MR. COSWAY AND THE LANDLADY.

by Wilkie Collins

I.

THE guests would have enjoyed their visit to Sir Peter's country house--but for Mr. Cosway. And to make matters worse, it was not Mr. Cosway but the guests who were to blame. They repeated the old story of Adam and Eve, on a larger scale. The women were the first sinners; and the men were demoralized by the women.

Mr. Cosway's bitterest enemy could not have denied that he was a handsome, well-bred, unassuming man. No mystery of any sort attached to him. He had adopted the Navy as a profession--had grown weary of it after a few years' service--and now lived on the moderate income left to him, after the death of his parents. Out of this unpromising material the lively imaginations of the women built up a romance. The men only noticed that Mr. Cosway was rather silent and thoughtful; that he was not ready with his laugh; and that he had a fancy for taking long walks by himself. Harmless peculiarities, surely? And yet, they excited the curiosity of the women as signs of a mystery in Mr. Cosway's past life, in which some beloved object unknown must have played a chief part.

As a matter of course, the influence of the sex was tried, under every indirect and delicate form of approach, to induce Mr. Cosway to open his heart, and tell the tale of his sorrows. With perfect courtesy, he baffled curiosity, and kept his supposed secret to himself. The most beautiful girl in the house was ready to offer herself and her fortune as consolations, if this impenetrable bachelor would only have taken her into his confidence. He smiled sadly, and changed the subject.

Defeated so far, the women accepted the next alternative.

One of the guests staying in the house was Mr. Cosway's intimate friend--formerly his brother-officer on board ship. This gentleman was now subjected to the delicately directed system of investigation which had failed with his friend. With unruffled composure he referred the ladies, one after another, to Mr. Cosway. His name was Stone. The ladies decided that his nature was worthy of his name.

The last resource left to our fair friends was to rouse the dormant interest of the men, and to trust to the confidential intercourse of the smoking-room for the enlightenment which they had failed to obtain by other means.

In the accomplishment of this purpose, the degree of success which rewarded their efforts was due to a favoring state of affairs in the house. The shooting was not good for much; the billiard-table was under repair; and there were but two really skilled whist-players among the guests. In the atmosphere of dullness thus engendered, the men not only caught the infection of the women's curiosity, but were even ready to listen to the gossip of the servants' hall, repeated to their mistresses by the ladies' maids. The result of such an essentially debased state of feeling as this was not slow in declaring itself. But for a lucky accident, Mr. Cosway would have discovered to what extremities of ill-bred curiosity idleness and folly can lead persons holding the position of ladies and gentlemen, when he joined the company at breakfast on the next morning.

The newspapers came in before the guests had risen from the table. Sir Peter handed one of them to the lady who sat on his right hand.

She first looked, it is needless to say, at the list of births, deaths, and marriages; and then she turned to the general news--the fires, accidents, fashionable departures, and so on. In a few minutes, she indignantly dropped the newspaper in her lap.

"Here is another unfortunate man," she exclaimed, "sacrificed to the stupidity of women! If I had been in his place, I would have used my knowledge of swimming to save myself, and would have left the women to go to the bottom of the river as they deserved!"

"A boat accident, I suppose?" said Sir Peter.

"Oh yes--the old story. A gentleman takes two ladies out in a boat. After a while they get fidgety, and feel an idiotic impulse to change places. The boat upsets as usual; the poor dear man tries to save them--and is drowned along with them for his pains. Shameful! shameful!"

"Are the names mentioned?"

"Yes. They are all strangers to me; I speak on principle." Asserting herself in those words, the indignant lady handed the newspaper to

Mr. Cosway, who happened to sit next to her. "When you were in the navy," she continued, "I dare say _your_ life was put in jeopardy by taking women in boats. Read it yourself, and let it be a warning to you for the future."

Mr. Cosway looked at the narrative of the accident--and revealed the romantic mystery of his life by a burst of devout exclamation, expressed in the words:

"Thank God, my wife's drowned!"

II.

To declare that Sir Peter and his guests were all struck speechless, by discovering in this way that Mr. Cosway was a married man, is to say very little. The general impression appeared to be that he was mad. His neighbors at the table all drew back from him, with the one exception of his friend. Mr. Stone looked at the newspaper: pressed Mr. Cosway's hand in silent sympathy--and addressed himself to his host.

"Permit me to make my friend's apologies," he said, "until he is composed enough to act for himself. The circumstances are so extraordinary that I venture to think they excuse him. Will you allow us to speak to you privately?"

Sir Peter, with more apologies addressed to his visitors, opened the door which communicated with his study. Mr. Stone took Mr. Cosway's arm, and led him out of the room. He noticed no one, spoke to no one--he moved mechanically, like a man walking in his sleep.

After an unendurable interval of nearly an hour's duration, Sir Peter returned alone to the breakfast-room. Mr. Cosway and Mr. Stone had already taken their departure for London, with their host's entire approval.

"It is left to my discretion," Sir Peter proceeded, "to repeat to you what I have heard in my study. I will do so, on one condition--that you all consider yourselves bound in honor not to mention the true names and the real places, when you tell the story to others."

Subject to this wise reservation, the narrative is here repeated by one of the company. Considering how he may perform his task to the best

advantage, he finds that the events which preceded and followed Mr. Cosway's disastrous marriage resolve themselves into certain well-marked divisions. Adopting this arrangement, he proceeds to relate:

The First Epoch in Mr. Cosway's Life.

The sailing of her Majesty's ship _Albicore_ was deferred by the severe illness of the captain. A gentleman not possessed of political influence might, after the doctor's unpromising report of him, have been superseded by another commanding officer. In the present case, the Lords of the Admiralty showed themselves to be models of patience and sympathy. They kept the vessel in port, waiting the captain's recovery.

Among the unimportant junior officers, not wanted on board under these circumstances, and favored accordingly by obtaining leave to wait for orders on shore, were two young men, aged respectively twenty-two and twenty-three years, and known by the names of Cosway and Stone. The scene which now introduces them opens at a famous seaport on the south coast of England, and discloses the two young gentlemen at dinner in a private room at their inn.

"I think that last bottle of champagne was corked," Cosway remarked. "Let's try another. You're nearest the bell, Stone. Ring."

Stone rang, under protest. He was the elder of the two by a year, and he set an example of discretion.

"I am afraid we are running up a terrible bill," he said. "We have been here more than three weeks--"

"And we have denied ourselves nothing," Cosway added. "We have lived like princes. Another bottle of champagne, waiter. We have our riding-horses, and our carriage, and the best box at the theater, and such cigars as London itself could not produce. I call that making the most of life. Try the new bottle. Glorious drink, isn't it? Why doesn't my father have champagne at the family dinner-table?"

"Is your father a rich man, Cosway?"

"I should say not. He didn't give me anything like the money I expected, when I said good-by--and I rather think he warned me solemnly, at parting, to take the greatest care of it.' There's not a

farthing more for you,' he said, 'till your ship returns from her South American station.' _Your_ father is a clergyman, Stone."

"Well, and what of that?"

"And some clergymen are rich."

"My father is not one of them, Cosway."

"Then let us say no more about him. Help yourself, and pass the bottle."

Instead of adopting this suggestion, Stone rose with a very grave face, and once more rang the bell. "Ask the landlady to step up," he said, when the waiter appeared.

"What do you want with the landlady?" Cosway inquired.

"I want the bill."

The landlady--otherwise Mrs. Pounce--entered the room. She was short, and old, and fat, and painted, and a widow. Students of character, as revealed in the face, would have discovered malice and cunning in her bright black eyes, and a bitter vindictive temper in the lines about her thin red lips. Incapable of such subtleties of analysis as these, the two young officers differed widely, nevertheless, in their opinions of Mrs. Pounce. Cosway's reckless sense of humor delighted in pretending to be in love with her. Stone took a dislike to her from the first. When his friend asked for the reason, he made a strangely obscure answer. "Do you remember that morning in the wood when you killed the snake?" he said. "I took a dislike to the snake." Cosway made no further inquiries.

"Well, my young heroes," said Mrs. Pounce (always loud, always cheerful, and always familiar with her guests), "what do you want with me now?"

"Take a glass of champagne, my darling," said Cosway; "and let me try if I can get my arm round your waist. That's all _I_ want with you."

The landlady passed this over without notice. Though she had spoken to both of them, her cunning little eyes rested on Stone from the

moment when she appeared in the room. She knew by instinct the man who disliked her--and she waited deliberately for Stone to reply.

"We have been here some time," he said, "and we shall be obliged, ma'am, if you will let us have our bill."

Mrs. Pounce lifted her eyebrows with an expression of innocent surprise.

"Has the captain got well, and must you go on board to-night?" she asked.

"Nothing of the sort!" Cosway interposed. "We have no news of the captain, and we are going to the theater to-night."

"But," persisted Stone, "we want, if you please, to have the bill."

"Certainly, sir," said Mrs. Pounce, with a sudden assumption of respect. "But we are very busy downstairs, and we hope you will not press us for it to-night?"

"Of course not!" cried Cosway.

Mrs. Pounce instantly left the room, without waiting for any further remark from Cosway's friend.

"I wish we had gone to some other house," said Stone. "You mark my words--that woman means to cheat us."

Cosway expressed his dissent from this opinion in the most amiable manner. He filled his friend's glass, and begged him not to say ill-natured things of Mrs. Pounce.

But Stone's usually smooth temper seemed to be ruffled; he insisted on his own view. "She's impudent and inquisitive, if she is not downright dishonest," he said. "What right had she to ask you where we lived when we were at home; and what our Christian names were; and which of us was oldest, you or I? Oh, yes--it's all very well to say she only showed a flattering interest in us! I suppose she showed a flattering interest in my affairs, when I awoke a little earlier than usual, and caught her in my bedroom with my pocketbook in her hand. Do you believe she was going to lock it up for safety's sake? She knows how much money we have got as well as we know it

ourselves. Every half-penny we have will be in her pocket tomorrow. And a good thing, too--we shall be obliged to leave the house."

Even this cogent reasoning failed in provoking Cosway to reply. He took Stone's hat, and handed it with the utmost politeness to his foreboding friend. "There's only one remedy for such a state of mind as yours," he said. "Come to the theater."

At ten o'clock the next morning Cosway found himself alone at the breakfast-table. He was informed that Mr. Stone had gone out for a little walk, and would be back directly. Seating himself at the table, he perceived an envelope on his plate, which evidently inclosed the bill. He took up the envelope, considered a little, and put it back again unopened. At the same moment Stone burst into the room in a high state of excitement.

"News that will astonish you!" he cried. "The captain arrived yesterday evening. His doctors say that the sea-voyage will complete his recovery. The ship sails to-day--and we are ordered to report ourselves on board in an hour's time. Where's the bill?"

Cosway pointed to it. Stone took it out of the envelope.

It covered two sides of a prodigiously long sheet of paper. The sum total was brightly decorated with lines in red ink. Stone looked at the total, and passed it in silence to Cosway. For once, even Cosway was prostrated. In dreadful stillness the two young men produced their pocketbooks; added up their joint stores of money, and compared the result with the bill. Their united resources amounted to a little more than one-third of their debt to the landlady of the inn.

The only alternative that presented itself was to send for Mrs. Pounce; to state the circumstances plainly; and to propose a compromise on the grand commercial basis of credit.

Mrs. Pounce presented herself superbly dressed in walking costume. Was she going out; or had she just returned to the inn? Not a word escaped her; she waited gravely to hear what the gentlemen wanted. Cosway, presuming on his position as favorite, produced the contents of the two pocketbooks and revealed the melancholy truth.

"There is all the money we have," he concluded. "We hope you will not object to receive the balance in a bill at three months."

Mrs. Pounce answered with a stern composure of voice and manner entirely new in the experience of Cosway and Stone.

"I have paid ready money, gentlemen, for the hire of your horses and carriages," she said; "here are the receipts from the livery stables to vouch for me; I never accept bills unless I am quite sure beforehand that they will be honored. I defy you to find an overcharge in the account now rendered; and I expect you to pay it before you leave my house."

Stone looked at his watch.

"In three-quarters of an hour," he said, "we must be on board."

Mrs. Pounce entirely agreed with him. "And if you are not on board," she remarked "you will be tried by court-martial, and dismissed the service with your characters ruined for life."

"My dear creature, we haven't time to send home, and we know nobody in the town," pleaded Cosway. "For God's sake take our watches and jewelry, and our luggage--and let us go."

"I am not a pawnbroker," said the inflexible lady. "You must either pay your lawful debt to me in honest money, or--"

She paused and looked at Cosway. Her fat face brightened--she smiled graciously for the first time.

Cosway stared at her in unconcealed perplexity. He helplessly repeated her last words. "We must either pay the bill," he said, "or what?"

"Or," answered Mrs. Pounce, "one of you must marry ME."

Was she joking? Was she intoxicated? Was she out of her senses? Neither of the three; she was in perfect possession of herself; her explanation was a model of lucid and convincing arrangement of facts.

"My position here has its drawbacks," she began. "I am a lone widow; I am known to have an excellent business, and to have saved money. The result is that I am pestered to death by a set of needy vagabonds

who want to marry me. In this position, I am exposed to slanders and insults. Even if I didn't know that the men were after my money, there is not one of them whom I would venture to marry. He might turn out a tyrant and beat me; or a drunkard, and disgrace me; or a betting man, and ruin me. What I want, you see, for my own peace and protection, is to be able to declare myself married, and to produce the proof in the shape of a certificate. A born gentleman, with a character to lose, and so much younger in years than myself that he wouldn't think of living with me--there is the sort of husband who suits my book! I'm a reasonable woman, gentlemen. I would undertake to part with my husband at the church door--never to attempt to see him or write to him afterward--and only to show my certificate when necessary, without giving any explanations. Your secret would be quite safe in my keeping. I don't care a straw for either of you, so long as you answer my purpose. What do you say to paying my bill (one or the other of you) in this way? I am ready dressed for the altar; and the clergyman has notice at the church. My preference is for Mr. Cosway," proceeded this terrible woman with the cruelest irony, "because he has been so particular in his attentions toward me. The license (which I provided on the chance a fortnight since) is made out in his name. Such is my weakness for Mr. Cosway. But that don't matter if Mr. Stone would like to take his place. He can hail by his friend's name. Oh, yes, he can! I have consulted my lawyer. So long as the bride and bridegroom agree to it, they may be married in any name they like, and it stands good. Look at your watch again, Mr. Stone. The church is in the next street. By my calculation, you have just got five minutes to decide. I'm a punctual woman, my little dears; and I will be back to the moment."

She opened the door, paused, and returned to the room.

"I ought to have mentioned," she resumed, "that I shall make you a present of the bill, receipted, on the conclusion of the ceremony. You will be taken to the ship in my own boat, with all your money in your pockets, and a hamper of good things for the mess. After that I wash my hands of you. You may go to the devil your own way."

With this parting benediction, she left them.

Caught in the landlady's trap, the two victims looked at each other in expressive silence. Without time enough to take legal advice; without friends on shore; without any claim on officers of their own standing

in the ship, the prospect before them was literally limited to Marriage or Ruin. Stone made a proposal worthy of a hero.

"One of us must marry her," he said; "I'm ready to toss up for it."

Cosway matched him in generosity. "No," he answered. "It was I who brought you here; and I who led you into these infernal expenses. I ought to pay the penalty--and I will."

Before Stone could remonstrate, the five minutes expired. Punctual Mrs. Pounce appeared again in the doorway.

"Well?" she inquired, "which is it to be--Cosway, or Stone?"

Cosway advanced as reckless as ever, and offered his arm.

"Now then, Fatsides," he said, "come and be married!"

In five-and-twenty minutes more, Mrs. Pounce had become Mrs. Cosway; and the two officers were on their way to the ship.

The Second Epoch in Mr. Cosway's Life.

Four years elapsed before the _Albicore_ returned to the port from which she had sailed.

In that interval, the death of Cosway's parents had taken place. The lawyer who had managed his affairs, during his absence from England, wrote to inform him that his inheritance from his late father's "estate" was eight hundred a year. His mother only possessed a life interest in her fortune; she had left her jewels to her son, and that was all.

Cosway's experience of the life of a naval officer on foreign stations (without political influence to hasten his promotion) had thoroughly disappointed him. He decided on retiring from the service when the ship was "paid off." In the meantime, to the astonishment of his comrades, he seemed to be in no hurry to make use of the leave granted him to go on shore. The faithful Stone was the only man on board who knew that he was afraid of meeting his "wife." This good friend volunteered to go to the inn, and make the necessary investigation with all needful prudence. "Four years is a long time, at _her_ age," he said. "Many things may happen in four years."

An hour later, Stone returned to the ship, and sent a written message on board, addressed to his brother-officer, in these words: "Pack up your things at once, and join me on shore."

"What news?" asked the anxious husband.

Stone looked significantly at the idlers on the landing-place. "Wait," he said, "till we are by ourselves."

"Where are we going?"

"To the railway station."

They got into an empty carriage; and Stone at once relieved his friend of all further suspense.

"Nobody is acquainted with the secret of your marriage, but our two selves," he began quietly. "I don't think, Cosway, you need go into mourning."

"You don't mean to say she's dead!"

"I have seen a letter (written by her own lawyer) which announces her death," Stone replied. "It was so short that I believe I can repeat it word for word: 'Dear Sir--I have received information of the death of my client. Please address your next and last payment, on account of the lease and goodwill of the inn, to the executors of the late Mrs. Cosway.' There, that is the letter. 'Dear Sir' means the present proprietor of the inn. He told me your wife's previous history in two words. After carrying on the business with her customary intelligence for more than three years, her health failed, and she went to London to consult a physician. There she remained under the doctor's care. The next event was the appearance of an agent, instructed to sell the business in consequence of the landlady's declining health. Add the death at a later time--and there is the beginning and the end of the story. Fortune owed you a good turn, Cosway--and Fortune has paid the debt. Accept my best congratulations."

Arrived in London, Stone went on at once to his relations in the North. Cosway proceeded to the office of the family lawyer (Mr. Atherton), who had taken care of his interests in his absence. His father and Mr. Atherton had been schoolfellows and old friends. He

was affectionately received, and was invited to pay a visit the next day to the lawyer's villa at Richmond.

"You will be near enough to London to attend to your business at the Admiralty," said Mr. Atherton, "and you will meet a visitor at my house, who is one of the most charming girls in England--the only daughter of the great Mr. Restall. Good heavens! have you never heard of him? My dear sir, he's one of the partners in the famous firm of Benshaw, Restall, and Benshaw."

Cosway was wise enough to accept this last piece of information as quite conclusive. The next day, Mrs. Atherton presented him to the charming Miss Restall; and Mrs. Atherton's young married daughter (who had been his playfellow when they were children) whispered to him, half in jest, half in earnest: "Make the best use of your time; she isn't engaged yet."

Cosway shuddered inwardly at the bare idea of a second marriage. Was Miss Restall the sort of woman to restore his confidence?

She was small and slim and dark--a graceful, well-bred, brightly intelligent person, with a voice exquisitely sweet and winning in tone. Her ears, hands, and feet were objects to worship; and she had an attraction, irresistibly rare among the women of the present time--the attraction of a perfectly natural smile. Before Cosway had been an hour in the house, she discovered that his long term of service on foreign stations had furnished him with subjects of conversation which favorably contrasted with the commonplace gossip addressed to her by other men. Cosway at once became a favorite, as Othello became a favorite in his day.

The ladies of the household all rejoiced in the young officer's success, with the exception of Miss Restall's companion (supposed to hold the place of her lost mother, at a large salary), one Mrs. Margery.

Too cautious to commit herself in words, this lady expressed doubt and disapprobation by her looks. She had white hair, iron-gray eyebrows, and protuberant eyes; her looks were unusually expressive. One evening, she caught poor Mr. Atherton alone, and consulted him confidentially on the subject of Mr. Cosway's income. This was the first warning which opened the eyes of the good lawyer to the nature of the "friendship" already established between his two guests. He

knew Miss Restall's illustrious father well, and he feared that it might soon be his disagreeable duty to bring Cosway's visit to an end.

On a certain Saturday afternoon, while Mr. Atherton was still considering how he could most kindly and delicately suggest to Cosway that it was time to say good-by, an empty carriage arrived at the villa. A note from Mr. Restall was delivered to Mrs. Atherton, thanking her with perfect politeness for her kindness to his daughter. "Circumstances," he added, "rendered it necessary that Miss Restall should return home that afternoon."

The "circumstances" were supposed to refer to a garden-party to be given by Mr. Restall in the ensuing week. But why was his daughter wanted at home before the day of the party?

The ladies of the family, still devoted to Cosway's interests, entertained no doubt that Mrs. Margery had privately communicated with Mr. Restall, and that the appearance of the carriage was the natural result. Mrs. Atherton's married daughter did all that could be done: she got rid of Mrs. Margery for one minute, and so arranged it that Cosway and Miss Restall took leave of each other in her own sitting-room.

When the young lady appeared in the hall she had drawn her veil down. Cosway escaped to the road and saw the last of the carriage as it drove away. In a little more than a fortnight his horror of a second marriage had become one of the dead and buried emotions of his nature. He stayed at the villa until Monday morning, as an act of gratitude to his good friends, and then accompanied Mr. Atherton to London. Business at the Admiralty was the excuse. It imposed on nobody. He was evidently on his way to Miss Restall.

"Leave your business in my hands," said the lawyer, on the journey to town, "and go and amuse yourself on the Continent. I can't blame you for falling in love with Miss Restall; I ought to have foreseen the danger, and waited till she had left us before I invited you to my house. But I may at least warn you to carry the matter no further. If you had eight thousand instead of eight hundred a year, Mr. Restall would think it an act of presumption on your part to aspire to his daughter's hand, unless you had a title to throw into the bargain. Look at it in the true light, my dear boy; and one of these days you will thank me for speaking plainly."

Cosway promised to "look at it in the true light."

The result, from his point of view, led him into a change of residence. He left his hotel and took a lodging in the nearest bystreet to Mr. Restall's palace at Kensington.

On the same evening he applied (with the confidence due to a previous arrangement) for a letter at the neighboring post-office, addressed to E. C.--the initials of Edwin Cosway. "Pray be careful," Miss Restall wrote; "I have tried to get you a card for our garden party. But that hateful creature, Margery, has evidently spoken to my father; I am not trusted with any invitation cards. Bear it patiently, dear, as I do, and let me hear if you have succeeded in finding a lodging near us."

Not submitting to this first disappointment very patiently, Cosway sent his reply to the post-office, addressed to A. R.--the initials of Adela Restall. The next day the impatient lover applied for another letter. It was waiting for him, but it was not directed in Adela's handwriting. Had their correspondence been discovered? He opened the letter in the street; and read, with amazement, these lines:

"Dear Mr. Cosway, my heart sympathizes with two faithful lovers, in spite of my age and my duty. I inclose an invitation to the party tomorrow. Pray don't betray me, and don't pay too marked attention to Adela. Discretion is easy. There will be twelve hundred guests. Your friend, in spite of appearances, Louisa Margery."

How infamously they had all misjudged this excellent woman! Cosway went to the party a grateful, as well as a happy man. The first persons known to him, whom he discovered among the crowd of strangers, were the Athertons. They looked, as well they might, astonished to see him. Fidelity to Mrs. Margery forbade him to enter into any explanations. Where was that best and truest friend? With some difficulty he succeeded in finding her. Was there any impropriety in seizing her hand and cordially pressing it? The result of this expression of gratitude was, to say the least of it, perplexing.

Mrs. Margery behaved like the Athertons! She looked astonished to see him and she put precisely the same question: "How did you get here?" Cosway could only conclude that she was joking. "Who should know that, dear lady, better than yourself?" he rejoined. "I don't understand you," Mrs. Margery answered, sharply. After a moment's

reflection, Cosway hit on another solution of the mystery. Visitors were near them; and Mrs. Margery had made her own private use of one of Mr. Restall's invitation cards. She might have serious reasons for pushing caution to its last extreme. Cosway looked at her significantly. "The least I can do is not to be indiscreet," he whispered--and left her.

He turned into a side walk; and there he met Adela at last!

It seemed like a fatality. _She_ looked astonished; and _she_ said: "How did you get here?" No intrusive visitors were within hearing, this time. "My dear!" Cosway remonstrated, "Mrs. Margery must have told you, when she sent me my invitation." Adela turned pale. "Mrs. Margery?" she repeated. "Mrs. Margery has said nothing to me; Mrs. Margery detests you. We must have this cleared up. No; not now--I must attend to our guests. Expect a letter; and, for heaven's sake, Edwin, keep out of my father's way. One of our visitors whom he particularly wished to see has sent an excuse--and he is dreadfully angry about it."

She left him before Cosway could explain that he and Mr. Restall had thus far never seen each other.

He wandered away toward the extremity of the grounds, troubled by vague suspicions; hurt at Adela's cold reception of him. Entering a shrubbery, which seemed intended to screen the grounds, at this point, from a lane outside, he suddenly discovered a pretty little summer-house among the trees. A stout gentleman, of mature years, was seated alone in this retreat. He looked up with a frown. Cosway apologized for disturbing him, and entered into conversation as an act of politeness.

"A brilliant assembly to-day, sir."

The stout gentleman replied by an inarticulate sound--something between a grunt and a cough.

"And a splendid house and grounds," Cosway continued.

The stout gentleman repeated the inarticulate sound.

Cosway began to feel amused. Was this curious old man deaf and dumb?

"Excuse my entering into conversation," he persisted. "I feel like a stranger here. There are so many people whom I don't know."

The stout gentleman suddenly burst into speech. Cosway had touched a sympathetic fiber at last.

"There are a good many people here whom _I_ don't know," he said, gruffly. "You are one of them. What's your name?"

"My name is Cosway, sir. What's yours?"

The stout gentleman rose with fury in his looks. He burst out with an oath; and added the in tolerable question, already three times repeated by others: "How did you get here?" The tone was even more offensive than the oath. "Your age protects you, sir," said Cosway, with the loftiest composure. "I'm sorry I gave my name to so rude a person."

"Rude?" shouted the old gentleman. "You want my name in return, I suppose? You young puppy, you shall have it! My name is Restall."

He turned his back and walked off. Cosway took the only course now open to him. He returned to his lodgings.

The next day no letter reached him from Adela. He went to the postoffice. No letter was there. The day wore on to evening--and, with the evening, there appeared a woman who was a stranger to him. She looked like a servant; and she was the bearer of a mysterious message.

"Please be at the garden-door that opens on the lane, at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. Knock three times at the door--and then say 'Adela.' Some one who wishes you well will be alone in the shrubbery, and will let you in. No, sir! I am not to take anything; and I am not to say a word more." She spoke--and vanished.

Cosway was punctual to his appointment. He knocked three times; he pronounced Miss Restall's Christian name. Nothing happened. He waited a while, and tried again. This time Adela's voice answered strangely from the shrubbery in tones of surprise: "Edwin, is it really you?"

"Did you expect any one else?" Cosway asked. "My darling, your message said ten o'clock--and here I am."

The door was suddenly unlocked.

"I sent no message," said Adela, as they confronted each other on the threshold.

In the silence of utter bewilderment they went together into the summer-house. At Adela's request, Cosway repeated the message that he had received, and described the woman who had delivered it. The description applied to no person known to Miss Restall. "Mrs. Margery never sent you the invitation; and I repeat, I never sent you the message. This meeting has been arranged by some one who knows that I always walk in the shrubbery after breakfast. There is some underhand work going on--"

Still mentally in search of the enemy who had betrayed them, she checked herself, and considered a little. "Is it possible--?" she began, and paused again. Her eyes filled with tears. "My mind is so completely upset," she said, "that I can't think clearly of anything. Oh, Edwin, we have had a happy dream, and it has come to an end. My father knows more than we think for. Some friends of ours are going abroad tomorrow--and I am to go with them. Nothing I can say has the least effect upon my father. He means to part us forever--and this is his cruel way of doing it!"

She put her arm round Cosway's neck and lovingly laid her head on his shoulder. With tenderest kisses they reiterated their vows of eternal fidelity until their voices faltered and failed them. Cosway filled up the pause by the only useful suggestion which it was now in his power to make--he proposed an elopement.

Adela received this bold solution of the difficulty in which they were placed exactly as thousands of other young ladies have received similar proposals before her time, and after.

She first said positively No. Cosway persisted. She began to cry, and asked if he had no respect for her. Cosway declared that his respect was equal to any sacrifice except the sacrifice of parting with her forever. He could, and would, if she preferred it, die for her, but while he was alive he must refuse to give her up. Upon this she shifted her ground. Did he expect her to go away with him alone? Certainly not. Her maid could go with her, or, if her maid was not to be trusted, he would apply to his landlady, and engage "a respectable elderly

person" to attend on her until the day of their marriage. Would she have some mercy on him, and just consider it? No: she was afraid to consider it. Did she prefer misery for the rest of her life? Never mind _his_ happiness: it was _her_ happiness only that he had in his mind. Traveling with unsympathetic people; absent from England, no one could say for how long; married, when she did return, to some rich man whom she hated--would she, could she, contemplate that prospect? She contemplated it through tears; she contemplated it to an accompaniment of sighs, kisses, and protestations--she trembled, hesitated, gave way. At an appointed hour of the coming night, when her father would be in the smoking-room, and Mrs. Margery would be in bed, Cosway was to knock at the door in the lane once more; leaving time to make all the necessary arrangements in the interval.

The one pressing necessity, under these circumstances, was to guard against the possibility of betrayal and surprise. Cosway discreetly alluded to the unsolved mysteries of the invitation and the message. "Have you taken anybody into our confidence?" he asked.

Adela answered with some embarrassment. "Only one person," She said--"dear Miss Benshaw."

"Who is Miss Benshaw?"

"Don't you really know, Edwin? She is richer even than papa--she has inherited from her late brother one half-share in the great business in the City. Miss Benshaw is the lady who disappointed papa by not coming to the garden-party. You remember, dear, how happy we were when we were together at Mr. Atherton's? I was very miserable when they took me away. Miss Benshaw happened to call the next day and she noticed it. 'My dear,' she said (Miss Benshaw is quite an elderly lady now), 'I am an old maid, who has missed the happiness of her life, through not having had a friend to guide and advise her when she was young. Are you suffering as I once suffered?' She spoke so nicely--and I was so wretched--that I really couldn't help it. I opened my heart to her."

Cosway looked grave. "Are you sure she is to be trusted?" he asked.

"Perfectly sure."

"Perhaps, my love, she has spoken about us (not meaning any harm) to some friend of hers? Old ladies are so fond of gossip. It's just possible--don't you think so?"

Adela hung her head.

"I have thought it just possible myself," she admitted. "There is plenty of time to call on her to-day. I will set our doubts at rest before Miss Benshaw goes out for her afternoon drive."

On that understanding they parted.

Toward evening Cosway's arrangements for the elopement were completed. He was eating his solitary dinner when a note was brought to him. It had been left at the door by a messenger. The man had gone away without waiting for an answer. The note ran thus:

"Miss Benshaw presents her compliments to Mr. Cosway, and will be obliged if he can call on her at nine o'clock this evening, on business which concerns himself."

This invitation was evidently the result of Adela's visit earlier in the day. Cosway presented himself at the house, troubled by natural emotions of anxiety and suspense. His reception was not of a nature to compose him. He was shown into a darkened room. The one lamp on the table was turned down low, and the little light thus given was still further obscured by a shade. The corners of the room were in almost absolute darkness.

A voice out of one of the corners addressed him in a whisper:

"I must beg you to excuse the darkened room. I am suffering from a severe cold. My eyes are inflamed, and my throat is so bad that I can only speak in a whisper. Sit down, sir. I have got news for you."

"Not bad news, I hope, ma'am?" Cosway ventured to inquire.

"The worst possible news," said the whispering voice. "You have an enemy striking at you in the dark."

Cosway asked who it was, and received no answer. He varied the form of inquiry, and asked why the unnamed person struck at him in the dark. The experiment succeeded; he obtained a reply.

"It is reported to me," said Miss Benshaw, "that the person thinks it necessary to give you a lesson, and takes a spiteful pleasure in doing it as mischievously as possible. The person, as I happen to know, sent you your invitation to the party, and made the appointment which took you to the door in the lane. Wait a little, sir; I have not done yet. The person has put it into Mr. Restall's head to send his daughter abroad tomorrow."

Cosway attempted to make her speak more plainly.

"Is this wretch a man or a woman?" he said.

Miss Benshaw proceeded without noticing the interruption.

"You needn't be afraid, Mr. Cosway; Miss Restall will not leave England. Your enemy is all-powerful. Your enemy's object could only be to provoke you into planning an elopement--and, your arrangements once completed, to inform Mr. Restall, and to part you and Miss Adela quite as effectually as if you were at opposite ends of the world. Oh, you will undoubtedly be parted! Spiteful, isn't it? And, what is worse, the mischief is as good as done already."

Cosway rose from his chair.

"Do you wish for any further explanation?" asked Miss Benshaw.

"One thing more," he replied. "Does Adela know of this?"

"No," said Miss Benshaw; "it is left to you to tell her."

There was a moment of silence. Cosway looked at the lamp. Once roused, as usual with men of his character, his temper was not to be trifled with.

"Miss Benshaw," he said, "I dare say you think me a fool; but I can draw my own conclusion, for all that. _You_ are my enemy."

The only reply was a chuckling laugh. All voices can be more or less effectually disguised by a whisper but a laugh carries the revelation of its own identity with it. Cosway suddenly threw off the shade over the lamp and turned up the wick.

The light flooded the room, and showed him--His Wife.

The Third Epoch in Mr. Cosway's Life.

Three days had passed. Cosway sat alone in his lodging--pale and worn: the shadow already of his former self.

He had not seen Adela since the discovery. There was but one way in which he could venture to make the inevitable disclosure--he wrote to her; and Mr. Atherton's daughter took care that the letter should be received. Inquiries made afterward, by help of the same good friend, informed him that Miss Restall was suffering from illness.

The mistress of the house came in.

"Cheer up, sir," said the good woman. "There is better news of Miss Restall to-day."

He raised his head.

"Don't trifle with me!" he answered fretfully; "tell me exactly what the servant said."

The mistress repeated the words. Miss Restall had passed a quieter night, and had been able for a few hours to leave her room. He asked next if any reply to his letter had arrived. No reply had been received.

If Adela definitely abstained from writing to him, the conclusion would be too plain to be mistaken. She had given him up--and who could blame her?

There was a knock at the street-door. The mistress looked out.

"Here's Mr. Stone come back, sir!" she exclaimed joyfully--and hurried away to let him in.

Cosway never looked up when his friend appeared.

"I knew I should succeed," said Stone. "I have seen your wife."

"Don't speak of her," cried Cosway. "I should have murdered her when I saw her face, if I had not instantly left the house. I may be the death of the wretch yet, if you presist in speaking of her!"

Stone put his hand kindly on his friend's shoulder.

"Must I remind you that you owe something to your old comrade?" he asked. "I left my father and mother, the morning I got your letter--and my one thought has been to serve you. Reward me. Be a man, and hear what is your right and duty to know. After that, if you like, we will never refer to the woman again."

Cosway took his hand, in silent acknowledgment that he was right. They sat down together. Stone began.

"She is so entirely shameless," he said, "that I had no difficulty in getting her to speak. And she so cordially hates you that she glories in her own falsehood and treachery."

"Of course, she lies," Cosway said bitterly, "when she calls herself Miss Benshaw?"

"No; she is really the daughter of the man who founded the great house in the City. With every advantage that wealth and position could give her the perverse creature married one of her father's clerks, who had been deservedly dismissed from his situation. From that moment her family discarded her. With the money procured by the sale of her jewels, her husband took the inn which we have such bitter cause to remember--and she managed the house after his death. So much for the past. Carry your mind on now to the time when our ship brought us back to England. At that date, the last surviving member of your wife's family--her elder brother--lay at the point of death. He had taken his father's place in the business, besides inheriting his father's fortune. After a happy married life he was left a widower, without children; and it became necessary that he should alter his will. He deferred performing his duty. It was only at the time of his last illness that he had dictated instructions for a new will, leaving his wealth (excepting certain legacies to old friends) to the hospitals of Great Britain and Ireland. His lawyer lost no time in carrying out the instructions. The new will was ready for signature (the old will having been destroyed by his own hand), when the doctors sent a message to say that their patient was insensible, and might die in that condition."

"Did the doctors prove to be right?"

"Perfectly right. Our wretched landlady, as next of kin, succeeded, not only to the fortune, but (under the deed of partnership) to her late brother's place in the firm: on the one easy condition of resuming the family name. She calls herself "Miss Benshaw." But as a matter of legal necessity she is set down in the deed as "Mrs. Cosway Benshaw." Her partners only now know that her husband is living, and that you are the Cosway whom she privately married. Will you take a little breathing time? or shall I go on, and get done with it?"

Cosway signed to him to go on.

"She doesn't in the least care," Stone proceeded, "for the exposure. 'I am the head partner,' she says 'and the rich one of the firm; they daren't turn their backs on Me.' You remember the information I received--in perfect good faith on his part--from the man who keeps the inn? The visit to the London doctor, and the assertion of failing health, were adopted as the best means of plausibly severing the lady's connection (the great lady now!) with a calling so unworthy of her as the keeping of an inn. Her neighbors at the seaport were all deceived by the stratagem, with two exceptions. They were both men--vagabonds who had pertinaciously tried to delude her into marrying them in the days when she was a widow. They refused to believe in the doctor and the declining health; they had their own suspicion of the motives which had led to the sale of the inn, under very unfavorable circumstances; and they decided on going to London, inspired by the same base hope of making discoveries which might be turned into a means of extorting money."

"She escaped them, of course," said Cosway. "How?"

"By the help of her lawyer, who was not above accepting a handsome private fee. He wrote to the new landlord of the inn, falsely announcing his client's death, in the letter which I repeated to you in the railway carriage on our journey to London. Other precautions were taken to keep up the deception, on which it is needless to dwell. Your natural conclusion that you were free to pay your addresses to Miss Restall, and the poor young lady's innocent confidence in 'Miss Benshaw's' sympathy, gave this unscrupulous woman the means of playing the heartless trick on you which is now exposed. Malice and jealousy--I have it, mind, from herself!--were not her only motives. 'But for that Cosway,' she said (I spare you the epithet which she put before your name), 'with my money and position, I might have married a needy lord, and sunned myself in my old age in the full

blaze of the peerage.' Do you understand how she hated you, now? Enough of the subject! The moral of it, my dear Cosway, is to leave this place, and try what change of scene will do for you. I have time to spare; and I will go abroad with you. When shall it be?"

"Let me wait a day or two more," Cosway pleaded.

Stone shook his head. "Still hoping, my poor friend, for a line from Miss Restall? You distress me."

"I am sorry to distress you, Stone. If I can get one pitying word from _her_, I can submit to the miserable life that lies before me."

"Are you not expecting too much?"

"You wouldn't say so, if you were as fond of her as I am."

They were silent. The evening slowly darkened; and the mistress came in as usual with the candles. She brought with her a letter for Cosway.

He tore it open; read it in an instant; and devoured it with kisses. His highly wrought feelings found their vent in a little allowable exaggeration. "She has saved my life!" he said, as he handed the letter to Stone.

It only contained these lines:

"My love is yours, my promise is yours. Through all trouble, through all profanation, through the hopeless separation that may be before us in this world, I live yours--and die yours. My Edwin, God bless and comfort you."

The Fourth Epoch in Mr. Cosway's Life.

The separation had lasted for nearly two years, when Cosway and Stone paid that visit to the country house which is recorded at the outset of the present narrative. In the interval nothing had been heard of Miss Restall, except through Mr. Atherton. He reported that Adela was leading a very quiet life. The one remarkable event had been an interview between "Miss Benshaw" and herself. No other person had been present; but the little that was reported placed Miss Restall's

character above all praise. She had forgiven the woman who had so cruelly injured her!

The two friends, it may be remembered, had traveled to London, immediately after completing the fullest explanation of Cosway's startling behavior at the breakfast-table. Stone was not by nature a sanguine man. "I don't believe in our luck," he said. "Let us be quite sure that we are not the victims of another deception."

The accident had happened on the Thames; and the newspaper narrative proved to be accurate in every respect. Stone personally attended the inquest. From a natural feeling of delicacy toward Adela, Cosway hesitated to write to her on the subject. The ever-helpful Stone wrote in his place.

After some delay, the answer was received. It inclosed a brief statement (communicated officially by legal authority) of the last act of malice on the part of the late head-partner in the house of Benshaw and Company. She had not died intestate, like her brother. The first clause of her will contained the testator's grateful recognition of Adela Restall's Christian act of forgiveness. The second clause (after stating that there were neither relatives nor children to be benefited by the will) left Adela Restall mistress of Mrs. Cosway Benshaw's fortune--on the one merciless condition that she did _not_ marry Edwin Cosway. The third clause--if Adela Restall violated the condition--handed over the whole of the money to the firm in the City, "for the extension of the business, and the benefit of the surviving partners."

Some months later, Adela came of age. To the indignation of Mr. Restall, and the astonishment of the "Company," the money actually went to the firm. The fourth epoch in Mr. Cosway's life witnessed his marriage to a woman who cheerfully paid half a million of money for the happiness of passing her life, on eight hundred a year, with the man whom she loved.

But Cosway felt bound in gratitude to make a rich woman of his wife, if work and resolution could do it. When Stone last heard of him, he was reading for the bar; and Mr. Atherton was ready to give him his first brief.

NOTE.--That "most improbable" part of the present narrative, which is contained in the division called The First Epoch, is founded on an adventure which actually occurred to no less a person than a cousin of

Sir Walter Scott. In Lockhart's delightful "Life," the anecdote will be found as told by Sir Walter to Captain Basil Hall. The remainder of the present story is entirely imaginary. The writer wondered what such a woman as the landlady would do under certain given circumstances, after her marriage to the young midshipman--and here is the result.

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 f rom 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 we re 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 to-morrow 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.