

CHAPTER XXI.

A LETTER FROM PARIS.

Since his return to Stockholm, Erik had received every day from all parts of Europe a voluminous correspondence. Some learned society wished for information on some point, or wrote to congratulate him; foreign governments wished to bestow upon him some honor or recompense; ship-owners, or traders, solicited some favor which would serve their interests.

Therefore he was not surprised when he received one morning two letters bearing the Paris postmark.

The first that he opened was an invitation from the Geographical Society of France, asking him and his companions to come and receive a handsome medal, which had been voted in a solemn conclave "to the navigators of the first circumpolar periplus of the arctic seas."

The second envelope made Erik start, he looked at it. On the box which closed it was a medallion upon which the letters "E.D." were engraved, surrounded by the motto "Semper idem."

These initials and devices were also stamped in the corner of the letter enclosed in the envelope, which was that from Mr. Durrien.

The letter read as follows:

"My dear child,--Let me call you this in any case. I have just read in a French newspaper a biography translated from the Swedish language, which has overcome me more than I can tell you. It was your account of yourself. You state that you were picked up at sea about twenty-two years ago by a Norwegian fisherman in the neighborhood of Bergen; that you were tied to a buoy, bearing the name of 'Cynthia;' that the especial motive of your arctic voyage was to find a survivor of the vessel of that name--ship wrecked in October, 1858; and then you state that you have returned from the voyage without having been able to gain any information about the matter.

"If all this is true (oh, what would I not give if it is true!), I ask you not to lose a moment in running to the telegraph office and letting me know it. In that case, my child, you can understand my impatience, my anxiety, and my joy. In that case you are my grandson, for whom I have mourned so many years, whom I believed lost to me forever, as did also my daughter, my poor daughter, who, broken-hearted at the tragedy of the 'Cynthia,' still mourns every day for her only child--the joy and consolation at first of her widowhood, but afterward the cause of her despair.

"But we shall see you again alive, covered with glory. Such

happiness is too great, too wonderful. I dare not believe it until a word from you authorizes me to do so. But now it seems so probable, the details and dates agree so perfectly, your countenance and manners recall so vividly those of my unfortunate son-in-law. Upon the only occasion when chance led me into your society, I felt myself mysteriously drawn toward you by a deep and sudden sympathy. It seems impossible that there should be no reason for this.

"One word, telegraph me one word. I do not know how to exist until I hear from you. Will it be the response that I wait for so impatiently? Can you bring such happiness to my poor daughter and myself as will cause us to forget our past years of tears and mourning?"

"E. DURRIEN, Honorary Consul-general,

"104 Rue de Varennes, Paris."

To this letter was added one of explanation, that Erik devoured eagerly.

It was also in Mr. Durrien's handwriting, and read as follows:

"I was the French consul at New Orleans when my only daughter, Catherine, married a young Frenchman, Mr. George Durrien, a distant connection, and, like ourselves, of Breton origin. Mr. George Durrien was a mining engineer. He had come to the United States to

explore the recently discovered mines of petroleum and intended to remain several years. I received him into my family--he being the son of a dear friend--and when he asked for my daughter's hand, I gave her to him with joy. Shortly after their marriage I was appointed consul to Riga; and my son-in-law being detained by business interests in the United States, I was obliged to leave my daughter. She became a mother, and to her son was given my Christian name, united to that of his father--Emile Henry Georges.

"Six months afterward my son-in-law was killed by an accident in the mines. As soon as she could settle up his affairs, my poor daughter, only twenty years of age, embarked at New York on the 'Cynthia' for Hamburg, to join me by the most direct route.

"On the 7th of October, 1858, the 'Cynthia' was shipwrecked off the Faroe Islands. The circumstances of the shipwreck were suspicious, and have never been explained.

"At the moment of the disaster, when the passengers were taking their places one by one in the boat, my little grandson, seven months old--whom his mother had tied to a buoy for safety--slipped or was pushed into the sea, and was carried away by the storm and disappeared. His mother, crazed by this frightful spectacle, tried to throw herself into the sea. She was prevented by main force and placed in a fainting condition in one of the boats, in which were three other persons, and who had alone escaped from the shipwrecked

vessel. In forty-nine hours this boat reached one of the Faroe Islands. From there my daughter returned to me after a dangerous illness which lasted seven weeks, thanks to the devoted attentions of the sailor who saved her and who brought her to me. This brave man, John Denman, died in my service in Asia Minor.

"We had but little hope that the baby had survived the shipwreck. I, however, sought for him among the Faroe and Shetland Islands, and upon the Norwegian coast north of Bergen. The idea of his cradle floating any further seemed impossible, but I did not give up my search for three years; and Noroe must be a very retired spot, or surely some inquiries would have been made there. When I had given up all hope I devoted myself exclusively to my daughter, whose physical and moral health required great attention. I succeeded in being sent to the Orient, and I sought, by traveling and scientific enterprises, to draw off her thoughts from her affliction. She has been my inseparable companion sharing all my labors, but I have never been able to lighten her incurable grief. We returned to France, and we now live in Paris in an old house which I own.

"Will it be my happiness to receive there my grandson, for whom we have mourned so many years? This hope fills me with too much joy, and I dare not speak of it to my daughter, until I am assured of its truth; for, if it should prove false, the disappointment would be too cruel.

"To-day is Monday: they tell me at the post-office that by next Saturday I can receive your answer."

Erik had hardly been able to read this, for the tears would obscure his sight. He also felt afraid to yield too quickly to the hope which had been so suddenly restored to him. He told himself that every detail coincided--the dates agreed; all the events down to the most minute particulars. He hardly dared to believe, however, that it could be true. It was too much happiness to recover in a moment his family, his own mother, his country. And such a country--the one that he could have chosen above all because she possessed the grandeur, the graces, the supreme gifts of humanity--because she had fostered genius, and the civilization of antiquity, and the discoveries and inventions of modern times.

He was afraid that he was only dreaming. His hopes had been so often disappointed. Perhaps the doctor would say something to dispel his illusions. Before he did anything he would submit these facts to his cooler judgment.

The doctor read the documents attentively which he carried to him, but not without exclamations of joy and surprise.

"You need not feel the slightest doubt!" he said, when he had finished.

"All the details agree perfectly, even those that your correspondent omits to mention, the initials on the linen, the device engraved on the

locket, which are the same as those on the letter. My dear child, you have found your family this time. You must telegraph immediately to your grandfather!"

"But what shall I tell him?" asked Erik, pale with joy.

"Tell him that to-morrow you will set out by express, to go and embrace him and your mother!"

The young captain only took time to press the hands of this excellent man, and he ran and jumped into a cab to hasten to the telegraph office.

He left Stockholm that same day, took the railroad to Malmo on the north-west coast of Sweden, crossed the strait in twenty minutes, reached Copenhagen, took the express train through to Holland and Belgium, and at Brussels the train for Paris.

On Saturday, at seven o'clock in the evening, exactly six days after Mr. Durrien had posted his letter, he had the joy of waiting for his grandson at the depot.

As soon as the train stopped they fell into each other's arms. They had thought so much about each other during these last few days that they both felt already well acquainted.

"My mother?" asked Erik.

"I have not dared to tell her, much as I was tempted to do so!" answered Mr. Durrien.

"And she knows nothing yet?"

"She suspects something, she fears, she hopes. Since your dispatch I have done my best to prepare her for the unheard-of joy that awaits her. I told her of a track upon which I had been placed by a young Swedish officer, the one whom I had met at Brest, and of whom I had often spoken to her. She does not know, she hesitates to hope for any good news, but this morning at breakfast I could see her watching me, and two or three times I felt afraid that she was going to question me. One can not tell, something might have happened to you, some other misfortune, some sudden mischance. So I did not dine with her to-night, I made an excuse to escape from a situation intolerable to me."

Without waiting for his baggage, they departed in the coup that Mr. Durrien had brought.

Mme. Durrien, alone in the parlor in Varennes Street, awaited impatiently the return of her father. She had had her suspicions aroused, and was only waiting until the dinner hour arrived to ask for an explanation.

For several days she had been disturbed by his strange behavior, by the

dispatches which were continually arriving, and by the double meaning which she thought she detected beneath all he said. Accustomed to talk with him about his lightest thoughts and impressions, she could not understand why he should seek to conceal anything from her. Several times she had been on the point of demanding a solution of the enigma, but she had kept silence, out of respect for the evident wishes of her father.

"He is trying to prepare me for some surprise, doubtless," she said to herself. "He is sure to tell me if anything pleasant has occurred."

But for the last two or three days, especially that morning, she had been impressed with a sort of eagerness which Mr. Durrien displayed in all his manner, as well as the happy air with which he regarded her, insisting in hearing over and over again from her lips, all the details of the disaster of the "Cynthia," which he had avoided speaking of for a long time. As she mused over his strange behavior a sort of revelation came to her. She felt sure that her father must have received some favorable intelligence which had revived the hope of finding her child. But without the least idea that he had already done so, she determined not to retire that night until she had questioned him closely.

Mme. Durrien had never definitely renounced the idea that her son was living. She had never seen him dead before her eyes, and she clung mother-like to the hope that he was not altogether lost to her. She said that the proofs were insufficient, and she nourished the possibility of

his sudden return. She might be said to pass her days waiting for him. Thousands of women, mothers of soldiers and sailors, pass their lives under this touching delusion. Mrs. Durrien had a greater right than they had to preserve her faith in his existence. In truth the tragical scene enacted twenty-two years ago was always before her eyes. She beheld the "Cynthia" filling with water and ready to sink. She saw herself tying her infant to a large buoy while the passengers and sailors were rushing for the boats. They left her behind, she saw herself imploring, beseeching that they would at least take her baby. A man took her precious burden, and threw it into one of the boats, a heavy sea dashed over it, and to her horror she saw the buoy floating away on the crest of the waves. She gave a despairing cry and tried to jump after him, then came unconsciousness. When she awoke she was a prey to despair, to fever, to delirium. To this succeeded increasing grief. Yes, the poor woman recalled all this. Her whole being had in fact received a shock from which she had never recovered. It was now nearly a quarter of a century since this had happened, and Mrs. Durrien still wept for her son as on the first day. Her maternal heart so full of grief was slowly consuming her life. She sometimes pictured to herself her son passing through the successive phases of infancy, youth, and manhood. From year to year she represented to herself how he would have looked, how he was looking, for she obstinately clung to her belief of the possibility of his return.

This vain hope nothing had as yet had the power to shake--neither travels, nor useless researches, nor the passage of time.

This is why this evening she awaited her father with the firm resolution of knowing all that he had to tell.

Mr. Darrien entered. He was followed by a young gentleman, whom he presented to her in the following words:

"My daughter, this is Mr. Erik Hersebom, of whom I have often spoken to you, and who has just arrived at Paris. The Geographical Society wish to bestow upon him a grand medal, and he has done me the honor to accept our hospitality."

She had arisen from her arm-chair, and was looking kindly at him. Suddenly her eyes dilated, her lips trembled, and she stretched out her hands toward him.

"My son! you are my son!" she cried.

Then she advanced a step toward Erik.

"Yes, you are my child," she said. "Your father lives over again in you!"

When Erik, bursting into tears, fell on his knees before her, the poor woman took his head in her hands, and fainted from joy and happiness as she tried to press a kiss on his forehead.