almost happy again when I am paying my poor father's debt. No more

now of my sad story! I want to hear all that you can tell me of yourself." She moved to the window, and looked out. "Oh, the beautiful blue sky! We used sometimes to take a walk, when we were in London, on fine days like this. Is there a park here?"

I took her to the palace gardens, famous for their beauty in that part of Germany.

Arm in arm we loitered along the pleasant walks. The lovely flowers, the bright sun, the fresh fragrant breeze, all helped her to recover her spirits. She began to be like the happy Jeanne of my past experience, as easily pleased as a child. When we sat down to rest, the lap of her dress was full of daisies. "Do you remember," she said, "when you first taught me to make a daisy-chain? Are you too great a man to help me again now?"

We were still engaged with our chain, seated close together, when the smell of tobacco-smoke was wafted to us on the air.

I looked up and saw the Doctor passing us, enjoying his cigar. He bowed; eyed my pretty companion with a malicious smile; and passed on.

"Who is that man?" she asked.

"The Prince's physician," I replied.

"I don't like him," she said; "why did he smile when he looked at me?"

"Perhaps," I suggested, "he thought we were lovers."

She blushed. "Don't let him think that! tell him we are only old friends."

We were not destined to finish our flower chain on that day.

Another person interrupted us, whom I recognized as the elder brother of Monsieur Bonnefoy--already mentioned in these pages, under the name of Uncle David. Having left France for political reasons, the old republican had taken care of his niece after her father's death, and had accepted the position of Jeanne's business manager in her relations with the stage. Uncle David's object, when he joined us in the garden, was to remind her that she was wanted at rehearsal, and must at once return with him to the theater. We parted, having arranged that I was to see the performance on that night.

Later in the day, the Baroness sent for me again.

"Let me apologize for having misunderstood you yesterday," she said: "and let me offer you my best congratulations. You have done wonders already in the way of misleading the Doctor. There is only one objection to that girl at the theater--I hear she is so pretty that she may possibly displease the Princess. In other respects, she is just in the public position which will make your attentions to her look like the beginning of a serious intrigue. Bravo, Mr. Ernest--bravo!"

I was too indignant to place any restraint on the language in which I answered her.

"Understand, if you please," I said, "that I am renewing an old friendship with Mademoiselle Jeanne--begun under the sanction of her father. Respect that young lady, madam, as I respect her."

The detestable Baroness clapped her hands, as if she had been at the theater.

"If you only say that to the Princess," she remarked, "as well as you have said it to me, there will be no danger of arousing her Highness's jealousy. I have a message for you. At the concert, on Saturday, you are to retire to the conservatory, and you may hope for an interview when the singers begin the second part of the programme. Don't let me detain you any longer. Go back to your young lady, Mr. Ernest--pray go back!"

VII.

ON the second night of the opera the applications for places were too numerous to be received. Among the crowded audience, I recognized many of my friends. They persisted in believing an absurd report (first circulated, as I imagine, by the Doctor), which asserted that my interest in the new singer was something more than the interest of an old friend. When I went behind the scenes to congratulate Jeanne on her success, I was annoyed in another way--and by the Doctor again. He followed me to Jeanne's room, to offer his congratulations; and he begged that I would introduce him to the charming prima donna. Having expressed his admiration, he looked at me with his insolently suggestive smile, and said he could not think of prolonging his intrusion. On leaving the room, he noticed Uncle David, waiting as usual to take care of Jeanne on her return from the theater--looked at him attentively--bowed, and went out.

The next morning, I received a note from the Baroness, expressed in these terms:

"More news! My rooms look out on the wing of the palace in which the Doctor is lodged. Half an hour since, I discovered him at his window, giving a letter to a person who is a stranger to me. The man left the palace immediately afterward. My maid followed him, by my directions. Instead of putting the letter in the post, he took a ticket at the railway-station--for what place the servant was unable to discover. Here, you will observe, is a letter important enough to be dispatched by special messenger, and written at a time when we have succeeded in freeing ourselves from the Doctor's suspicions. It is at least possible that he has decided on sending a favorable report of the Princess to the Grand Duke. If this is the case, please consider whether you will not act wisely (in her Highness's interests) by keeping away from the concert."

Viewing this suggestion as another act of impertinence on the part of the Baroness, I persisted in my intention of going to the concert. It was for the Princess to decide what course of conduct I was bound to follow. What did I care for the Doctor's report to the Duke! Shall I own my folly? I do really believe I was jealous of the Duke.

VIII.

ENTERING the Concert Room, I found the Princess alone on the dais, receiving the company. "Nervous prostration" had made it impossible for the Prince to be present. He was confined to his bed-chamber; and the Doctor was in attendance on him.

I bowed to the Baroness, but she was too seriously offended with me for declining to take her advice to notice my salutation. Passing into the conservatory, it occurred to me that I might be seen, and possibly suspected, in the interval between the first and second parts of the programme, when the music no longer absorbed the attention of the audience. I went on, and waited outside on the steps that led to the garden; keeping the glass door open, so as to hear when the music of the second part of the concert began.

After an interval which seemed to be endless, I saw the Princess approaching me.

She had made the heat in the Concert Room an excuse for retiring for a while; and she had the Baroness in attendance on her to save appearances. Instead of leaving us to ourselves, the malicious creature persisted in paying the most respectful attentions to her mistress. It was impossible to make her understand that she was not wanted any longer until the Princess said sharply, "Go back to the music!" Even then, the detestable woman made a low curtsey, and answered: "I will return, Madam, in five minutes."

I ventured to present myself in the conservatory.

The Princess was dressed with exquisite simplicity, entirely in white. Her only ornaments were white roses in her hair and in her bosom. To say that she looked lovely is to say nothing. She seemed to be the ethereal creature of some higher sphere; too exquisitely delicate and pure to be approached by a mere mortal man like myself. I was awed; I was silent. Her Highness's sweet smile encouraged me to venture a little nearer. She pointed to a footstool which the Baroness had placed for her. "Are you afraid of me, Ernest?" she asked softly.

Her divinely beautiful eyes rested on me with a look of encouragement. I dropped on my knees at her feet. She had asked if I was afraid of her. This, if I may use such an expression, roused my manhood. My own boldness

astonished me. I answered: "Madam, I adore you."

She laid her fair hand on my head, and looked at me thoughtfully. "Forget my rank," she whispered--"have I not set you the example? Suppose that I am nothing but an English Miss. What would you say to Miss?"

"I should say, I love you."

"Say it to Me."

My lips said it on her hand. She bent forward. My heart beats fast at the bare remembrance of it. Oh, heavens, her Highness kissed me!

"There is your reward," she murmured, "for all you have sacrificed for my sake. What an effort it must have been to offer the pretense of love to an obscure stranger! The Baroness tells me this actress--this singer--what is she?--is pretty. Is it true?"

The Baroness was quite mischievous enough to have also mentioned the false impression, prevalent about the Court, that I was in love with Jeanne. I attempted to explain. The gracious Princess refused to hear me.

"Do you think I doubt you?" she said. "Distinguished by me, could you waste a look on a person in that rank of life?" She laughed softly, as if the mere idea of such a thing amused her. It was only for a moment: her thoughts took a new direction--they contemplated the uncertain future. "How is this to end?" she asked. "Dear Ernest, we are not in Paradise; we are in a hard cruel world which insists on distinctions in rank. To what unhappy destiny does the fascination which you exercise over me condemn us both?"

She paused--took one of the white roses out of her bosom--touched it with her lips--and gave it to me.

"I wonder whether you feel the burden of life as I feel it?" she resumed. "It is immaterial to me, whether we are united in this world or in the next. Accept my rose, Ernest, as an assurance that I speak with perfect sincerity. I see but two alternatives before us. One of them (beset with dangers) is elopement. And the other," she added, with truly majestic composure, "is suicide."

Would Englishmen in general have rightly understood such fearless confidence in them as this language implied? I am afraid they might have attributed it to what my friend the secretary called "German sentiment."

Perhaps they might even have suspected the Princess of quoting from some old-fashioned German play. Under the irresistible influence of that glorious creature, I contemplated with such equal serenity the perils of elopement and the martyrdom of love, that I was for the moment at a loss how to reply. In that moment, the evil genius of my life appeared in the conservatory. With haste in her steps, with alarm in her face, the Baroness rushed up to her royal mistress, and said, "For God's sake, Madam, come away! The Prince desires to speak with you instantly."

Her Highness rose, calmly superior to the vulgar excitement of her lady in waiting. "Think of it to-night," she said to me, "and let me hear from you to-morrow."

She pressed my hand; she gave me a farewell look. I sank into the chair that she had just left. Did I think of elopement? Did I think of suicide? The elevating influence of the Princess no longer sustained me; my nature became degraded. Horrid doubts rose in my mind. Did her father suspect us?

IX.

NEED I say that I passed a sleepless night?

The morning found me with my pen in my hand, confronting the serious responsibility of writing to the Princess, and not knowing what to say. I had already torn up two letters, when Uncle David presented himself with a message from his niece. Jeanne was in trouble, and wanted to ask my advice.

My state of mind, on hearing this, became simply inexplicable. Here was an interruption which ought to have annoyed me. It did nothing of the kind--it inspired me with a feeling of relief!

I naturally expected that the old Frenchman would return with me to his niece, and tell me what had happened. To my surprise, he begged that I would excuse him, and left me without a word of explanation. I found Jeanne walking up and down her little sitting-room, flushed and angry. Fragments of torn paper and heaps of flowers littered the floor; and three unopen jewel-cases appeared to have been thrown into the empty fireplace. She caught me excitedly by the hand the moment I entered the room.

"You are my true friend," she said; "you were present the other night when I sang. Was there anything in my behavior on the stage which could justify men who call themselves gentlemen in insulting me?"

"My dear, how can you ask the question?"

"I must ask it. Some of them send flowers, and some of them send jewels; and every one of them writes letters--infamous, abominable letters--saying they are in love with me, and asking for appointments as if I was--"

She could say no more. Poor dear Jeanne--her head dropped on my shoulder; she burst out crying. Who could see her so cruelly humiliated--the faithful loving daughter, whose one motive for appearing on the stage had been to preserve her father's good name--and not feel for her as I did? I forgot all considerations of prudence; I thought of nothing but consoling her; I took her in my arms; I dried her tears; I kissed her; I said, "Tell me the name of any one of the wretches who has written to you, and I will make him an example to the rest!" She shook her head, and pointed to the morsels of paper on the floor. "Oh, Ernest, do you think I asked you to come here for

any such purpose as that? Those jewels, those hateful jewels, tell me how I can send them back! spare me the sight of them!"

So far it was easy to console her. I sent the jewels at once to the manager of the theater--with a written notice to be posted at the stage door, stating that they were waiting to be returned to the persons who could describe them.

"Try, my dear, to forget what has happened," I said. "Try to find consolation and encouragement in your art."

"I have lost all interest in my success on the stage," she answered, "now I know the penalty I must pay for it. When my father's memory is clear of reproach, I shall leave the theater never to return to it again."

"Take time to consider, Jeanne."

"I will do anything you ask of me."

For a while we were silent. Without any influence to lead to it that I could trace, I found myself recalling the language that the Princess had used in alluding to Jeanne. When I thought of them now, the words and the tone in which they had been spoken jarred on me. There is surely something mean in an assertion of superiority which depends on nothing better than the accident of birth. I don't know why I took Jeanne's hand; I don't know why I said, "What a good girl you are! how glad I am to have been of some little use to you!" Is my friend the secretary right, when he reproaches me with acting on impulse, like a woman? I don't like to think so; and yet, this I must own--it was well for me that I was obliged to leave her, before I had perhaps said other words which might have been alike unworthy of Jeanne, of the Princess, and of myself. I was called away to speak to my servant. He brought with him the secretary's card, having a line written on it: "I am waiting at your rooms, on business which permits of no delay."

As we shook hands, Jeanne asked me if I knew where her uncle was. I could only tell her that he had left me at my own door. She made no remark; but she seemed to be uneasy on receiving that reply.

X.

WHEN I arrived at my rooms, my colleague hurried to meet me the moment I opened the door.

"I am going to surprise you," he said; "and there is no time to prepare you for it. Our chief, the Minister, has seen the Prince this morning, and has been officially informed of an event of importance in the life of the Princess. She is engaged to be married to the Grand Duke."

Engaged to the Duke--and not a word from her to warn me of it! Engaged--after what she had said to me no longer ago than the past night! Had I been made a plaything to amuse a great lady? Oh, what degradation! I was furious; I snatched up my hat to go to the palace--to force my way to her--to overwhelm her with reproaches. My friend stopped me. He put an official document into my hand.

"There is your leave of absence from the legation," he said; "beginning from to-day. I have informed the Minister, in strict confidence, of the critical position in which you are placed. He agrees with me that the Princess's inexcusable folly is alone to blame. Leave us, Ernest, by the next train. There is some intrigue going on, and I fear you may be involved in it. You know that the rulers of these little German States can exercise despotic authority when they choose?"

"Yes! yes!"

"Whether the Prince has acted of his own free will--or whether he has been influenced by some person about him--I am not able to tell you. He has issued an order to arrest an old Frenchman, known to be a republican, and suspected of associating with one of the secret societies in this part of Germany. The conspirator has taken to flight; having friends, as we suppose, who warned him in time. But this, Ernest, is not the worst of it. That charming singer, that modest, pretty girl--"

"You don't mean Jeanne?"

"I am sorry to say I do. Advantage has been taken of her relationship to the old man, to include that innocent creature in political suspicions which it is simply absurd to suppose that she has deserved. She is ordered to leave the Prince's domains immediately.--Are you going to her?"

"Instantly!" I replied.

Could I feel a moment's hesitation, after the infamous manner in which the Princess had sacrificed me to the Grand Duke? Could I think of the poor girl, friendless, helpless--with nobody near her but a stupid woman-servant, unable to speak the language of the country--and fail to devote myself to the protection of Jeanne? Thank God, I reached her lodgings in time to tell her what had happened, and to take it on myself to receive the police.

XI.

IN three days more, Jeanne was safe in London; having traveled under my escort. I was fortunate enough to find a home for her, in the house of a lady who had been my mother's oldest and dearest friend.

We were separated, a few days afterward, by the distressing news which reached me of the state of my brother's health. I went at once to his house in the country. His medical attendants had lost all hope of saving him: they told me plainly that his release from a life of suffering was near at hand.

While I was still in attendance at his bedside, I heard from the secretary. He inclosed a letter, directed to me in a strange handwriting. I opened the envelope and looked for the signature. My friend had been entrapped into sending me an anonymous letter.

Besides addressing me in French (a language seldom used in my experience at the legation), the writer disguised the identity of the persons mentioned by the use of classical names. In spite of these precautions, I felt no difficulty in arriving at a conclusion. My correspondent's special knowledge of Court secrets, and her malicious way of communicating them, betrayed the Baroness.

I translate the letter; restoring to the persons who figure in it the names under which they are already known. The writer began in these satirically familiar terms:

"When you left the Prince's dominions, my dear sir, you no doubt believed yourself to be a free agent. Quite a mistake! You were a mere puppet; and the strings that moved you were pulled by the Doctor.

"Let me tell you how.

"On a certain night, which you well remember, the Princess was unexpectedly summoned to the presence of her father. His physician's skill had succeeded in relieving the illustrious Prince, prostrate under nervous miseries. He was able to attend to a state affair of importance, revealed to him by the Doctor--who then for the first time acknowledged that he had presented himself at Court in a diplomatic, as well as in a medical capacity.

"This state affair related to a proposal for the hand of the Princess, received

from the Grand Duke through the authorized medium of the Doctor. Her Highness, being consulted, refused to consider the proposal. The Prince asked for her reason. She answered: 'I have no wish to be married.' Naturally irritated by such a ridiculous excuse, her father declared positively that the marriage should take place.

"The impression produced on the Grand Duke's favorite and emissary was of a different kind.

"Certain suspicions of the Princess and yourself, which you had successfully contrived to dissipate, revived in the Doctor's mind when he heard the lady's reason for refusing to marry his royal master. It was now too late to regret that he had suffered himself to be misled by cleverly managed appearances. He could not recall the favorable report which he had addressed to the Duke--or withdraw the proposal of marriage which he had been commanded to make.

"In this emergency, the one safe course open to him was to get rid of You--and, at the same time, so to handle circumstances as to excite against you the pride and anger of the Princess. In the pursuit of this latter object he was assisted by one of the ladies in waiting, sincerely interested in the welfare of her gracious mistress, and therefore ardently desirous of seeing her Highness married to the Duke.

"A wretched old French conspirator was made the convenient pivot on which the intrigue turned.

"An order for the arrest of this foreign republican having been first obtained, the Prince was prevailed on to extend his distrust of the Frenchman to the Frenchman's niece. You know this already; but you don't know why it was done. Having believed from the first that you were really in love with the young lady, the Doctor reckoned confidently on your devoting yourself to the protection of a friendless girl, cruelly exiled at an hour's notice.

"The one chance against us was that tender considerations, associated with her Highness, might induce you to hesitate. The lady in waiting easily moved this obstacle out of the way. She abstained from delivering a letter addressed to you, intrusted to her by the Princess. When the great lady asked why she had not received your reply, she was informed (quite truly) that you and the charming opera singer had taken your departure together. You may imagine what her Highness thought of you, and said of you, when I mention in conclusion that she consented, the same day, to marry the Duke.

"So, Mr. Ernest, these clever people tricked you into serving their interests, blindfold. In relating how it was done, I hope I may have assisted you in forming a correct estimate of the state of your own intelligence. You have made a serious mistake in adopting your present profession. Give up diplomacy--and get a farmer to employ you in keeping his sheep."

* * * * *

Do I sometimes think regretfully of the Princess?

Permit me to mention a circumstance, and to leave my answer to be inferred. Jeanne is Lady Medhurst.