

## Chapter XLI.

We four formed (to use a term well understood nowadays in every social sphere) a "syndicate" owning the Tremolino: an international and astonishing syndicate. And we were all ardent Royalists of the snow-white Legitimist complexion--Heaven only knows why! In all associations of men there is generally one who, by the authority of age and of a more experienced wisdom, imparts a collective character to the whole set. If I mention that the oldest of us was very old, extremely old--nearly thirty years old-- and that he used to declare with gallant carelessness, "I live by my sword," I think I have given enough information on the score of our collective wisdom. He was a North Carolinian gentleman, J. M. K. B. were the initials of his name, and he really did live by the sword, as far as I know. He died by it, too, later on, in a Balkanian squabble, in the cause of some Serbs or else Bulgarians, who were neither Catholics nor gentlemen--at least, not in the exalted but narrow sense he attached to that last word.

Poor J. M. K. B., Americain, Catholique, et gentilhomme, as he was disposed to describe himself in moments of lofty expansion! Are there still to be found in Europe gentlemen keen of face and elegantly slight of body, of distinguished aspect, with a fascinating drawing-room manner and with a dark, fatal glance, who live by their swords, I wonder? His family had been ruined in the Civil War, I fancy, and seems for a decade or so to have led a wandering life in the Old World. As to Henry C-, the next in age and wisdom of our band, he had broken loose from the unyielding rigidity of his family, solidly rooted, if I remember rightly, in a well-to-do London suburb. On their respectable authority he introduced himself meekly to strangers as a "black sheep." I have never seen a more guileless specimen of an outcast. Never.

However, his people had the grace to send him a little money now and then. Enamoured of the South, of Provence, of its people, its life, its sunshine and its poetry, narrow-chested, tall and short-sighted, he strode along the streets and the lanes, his long feet projecting far in advance of his body, and his white nose and gingery moustache buried in an open book: for he had the habit of reading as he walked. How he avoided falling into precipices, off the quays, or down staircases is a great mystery. The sides of his overcoat bulged out with pocket editions of various poets. When not engaged in reading Virgil, Homer, or Mistral, in parks, restaurants, streets, and suchlike public places, he indited sonnets (in French) to the eyes, ears, chin, hair, and other visible perfections of a nymph called Therese, the daughter, honesty compels me to state, of a certain Madame Leonore who kept a small cafe for sailors in one of the narrowest streets of the old

town.

No more charming face, clear-cut like an antique gem, and delicate in colouring like the petal of a flower, had ever been set on, alas! a somewhat squat body. He read his verses aloud to her in the very cafe with the innocence of a little child and the vanity of a poet. We followed him there willingly enough, if only to watch the divine Therese laugh, under the vigilant black eyes of Madame Leonore, her mother. She laughed very prettily, not so much at the sonnets, which she could not but esteem, as at poor Henry's French accent, which was unique, resembling the warbling of birds, if birds ever warbled with a stuttering, nasal intonation.

Our third partner was Roger P. de la S-, the most Scandinavian-looking of Provençal squires, fair, and six feet high, as became a descendant of sea-roving Northmen, authoritative, incisive, wittily scornful, with a comedy in three acts in his pocket, and in his breast a heart blighted by a hopeless passion for his beautiful cousin, married to a wealthy hide and tallow merchant. He used to take us to lunch at their house without ceremony. I admired the good lady's sweet patience. The husband was a conciliatory soul, with a great fund of resignation, which he expended on "Roger's friends." I suspect he was secretly horrified at these invasions. But it was a Carlist salon, and as such we were made welcome. The possibility of raising Catalonia in the interest of the Rey netto, who had just then crossed the Pyrenees, was much discussed there.

Don Carlos, no doubt, must have had many queer friends (it is the common lot of all Pretenders), but amongst them none more extravagantly fantastic than the Tremolino Syndicate, which used to meet in a tavern on the quays of the old port. The antique city of Massilia had surely never, since the days of the earliest Phoenicians, known an odder set of ship-owners. We met to discuss and settle the plan of operations for each voyage of the Tremolino. In these operations a banking-house, too, was concerned--a very respectable banking-house. But I am afraid I shall end by saying too much. Ladies, too, were concerned (I am really afraid I am saying too much)--all sorts of ladies, some old enough to know better than to put their trust in princes, others young and full of illusions.

One of these last was extremely amusing in the imitations, she gave us in confidence, of various highly-placed personages she was perpetually rushing off to Paris to interview in the interests of the cause--Por el Rey! For she was a Carlist, and of Basque blood at that, with something of a lioness in the expression of her courageous face (especially when she let her hair down), and with the volatile little soul of a sparrow dressed in fine Parisian feathers, which had the trick of coming off disconcertingly at unexpected moments.

But her imitations of a Parisian personage, very highly placed indeed, as she

represented him standing in the corner of a room with his face to the wall, rubbing the back of his head and moaning helplessly, "Rita, you are the death of me!" were enough to make one (if young and free from cares) split one's sides laughing. She had an uncle still living, a very effective Carlist, too, the priest of a little mountain parish in Guipuzcoa. As the sea-going member of the syndicate (whose plans depended greatly on Dona Rita's information), I used to be charged with humbly affectionate messages for the old man. These messages I was supposed to deliver to the Arragonese muleteers (who were sure to await at certain times the Tremolino in the neighbourhood of the Gulf of Rosas), for faithful transportation inland, together with the various unlawful goods landed secretly from under the Tremolino's hatches.

Well, now, I have really let out too much (as I feared I should in the end) as to the usual contents of my sea-cradle. But let it stand. And if anybody remarks cynically that I must have been a promising infant in those days, let that stand, too. I am concerned but for the good name of the Tremolino, and I affirm that a ship is ever guiltless of the sins, transgressions, and follies of her men.