

FICTION

Guy Boothby

Long Live the King

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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"LONG LIVE THE KING!"

BY GUY BOOTHBY

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"A Maker of Nations," "A Bid for Fortune," etc.*

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"'Farewell, your Majesty,' he said."

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LONG LIVE THE KING!"

CHAPTER I.

How strange it seems, after this long lapse of time, to look back upon those days, and after all that has come between. When I think of the child whose curious fancies, strange whims, and still stranger life, I am about to portray, I find myself inclining towards what is certainly a feeling of bewilderment, and one that might almost be said to be akin to physical pain. That the little fellow I see in my mind's eye, playing so happily on the far side of that River of Years, can be *myself*, the man sitting in this chair, who, pen in hand, is trying so hard to arrange his thoughts, is to me scarcely believable. Between the two there looms so vast a difference, that it would appear as if no possible connecting link could serve to unite them with each other. Whether I am better or worse for the change must be left for more competent judges to declare.

Looking back, I can scarcely determine which is the first event in my life that I can recall. I have always declared that I have the very faintest recollection of being held up by my mother at a window to see my father present some new colours to his favourite regiment of Guards in the square below. But if, as they say, that occurrence happened exactly five-and-twenty years ago, and the records of the Regiment are there to prove it, my memory must be a more than ordinarily good one, seeing that, at the time, I could not have been more than three years of age. Imperfect though that recollection may be, however, it is quite certain that I can distinctly recall the day, two years later, when my brother, the Crown Prince Maximilian, being then a big boy of nine, led his regiment past my father on parade for the first time. I can also remember crying bitterly, because I was not permitted to accompany him, which eagerness on my part, so I have been informed since, was taken by my mother's Ladies-in-Waiting to be a sign that a great military career awaited me. That I have never so far justified either their hopes or their good opinion of me must be set down by the charitably-minded as the result of a lack of opportunity. In a sense, however, I must confess it has proved almost true, but how it came about will be told in its proper place. In the meantime, having a long story to tell, and not much space to tell it in, it is necessary that I should return to my earliest recollections with as much speed as possible.

To enter upon my story proper, it is only fit that I should commence with a brief description of the life of my poor father. Maximilian the Second, King of Pannonia, as all the world is aware, was a monarch foredoomed to trouble from his cradle. His succession to the throne was the result of an accident. But for a fatal shot, fired in the excitement of a wolf hunt, and which stretched the heir lifeless upon the snow, he would in all human probability never have been called upon to undertake the responsibilities for which he was, not only by nature, but also by inclination, so totally unfitted. A scholar of the finest type, essentially a recluse, more at his ease in his library than in the Council Chamber, happier when holding a pen than when carrying a sword, I must admit it is to me a matter of wonderment that he succeeded even as well as he did. A loveless marriage, thrust upon him by the exigencies of State, when his inclinations tended in another and very different direction, marked the next downward step in his career. My mother was the eldest daughter of Alexander the Tenth, King of Gothia, and was as ambitious as my father was the reverse. Where he was only too glad to find an opportunity of effacing himself, she, at first, boldly courted the admiration of the world. Among other things, she insisted upon all the extremes of court ceremonial being observed, and under her rule the sleepy old palace woke to new life. Neighbouring Sovereigns were repeatedly our guests, entertainment followed entertainment, each conducted on the most lavish scale, until the country, which at first had inclined towards applause, began to show unmistakable signs of disapproval. Things were said in the Reichsrath that should have enabled any one less absorbed in his own private affairs than my father, and less wilful than my mother, to have seen how foolish was the course each was pursuing. When, eventually, the Prime Minister of the day, the Count von Marquart, ventured upon a remonstrance, my mother cut him short with a hasty speech that was destined to rankle in his heart and to lay the foundation-stone of the misunderstanding that, for the rest of their lives, existed between them. Fortunately, however, for the affairs of men, Time is able to accomplish what argument and diplomacy cannot hope to achieve. The duties of motherhood, and a long and serious illness, which followed my advent into the world, put it out of her power to adhere to the dangerous course she had hitherto been running. Much to everyone's surprise, when she was fully recovered, it was found that the craving for excitement, which she had formerly possessed, had completely left her. The change, however, as is so often the case, came too late; the mischief was already done. The Pannonians as a race are, so it has been said, amongst the most undemonstrative of the inhabitants of Europe. It is possible that this may be so. I am not going to admit or to combat the accusation. This much, however, is quite certain: if they are phlegmatic, they are also retentive; and, having once derived an impression, or allowed themselves to become prejudiced in any given direction, they seldom, if ever, return to their original condition. For this reason, while the change in my mother was apparent to all who were brought into immediate contact with her, and by hearsay to many who were not, the greater proportion of the populace were of the opinion that every calamity that befell the nation for years to come was attributable, either directly or by inference, to her recklessness and her extravagance in the past. That the great ceremonials and festivities, balls, concerts, and hunting parties, were no longer to be witnessed by the public eye, was, in their minds, no sort of proof that they did not exist. With the strange perversity that so often characterises the actions of a nation, those who had been most dazzled and delighted when she had lifted the sombre old court life from its former stagnation into its

then glittering effervescence now constituted themselves her most bitter accusers. Thus the inevitable drew nearer, while my mother attended to her nursery with as much devotion as could have been displayed by any *bourgeoise* parent, and my father pored over his books in the north-west tower of the palace, translating Ovid when he should have been pulling at the ropes of Government, and enjoying the selfish pleasures of the student when he should have been endeavouring to prevent the ship of State from foundering. The country, being delivered over to the mercy of party politics, rushed blindly on towards the maelstrom that was to engulf it, and with it our devoted family.

Having thus formally introduced my father and mother to your notice, it is necessary that I should now perform the same ceremony for my brother and myself. Surely two lads were never more different. Max, the Crown Prince, was, as I have already remarked, my senior by four years, and the incarnation, so far as I was concerned, of all that was manly and heroic. At the time of which I am about to tell you, and which was the turning point of our fortunes, he was twelve years old, advanced for his age, and showing promise of development into a tall and powerful man. In face he resembled our mother more than our father; he had her dark, piercing eyes, and, if the truth must be told, he was also gifted with a very large amount of her imperiousness and love of power. It was said that he was a born ruler of men, and some went even so far as to predict that when he ascended the throne, Pannonia, under his influence, would resume her proper place as the leading nation of the earth. But, alas! how strangely things fall out. That which we count a certainty seldom comes to pass, while it has become a commonplace amongst us that the unexpected nearly, if not always, happens. As an example, I must put on record an incident as strange as, at the time, it was disconcerting.

One day Max and I, accompanied by our tutor, were riding on the road that leads from the city towards the village of Schartzvam, at the foot of the mountains. Five miles from home, the pony Max was riding cast a shoe, and it became necessary for us to call a halt at a blacksmith's shop, in order that the defect might be remedied. We had dismounted, and were standing at the door watching the work in hand, when a party of gipsies made their appearance in the street. The majority had passed us and turned the corner; only a withered beldame, hobbling along with the assistance of a stick, remained behind. On seeing us she paused, and, addressing Max, asked for charity. Upon his giving her a coin she inquired whether he would like his fortune told in return. Doctor Liecharadt, feeling a certain responsibility in the matter, was about to order her away, but Max, who had always a touch of the mystical and romantic in his character, begged him to allow her to remain.

"She shall tell my fortune," he said, taking some money from his pocket and handing it to the old woman. "Who knows but that she may be able to give me a hint which may some day be of use to me?"

The worthy doctor, who never willingly thwarted Max in anything, was perforce compelled to agree. Accordingly he held out his hand, and the old crone took it. For a few moments she studied its lines attentively.

"You have started on good terms with the world," she began at last. "Fortune favours you now, but the time will come when she will not, and you will be obliged to go on your way alone. You have a proud heart, and desire great things. When the time is ripe, you will walk rough paths, and will travel to a far country. Your dreams will go with you, but, when you return, it will be too late. Your heart's desire will have passed from you. I can say no more."

"You have not said very much," replied Max, with what I could not help noticing was not his usual laugh. "Nor is what you *have* told me encouraging. However, I suppose it will prove as true as most of your prophecies. And now, Paul, you must have your fortune told. Perhaps you can find something better in your lucky bag for my brother."

At first I would have drawn back, being at that time rather a timid boy, but Max's orders were always law to me. I accordingly held out my hand, at the same time giving the old woman the necessary money wherewith to cross it. As before, she bent over and studied the palm attentively. I can see her wrinkled face now, peeping out, with its raven tresses, from beneath her coloured hood. As soon became apparent, the prophecy in my case was to be infinitely happier than that she had offered Max. I was to retain the love of my friends, to enjoy long life, to possess a beautiful wife, and to see many happy children clustering round my knee. She had got this far when she looked into my face. What she saw there appeared to startle her.

"I read it on his hand," she resumed, as though speaking to herself. Then, looking fixedly at me once more, she continued, but with greater respect than she had hitherto shown: "Go on and prosper, child; though they know it not, the people's heart goes with you."

Then, in a strange sing-song voice, and still looking steadfastly at my face, she repeated the old distich, which has been popular in the country for many hundreds of years. Translated roughly into English, it runs somewhat as follows:

"Pannonia's King shall firmly sit,
So long as Michael's Cross doth fit."

After bidding me remember what the gipsy had said, and before we could stop her, or question her further, she had left

us and was hobbling after her party. Even now I can feel the awkwardness of the next few moments. It had all been so sudden and so unexpected, that it had taken us completely by surprise. I was only a child, and I knew I was not to blame; nevertheless, I looked appealingly at Max as if for forgiveness. His handsome face was black with passion. Placing my hand upon his arm, I asked him to forgive me, begging him not to be angry at a gipsy's idle words, but he threw my hand off, saying that he was scarcely likely to allow himself to be made angry by an old fool. Be that as it may, however, for the rest of the ride he held himself aloof from us, only speaking when he was spoken to, and then with a bitterness that was older than his years, and, if possible, more uncomfortable than his silence. In my own mind I believe it was from that day that the estrangement which afterwards existed for some years between us might be said to have dated; yet the mere fact that I happened to possess--though at that time very faintly--the peculiar cross-like indentation between the brows, that, tradition says, was bequeathed to us by Duke Michael, the founder of our House, and which it is maintained none but those destined to rule the kingdom ever possess, should not have made any difference in our feelings towards each other.

One more digression from the direct path of my narrative, and I shall be at liberty to proceed at my best pace.

Among certain nobles of the kingdom, and one who commanded an influence in some quarters, second only to that of the King himself, was Prince Ferdinand of Lilienhohe, a brilliant man in every way, but a bitter enemy of the Ramonyi family. It was his misfortune that he was never able to allow himself to forget that, more than a hundred years ago, one of his family had, for a brief period, sat upon the throne of Pannonia, and this knowledge had proved the evil factor of his life. Out of it he had permitted an idea to take root and grow, until it had passed beyond his control. Being well thought of by a certain section of the community, particularly in the northern portion of the kingdom, where he had large estates, he did not despair, even now, of accomplishing his desires. Plotting and scheming were integral parts of his nature, and it seemed out of his power to check them. It is not of the Prince himself, however, that I am going to speak, but of his only child, his daughter, who was destined in the future to play a most important part in the drama of my life.

One morning, just as we were preparing to leave the palace for our daily ride, we were the witnesses of what promised to be, and might very easily have become, a terrible catastrophe. A carriage, drawn by a pair of handsome horses, had just turned from the Jungferngasse into the Michael Platz, when something caused them to take fright, and they dashed off at terrific speed in the direction of the palace. In vain the coachman, assisted by the groom beside him, endeavoured to restrain the frightened animals. They had become unmanageable, and it looked as if nothing could save the carriage, and any one who might be in it, from annihilation. Even now I can feel the terror that possessed me as I watched them come dashing headlong across the square, making straight for the iron gates of the palace. Instinctively I put up my hand to shut out the sight from my eyes. Then I heard a crash, succeeded by a short silence which in its turn was broken by the screams of the injured horses. When I looked again, the guards had turned out, and some of the men were assisting the coachman, who fortunately was not hurt, with the animals, while the officer of the day was removing a little girl from the carriage to the guard-room beside the gates. It was miraculous that she had not been hurt, for, as it was afterwards discovered, she had only fainted from the shock she had received. My mother, who had witnessed all that had transpired from one of the windows, immediately sent a servant with instructions that the child was to be brought to the palace, where she could be properly attended to. This was done, and presently the little one, who had been examined by our own surgeon, was in my mother's boudoir, recovering from the effects of the fright she had received. Side by side, unconscious of the part she was one day to play in our several destinies, Max and I stood and watched her. For myself, I can say that never in my life before had I seen so dainty and bewitching a little creature. Beautiful as she is now--the loveliest woman in Europe, they say, and I believe they speak the truth--she was even more beautiful then. There was a spirituality about her--a frailness, if I may so express it--that was almost fairylike.

"You have nothing to fear now, little one," said my mother, who held her in her arms. "You have had a wonderful escape, and you must thank the good God for your preservation."

Then, turning to one of the servants, she asked whether he had discovered whose carriage it was. The man paused for a moment before he replied.

"Why do you not answer?" my mother inquired. "Surely you must know?"

"I have been given to understand, your Majesty," the man answered respectfully, "that the carriage was the property of His Highness the Prince of Lilienhohe, and that this young lady is his daughter, the Princess Ottilie."

It was well known in the city that the Prince of Lilienhohe had at last reached the end of his treasonable tether, and that, only that day, to save him further disgrace, he had been given a stated time in which to quit the country. You may, therefore, imagine the effect the man's words produced upon us, and my mother in particular. Being a child, I could not of course understand what it meant, but the name of Lilienhohe had of late been of such ominous report in my ears, that I could scarcely fail to be struck by the importance of the incident. The very title of the Prince who was to go into

exile had an ogreish ring about it for me; and, though I had been told on good authority that he was a man of remarkably handsome appearance, possessing the most pleasant manners, and was devoted to little children, I was very far from crediting the statement. In my youthful mind a man who was notoriously inimical to my own family, and who had publicly called my mother the Enemy of Pannonia, and had stated his wish to have us turned neck and crop out of the country, could never be anything but a fiend in human shape. To see this beautiful creature before me, however, and to have it on reliable evidence that she was his daughter, somewhat disconcerted me. I looked at the little maid seated in my mother's lap with a fresh curiosity, and endeavoured to take soundings of the position. It was beyond me, however. Could she be a second Gerda (I was busy with Hans Andersen at the time); and would she turn out to be a robber maiden who tickled reindeers' throats with a sharp knife, and laughed to see their fear? I was in the midst of my cogitations, and was vaguely wondering what the Count von Marquart would say if he knew that his enemy's daughter was in the palace, when the little maid, yearning for younger sympathy, I suppose, slipped from my mother's knee, and, crossing the room to where I stood, took possession of my hand.

"I like you," she said, looking up into my face with her beautiful eyes; and from that moment the pressure of her tiny fingers, and the remembrance of the look she gave me then, have been among my most cherished memories.

By my mother's orders, a carriage had been brought for her, and one of the ladies-in-waiting had been deputed to take her back to her father's house. While the necessary preparations were being made, we passed out, still hand-in-hand, into the great vestibule.

It was the first time for more than a hundred years that a Ramonyi and a Lilienhohe had walked together, and there were some who looked upon it as an augury.

It was quite certain that she had not yet altogether recovered from the shock the accident had given her, for her face was still pale, and her hand trembled in mine.

"What is your name?" she asked in childish accents, as we stood before the statue of the Great Founder, the same who had bequeathed to me the Michael Cross of famous memory.

"Paul," I answered: "Paul Michael George." I gave it in full in order that the fact might be more clearly impressed upon her memory.

"I shall 'member," she returned gravely; and for the second time she added--"I like you."

At this moment the carriage made its appearance, and the Baroness Rabovsdin, to whom my mother had entrusted the responsibility of conveying the child back to her father's house, went down the steps and entered it. With a gravity beyond my years, I led Princess Otilie down to it, and helped her to her seat beside the Baroness. Then the carriage drove away, and that was the last I saw of the daughter of the Prince of Lilienhohe for many years to come.

CHAPTER II.

Although my father, acting on the advice of his Ministers, had taken the decisive step of banishing the Prince of Lilienhohe from the country, he had not been able altogether to rid himself of the trouble the latter had occasioned. The Ogre had been growing larger and uglier for years, and, on looking back upon it now, I am of the opinion that it was his last, and I cannot help thinking his greatest, imprudence, that brought about the disastrous end. Be that as it may, however, the result was quickly apparent. The contempt the populace felt for us was to be observed in every direction. My father, who seldom left the palace, was not brought into actual contact with it, but I remember on one occasion my mother and I being hooted while driving in the Graben. What we had done to deserve it I cannot say, but the incident was sufficient to show me a side of my mother's character that I had never encountered before. In her home life she had, as I have observed already, developed into a quiet and loving woman. Now, in the face of danger, her old spirit reasserted itself, and I can recall the flash that lighted her eyes, and the contemptuous curl of her lips, as she faced the crowd that surged about the carriage. Turning to me she took my hand and bade me not be frightened; then, looking at the Baroness Niedervald, who was sitting opposite, and who appeared as if she were about to collapse, added sternly, "I am sure you are not afraid, Madame, so I beg you will not permit them to think so."

The Baroness, who stood in greater awe of my mother than a thousand street ruffians, pulled herself together, and immediately repaid their jeers with looks of scorn.

Ten minutes later we were back at the Palace once more, and my father had been made acquainted with what had occurred. A curious smile flickered over his sphinx-like face as he heard the news.

"You fed your hounds too well at first, my dear," he said, with that cynicism that always characterised him. "They are grumbling now because the supply of bones is finished, and they are compelled to fall back on stones."

I did not realise the force of this allusion then, but it has become more plain to me since. One thing is quite certain--it angered my mother beyond measure, and from that time she carried no more complaints to him. Even had she done so, it is doubtful whether it would have been of any use. "Go to von Marquart, your Majesty," he would have said. "He is the real king; I am only the figurehead--the puppet, if you like."

As a matter of fact the time had gone by for active interference, and all that could now be done was to wait, and to endeavour, as far as possible, to hold the rabble in check, until some new sensation should arise to divert their attention. To make matters worse, the country was split up into factions; thus for every step gained in one place we lost ground elsewhere, and, by propitiating one, we enraged another. Some were for deposing my father outright, and inviting Prince Ferdinand to mount the throne; while others went even so far as to contemplate doing away with Royalty and nobles altogether, and establishing a Republic, in which every man was to be the equal of his fellow, and caste should be swept away entirely. They could not realise the fact that their present ruler, if he had done nothing else, had at least permitted them to enjoy the benefits of peace. He was not ambitious like his neighbour on the north, nor aggressive like his fellow on the south, and in consequence the country flourished as it could not otherwise have hoped to have done. It has often struck me since that a nation is not unlike a defective dam. So long as it holds together it is solid and watertight, but let even the faintest trickle of moisture percolate through its massive sides and more will surely follow; later, a gaping rent will show itself, where first the dampness appeared; then, in one brief instant, before man can prevent it, the mighty flood bursts its bonds, dashes forth and sweeps all the old order away before it.

Being at this time only nine years old, I could not, of course, appreciate the gravity of the situation. But I was quite aware that those I loved were in trouble. It was brought home to me more convincingly by one little incident than by anything else.

It was nine o'clock on a winter's night. Snow was falling, and the palace courtyard was covered with a white mantle. According to custom, Max and I had been to our mother's room to bid her good-night, and had crossed the great hall on our way to our own apartments, when, at the top of the grand staircase, we met the Prime Minister, Count von Marquart, ascending. As a rule we were afraid of him; his manner was harsh and overbearing, and it had been wittily observed that there were only two persons in the world, the Count von Marquart and himself, with whom he was on terms of anything approaching intimacy. To-night, however, we noticed that he was disturbed about something. On seeing us, he paused and bade us a polite good-evening. Then, gazing into our faces with those cold, piercing eyes of his, which seemed to look one through, he patted us on the shoulders, heaved a heavy sigh, and muttering "Poor lads, poor lads!" followed the servant along the corridor in the direction of my father's study.

For the next few days Council followed Council, and from each the Ministers drove away with gloomier faces. I have since learnt that the failure of the crops in the northern provinces, and the consequent dearness and scarcity of bread,

had precipitated matters, and forced the hands of those who were really at the bottom of the mischief. Somehow I do not fancy that my father even at this, the gravest crisis of his life, properly realised what the near future had in store for us. Having devoted his attention to other matters for so long, he had lost his grip of the public pulse, and in consequence was unable to realise the deadliness of the disease that was taking possession of his country. Like the dipsomaniac, who, in his own heart, is quite aware that to indulge his craving is to court a certain and most terrible death, my father persisted in his former line of action—or shall I say *inaction*?—finding, it would seem, a recondite pleasure in contemplating the approach of ruin. With my mother it was entirely different. Wayward and impetuous as she had once been, she now proved herself, by the feminine rule of contrary, I suppose, the best wife he could have had under the circumstances. Where he was weak, she was strong; she threw herself into the breach, and with counsel and encouragement, and with an insight that marked her as a daughter of a race of rulers, endeavoured, so far as lay in her power, to beat back and outwit the foes who were hemming us in on every side. Upon one person only, and then always excepting on one memorable occasion, the peril in which we stood seemed to produce no outward effect. I allude to Count von Marquart, the man whose personality stands out in that terrible period, clear cut, impressive, and invariably heroic. The waves of discord might dash and break at his feet, the winds of hatred shriek about his devoted head, but, like a lighthouse in a storm, he stood immovable—a guiding light to the end.

Though we did not think so at the time, and flattered ourselves that everything would soon be set right, we were nearer the end than we supposed. It was on the sixteenth of December, a date engraved in letters of fire upon my brain, that the climax came. For several days the city had been in an uproar, crowds had paraded the streets, and had even clamoured at the palace gates. So violent did they at last become, that it was necessary that the military should be called out in order to disperse them. But—and it was here that the shoe pinched—it was unmistakably borne in upon those at the head of affairs, that the army itself was in sympathy with the rioters. For upwards of a week Max and I had not been permitted to leave the palace, the streets being considered unsafe for us at such a time. During the afternoon of the sixteenth a council meeting was held, after attending which the members had been compelled to disperse secretly, and by different doors, for fear the mob should get hold of them. By chance I happened to be near my mother's boudoir when von Marquart acquainted her with the result of their deliberations. They had never been friends, but at such a time they felt they must cease to be enemies.

"If you will give me warning when it will be necessary for us to start, I will take care to be ready," I heard my mother say, in answer to a speech of his.

"You may count upon me," Marquart replied gravely. "I will allow your Majesty as much time as possible."

Then, having kissed her hand, he withdrew without another word. When he had gone, my mother crossed to the window, and drawing back the curtain, looked out upon the snow-covered Platz. Presently a convulsive sob reached my ears. Proud woman though she was, in the face of this new trouble, her fortitude for the moment deserted her. I emerged from my hiding place and went over to her, slipping my hand into hers. Sinking down upon the window-seat she drew me to her and kissed me passionately.

"Paul, Paul, my little son," she cried, her voice breaking with tears, "this is my work. It is your mother who has brought about this ruin. And yet God knows I am innocent of any evil intention."

"Those who say that it is your fault lie, mother," I began, with an indignation that at any other time would have been ludicrous in one so young. "Max says it is a lie, and when he is king he will punish them. He told me this morning. Don't cry, mother dear; Max and I will take care of you."

The unintentional irony of my remark must have occurred to her, for she rose from her seat and walked a few paces away. How bitter her thoughts must have been at that moment! Her husband was alive, and yet her honour was to wait for vengeance until her sons should be come to man's estate. My little speech, spoken in all good faith, strikes me now as the most cruel indictment yet urged against my father's memory.

That night, when Max and I were in bed, I told him what I had heard and seen.

"Why doesn't our father order out the troops and shoot them down?" said bloodthirsty Max. "That was what Maximilian the Seventh did, and they left him in peace. If I were king I would show them no mercy."

It seemed to me a pity under these circumstances that Max was *not* upon the throne, for then by his own showing we should have nothing to fear, and should be able to go for our daily rides, instead of being shut up within the palace from morn till night. Then I fell asleep and remembered no more until I was awakened by hearing a stern voice ordering us to get up and dress as quickly as possible. I opened my eyes and to my surprise found the Count von Marquart standing beside my bed. What his presence there, and at such an hour, betokened, I could not for the life of me understand; but such was my respect for him, by day or night, that I did not hesitate to do as he bade me. Half asleep and half awake Max and I huddled on our garments, and, as soon as we were dressed, followed the Count down the

stairs to one of the audience chambers leading out of the great hall. There we found my mother and father, dressed for going out. My favourite captain of the Guard, Baron Bathony, covered with snow, entered the vestibule as we crossed it. He shook himself like a great dog, and then, seeing von Marquart standing by the door, hastened towards him. That he had some bad news to report was plain to all of us. It was written on his face.

"Well, sir, what tidings do you bring?" asked von Marquart in a fierce whisper, that was as audible as his usual voice.

"The very worst," replied Bathony. "The citadel has fallen and the garrison has gone over to the Revolutionists. The enemy are even now marching in the direction of the palace. I have come to warn his Majesty."

"And his Majesty is infinitely obliged to you," said my father, who had approached unobserved. "The farce of kingship is played out, and now it is perhaps as well that we should ring the curtain down. What say you, Marquart?"

"I think it is time your Majesty considered the safety of your wife and children," answered the Prime Minister bluntly. "If you would save their lives it would be as well that you should leave the palace and start on your journey at once. There is no saying how soon the mob may be here, and then escape may be impossible."

On hearing this my mother rose from her chair. All traces of the agitation I had noticed earlier that evening had left her, and she was as calm and collected as ever I had seen her.

"We are quite ready," she said. "If your Majesty will give the necessary orders, there need be no further delay."

"So be it," remarked my father. Then turning to Max, who had been listening attentively to all that passed between them, he added, in his usual cynical fashion, "I had once hoped, my boy, to have had the pleasure of abdicating in your favour. It would appear that even kings may be mistaken. It is only the Sovereign people who are invariably right. Now, Marquart, if you are quite ready, let us bid the Capital good-bye."

With Bathony leading, my father and Max following close behind him, my mother and I, hand-in-hand, coming next, and Marquart bringing up the rear, we left the audience chamber and passed across the great hall, under the staring statues, many of which had looked down on at least three generations of our race, and which were destined to be hurled from their pedestals and smashed to atoms within a few hours of our departure. Then out by a side door into the walled-in space called the Guard's Parade, from the fact that on sunny mornings the band of the Household Regiment was wont to play there. On opening the door we were assailed by the cold blast, which, blowing across the snow, gave us a foretaste of what our journey would be like. The night was fine, and overhead the stars shone brilliantly. The glow of the city lights could be seen on every hand, while in the distance the low hum of the mob fell upon our ears like a wild beast roaring for its prey. This alone served to make us quicken our pace towards a gate on the opposite side of the courtyard, which Bathony unlocked, and which, when we had passed through it, he again secured behind him. Only once in my memory have I heard of a reigning family leaving their palace in so unostentatious a fashion.

Twenty yards or so from the gate, two carriages were drawn up. Towards the first of these Marquart hurried us. The other was for my mother's maid and my father's faithful valet, and also for our luggage, of which we could not carry very much. The leave-taking of the two men who had stood by us so faithfully was affecting in the extreme.

"Your Majesty knows the route that has been arranged?" began Marquart. "The men, I pledge myself, are trustworthy, but I should not delay at any place longer than is absolutely necessary for the business in hand. The rebellion is spreading through the country, and one scarcely knows upon whom to pin one's faith. For your children's and your Queen's sake, let me implore you to be careful!"

Even then, at this late hour in the tide of his affairs, my father could not resist a jibe at the other's expense.

"I must endeavour to remember your advice, Marquart," he said. "At first it is a little difficult to understand that one is out of leading strings. I suppose, however, I shall get used to being my own master in time."

To this speech Marquart offered no reply. Taking the hand my mother offered him, he bent over it and kissed it.

"Farewell, your Majesty," he said, "and when we next meet I pray it may be in happier times."

Then he took leave of my father and afterwards of Max and myself. Bathony followed suit, and then we entered the carriage and drove rapidly away.

Choosing deserted streets and avoiding every thoroughfare in which there was the remotest chance of our carriages being recognised, we eventually reached the outskirts of the city and took the high-road that leads across the mountains to the town of Aschenberg. So far, admirable success had accompanied us, but it was no sort of guarantee that such good fortune would continue. Hour after hour we rolled along the silent country roads, drawing gradually nearer the mountains, whose snow-clad peaks loomed dense as a wall against the starlit sky.

It had been arranged that we should spend what remained of that night and also the next day at the house of a distant kinsman of the Count von Marquart. On the second night we were to continue our journey, putting up at an inn in the mountains, and so on, as fast as horses could take us, and circumstances would permit, until we should have crossed the border and be in safety. The night was well spent before we reached the mountains, and it wanted only an hour or so to daybreak when we began the climb up the last ascent that led to our refuge for the night. Already the first grey dawn was creeping across the landscape, showing the snow-covered slopes of the mountains on the one side, and the rock-strewn valley on the other, in all their dreary nakedness. Then we looked out of the carriage window and saw the castle itself, standing out on the bold side of the mountain, and commanding a view that is possibly without its equal in all Pannonia. The rusty old drawbridge--for this ancient place still possessed one--was lowered in readiness for our approach, and since the owner and his three stalwart sons were beside it on the look-out for our coming, it seemed as if our arrival were more anxiously awaited than we imagined. Glad as they were to see us, we were still more pleased to leave the carriage. For two of our number at least the journey must of necessity have been an agonising one. Yet no word of reproach had been spoken on either side.

"I offer your Majesties the heartiest welcome in my power," said our host, coming forward and bowing before my father and mother. "I would to God it were not under such circumstances."

"The fortune of war, my dear Count," replied my father. "Let us be thankful our enemies have allowed us even to live. I believe I am not the first of my House that your castle has sheltered in adverse days. If I am not mistaken my ancestor, Stephen Ramonyi, was its guest in 1553 when--but there, the present is sufficient for our needs, without raking up the troubles of the past, and it is rather cold here for such a discussion. Her Majesty and the children are tired after their long journey."

On hearing this the old man led the way across the great courtyard towards the flight of steps which led up to the main entrance of the castle. I cannot hope to make you understand how the dreariness of the place struck me, and what a chill it set upon my heart. Yet for the time being it meant safety, even life itself, for us.

The Countess received my mother on the steps, and then we passed into the castle together. A meal had been prepared for us, and as soon as we had discarded our wraps we sat down to it. What transpired further I do not know, for, quite worn out, I fell asleep in my chair before I had swallowed half a dozen mouthfuls. When I awoke again I was in bed, and the wind was whistling round the turret as if in mockery of our fallen fortunes.

Next evening, as soon as it was dark, we bade our friends farewell, and once more resumed our journey. It was necessary that, if possible, we should reach a lonely inn on the other side of the mountains before daylight, and the road, so we were informed, was by no means a good one. As we soon discovered, this proved a correct assertion; for a more discouraging thirty miles could scarcely have been found in the length and breadth of the country. In consequence, instead of arriving at our destination, as it was most important we should do, while it was still dark, it was full morning before we came in sight of it. If the castle of Elfrinstein had seemed a lonely spot, this, our second stopping place, was infinitely more so. The inn itself stood within a deep gorge, the rugged sides of which towered some hundreds of feet above its roof. The building was a mere hovel of four rooms, and at one time was much frequented by those engaged in smuggling spirits across the border.

When we drew up at the door, the landlord, an enormous man, possessing the reddest hair I have ever seen on a human being, and a beard that reached almost to his waist, emerged, rubbing his eyes and yawning cavernously. He was followed by a woman, his wife. Together they approached the carriage, and as soon as my father had alighted, knelt before him with bowed heads. The picture seemed so incongruous, so out of keeping with the other attributes of that grim place, that, miserable as we all were--for the previous night's journey had been comfort itself compared with that we had just completed. I don't think one of us was able to suppress a smile.

"Get up, my friends," said my father in a kindly tone, "and lead us into the house. We are worn out after our night's travelling. No one has been this way in search of us, I hope?"

"Not a living soul, your Majesty," the man replied. "They'd best not come about here now. 'Twould be a bad case for them if they found your Majesties here."

Having uttered this somewhat ambiguous speech, he led the way into the house, where, it was soon apparent, great preparations had been made for our reception.

It was early in the afternoon when a terrible incident, which came so near our undoing, occurred, and it happened in this way. Being determined that no one should approach the inn during the time we occupied it, our shock-headed friend had stationed one of his sons at the entrance of the defile, with definite instructions to bring the news to him with all speed should he detect the approach of any suspicious persons. For the greater portion of the day the lad saw no one; just when his brother arrived to relieve him, however, they espied approaching them, as rapidly as the rough

nature of the ground would permit, a body of horsemen, who presently proved themselves to be soldiers. To rush back to the inn and give the alarm was the work of a few minutes.

"The soldiers! the soldiers!" cried the lads, bursting together into the room where their mother was busily engaged in preparing a last meal for us.

Their father rose to his feet.

"You know what to do, wife?" he said quietly, and then entered the room where we were sitting listening to the dreadful tidings.

"The soldiers are coming, your Majesty," he remarked, still quite unperturbed. "You must be away before they reach the house."

"But how is it to be done?" inquired my mother anxiously. "I see no way of escape, and there are the children to be thought of."

"When the little princes are ready, I'll show your Majesty a way, never fear," the man replied, and surely enough, as soon as our outdoor garments had been donned, he took me in his arms and led the way through the house to the back. The great blank wall of the cliff abutted close upon it, but how this was to help us I could not understand. At one place his eldest son was busily engaged removing a pile of brushwood, and making straight for this he put me down and began to assist the boy. When the stack had been partially removed, a circular hole in the cliff, about the size of a large barrel, became apparent.

"If your Majesties will follow me, I don't think the soldiers will catch you," he said, and forthwith went down upon all-fours. A moment later the King and Queen of Pannonia and their somewhat fastidious children might have been seen on their hands and knees, crawling into safety, if I may so express it, through a hole in the wall.



CHAPTER III.

I have described the ignominious fashion in which our family, led by the giant innkeeper, made its way through the hole in the cliff, and thus escaped the soldiers, who otherwise would certainly have arrested us. As soon as Gabriel, my father's valet, who was the last of our party to enter, had disappeared, the innkeeper's son, who remained outside, once more covered the aperture with brushwood, thus effectually concealing its existence. Provided the soldiers did not become aware of our subterranean hiding-place as they were scarcely likely to do, we had every right to consider ourselves safe, at least for the time being.

Much to our relief the small tunnel through which it was necessary for us to crawl was only a few feet in length; for this reason we seemed scarcely to have entered it before our guide informed us that we might resume an upright position. He then struck a match, and its light enabled us to see that we were standing in a large cave, the walls of which streamed with moisture. Taking a torch, made of some resinous wood, from a small box covered with a sack, he fired it and turned to us again.

"It is for your Majesty to say what you will do now," he observed, addressing my father. "Do you prefer to wait until the soldiers have gone, and then return to the inn, or will you permit me to guide you across the mountains to the Border by a track which is difficult but safe, and which will shorten the distance by nearly one half? I await your Majesty's orders!"

The King turned to my mother as if for her opinion. Her mind was soon made up.

"Let us endeavour to reach the Border by all means," she answered. "There is nothing to be gained by returning to the inn, and there is always the risk of the soldiers finding us there. The sooner we are under the protection of King George, the better for us all."

"So be it," my father replied, with his usual equanimity. Then, turning to the innkeeper, he added, with what must have been a touch of his old sarcasm, "If it will not be troubling you too much to conduct us to the Border, we will do our best to follow you."

The man bowed, and having advised us to step carefully, led the way to the back of the cave. Hitherto it had looked as if we were standing in a chamber to which the tunnel was the only entrance. This was not the case, however. In the further corner, hidden by a projecting rock, was a narrow passage, perhaps seven feet high by three in width. Whether it had been cut by the hand of man, or whether it was the work of Nature, I cannot say. In either case it enabled us to escape from what promised to be a most embarrassing situation, for had the troops caught us, I tremble to think what our fate must have been. Enraged as the populace were by our departure from the Capital, and flushed with their recent triumphs, it is difficult to say to what extremes they might have resorted.

Leaving the cave, we climbed the narrow passage in single file, the landlord leading the way, Gabriel bringing up the rear. Sometimes in my dreams I climb that passage now, see the streaming walls, feel the rough stones under my feet, and hear my mother's voice bidding me step carefully. From what I can remember of it now, the path must have sloped upwards very gradually. It was long, and certainly difficult. As the innkeeper, with a desire for explanation that unconsciously attained a fine height in the realms of irony, confessed to my father afterwards, it had been used in bygone days by smugglers, who were in the habit of bringing their booty across the border by the self-same track we were to follow that night. Having reached the western slope of the mountains, they carried it down by the passage to the cave below, whence it was despatched to its destination by different hands. It is possible that our guide had himself participated in this amusement; if he had, however, he did not commit himself. Once on the road my father gave him a home thrust:

"You seem to know the road extremely well, my friend," he said. "Doubtless you have carried many a valuable cargo over it with your friends. I fancy, however, this must be the first time you have convoyed a king."

The man looked sheepish.

"Well, well," continued my father, noticing his confusion, "if you have defrauded the king, you have at least made up for it by giving him his life. Since the bargain would strike you as a fair one, we will cry quits."

It was noticeable, as we approached the end of the passage, that the incline was not so steep. Indeed, at the mouth it was almost level walking. A moment later the guide put out his torch by knocking it against the wall, and as he did so, the daylight poured in upon us. We had reached the end of our underground journey. Outside, the world was covered with snow, and the air that blew in through the passage was bitterly cold.

"Would your Majesties care to rest awhile, or shall we push on?" inquired the innkeeper, after he had inspected the

sky.

"Let us go on by all means," my mother replied. "How far shall we have to travel to reach the Border?"

"Fully thirty miles," the man answered. "It is about twenty from here as the crow flies. There is a hut half-way in which we can spend the night. If we are to reach it before dark, however, we must step out."

We accordingly rose and prepared for our long tramp. It was a terrible undertaking for most of our party. My mother and her maid were by no means strong; my father had lived a recluse's life for so many years that he was ill-fitted for so much exertion; Max and I were children, while Gabriel was a man who had led a decidedly easy life, and was by no means accustomed to outdoor exercise. Our minds having been made up for us by our mother, we left the passage and set out. The mountains, covered with their white mantle, looked very beautiful, but the silence was awesome in the extreme. Not a sound save the crunching of the snow under our feet fell upon the ear. All things considered, it was far from being a joyous procession. The remembrance of what we had before us, and the recollection of what we had already passed through, weighed upon us like lead. As a matter of fact, we had not proceeded more than a mile before I was quite exhausted. Seeing this, the innkeeper waited until I approached him, then took me up and carried me, sometimes in his arms, sometimes on his shoulder, for the remainder of the journey.

The sun had fallen and day was drawing to its close when we saw ahead of us the hut in which we were destined to spend the night. It was a tiny place, built of wood, and of the roughest possible description. Poor as it was, however, our hearts were gladdened by the sight of it, and on its appearance the others unconsciously hastened their steps. With the approach of night the cold had increased a hundredfold, and a heavy fall of snow seemed imminent. My mother and her maid could scarcely draw their feet along, and the remainder of our party were in almost as bad a case. For my own part, I believe I must have fallen asleep in our guide's arms, for I have but the faintest recollection of what occurred during the latter portion of the march. But we reached the hut at last, and, for the time being at least, were able to consider our troubles at an end. In such a place we were scarcely likely to be disturbed. Unfastening the door of the hut, the man threw it open and invited us to enter.

I am often tempted to wonder whether in the history of the Nineteenth Century, when it comes to be written, it will be possible to find a parallel in the record of any single royal family for that strange evening's lodgings. For my own part, I know that whenever my mother's description of it occurs to me, I am compelled to a feeling of wonderment that she should not only be able to recall it with so much equanimity, but that she should have come through it at all. As I have said, dusk had fallen before we reached the hut.

As we entered it and closed the door behind us, the wind rose, and a long gust whistled drearily round the building as if loth to let us escape so easily. The snow was piled high against the walls, so that at a distance the hut must have resembled a white heap rather than a human dwelling. Fortunately for our comfort, however, the last occupant of the hut had accumulated a good supply of fuel, and this being so it was not long before the innkeeper and Gabriel had a large fire blazing on the hearth. Provisions were next obtained from some mysterious hiding-place, and then might have been seen, had there been any stranger there to witness it, the curious spectacle of the King and Queen of Pannonia, their children, and their faithful adherents, sitting before the cheerful blaze munching black bread with its accompaniment of goat's milk cheese. After that I must have become drowsy, for I remember resting my head upon my mother's arm, watching the sparks hop from the logs, and listening to the moaning of the wind outside.

I can recollect nothing else, however, until I was awakened by a loud knocking at the door. "Who can it be?" was the question that each one asked of him or her self. Had the soldiers discovered our whereabouts? Were we destined to be captured after all? My father, who had his place on the further side of the hearth, had risen, and was watching the innkeeper, who had approached the door, while my mother placed her arm round me as if she were prepared to protect me to the last gasp. Once more the knocking sounded, and the innkeeper turned to my father for instructions.

"Open it," said the latter with a nod. "If they want us they must have us, so we may as well make a virtue of necessity."

The other obeyed, and a moment later a blast of cold air entered, bringing with it a quantity of snow that melted as soon as it touched the floor. Outside, within the range of firelight, stood three men, each of whom, it was to be observed, carried upon his back a pack of curious shape. That they were not soldiers was happily apparent. The luck which had stood by us so far was once more triumphant. The innkeeper must have recognised the new arrivals, for, uttering a cry of surprise, he threw his cloak round his shoulders and went out to them, closing the door behind him. He was absent some ten minutes. When he returned he approached my father and informed him, with a candour quite in keeping with his character, that the men were three of the band of smugglers of whom he had spoken to us that afternoon. The hut was their property, and it was they who kept it stocked and provisioned.

"But the point is what they intend doing with us?" said my father. "Surely they do not wish to turn us out? And there seems scarcely room for us all."

"They have no thought of turning your Majesties out," the other replied. "All they desire is to be permitted to share the hut with you to-night. They have come far to-day and are weary."

"If that is all, let them enter by all means. It would be hard indeed if we were to keep them out of their rightful property." Then turning to my mother, he continued, "It is only consistent with the topsy-turvy state of things at present existing, that a king and those who are defrauding him of his revenues should spend the night together. I wonder what von Marquart would say if he could see us now?"

He had scarcely finished speaking before the three men, whose arrival had caused us so much anxiety, entered the hut, the last of the three closing the door carefully behind him. Needless to say we eyed them critically. And indeed they were a singular trio. Two were enormous men, so tall indeed that, when they stood upright, their heads came within a few inches of the roof. The third, the leader and their spokesman, was built on different lines; in other words, he was as small as his companions were large; as talkative as they were taciturn. He was the possessor of an enormous head, which was quite out of proportion to his body; and his face, which was without hirsute adornment of any sort or description, derived an added comicality from the fact that his left eye was partially closed, giving it the appearance of a perpetual wink. When they had deposited their burdens in a corner of the hut, they turned and saluted my father and mother.

"Welcome, my friends," said my father, who could be graciousness itself when he pleased. "You have chosen a rough night for travelling. Approach the fire and warm yourselves."

In response to his invitation, the men drew a step or two nearer the blaze, but no persuasion could induce them to come further. Their leader had not given them the signal, and they were not accustomed to act on their own initiative. Consequently, they took up their positions on blocks of wood at the back of the hut, and sitting there stared at us with a solemnity that at any other time would have been laughable in the extreme. It was in vain that my father sought to lure them into conversation. They answered him, it is true, but in so few words as possible. They had been engaged in this illicit traffic all their lives, and, as they protested, and we could believe, made but little out of it. The risks were great, the hardships never ceasing, dangers surrounded them on every hand, and yet they braved them for a reward which they could have doubled had they confined their energies to the humbler tranquility of trade. They were brothers, and their father had been in the business before them, a fact which they regarded as a good and sufficient reason that they should continue the enterprise after he had ceased to participate in it.

Suddenly the small man turned and whispered something to his companion. The idea, whatever it was, seemed to give him considerable satisfaction, for he nodded his head approvingly. Still true to his *role* of leader, the smaller rose and went to the corner where their illicit merchandise was stored. Having broached one of the kegs he poured from it a cup of spirit for the refreshment of the party. It was offered first to my mother, who refused it. Then to my father, who took a sip and passed it on; the others drinking in their turn. From that moment matters improved a little, and a desultory conversation followed, my father and the little man doing most of the talking, the others throwing in occasional remarks, like the firing of minute guns at sea. Thus the night wore on.

At length the pauses in the conversation grew longer and more frequent. The sound of breathing resounded through the hut, until only my mother remained awake, thinking her own thoughts, which, it may be supposed, were far from being of the most pleasant description. Poor Queen, though she lived for many years after our flight, she never fully recovered from the shock of that dreadful time. The recollection of those days remained a nightmare to her until the end, and it may be remembered that in her last delirium she fancied herself back in the hut with her children crouching by her side.

As soon as it was light next morning we ate a hasty meal, and then prepared to continue our journey. It was a white world that we looked upon when we opened the door. Fortunately, snow was no longer falling, but it had been doing so all night, and every sign of the path by which we had approached the hut had entirely disappeared. A consultation had taken place earlier between the innkeeper and the smugglers, the result of which was an offer on their part to assist in the work of conducting us to the frontier, which, needless to say, was only too gladly accepted. Accordingly, as soon as day was sufficiently advanced, we bade the hut good-bye and set out on the last stage of our momentous journey. A strong breeze was still blowing across the snow, and, as we were soon to discover, it cut like a knife. When we had decided upon the route, the little man went on ahead, in order, so he explained, to spy out the country, and to make sure that we did not fall into a trap. As on the previous afternoon, the big innkeeper carried me, and one of the smugglers did the same at intervals for Max, while the other helped my mother and her woman whenever the path became more difficult than usual. It was perhaps as well that we had their assistance, for, as we soon found, the road we were following, if road it can be called, was far from being an easy one. For the first few miles it lay along the mountain side, then by a long and gradual descent to the valley below. For the women of our party it proved even more trying than that of the previous day, but, with the assistance of the guides, it was in the end safely accomplished, and we stood

upon the plain, only a matter of ten or a dozen miles from safety. Even that short distance, however, contained a sufficiency of dangers. On one occasion we were within an ace of stumbling upon a camp of gipsies, on another we discovered that we were being followed by three men, whose intentions could scarcely have been conducive to the end we had in view. It was within half a mile of the Border, however, and just when we were beginning to deem ourselves safe, that we received the greatest shock. We had left the fields behind us and had entered a small wood, when the little man, who, as usual, was leading the way, suddenly stopped, and held up his hand to the others not to advance. Then he crept forward to discover, if possible, of what the danger consisted. He was absent for upwards of five minutes, and when he returned it was with a solemn face.

"Soldiers!" he whispered; "they are resting on the far side of the wood."

"There are at least a dozen of them," he replied in answer to a question of my father's. "They are eating a meal. They have not unsaddled, so that they will go on when they have rested."

Comforting as this last assurance was, we dared not place too much reliance on it. If the men were really searching for us, as we felt sure they were, it was more than likely that they would make an examination of the wood before leaving it. In that case we could scarcely fail to be captured. My father pointed this out to the innkeeper, who he still regarded as the leader of the party.

"We must hope for the best, your Majesty," that stalwart individual replied. "They have not caught us yet."

I can recall the whole scene now--the white trees, the snow-covered ground, and the anxious faces of our party, as we clustered together in the most sheltered spot we could find. While we were deliberating, snow once more began to fall in heavy flakes. It was the only touch that was wanting to complete our misery, and I heard my mother give a heavy sigh as if her endurance were giving way under the strain placed upon it.

"Go back again," said my father to the little man, "and watch them closely. As soon as they have finished their meal and you are in a position to divine their intentions, return and tell us, in order that we may know how to act."

The man slipped away in the same noiseless fashion as before, and once more we settled ourselves down to wait. The snow was falling thicker and faster every minute, and before the man had been absent ten minutes his footmarks were completely hidden. Of all the trials to which we were subjected during those three terrible days, I fancy that time of waiting was the worst. We were cold, tired, hungry, and in immediate danger. Small wonder, therefore, that everything seemed hopeless to us. Years afterwards, when I spoke of it to my mother, she confessed that, at the time, she did not expect to cross the Border alive. Hitherto, she had borne up as bravely as any woman could do; now, however, her fortitude gave way. To me it was all one long bewilderment. Accustomed as I was to be treated as a king's son, used to all the luxuries that rank and wealth could bestow, I could only imperfectly realise the change in our position. The guard turned out and saluted me when I entered the palace gates, my name was even associated with one of the crack regiments--Prince Paul's Own Hussars. How was it then, I asked myself, that the self-same troops were engaged in hunting instead of protecting us? It was a riddle I could not answer, try how I would, and my mother's explanation, that it was because they hated her, served to intensify rather than to dispel my bewilderment. I was about to interrogate Max, on whose wisdom I was accustomed to rely, on the subject, when we were suddenly called to action. Running as fast as his short legs could carry him, the little man burst upon our group with the alarming intelligence that the soldiers were about to search the wood. Though we had been expecting it, and were even waiting for it, the news came upon us like a thunder clap.

"What can we do to escape them?" cried my mother, wringing her hands in an agony of terror. Then turning to my father she continued: "Whatever happens they must not take the children. Save them at any hazard."

Even in that moment of danger she gave no thought to herself. It will always remain my firm conviction that she would have yielded up her own life joyfully, if by so doing she could have been sure of saving ours.

"There is nothing for it but for us to hide in the trees and take our chance," began my father, for once coming forward with a suggestion. "If we are perfectly quiet and the snow covers our tracks, it is just possible that they may not become aware of our presence."

In order that you may understand the value of the idea, it should be explained that the trees of which the wood was composed were a species of pine--I cannot recall their botanical name--with long, low branches that stretched out and touched the ground on every side. It was within the bounds of possibility that if we scrambled in among the snow-laden boughs and crouched down, our presence might not be observed, but it was a very slender chance upon which to trust our lives. However, within a few seconds of the man's sounding the alarm, we were all stowed away out of sight. I scrambled into a tree with my mother and Max; my father, Gabriel, and my mother's woman were hidden in another; while the remainder of the party distributed themselves as best they could. Then followed another interval of

suspense, during which we expected to hear every moment the tramp of the soldiers' chargers on the snow, and to find a lance come driving into the tree to turn us out. With anxious eyes we watched the tell-tale footmarks on the ground, knowing that upon them our lives depended. Heaven be thanked, however, the snow was falling fast, and every second's delay meant a greater chance of safety. A quarter of an hour went by and still the troopers did not come. The delay was difficult to account for. Had the man made a mistake when he had said that he had seen them preparing to search the wood? I had turned my face up to my mother's and was about to address a remark to her on the subject, when a look of terror flashed into her face, and she had clapped her hand upon my mouth to prevent me from speaking. It was well that she did, for, looking through the branches, I saw coming towards us, and not a dozen paces distant, a stalwart cavalryman, mounted upon a bay horse. He was covered by a heavy cloak and had a bundle of hay tied behind his saddle. As he rode toward the tree in which we lay hidden, he hummed a song, the words of which we could plainly distinguish. That he noticed nothing unusual about the ground, and that he was not troubling himself very much on our account, was as plain as his appearance there. At any rate, he passed us without becoming aware how close we were to him. A moment later we heard him call to his companion to know if he had discovered anything.

"I've got the ague, I believe," the other answered. "That's all I've found. I wish his Majesty had discovered it instead of me."

"He's worse off than you are, I'll be bound," returned the first speaker with a considerable amount of truth. "For my part, I wouldn't change places with him."

Then the voice of the officer in command interrupted them. Five minutes later they had left the wood and were on their way along the road upon the other side. We were saved! But it was some time before we recovered from our fright.

An hour later we crossed the Border, and in less than two hours we had placed ourselves under the protection of King George of Gota. Our leave-taking of the brave innkeeper and his equally brave friends the smugglers was of an affecting description. For once my father dropped his cynicism and spoke his mind direct. My mother added her thanks to his, and distributed her rings among the men in token of the gratitude she felt for the service they had rendered us. If we had no other friends in Pannonia we had at least four upon whom we knew we might depend.



CHAPTER IV.

At the end of the previous chapter I described our arrival in the kingdom of Gota, and the farewell we took of the men who had risked so much to bring about our safe arrival there. As it transpired, we arrived only just in time, for two days later my mother was taken seriously ill, and for upwards of a month lay at death's door. During that time the news we received from Pannonia was far from being satisfactory. The Prime Minister, the Count von Marquart, who still remained staunch to my father, had done his best to reduce the country's affairs to something like order, but his efforts were in vain. In consequence he was compelled to beat a hasty retreat to his country seat, and to leave it to its own devices. Trading on the popularity he believed himself to enjoy, the Prince of Lilienhohe returned from exile, and, assisted by certain notorious enemies of the Ramonyi dynasty, made a vigorous attempt to seize the throne. He also was disappointed in his endeavour, for the country would have neither a Lilienhohe nor a Ramonyi. What it wanted was a Republic of the French and American description, and a Republic, in hot haste, it was determined to have. As a result the Prince followed our example and crossed the Border with as much despatch as possible.

As soon as my mother was convalescent, it became necessary to arrive at some sort of an understanding as to what our future was to be. To return to our own country was out of the question; for many reasons, too numerous to mention, it was impossible for us to remain in Gota; while the neighbouring kingdoms were equally unsafe. It was King George himself, our host, who solved the problem for us. As a result my tenth birthday found us on English soil. Nowhere else in Europe could we hope to be so safe, and the affection I feel for that country may be said to have originated at the moment we set foot upon her shores. We were welcomed by the country at large, while, with thoughtful generosity, a royal residence was placed at our disposal until we should be in a position to find one for ourselves. This done, however, we settled down to the enjoyment of a quiet country life, and to wait until the course of events should make it possible for us to return to Pannonia once more. The change in our affairs proved exactly to my father's taste. He was no longer worried with the cares and responsibilities of kingship, but was able to give himself up entirely to the studies he so ardently loved. In my own heart I believe that, during the period of years that elapsed before his death, he had but one real fear, and that was the dread lest affairs should right themselves in Pannonia and he be called upon to resume his old life. With my mother it was altogether different. Where he rejoiced at his new-found liberty, she chafed and worried about the change in our lives. She could not forget that she was a king's wife and a king's daughter, and that in England we were exiles, turned out of our country and defrauded of our just rights. Where he scarcely spoke of his old life, and took but small interest in the country of his birth, she was invariably well informed as to all that occurred. She was fighting for her children's rights, and declared that she could never rest, or know any peace of mind, until we had come to our own again. Alas! for her happiness, poor soul, she did not live to see that day.

To Max and myself, accustomed as we were to the excitement of a Court, the new life came as a decided, and by no means welcome, change.

It was not long, however, before we became reconciled to it, and by the time we had been a year in England we could not only speak the language fluently, but were to all appearances veritable sons of the soil. It was a quiet life we led, but not an aimless one. The best of tutors were engaged for us, and the smallest detail of our studies was attended to by my mother with scrupulous exactness. We learnt to play cricket and football, to fence and box like English boys; and in order that our military education should not be neglected, it was decided that as soon as we were old enough, Max and I should enter the British Army, for which my mother entertained the greatest admiration. "The training," she was accustomed to say, "will prove of the greatest value to them when they return to Pannonia," and that seemed to settle it. Strangely enough, however, Max did not hail the arrangement with the delight that she had expected him to show. For some reason, as he grew up, his disposition seemed to change. He, who was at first a headstrong, impulsive boy, was developing into a silent and almost taciturn young man. The notion that he would not succeed to the throne of his ancestors, which he had conceived as a boy, now returned to him with renewed force. It grew with him and thrived upon the thoughts that fostered it. One little incident will be sufficient to show the hold this strange idea had upon him. He was nineteen at the time; I was scarcely sixteen. In appearance he was a tall, fine-looking young fellow, with clean-cut features, dark resolute eyes, and black hair, that he wore in a somewhat foreign fashion. While he was, to all intents and purposes, a man, I was still a boy, fairly well grown it is true, perhaps somewhat advanced for my years, but in many respects as inferior to Max as a child of six is to a lad of twelve.

"My dear," said my father, one morning, addressing my mother, when we sat at breakfast, which, *en passant*, we took together in the homely English fashion, "I have received a letter that you will doubtless consider of some importance. The Count von Marquart is in England, and, with your permission, will pay us a visit to-day. May I instruct Beckerstein to telegraph to the effect that you will receive him?"

A look of pleasure came into my mother's face. What did Marquart's presence in England mean? Did it foretell a change in our lives? She hastened to assure my father that it would give her the utmost pleasure to see the old Minister who

had served our House so faithfully. I thought of the Chancellor as I had last seen him, bending over my mother's hand as he bade her good-bye in the street beyond the palace, that terrible night on which we had fled from the Capital, and informed her in answer to her question that I remembered him perfectly. Strangely enough the enthusiasm which took possession of my mother and myself did not extend to my father and Max. The former, I am inclined to think, dreaded lest the Count's presence meant the commencement of an intrigue, which would eventually land him in Pannonia; but Max's reception of the news I am altogether at a loss to understand. The fact, however, remained, that the Count was in England, and that in a few hours we should see him once more.

For the remainder of the time that elapsed before he could be with us, my mother was filled with the greatest impatience. Never before had she been so well disposed towards the old man.

At last his carriage was seen rolling up the drive. Contrary to custom, and, perhaps, to etiquette, we had assembled on the terrace before the house, to await his arrival. Gradually the carriage drew nearer, and at last it pulled up at the steps. When the servants had opened the door, the figure of the aged statesman appeared, and ascended to where we were standing waiting to receive him. The time that had elapsed since we had last seen him had not played such havoc with him as we had expected. His back was still as straight, his glance as piercing; his moustache and hair may have been a little whiter, but it curled as fiercely as before. His age must have bordered close upon eighty, but his intellect was as keen as in his prime. He saluted my father and mother; then turned to Max. I saw his eyes wander over him with evident approval, taking in and appreciating the details of his appearance. "Here," doubtless he was saying to himself, "is a man worthy to be called king." Then he turned to me and took my hand. Immediately his expression changed and a look of bewilderment spread over his face. "Good Heavens! Michael's cross!" I heard him mutter to himself, and I could not have been mistaken, for the others of the party heard it also.

An awkward pause followed, during which I thought of that interview with the gipsy so many years before. Perhaps Max was thinking of it also, for his face grew very hard, and I knew by experience that he was battling with the temper that was trying to get possession of him. Nothing was said on the subject, however, and when Marquart had recovered his self-possession (why he should have lost it I cannot say) we followed our elders into the house. Though he endeavoured not to show it, I am inclined to believe that my father was more touched by his old Minister's visit than he would have liked us to suppose. At any rate, he forebore to indulge in his usual fits of cynicism. Though at dinner that evening he did not once refer to Pannonia, I feel certain a large portion of his thoughts were with her. Indeed, all things considered, it could scarcely have been otherwise. Since the establishment of the Republic, the old Chancellor had held aloof from public affairs. Nothing would induce him to take any part in the new state of things. "They have mounted their horse of folly," he had observed when he had been approached on the subject, "let them ride it to death. I, for one, will not attempt to stop them." With that he had retired to his castle at Friedelbain, and had sat himself down to work out his Logarithms and to wait for the old order to reassert itself. This he confidently believed would some day come to pass.

After dinner, my father and Marquart withdrew to the former's study, while Max and I joined our mother in the drawing-room. Her lady-in-waiting, for though we were in exile we still preserved the semblance of a Court, was reading to her; but when we entered, at a signal from my mother, she stopped and put away her book. It was easily seen that the former had been upset by something, for, when we spoke to her, her thoughts seemed far away, and she answered with a hesitation that was by no means usual to her. Another thing struck me as remarkable, and that was her treatment of Max. They had not quarrelled; indeed, I had never known them to do such a thing, and yet her behaviour towards him seemed based on something that I could not for the life of me understand. It was as if she were trying to make up to him for an unintentional wrong that she had done him, and which she feared he might not forgive when he discovered. To add further to this strange state of affairs, the more amiable she was towards him the more ill at ease did he become with her. He seemed restless, discontented, and yet particularly anxious to be on friendly terms with myself, the one person of all others, after what had happened that afternoon, whom he might have been forgiven had he ignored. I could not understand it all, and the more I thought of it the more it troubled me. Surely Max did not imagine that I deemed it likely I should ever ascend the throne! I could not believe that he would be so foolish as to attach any credence to the old superstition concerning the Michael cross, or that even if he did, he would be weak enough to allow it to embitter his life.

If I live to be a hundred I shall not forget that evening, every detail connected with which, as I have shown, is engraved upon my memory. It was considerably after ten o'clock before my father and Marquart joined us in the drawing-room. The former seemed in excellent spirits, the latter scarcely so happy. Doubtless he had come expecting to find his old master pining to be back in his own country once more. His shrewd common sense, however, must have shown him, before they had been very long together, that this was far from being the case. He found him contented with his lot, and far from desirous of again taking up the load of responsibility he had been so fortunate as to cast off. Knowing nothing of the strained state of affairs that had existed prior to their entrance, Marquart must not be blamed if he unwittingly intensified the unpleasantness of the situation. He seated himself by the side of my mother, and talked with

her of bygone days, and of friends of whom she had long lost sight, thus raising a train of thoughts in her mind that could only give birth to hopes she must have felt in her heart would never now be realised. It was noticeable also that the Count's eyes wandered continually in my direction. In consequence, I did not appear at my best. Knowing that Max was watching me, and that my mother was nervous on his account, I would have given anything to have been able to slip quietly from the room, and not make my appearance in public again until Marquart had left the house. This, however, was out of the question. The Count was our guest, and it behoved me to remain with him. How thankful, therefore, I was when the time arrived for us to say good-night, I must leave you to imagine. In silence Max and I made our way to our own quarter of the house. I wanted to say something to him, and yet I did not know with what words to approach him. I remembered the look I had seen on his face that afternoon, and dreaded lest an explosion were imminent. Such, however, was not the case. Having reached my bedroom, we paused to bid each other good-night. Then Max put his hand on my shoulder and looked sadly down at me. There was an expression upon his face that I had never seen there before. It told me that he had battled with himself, and that, after a severe struggle, his better nature had come out triumphant.

"Poor old Paul!" he said in a kindlier tone than I think he had ever yet spoken to me. "Come what may, we will be friends. Whatever the future may have in store for us, we will not quarrel, will we? Shall we swear to that?"

"Of course we will be friends, Max," I answered. "We'll never be anything else, happen what may. Why should we?"

He did not answer my question, but shook me by the hand, and then, with a little sigh, turned and went along the corridor to his own room, while I went into mine, vainly trying to arrive at an understanding of the situation. One thing, at any rate, was certain: Max and I had agreed not to quarrel. Yet instinctively I felt that it had cost him something to speak to me as he had done. Poor Max! Poor Max! I have known many men, but few with such honest hearts as yours.

A few minutes later I was in bed, but, as I soon discovered, not to sleep. The stirring events of the day had exercised a greater effect upon my brain than I had imagined. My interview with Max was still too fresh in my memory to permit of my settling down to slumber. My heart was upbraiding me for not having met his advances with a greater show of warmth. While he had been all generosity to me, it struck me that I had been almost cold to him. How devoutly I wished that Marquart had never come to England at all! Unconsciously, it is true, he had done his best to estrange my brother and myself; he had put all sorts of thoughts in my mother's head that had better not have been there, and for what purpose? For the life of me I could not tell. What a strange world it is, after all, and what blind bats we mortals may consider ourselves! While I was fretting and worrying because Max was unhappy, Destiny was slowly moving forward her chessmen, in the ranks of which we none of us knew what parts we were to play. Looking back at that time, I am struck by two strange facts. If my mother could see sufficiently far into the future to entertain vague fears upon Max's account, and the latter, forewarned by fate, perhaps, thought it necessary to make me swear that we should ever remain friends, how was it that they could not see further? Had they done so, Max would have----but there, we could not see, so what more remains to be said? Let me return, therefore, to the point at which I broke off.

I had retired to rest for upwards of an hour when I caught the sound of a door being shut further along the corridor, and a moment later of a soft footfall outside my room. I wondered who it could be, for there was no room save Max's and my own in that quarter of the house, and I did not know of any one who would be likely to visit it. As I listened, the footfalls were accompanied by something that was very like a sob. I could restrain my curiosity no longer, but, springing from my bed, opened the door and looked out. A figure was making its way towards the main portion of the house, and one glance was sufficient to show me that it was my mother. She had been to Max's room, and was returning to her own, weeping bitterly. Had there been the remotest chance of my catching her, I should have run after her and attempted to comfort her, but I was too late. Feeling as if I were the cause of her unhappiness, I returned to bed, and once more set to work to try and unravel the mystery that surrounded us. Had I been able to guess what the future had in store for us, I might have been able to set it right. I wonder if I should have had the pluck to do so? In my own heart I like to think it possible.

CHAPTER V.

In course of time and in accordance with the parental plans, Max had joined a regiment, the 123rd Lancers, and was quartered in the Midlands, while I was to embark upon my quest for military distinction as soon as I should be old enough for a commission. Eventually I was gazetted to a lieutenancy in Her Majesty's Household Cavalry. This necessitated my living in town; a distinct change from the quiet country life I had hitherto led. I was fortunate in being kindly received by my brother officers, and as my father and mother's friends went out of their way to show me attention, it may be taken for granted that I was about as satisfied with my lot in life as a man could well be. Pannonia seemed slipping every day further into the background, and there were even times when I was scarcely conscious of her existence. Strangely enough, my mother, upon whom time was steadily laying her hand, seemed to be abandoning the notion that we should return, and to be resigning herself to the idea that England was likely to be her home for the remainder of her existence. And that leads me to venture upon a little piece of moralising, the first and last, I trust, I shall indulge in.

We are led to believe by the doctors that once in every seven years our physical being undergoes a change. Might this not be so in other matters? Be that as it may, there is certainly a strange concurrence in numbers. I was eight years old when the gipsy woman told me my fortune, and brought about the first trouble between Max and myself; I was sixteen when von Marquart made his appearance in England, and marked another epoch in my life; and if the line of coincidence may be followed further, I might also observe that I was twenty-four when the third, and, perhaps in a certain sense, the most important event occurred, for the reason that from it so many other issues were developed. At the same time I must confess it is not a subject upon which I care to dwell for any length of time. It has both a pleasant and painful side, and while I am willing to state that it has proved my greatest blessing, I am also bound to admit that it has inflicted upon me a wound, the scar of which time will never be able to obliterate. And this brings me to another argument. Surely it must have struck you how often the greatest events find their origin in the simplest things. I will supply an instance. John Noakes, a village mechanic, drops in one Sunday afternoon, having nothing better to do, to take a cup of tea with Matthew Stoakes, whose daughter Jane, by the way, boasts a pretty face and a comely figure. Hitherto, John has never thought of sweethearting, or indeed of anything else but his carpenter's bench, and his bit of garden behind the cottage. Somehow this afternoon, however, he feels impelled towards his neighbour's house. He goes; old Matthew, to while away the time, reads to the assembled company a letter he has received from a brother in Australia. Though the writer himself would not appear to have done as well as he could have wished, he describes, with fine descriptive touches, the wealth other men have accumulated in that Eldorado of the South. John goes home with a notion at the back of his head that he too would like to try his luck there. The idea grows and flourishes. Eventually he sets sail for the Antipodes, and for upwards of thirty years nothing more is heard of him. When he returns to England after this long lapse of time he is several times a millionaire, and in a position to purchase half the country-side, which he promptly does. He plumes himself upon his shrewdness, and talks of his business capacity to his fellow-justices! He quite forgets, however, that, had it not been for that chance visit to old Matthew's house that sunny Sunday afternoon, and the letter that was read to him there, he might still be planing at his bench, a poorer and, in every respect, a humbler man. And so, gentle reader, I venture to suggest, it is with all of us. However we may be born, whatever may come to us from other people, there is always one little chance permitted us, and according as we seize it or neglect it, so it will make or mar our lives. Mine came to me in a quite unexpected fashion, and I must leave you to discover for yourselves in what manner I treated it, and what befell me and mine in consequence.

It has been popularly supposed that Her Majesty's Household Troops have no other occupation in life than to act as escorts to Royal carriages, to take part in public processions, and to sit like statues upon their chargers, in the pigeon-houses that ornament the front of the Horse Guards. A certain popular novelist has gone further, and has accused their officers of being as luxuriously housed as young duchesses, of breaking the hearts of beautiful ladies-in-waiting, and of committing various other petty sins, very charming no doubt in themselves, but much too improper for me to mention here. However that may be, I am prepared to state that my military duties were of a somewhat more arduous nature. Relaxations there were, it is true, and of the most pleasant description; and he would have been hard indeed to satisfy who could have been discontented with them. Nevertheless, the fact remains that our lives were not so easy as many people are wont to declare.

Despite a certain witty diplomatist's assertion that Paris is pre-eminently "the city of pretty women, while London is that of immaculate wives," I am prepared to contend that never in any other part of Europe have I seen so many beautiful women gathered together at one time as in the foggy metropolis of England. At the risk of being considered conceited, I must admit their kindness to myself. A heart less susceptible to their fascinations could not have failed to have been broken a dozen times in each successive season. As for me, I gave in at once without a struggle, and did not utter even a cry for mercy.

"It's a good thing for you that your position protects you," said one of our majors one afternoon as we drove home together from Hurlingham. "Had it been otherwise, you would have been caught long since."

A certain young unmarried American had been present that afternoon, and I am not going to say that there had not been some excuse for his admonition. At the same time I would not admit that he was right. To have done so would have been to deprive myself of a considerable amount of pleasure in the future.

"My dear fellow," I answered, "when Providence vouchsafes one such opportunities, it would be scarcely respectable on a mere mortal's part to neglect them. Miss Gedge was kind enough this afternoon to tell me that she *'just fairly adored princes,'* and after an invitation of that description what could one do but make oneself as agreeable as possible? Put yourself in my place and see what you would do!"

"Not if I know it," he replied. "I would not run such a risk for the world."

Favoured though I had been, I was happy enough, so far, not to have been smitten by the Bow Boy's dart, and with this little explanation I will proceed to narrate the incident to which it is the prelude.

The week in question had been an exceptionally busy one. We had had a field day at Wormwood Scrubs on Monday, a regimental polo match at Hurlingham on Tuesday, a mess dinner given to the Hereditary Prince of Liedensvald on Wednesday, while on Thursday there was a garden party at Marlborough House, a state dinner at Buckingham Palace, and dances at no less than four houses afterwards. When I opened my eyes in the morning, it was with the feeling that I had a vast amount of work to get through before I should be able to close them again. How little I imagined the variety of emotions to which I was to be subjected before that event could take place! That afternoon, at the last moment, I was detained at the barracks for some little time; in consequence, it was considerably past four o'clock before I entered the gates of Marlborough House. Having paid my respects to the most charming hostess in England, if not in the world, I crossed the lawn in search of acquaintances. Seated under a tree I discovered my kind friend the Duchess of Laverstock. She was talking to the Russian Ambassador at the moment, but was kind enough to receive me very graciously.

The good fairy at her birth had bestowed upon Her Grace the rare gift--and, believe me, it is a rare one--of being able to make the person to whom she was speaking think that the amusement of the moment would be like leather and prunella to her, but for his, or her, participation in it.

"You are late, Prince Paul," she said, moving her parasol a little, in order to shade her face. "I have been expecting you for the last half-hour."

"Am I to be flattered by your interest or grieved at your disappointment?" I replied, seating myself beside her. "Perhaps you will decide for me. In any case, could you not induce the Duke to bring in a Bill to ameliorate the condition of lieutenants in Her Majesty's Household Cavalry? Think how they have worked us this week. It will take at least three months' leave to put me on my feet again."

The Duchess laughed good-humouredly.

"You must dine with us and give him your ideas on the subject," she said. "In the meantime I am going to talk seriously to you. I have brought a young friend with me to-day to whom you must really be introduced."

"Who is this friend you are so anxious I should meet? You have aroused my curiosity."

"Is it really in my power to do that?" she retorted. "You have at last paid me a compliment I can appreciate. But let us walk across the lawn; I fancy we shall find her at the further end. I saw her a few minutes since walking with Lord Newmarket."

"I only hope he has not been regaling her with any of his sporting reminiscences. It was Mary Bethbridge, I think, who declared that, when she was staying at Markingdale, even the wording of the family prayers reeked of the stables."

Talking in this strain, the amiable lady led me across the lawn towards a group of people who were clustered near the band. She was on the look-out for her friend, but who that friend was I am prepared to admit I had not the slightest idea. As all the world is, or should be, aware, the Duchess of Laverstock is an inveterate matchmaker. It is said that, at their place in Devonshire, she allows such of her farm servants as are bachelors a month to choose a sweetheart, six months to court in, a week to propose in, another month in which to marry, and--well, the long and the short of it is that since there were reasons of State why she could not do me an injury in that respect, I could not understand why she could have been so eager to find the lady in question. Putting up her glasses she examined the people about her attentively.

"Ah! there she is!" she said at last. "Come this way, Prince, and remember that you are to behave yourself very nicely,

under pain of my severest displeasure."

So saying, she led the way towards a lady and a gentleman who had hitherto been hidden from our sight by the fashionable crowd. The man I recognised immediately; but his companion I could not remember ever to have seen before. One thing was certain, she was a wonderfully beautiful girl. She was exquisitely dressed, and carried herself with a distinction that raised her above the level of the other beauties. I seemed to know her face, and yet I could not recall where I had seen it before. Then, in a flash, I remembered.

"Princess Otilie," I began, as soon as we stood face to face.

The Duchess stared at me in surprise.

"Can it be possible that you know each other?" she cried. "I had quite made up my mind that you had not met, and I was hoping to do you both a charitable action."

Turning to the girl before me, I said, "You are the Princess Otilie, are you not?"

"Yes," she answered; "and if I am not mistaken you are Prince Paul of Pannonia. Do you remember that dreadful day when the horses ran away and nearly killed me at the palace gates?"

"Is it likely I shall ever forget it?" I returned. "The whole scene rises before my eyes at this moment. What an age has elapsed since then!"

The Duchess and Lord Newmarket, who were kindly souls, strolled away, leaving us together. I looked again at the girl; really she was remarkably beautiful. There could be no sort of doubt about that. I had never seen anyone in my life half so fair.

"Can we not discover a couple of chairs, and try to recall some other impressions?" I inquired.

"It would be very pleasant," she replied; and we accordingly strolled away together.

"If I may be allowed to say so, you have altered a great deal since I last saw you," I began, when we had found our chairs and had seated ourselves upon them.

"And perhaps I might return the compliment," she continued. "How strange it seems that we should meet here, does it not?"

"Very strange indeed," I answered. "You have not been back to Pannonia since that dreadful time?"

As I said it the folly of the remark became apparent to me. Was it not my own father who had sent the Prince of Lilienhohe into exile? And had not the latter, as soon as the Ramonyi dynasty was overthrown, stepped into the breach and attempted to seize the throne for himself? That for the moment I had embarrassed her I could see. However, she evaded it with a cleverness that showed she was not wanting in that rarest of all gifts--tact.

"We have been living in England for the last seven years," she replied, with a candour that concealed her real feelings. "My father declares that he is getting too old to move about, and sometimes I think he will never cross the Channel again."

I did not say so to her, though I thought it, that I deemed it a fortunate thing, not only for himself, but also for Pannonia, that he had come to so sensible a conclusion. How foolish and futile the whole business appeared when looked at through the diminishing glass of years! The feud between the two families, the constant quarrels, the scarcely veiled hatred on both sides, and then the last outbreak and its consequences! My father had sent Lilienhohe into exile only to follow himself, a few days later. And now, strangest part of all, here was I, Paul of Pannonia, talking to Otilie of Lilienhohe in the garden of the Heir Apparent to the throne that had given us both shelter.

When Fate takes it into her head to jest, she does not do so in a half-hearted fashion. After a little while I inquired how it was I had not met her before.

"I was only presented last year," she answered; "and this season we were late in coming to town. Indeed, had it not been for the Prince of Liedenvald's visit to England, I doubt very much whether we should have come at all."

For once in my life I was grateful to my cousin Wilhelm.

Really she was beautiful. I remembered what a dainty, fragile child she had seemed that day when I had led her hand-in-hand, after the accident, to see the statues in the great hall at Pannonia. In that respect she had scarcely altered. Her beauty seemed of a different description from any I had met before. Her skin was so transparent, her hands and feet so small, her head so daintily poised, that the most fastidious critic could scarcely have discovered a fault in her. Later on

she inquired for Max, and I furnished her with a faithful description of him, trying to make her realise what a splendid fellow he was.

"You admire him as much as ever, I can see," she said. "Your brother is fortunate in having so able a champion."

I did not grasp her meaning then, but it has become more plain to me since. We changed the topic, and after a while, feeling that it would not do for me to monopolise her altogether, I rose, remarking, as I did so, that I hoped to have the pleasure of meeting her again very soon. I ran over the list of houses to which I had invitations that evening, and inquired whether she was likely to be at any one of them.

"We are going to Lady Cummingdale's musical first," she said; "then we go on to the Countess of Winterbourne's dance, and afterwards to Lady Basingstoke's."

"Then perhaps I may have the pleasure of a dance with you at Winterbourne House?" I answered.

"I shall be very pleased," she returned.

At that moment a tall, handsome man, perhaps sixty years of age, with a fierce grey moustache and almost snow-white hair, crossed the lawn and made his way towards us. I did not know him, but I was soon to do so, for the Princess Otilie took a step forward to meet him, saying as she did so:

"Papa, let me introduce you to Prince Paul of Pannonia."

The other gave a start and drew himself up to his full height.

"I am honoured in being permitted to make the acquaintance of his Royal Highness," he replied, a little stiffly, so I thought. "The last time I saw you, sir, was on the day you were baptised. I trust his Majesty and the Queen enjoy good health?"

I replied to the effect that they were as well as could be expected of people of their years, and after a few polite nothings made my adieu, vaguely wondering what my mother would say when she heard of the interview, as I had no doubt she very soon would.

That evening, during the long state dinner at Buckingham Palace, I found myself continually thinking of the pretty Princess. Never had an admirably arranged banquet seemed so tedious. I was all anxiety for it to be over, in order that I might get away to Winterbourne House. At last it came to an end, and very soon after I was bowling along in my cab towards Carlton Terrace. On entering the house I made my way up the crowded staircase to the ball-room, where dancing was in full swing. Having paid my respects to my hostess, I searched the room for Princess Otilie. I discovered her dancing with one of the foreign military attaches. She was not aware of my presence, so I took up a position in an alcove and watched her. If she had looked beautiful that afternoon, she was doubly so now. I noticed that she was taller than the majority of women present, but her slender figure was so exquisitely proportioned that the fact at first glance was not apparent. The dance over, I accosted her.

"I hope your dances are not all bespoken, Princess," I said. "I have the liveliest recollection of your promise this afternoon."

"You may have the next waltz if you like," she answered. "We shall be going on to Lady Basingstoke's in half an hour, so that I do not know how many I shall have time for here."

"In that case I must have this one and endeavour to extort a dance from that house also," I retorted. "Experience has taught me that there is nothing like being beforehand in these little affairs."

Seeing how matters stood, the attache, with all the *aplomb* of a Frenchman, paid her a charming compliment, and gracefully took himself off. We thereupon passed into the conservatory together.

"Is your father here to-night?" I inquired. "I have not seen him."

"No," said she. "Papa never condescends to dance. He is probably playing *ecarte* at this moment at his club. I need not describe to you the pleasure it gave him to make your acquaintance this afternoon."

I glanced at her to see whether she were joking, but her face was as serious as even she could wish. Naturally, I expressed my delight at what she had told me, but I could not help believing that she had derived a wrong impression from her father's compliments. The Prince of Lilienhohe had been such a determined foe of my family for so many years, that I could not see how making my acquaintance could possibly afford him pleasure. However, I had no time to give to the subject then, for the band was playing the introduction to the next waltz, and it was time to return to the ball-room. A few steps were sufficient to show me that the Princess, like all Pannonians, was an excellent dancer. To the melody of

one of Strauss' waltzes I steered her through the crowd. The fragrance of her hair was intoxicating, and for some reason, I cannot explain what, it carried me back to the day, so many years ago, when she had taken my hand in hers, and had cemented our friendship with the three magic words, "I like you." How little we had dreamed then of the place where we should next meet, and under what circumstances it would be brought about! In those days the Ramonyi dynasty had seemed as firmly seated upon the throne as that of any other ruling family in Europe. Now we were in exile, and our country was given over to the tender mercies of the populace.

"Are you tired?" I inquired, when we had made the circuit of the room three or four times.

"Not in the least," she answered. "I am never tired of waltzing, and, if I may say so, you dance beautifully."

"I am afraid it is my only accomplishment," I replied.

"I shall hope to be a better judge of that later," she retorted. "You must remember that, so far, you have told me more concerning your brother than yourself. Are you always so enthusiastic about him and so reticent concerning yourself?"

"Always."

"Really! In that case I shall be quite anxious to see this Admirable Crichton. Does he never come to town?"

"Very seldom," I replied. "He is devoted to his profession."

"But surely he is fond of dancing, and of some of the little amusements that ordinary mortals indulge in?"

"I don't think he cares very much for them. I fear Max is not in any sense a lady's man."

"You are prepared then to admit that he has at least one fault?" she said. "I was beginning to believe he was scarcely human."

The waltz was gradually dying down, expiring like the fabled swan in softest music. When it had ceased altogether, I thanked my partner, and led her into the cool conservatory. The admiration I had felt for her from the beginning was fast turning to enthusiasm.

Half an hour later I followed her to Lady Basingstoke's house, and when, after another delicious waltz, I escorted her to her carriage, and was introduced to her chaperone, I was as near enchantment as a man could well be. Next day I did myself the honour of calling at her house, and was most graciously received; the morning following I met her in the Row. She was mounted on a neat thoroughbred, which she sat and handled with the grace and dexterity of an accomplished horsewoman. With the sunshine sparkling in her eyes and playing among the tresses of her hair, her trim figure clad in its well-cut habit, with just the suspicion of a tiny foot peeping from beneath her skirt, she presented a picture that a man would have been justified in walking miles to see. On the Monday following we met at a dance in Eaton Square, on the Tuesday at another at Wiltshire House, on Wednesday at the state concert at Buckingham Palace, and on Thursday and Friday at a multiplicity of dances. Take these things into consideration, and is it necessary for me to add that by the end of the week I was head over ears in love?



CHAPTER VI.

"My dear old fellow, how well you are looking!" said Max, as he drew off his gloves and brushed some dust from his coat sleeve. He had just arrived from Yorkshire, and had arranged to spend a portion of his leave in town before going down to Hampshire to visit our respected parents.

"I am wonderfully fit," I answered. "How are you?"

"Only pretty well," he replied, and I noticed as he spoke that his face looked older and more careworn than when I had last seen him. What was more, his manner seemed to have lost much of its old vivacity. The change startled me more than I can say, and my fears were far from being allayed when, half an hour later, he communicated to me the direful intelligence that he had determined to resign his commission in the army.

"I cannot get on with it," he said. "I do not take the least interest in it; and, if the truth must be told, I am far better out of it. I am only sorry that they ever permitted me to take it up."

"My dear old fellow," I answered, "this is the worst news that I have heard for a long time. You surely cannot be serious?"

"I could not be more serious if my life depended upon it," he returned. "Don't imagine that I have acted hastily and without thought. I have given the matter the fullest possible consideration, and the step I am about to take is the result. It will hurt our mother terribly, I fear, but it cannot be helped."

"And what do you intend to do when you have left the army?" I asked, more for the sake of saying something and having time to collect my thoughts, than for any other reason.

"I don't know," he replied gloomily. "Upon my word, I do not. The truth of the matter is, Paul, old man, I'm a failure, an abject failure. I have guessed it for years, and now I am certain of it."

He looked so sad, that I crossed the room and took his hand. "You musn't say that," I began. "You know how proud we all are of you, and how our hopes are centred on you."

Then, with what was for me unusual earnestness, I continued, "Think of Pannonia! This wretched *fiasco* of a republic cannot endure much longer, and then our father will abdicate in your favour, and you will be king. Isn't that something to look forward to and to work for?"

He shook his head.

"If it were likely to happen, it might be," he answered. "But I know better. I am as certain, Paul, old boy, that I shall never sit upon the throne of Pannonia, as I am that I am standing before you now. I don't know why I should be so sure of it, but I am quite convinced that it is the case."

"It seems to me," I said in a fit of temper, "that the best thing you could do would be to consult a Harley Street physician. You are not yourself; you have run down and want a fillip."

He shook his head once more.

"It would take more than a Harley Street tonic to set me up," he replied. "But there, do not let us talk of my own wretched affairs. Tell me of yourself--what you have been doing, and how you like soldiering?"

I satisfied him upon these points, and then went on to tell him of my meeting with the Princess Ottilie. Though it was a difficult thing to do, I spoke of her with apparent unconcern. I had no wish that he should read my secret, not yet at any rate. He was extremely interested, and expressed a desire to be presented to her himself. Only too glad to agree to anything that would take him out of himself, I proposed that we should ask permission to call upon her. He assented, and I accordingly sat down to write a note to her, inquiring whether she would be at home that afternoon, and if so, if she would permit me to call and present my brother to her? This note I despatched, and when Max had made some changes in his attire, we went out and lunched together at the club. On our return, two hours later, my servant handed me a note. The handwriting was small, and in some respects un-English.

"The Princess will be very pleased to see us at four o'clock this afternoon, if we will call," I said in explanation.

Returning the note to its envelope, I placed it carefully in my pocket. The faint perfume of the paper seemed to linger in the room and to endow it with a sweetness it had not possessed before. With what eagerness I looked forward to that call! It seemed as if the laggard hours would never pass. At last, however, the time arrived, and Felix entered the room

to inform us that the cab was at the door. Soon we turned into Curzon Street, and drew up before the door of the Prince of Lillienhohe's residence. On entering, we were conducted to the drawing-room, where the Princess and the Baroness Roqsal, her chaperone, were awaiting our coming.

"Princess," I began, as I crossed the room and took her hand, "will you permit me the pleasure of presenting my brother to you?"

"It is very kind of you to bring him," she answered. Then, turning to Max, she continued: "I am delighted to see you. It is many years since we last met, but I remember you perfectly."

As he answered her, I glanced at his face and noticed the expression of admiration upon it.

"Do you know I am almost afraid of you," she said, when he had been presented to the Baroness, and we had seated ourselves.

"I am sorry to hear that," he replied. "I was not aware that I was such a dreadful personage. What have I done that you should fear me?"

"You have done nothing," she answered. "If anyone is to blame it is your brother. He has been singing your praises to an extent that has made me deem you almost superhuman."

"It seems almost a pity that I should shatter such a beautiful illusion, does it not?" he asked. "However, now that you know me, I fear its destruction is inevitable."

"I must ask for grace before I reply to that speech," she said with a smile. "I have scarcely had time to form my own opinion of your character yet."

At that moment afternoon tea made its appearance, and with it the conversation branched off into other channels. We touched upon Pannonian politics guardedly, spoke of our childish recollections of the country somewhat more freely, and then, with positive relief, of the many friends with whom we were mutually acquainted. At last we rose to take leave.

"Will you let me say *au revoir*, not adieu, Princess?" inquired Max, as he took her hand. "I hope I may be permitted to see more of you during the time I am in town."

"I shall be very happy to see your Highness," she replied. "Will you remember that I am always at home to my friends on Thursday afternoons?"

When I bade her good-bye, I could have staked my word that her hand trembled.

"Good-bye," I said simply.

"Good-bye," she answered with corresponding brevity, and, as I looked into her face, I saw what I felt sure were tears rising in her eyes.

"What could it mean?" I asked myself, as we made our way downstairs. As far as I could see, nothing had occurred to cause her so much emotion.

That evening Max was my guest at mess, and afterwards we went on to two or three houses together, at none of which were we fortunate enough to meet the Princess. Next morning, however, we encountered her in the Row, and in the evening at a succession of dances. From that time forward, during the remainder of Max's stay in town, we seemed to be continually in her company. That Max had followed my example, and was by this time as madly in love with the Princess as I was myself, I am quite convinced. Never by word or deed, however, did he try to make me aware of the fact. But I could see that it existed. Of my own feelings I am not going to say anything. All things considered, it is better I should not. Those who have the wit to understand will be able to read between the lines.

It was during Max's stay in town that he completed the formalities connected with his decision to resign his commission in the Lancers.

At this juncture it is necessary that I should depart from the direct course of my narrative, in order to offer a few remarks upon Max's own personal condition during the few weeks he was with me in town. This, I must frankly confess, was at times of such a nature as to cause me the greatest possible alarm. He was as changeable as the summer breezes. At one moment he seemed all happiness; the next he was plunged into the depths of despair. At one time he would talk of Pannonia with the greatest affection, and appear to be sanguine as to his chance of some day ascending the throne; the next he would assure me that the Republic would last longer than we expected, and that, even if it did not, he would never live to be king. Extravagant though it may seem to say so, I feel bound to confess that there were

occasions when I wondered whether the troubles of our unhappy House had not exercised an undue influence upon his mind. As may be supposed, my position at this particular time was far from being a happy one. To make it worse, the Princess had, for some reason or other, taken it into her head to be vexed with me. What I had done to offend her I could not see, but that she *was* angry with me was quite clear. It may possibly have been that she thought I was growing tired of the acquaintanceship, inasmuch as I was not quite so often with her. But I was resolved that, happen what might, Max should have a fair chance. He was the elder, and, if he were going to be king, their marriage would be only fit and proper. Therefore, if she preferred him to myself, he should have her, and I would do my best to appear delighted. If not, well, then it would be my turn to put my fortune to the test. It took some time to arrive at this decision, but that once done, the rest was easy. Oh, that dreadful time! It has often struck me as extraordinary that Max and I should have managed to come through it as satisfactorily as we did. Surely he must have guessed something of what was in my mind. But it is quite certain that, if he did, he never for one moment allowed me to suspect it. We met continually, discussed the various topics of the day with well-simulated interest, occupied ourselves with our round of amusements, as if the wolves were not all the time gnawing at our heartstrings, and to each other and the world in general were as friendly as two brothers could hope to be. Meanwhile, we both knew that every day was bringing us nearer the inevitable end.

To be precise, it was on Monday, the fourteenth day of July, that the climax came. Max had left me soon after lunch to ride in the Park with the Princess Otilie. I was on duty that afternoon, so was unable, even had I desired to do so, to accompany them. Indeed, it was after six o'clock before I returned to my house, where I expected to find Max awaiting me. To my surprise, however, he was not there.

"Has not the Crown Prince returned?" I inquired of Felix, my imperturbable groom of the chambers.

"His Royal Highness left the house nearly an hour and a half ago," the man replied. "I thought your Highness was aware of his intention to leave London."

"To leave London!" I cried in astonishment. "What do you mean? What reason have you for supposing that he has left London?"

I was certain that he had not the least intention of doing so when we had lunched together.

"His Royal Highness gave me to understand that he intended paying a visit to their Majesties in the country," the man replied apologetically.

This sudden and entirely unexpected action on Max's part was inexplicable to me. Could he have proposed to the Princess, and had she refused him? I was still turning this problem over in my mind, when a letter, balanced against the inkstand on my writing table, attracted my attention. It was addressed to myself, and the handwriting was quite familiar to me. To pick it up and open it was the work of a moment.

MY DEAR PAUL (it ran)--

At last, thank Heaven, I have been able to come to a decision with myself. After years of doubt and darkness I can see light ahead. God knows whether I am doing right or wrong, but my belief is that it is my duty. I want you to be the first to hear it, and then to act as may seem best to you. Do you think, my brother, that your secret is unknown to me? Have you flattered yourself that I am not aware that you love Otilie of Lilienhohe as truly as I do myself? If so, you are wrong. I knew it from the first moment that you spoke of her to me. It was written on your face as plain as any words. At that time I had not seen her, and, in consequence, I was as careless of the future as I was of the present. From the fatal moment, however, that we crossed the threshold of the Prince's house in Curzon Street, I realised that I was destined by fate to be your rival. (Here followed a tribute to my own behaviour in the affair, which, with your permission, I will pass over.) ... I saw her and loved her from the moment that I looked into her eyes. At first I resolved that nothing should induce me to play you false; but I did not know then the strength of my love, or the violence of the temptation to which I was to be subjected. I give you my word, Paul, that for the first fortnight I wrestled with myself and my love with all the strength of a man, who was despairing, and who wished to be honourable. But it proved too powerful for me in the end, and at last I was obliged to succumb. The devil was at my elbow whispering continually that it was not myself alone that I had to think of, but of my country. To marry the daughter of the Prince of Lilienhohe would be to unite the two strongest factions in Pannonia, to bring peace and happiness to it as a nation, and to lift it again, from its place in the mire, to its former proud position among the great peoples of the earth. I can only wonder how it was that you did not see my misery. That it *was* misery for me I can only ask you to believe. The uncertainty was heart-breaking. One day I felt sure that she loved me, and, in consequence, I walked in an earthly paradise; the next I was certain that she did not, and then I tasted all the bitterness of hell. Meanwhile, my conscience was calling upon me to be as loyal to you as you had been to me. But it was of no avail. The temptation was more than I could withstand; at last I fell. My punishment,

however, was not long in coming. This afternoon, as you know, I arranged to ride with the Princess in the Row. I met her near Hyde Park Corner, and I assure you, that I, who have never since our escape from Pannonia known the meaning of the word "fear," felt a tremor run through me as she rode towards me. But I soon discovered that I was not alone in my fear. The moment I saw her face I knew that she also was dreading our meeting. That was sufficient to tell me my fate. Failure had dogged me all my life, and it was scarcely likely that, when I desired something that was more to me than life itself, she would grant it to me. Having exchanged greetings with an appearance of pleasure on either side, we turned our horses' heads and made our way down the Row together. With a make-believe of composure, we discussed the trivialities of the day. This, however, did not last long. We began sentences and did not finish them, and at last lapsed altogether into silence. I stole a glance at her face, and, as I did so, enlightenment came to me. Her secret was a secret no longer. I knew, not only that she did not love me, but that her love was given elsewhere. I would have had pity on her, and have left my question unasked, but that the devil was still behind me, whispering in my ear, "Why do you trouble yourself about her feelings? What does it matter to you whether she loves anyone else or not? There are reasons of State why she should be your wife, and you have only to put them before her, backed up by her father's authority, and she *must* surrender." However, I had not fallen so low as that yet. I had still sufficient of the gentleman left to declare to myself that, if she did not love me, and the union was distasteful to her, I would not force it upon her. When we turned our horses, I brought mine a little closer to hers.

"Princess," I said, "will you take pity on me, and give me a plain answer to a question I want to ask you?"

Her face was bloodless in its pallor. She tried to answer, but no word escaped her lips. My God! man, you can't conceive what a brute I felt at that moment. And yet I was well aware that I must go on, that I should know no peace until I had tortured her to the end. All this time she was striving to be brave. Fortunately, there were few people about in that particular part of the Row, otherwise her agitation could scarcely have failed to attract attention.

"What is the question your Highness desires to ask me?" she faltered.

"Surely you can guess," I answered. "Otilie, I love you, and I want you to tell me whether in return you can love me well enough to be my wife."

Though she must have known what was coming, a little cry escaped her.

"What can I say? What can I say?" she repeated in a choking voice. "Can you not see that I am prepared to do my duty at any cost to myself?"

"But you shall not do it at the expense of your heart," I answered. "Otilie, do you love me?"

"Oh, why do you ask me?" she cried, with a catch of her breath that was almost hysterical. "How can I answer as you wish?"

"You have given me my answer," I returned. "It seems I have lived in a fool's paradise. But I have loved you, and, as God is my witness, I will not force you into a loveless marriage."

What I said to her after that can have no interest for anyone save our own two selves; let it suffice that, when I left her, I came on here. Strangely enough, I had no sooner quitted the Park than my composure returned to me, and by the time I had reached this room, I could stand off and look at everything in its proper light. And now one other matter, and the last. I know what you have thought of me these last few weeks, and the suspicions you have entertained--well, I might also say, concerning my sanity. But you are in error, my dear brother. No man was ever saner than I am at this moment. The result of it all is, as I said at the commencement of my letter, that I have arrived at a decision. I have come to an understanding with myself. By the time you open this letter I shall have left London, never, I hope, to return to it. As far as I am concerned, the farce of kingship is played out. I, for one, have been wearied to death by the performance. With this letter I cast it off. To-night I enter upon a new life, in which, please God, I shall comport myself more like a man than I have done hitherto. I have chosen a name which will not furnish any clue as to my identity, so that it will be impossible for you to trace me. Under it, as under a new banner, I shall fight and endeavour to win that self-respect which up to now I have never been able to attain. Look upon me as one who is dead, and try, if you can, to forgive me for the pain I have caused you these few weeks past. Remember always that, even though I gave way, I did not fall altogether. Try also to understand that my victory over myself was, in a great measure, a proof of my love for you. God bless you always. Think sometimes of

Your ever affectionate brother,

MAX.

In a postscript there were a few directions as to what should be done with his valet, Theodore, and the manner in which his horses and other belongings should be disposed of.

For some moments after I had read it, I stood holding the letter in my hand, staring at it in blank amazement. I read it again and again, trying, in vain, to arrive at a proper understanding of it. Of one thing there could be no doubt. He had proposed to the Princess, and she had told him that she did not love him. He had accordingly determined to relinquish his position in society and to go abroad, rather than allow her to be forced into a marriage with a man she did not love. Was ever a man more noble? At the same time it occurred to me that he had often stated that nothing would give him greater pleasure than to endeavour to win a position for himself in a new country, where nobody knew him, and his rank could be of no assistance to his efforts. This was what he was going to do now. But it was impossible we could permit it. At any hazard I felt that I must find him, and argue it out with him, before he could leave England. For my father's and mother's, for his own, for mine, and for Pannonia's sakes, he must be prevented from committing this rash act. At that moment Felix entered the room once more.

"I have made inquiries," he began, "but Theodore declares he knows nothing of his master's movements. He was told to wait here until he received his instructions from your Highness."

"Tell him that I will see him later," I answered. "In the meantime give me my hat and call a hansom. I am going out."

A cab having been obtained, I bade the man drive me to the nearest telegraph office. Once there I wired to my father to know if he had seen anything of Max, and implored him, should he put in an appearance, to keep him until I arrived. Then I drove to Scotland Yard, where I sent in my card to the Chief Officer of the Detective Department. To him, in confidence, I imparted my fears, and told him that, if possible, I wanted my brother's whereabouts ascertained before it would be possible for him to leave England, convincing him, at the same time, of the necessity that existed for secrecy. This precaution he promised most religiously to observe. After that, I returned to my own abode to await the telegram from my father. At last it came. It was worded as follows: "Max left here more than an hour ago, having said good-bye to us prior to leaving for the Continent." I immediately sat down and scribbled a note to Scotland Yard, informing them of the discovery I had made. Then, when I had written another to my hostess of that evening, asking her to excuse me not being present at her dinner, on account of urgent private trouble, I took a hansom and drove to Waterloo. Instantly on my arrival at home I gave my father and mother a full account of all that had occurred. They, like myself, were overwhelmed by the suddenness of the catastrophe, and could give me no further information than that Max, after bidding them good-bye, had driven to Eastleigh, in order to catch, so they supposed, a train either for London or Southampton. I inquired at the station, but in vain. The station-master had not seen him, nor could he tell by what train he would have been likely to have travelled.

"There was the 6.50 up to town, your Royal Highness," he said, "and the 6.45 down to Southampton. He might have taken either."

Feeling sure that he would have not returned to London, I took the next train to Southampton and made inquiries there. But my efforts were in vain. No one seemed to have seen a person answering to his description. When next morning I called at the various shipping offices I was equally unsuccessful. Almost despairing, I applied for leave and remained at Southampton, day by day, for a week, watching the various boats that left for America and South Africa. So far as I could discover, however, Max was not on board any one of them. At last, wearied with waiting, and hopeless of hearing anything of him, I returned to town, calling *en route* at Rendlehurst to inform my father and mother of my ill-success.

From that moment, for many years, nothing was heard of poor ill-fated Max of Pannonia.

CHAPTER VII.

And now a word to preface the story of Max's adventures as set forth by himself--from the time he wrote the famous letter to me.

Headstrong and wilful as he undoubtedly was, Max was the possessor of a habit which would not be supposed to agree in any way with his other characteristics. In our school days, prompted by a tutor who was method and preciseness in itself, we had been induced to cultivate the habit of keeping a diary. My own fits of application had their limits, and in consequence the record of my own daily life died a natural death within a week of its commencement. Max, however, must either have looked at it in another light, or have been composed of entirely different material. Having set his hand to it, his dogged determination insisted upon his carrying it through; in consequence, the habit grew upon him, and, fortunately for the story I have to tell, it lasted until the day of his death. It is from the last two volumes of this concise, and I might even add remarkable, history that I take the record as it is set down in the following pages. It will be observed that I have put it in the form of a narrative, told by myself, adding explanations where necessary, but in the main preserving the whole in as complete a form as it was originally written. How Max left the Princess Ottilie in the park after his ill-starred interview with her and rode away has already been told. A few other details, however, may prove of interest. As soon as he arrived, it would appear that Felix offered him refreshment, but he declined it, saying that he was in a hurry to catch a train to Hampshire. Seating himself at my writing-table he took a sheet of notepaper and composed the letter which was destined, a few hours afterwards, to cause me so much unhappiness. "Thank heaven, that's done," he said to himself, as he rose to his feet and placed the envelope, which he secured with his private seal, in a conspicuous position upon the table. "Paul will be certain to see it directly he returns." Then having rung the bell for Felix, he bade him send some one to call a cab. Telling him to inform Theodore, his valet, that he would receive his orders from myself, he went down to it, sprang in, and bade the man drive him with all speed to Waterloo. He had barely time to take his ticket, to see that the luggage he himself had packed and sent on ahead earlier in the day had started for Bristol, and then to catch the train. Indeed, the starting bell had already sounded as he crossed the platform.

"This won't do at all," Max said to himself, when they had rolled out of the station, and he had time to look round the luxurious compartment in which he was seated. "If I am going out into the world to win my way I should not be riding first class. I must travel third and save my money as much as possible. On the other side, wherever that may be, it will have to be corduroys instead of tweeds, and (here he took his cigar-case from his pocket and selected a weed) a clay pipe, I suppose, in place of the mess' extra special Laranagas." The train was an express, stopping only at Basingstoke and Eastleigh. At the latter place he alighted, and taking a cab in the station yard bade the man drive him as quickly as possible to Rendlehurst. It was nearly half-past six by the time he reached the house, where Anton, the head of my father's household, received him at the door.

"Anton," he said, "I must see my father and mother at once. Where are they?"

"Her Majesty is in the boudoir," the old man replied, in measured tones that contrasted forcibly with the other's excited state. "His Majesty has but lately returned from a walk, and is now in his study. I will acquaint him with your Royal Highness's arrival."

What transpired at that meeting is not set forth in the diary. It is sufficient, however, that in something less than half an hour he had said good-bye to them, though he did not know it, for ever, and was back in his cab *en route*, so it was popularly supposed, for Eastleigh. At the Foresham cross-roads he stopped the driver. "Pull up," he said. "It is a beautiful evening, and as I have plenty of time, I think I will walk the remainder of the distance." He paid his fare and, in order to avert suspicion, strolled slowly along the road the cab was following. When the man had turned the corner and was out of sight, he retraced his steps and set off at a brisk pace in the opposite direction. The evening was close and sultry, and signs of thunder were in the air. The roads and hedges were white with dust, and by the time he had reached the small station for which he was making, he was coated with a fine white powder. Interrogating the station-master, whom he found upon the platform, he inquired what time the next train was due for Salisbury.

"There is not one for nearly an hour, sir," the man replied. "It leaves here at half-past eight and reaches Salisbury at 9.25."

"That's a pity," said Max, who saw that he would not be able to get on to Bristol that night. "However, as it can't be helped, I must wait for it. I am much obliged to you."

The station-master, as a matter of form, compared his watch with the clock in the little waiting-room, then glanced up and down the line, and finally disappeared into his cottage, leaving Max to his own devices. The latter examined the various railway advertisements on the notice board, criticised the name of the station arranged in white flints on a

neatly-kept bank beside the platform, and then decided that he felt hungry after his walk. Fifty yards or so further along the road was a small inn, and toward this he made his way. Entering the bar, which was unoccupied, he inquired of the buxom landlady if she could supply him with a meal.

"It all depends, sir, what you want," the latter replied, shaking her curls coquettishly at him; "if you'd like ham and eggs we can manage that, or maybe a bloater if so be you'd relish it, but I don't know that I can do better for you at this time o' night, at any rate."

Max decided in favour of the former, and a quarter of an hour later might have been observed in the landlady's own private parlour, seated before a steaming dish of ham and eggs, which he was devouring with an appetite that was the outcome of a four-mile walk. I have seen that landlady since, and have tried to make her understand who her guest was.

"Lor' bless you, sir," she said--for though I told her about Max, she had not the least notion of my identity--"I don't know anything about his being a prince, but what I do know is, that he ate his ham and eggs hearty enough for a king, as I told my old man afterwards."

His meal disposed of, Max paid the bill, and returned to the station to await the arrival of his train. The sun was sinking behind the trees on the other side of the cutting, and the whole heavens were suffused with crimson light. A belated cuckoo was wishing the world good-night in the far distance, and the tinkling of bells on the harness of a waggoner's team was wafted to him like faintest music upon the still evening air. As he strolled up and down the platform, his thoughts involuntarily returned to the Princess. He wondered whether she were thinking of him, and how long it would be before he would be able to school himself to forget her.

The first sign that heralded the train's approach was the arrival of a hobbledehoy rustic of about sixteen on the platform. He carried in one hand a bundle, tied up in a red pocket-handkerchief, and in the other a ground-ash stick, with which he beat his leg to the tune of a music-hall melody that had been popular in London some six months before. As Max passed him on his way to the booking-office to take his ticket, he civilly wished him good-evening. When the train entered the station, he followed the lad to a third-class compartment, and seated himself opposite him. They were the only two occupants of the carriage, and Max was in the humour for conversation. He felt as if he had been alone in the world for countless years, and for some reason the boy's broad Hampshire dialect was soothing to his ears. The lad was on his way to a new situation, so he informed his companion, a farm on the outskirts of the village of Dean. It was his first absence from home, and Max noticed that an ominous snuffle followed his statement of the fact. To the elder man there was something engaging about this encounter. They were both stepping out of their old into a new world, in order to gain experience, and were equally anxious, yet equally loth to say farewell to their old surroundings.

"I knew it was coming for a long time, sir," said the boy in a burst of confidence. "Father always had a sort of feeling that he wanted me to go along o' Mr. Simpkins, but, somehow, mother didn't kind o' fancy it. Not but that I can do my work, sir. I bain't afraid of work--not a bit of it. It's the going away from home and mother, that's the worst of it. But there, it will seem kind of strange at first, sir, I don't doubt; but bless you, I reckon somehow it will come right in the end. Anyways, I am going to do my best to make it."

For many a long day that homely speech was destined to live in Max's memory. It was an augury for the future; at any rate, he determined to regard it as such. When they reached Dean, and the boy had made his preparations to alight, Max held out his hand.

"Good-bye," he said. "I hope you may prosper in your undertaking. Like you, I, too, am starting out into the world to gain experience. I have wished you good luck; won't you do the same for me?"

The boy shyly took the hand held out to him, and, as he did so, he said: "God speed ye, sir, and thank ye kindly for the way you've let me talk to you. It's done me a world o' good."

A second later he was gone, and the train was on its way once more. In something under twenty minutes they had reached Salisbury, where Max discovered, as he had quite made up his mind he would do, that the last train for Bristol had departed. In consequence, he would be compelled to wait in Salisbury until morning for another. The disappointment was a severe one, for he had hoped to reach his destination before the night was over. In his present state, rapid travelling was exactly what he wanted; to feel he was dashing through the country, drawing nearer his goal with every mile, was like an antidote to pain, it prevented him from thinking. Now there was nothing for it but to find an hotel and to wait for morning.

As he made his way out of the station and down into the town, he thought of the last time he had visited that ancient city. Then he had been the favoured guest of a well-known nobleman in the neighbourhood, and his arrival had been the signal for quite a respectable crowd to gather in the station yard to see the Crown Prince of Pannonia. Flags had decorated the streets, and the civic authorities had offered him a hearty welcome in their council-house. Now a thick

drizzle was falling as he walked along the muddy street, and the only welcome he received was the curse of a tipsy man who reeled and almost fell against him. When he had discovered a convenient hostelry he engaged a room, and afterwards strolled about the town. At last he found himself standing before the ancient cathedral, in what is perhaps the most peaceful and beautiful close in all the length and breadth of England. The graceful spire towered hundreds of feet into the moonlit sky, and as he watched it the clock struck ten, slowly and solemnly, as if it were aware of the important part it was playing in the passage of time. At the same moment I was alighting from my train at Southampton Docks, whither I had gone in search of him. Small wonder was it, since he was in Salisbury, that I could not find him.

Next morning, shortly before five o'clock, he rose and continued his journey, catching a London train at Westbury, reaching Bath at eight o'clock, and Bristol thirty-five minutes later. Before leaving the station he secured the luggage he had sent on ahead, and then once more departed in quest of an hotel. This accomplished, he was at liberty to go in search of a vessel. From the collection of advertisements in the coffee-room, it would appear that there was no place on the face of the habitable globe that could not be reached from that port. He could find nothing, however, to suit him. The United States did not appeal sufficiently to his sense of the romantic; South Africa had another and still more vital objection; Canada was impossible, for the simple reason that he had already visited it, and was exceedingly well known there. He wanted to find a vessel on which there would be no possible chance of his being recognised, and for this reason also the big liners were unsuitable. Leaving the hotel, he went into the town, scanned the wharves, and entered into conversation with men who had their dealings in great waters. At last, and quite by chance, he happened upon the very vessel he wanted. She was the *Diamantina*, a steamer of some three thousand tons, engaged in the South American trade. Her steam was already up, and, as Max was informed, she was to sail that afternoon for Rio de Janeiro. He inquired the name of the agents, and as soon as he had discovered their address, set off in search of the office post-haste. The clerk who did him the honour to inquire his business informed him that he was quite right in supposing that she would sail that afternoon, and went even so far as to add that she had sufficient accommodation for half a dozen passengers, four of which were already booked. The chance seemed too good to be lost. Brazil was the country he had always had a desire to visit; now he paid the money demanded of him and received his ticket in exchange. An hour later he had made his way on board and the voyage to South America had commenced. Max stood at the port bulwarks as the vessel steamed slowly down the river, and watched the shore slip past with what was almost a feeling of wonderment at his position. At last he might consider himself freed from his past life. He had a hundred pounds in the belt that was safely clasped round his waist, ten pounds in his pocket, and when that was gone he would have nothing to depend upon, save his health and his determination to succeed. By nightfall they were out in more open water, and a brisk sea was running. Fortunately, Max was an excellent sailor, and enjoyed rather than disliked the active motion of the steamer. To his surprise, when the dinner-bell rang at six o'clock, he, the captain, and one solitary passenger were all who sat down to table. They were the only three to sit down at subsequent meals during the voyage. The captain was inclined to be agreeable, and Max's fellow saloon passenger was the Senor Francisco Moreas, and he was, by his own account, an old resident in Brazil. Be that as it may, and I am certainly not in a position to contradict it, he had seen more of the world than the average man. His age must have been between forty and forty-five; his appearance was that of a typical Spaniard, debilitated partly by fever and partly by his own excesses; he was tall but sparely built, boasted keen, hawk-like eyes, a nose that at first glance reminded one of the same bird's beak, a small and carefully-trimmed moustache, and last, but not least, exceedingly small hands and feet, of which he was inordinately proud. The fingers of the former, which were dirty, were invariably ornamented with rings.

The captain, who, as I have already said, had laid himself out to be agreeable to Max, found an occasion to invite him to the chart-room alone. Once there he spoke his mind freely and to the point.

"I want to give you a hint, Mr. Mortimer," he said, for that was the name Max had assumed. "I must put you on your guard against our friend Moreas."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you for the trouble you are taking," Max returned, as he seated himself on the chart locker. "What has he done that you should warn me against him?"

The captain sank his voice a little as he replied.

"I have known him for a good many years. He is a notorious gambler, and, as far as my observation goes, I can say that I have seen him win a good deal oftener than he loses. When I say that he is a dead shot with a revolver, and that he is not above calling a man out and putting a bullet into him before breakfast, you will understand that I've gone out of my way to tell you something that might land me in difficulties if he came to know of it."

"I am obliged to you," said Max. "You may be quite sure I shall respect your confidence. I will be on my guard for the future."

"I'm glad to hear it," the captain replied and added: "I've noticed that you've been playing cards with him lately."

Max admitted the soft impeachment. He might have added that he had lost more than he cared to remember. He felt certain in his own mind, however, that Moreas had obtained the money honestly, and in common fairness he felt compelled to say so to the captain.

"I don't doubt it," the other answered. "He is not such a fool as to try anything else while it is possible for him to get it by straightforward play. But if you must play with him I should advise you to keep your eyes and wits open. It is not in my interest to say so, for if you find him out you will come to quarrelling, and then possibly to blows, and at that point it will be my duty to step in. But I don't want to have to do it. As a rule, we carry very few passengers on this boat, but I can tell you that I have seen some funny scenes on board her now and again, and Moreas has figured conspicuously in more than one of them."

As it transpired, the captain's warning reached Max just in time. Another day and it might have been too late. The incident I am about to relate took place on a warm morning. They were nearing the Equator, and Max was stretched on the poop skylight, reading, when Moreas made his appearance. The latter offered him an excellent cigar, and after they had been smoking for a time proposed a game of ecarte. Max, who, I regret to say, was an inveterate gambler, immediately assented, not, however, without thinking of the captain's warning. His companion immediately produced a pack of cards. The steward, on being appealed to, brought a small folding table from below, whereupon the game commenced. For some time they played with varying success, then Max, contrary to custom, began to win. They doubled the stakes and played again. Once more Max won. They played another hand, still with the same result. An ominous look flashed into Moreas' eyes, but it was gone again as quickly.

"I am glad to see that your luck has turned at last, Senor," he said, with a suspicion of a sneer about his lips.

"Fortune must smile some time or other," retorted Max coolly. "It would be hard indeed if I were always to have the same luck that I've had of late. It is your deal, I fancy."

Moreas accordingly dealt, and they played the next hand. Suddenly Max laid down his cards, back uppermost, and leant across the table.

"Forgive me, Senor," he said, "but I feel sure there is some little mistake. We have played two rounds, and I see that you still have four cards in your hand."

The remainder of the pack was lying at the Spaniard's elbow, and Max noticed a suspicious movement of the other's sleeve a few seconds before. Had he not spoken when he did, the other would have rid himself of one of his cards without delay.

"Carambo! so I have," he said, with a well-simulated astonishment. "I must offer you ten thousand apologies, Senor, for having unwittingly made such a mistake. I do not know how it occurred."

As he said this he fixed his beady eyes upon Max's face, as though to give him warning that if he had anything to say on the subject it had better be of a conciliatory nature.

"I feel sure of that," Max answered good-humouredly, for he had not the least intention of quarrelling with him. He only wanted to let the other see that he was quite aware of his man[oe]uvres, and that they must not be attempted in the future. "Are you tired or shall we play another hand?"

"I think a little rest, Senor, would be acceptable," Moreas responded. "It is so hot under this awning. I will ask you for my revenge another time."

With that he rose and lit a fresh cigar. Going to the companion hatch, he called to the steward to bring a couple of bottles of beer and some glasses on deck. When these arrived, he insisted that Max and the captain, who had just arrived on the poop, should join him. To all appearances he was as calm and as friendly as usual, but there was still a gleam in his eyes that spoke for the smouldering fire in the brain behind.

"It is too hot," he said, spreading his arms abroad. "How shall we amuse ourselves? We have read, we have played, and now we have drunk beer. What else is there for us to do?"

Then, as if an idea had struck him, he continued:

"I wonder if our good friend, the captain, here, would permit us to have some pistol practice. There would be no danger, believe me, if we shoot over the stern."

Max understood what was in his mind. Though he had pretended to do so, the other had not forgotten the incident of the cards, and now he was going to give him, in case he should be inclined to spread the report abroad, an exhibition of his powers with the pistol. It was a hint delicately administered.

"I don't know that I ought to allow it," said the captain doubtfully; "but seeing that we have no ladies aboard, and that you promise to fire over the stern, we will risk it. Don't shoot each other, and don't keep it up too long, that's all I ask."

Moreas gave his promise and immediately disappeared below, to appear a few moments later, carrying in his hand a revolver, a piece of string, and a dozen medium-sized apples. Reaching the deck, he made one of the apples fast by the string to the wire rope that carried the awning. When this was done it hung midway between the awning and the taffrail, and afforded an excellent target.

"Have you done much shooting with the revolver?" Moreas inquired of Max, as he returned from placing the fruit in position.

"A little," the other replied.

"In that case shall we say thirty paces?"

"Whatever you like," said Max.

The distance was accordingly measured, and a chalk line drawn upon the deck.

"Shall we bet on the shot," remarked Moreas, taking a box of cartridges from his pocket and carefully filling the chambers of the revolver.

"Why not?" answered Max, still with the same imperturbability. "What shall it be? Name the sum."

"Let it be whatever you please," returned his polite adversary. "Since we are loaded with English gold shall we say half a sovereign?"

"Half a sovereign will suit me admirably," the other replied. "Perhaps you will commence?"

Nothing loath, Moreas toed the line, and, when he had examined the revolver to make sure that it was in working order, fired. The bullet hit the apple dividing it as neatly as if it had been cut with a knife.

"Bravo!" said Max. "I owe you half a sovereign."

The Spaniard handed him the revolver, and he, in his turn, took his place at the line. As boys, Max and I had been keen pistol shots, and I was quite prepared when I reached this part of his narrative to find that he had imitated Moreas' example and destroyed the target. To my surprise, however, he chronicled a miss.

"I owe you a sovereign," he said, handing the revolver to his adversary.

"You will come to it directly," the other replied patronisingly.

Once more Moreas toed the line and fired. He missed his mark, however, by some inches. An oath in Spanish escaped his lips as he handed the revolver to Max. The latter had recovered his presence of mind by this time, and when he pulled the trigger the ball pierced the apple in the centre.

"A good shot," said one of the men behind him, and Moreas, who, though he deemed it a fluke, felt compelled to agree.

"We are equal now," said Max quietly.

Again Moreas fired, but this time he hit the apple on its side, causing it to swing backwards and forwards like a pendulum. One cartridge still remained in the revolver. Max waited until the target was ready, then fired and again hit his mark. The shot was a good one, and this time there was no question of chance about it. Moreas changed colour as far as it was possible to do, and began to think that his exhibition was scarcely likely to serve the purpose for which it was intended. Once more the revolver was charged, and out of the six shots fired Max struck the apple three times and Moreas twice. Whether it was the salutary lesson he had received, or whether it was because, as he informed him later, he had taken a great liking to Max, I cannot say; the fact remains, however, that from that moment they agreed most amicably together. That he was aware Max did not trust him very far did not appear to detract from their friendliness. On the other hand, it may have added a spice to it, somewhat as bitters at times improve a glass of sherry. One day he asked Max point-blank what he intended doing when he reached his destination.

"Up to the present I have settled nothing," Max replied. "I am leaving it to chance to decide."

"It's not a bad idea," Moreas answered. "Brazil is a great place for chance. Your life is one long gamble from the time you set foot ashore until they *put* you under ground."

"The picture you draw is not a very cheerful one," remarked Max; "particularly for the confiding emigrant."

"Oh, you need not be afraid," said Moreas confidently. "A man who can shoot as you do will always be able to keep his head above water. And now I am going to make you a little offer, which it may possibly be worth your while some day to accept. My advice to you is to try your luck first in your own fashion, and if you don't succeed, just come to me and see what I can do for you. Will you agree to this proposal?"

"It's extremely kind of you to take so much interest in me," Max returned, "and of course I agree. I should be foolish if I did not. But where and how am I to find you in the event of my being compelled to accept your offer?"

"That is easily arranged. I will give you my address before I leave the vessel." Then he added, with pardonable vanity, "It is scarcely necessary, however; I believe I am fairly well known in Rio."

Next day he handed Max his card, on which his name and address was set forth with many flourishes.

"At least," said Max to himself as he stowed it away in a safe place, "there is something here to fall back upon."



CHAPTER VIII.

To disembark in a strange port, particularly a foreign one, is, to the thinking man, invariably an interesting experience. The difference in architecture, in costume, in language, and in custom, attracts the attention and, if one may employ the expression in such a case, titillates the senses, like the first taste of a rare wine to which one has yet to grow accustomed.

Of all the cities of South America, Rio de Janeiro is, perhaps, the most cosmopolitan, the most representative, and at the same time the most contradictory. It is up to date, yet in many things it is sadly behind the times; it is beautiful in some respects, yet indescribably hideous in others; taken altogether it is a human abode full of bizarre contrasts, that step out and confront one at every turn. Generous and hospitable in certain directions, it is cruel and treacherous, almost to the borders of fanaticism, in others. To the right one sees a desire to copy Europe, to the left what would appear to be a deliberate attempt to disregard her altogether. It is these little idiosyncrasies that make Rio de Janeiro what it is, namely, one of the most instructive and fascinating cities in the world.

As soon as he had breakfasted on board in the harbour, Max hired a boat and made his way ashore. His luggage had already preceded him to the Custom House. Reaching the quay he set off, by way of the Rua Direita, in search of that building. What a strange collection of humanity he found crowded together in the streets! Faultlessly attired ladies, elegant gentlemen in frock coats and high hats, negroes and negresses, the latter decked out in the gayest colours, deformed, haggard, slouchy soldiers, Italian newspaper boys, cigarette-smoking policemen, clad in brown holland and quaint shakos, all helped to constitute a human jumble of the most varied and interesting description. Following the Rua Direita he entered the Rua d'Ouvidor, the fashionable street, indeed, one might almost say the Bond Street, of the city. Thence he continued his walk by way of the Rua dos Ourives, the Palais Royale of Rio, to the Custom House, where his baggage was examined and he told that he was at liberty to take it where he pleased. Chartering a small tilbury, a species of cab peculiar to Brazil, he drove to the Candido Hotel, in the Larangeiras, where he engaged a room, installed himself in it, and then prepared to look about him. He had considerably less than thirty pounds left in his money-belt; and when he became aware of this fact he could have cursed himself for his folly in having gambled with Moreas on board the *Diamantina*. It was done, however, and now he had to face the consequences. As he told himself, it was no use crying over spilt milk, and no amount of regret would bring the money back. One thing, however, was painfully certain--he must find some employment without delay. But in what direction was he to look for it? Putting on his hat, and stowing the key of his room away in his pocket, he set off on a tour of inspection. When he reached the principal business thoroughfares he kept his eyes open for an English name. It was some time, however, before he discovered one. Why he should have decided in favour of England, and have rejected Germany and Pannonia, both of whom were of nearer kin to him than the Island of the West, I can only hazard a guess. The fact remains, however, that he did so. When he had selected one that looked promising he entered, and inquired if he might see the merchant. Unfortunately, the clerk informed him, he was not in town that day. He left, and tried another further down the street. This one had already more clerks than was sufficient for his purpose, and could not dream of engaging another. The next was courteous, but equally firm in his refusal. A hundred yards or so further on he discovered a German firm, and, thinking a change of nationality might influence his luck, went in and asked his usual question. Yes; it was quite true that they stood in need of a clerk, but what experience and what references had he to offer? He informed his interrogator that he had none. He had only to add that he had spent the last five years of his life in the English army to have his services declined with thanks, and to find himself in the street once more. His next attempt was with a Portuguese Jew, who offered him employment at a wage that would have meant little else than genteel beggary for him. This post he declined of his own free will. "Things are beginning to look cheerful, I must say," he remarked to himself when he was in the street once more. "If I'm not more successful than this I shall have to fall back on Moreas after all." At last, and just when he was beginning to think that he would give up trying for that day, he found himself face to face with an office, on the window of which, written in gold letters, was "Brockford, Brent, & Kerton, English Merchants and Importers." He determined to go inside once more and try his luck. He accordingly entered the office, and, as usual, inquired for the head of the firm. A clerk, who was entering some figures in a large ledger, looked up and informed him that Mr. Brockford was engaged for a moment, and, having done so, inquired his business.

"To see Mr. Brockford," Max replied curtly. "If you don't think he will be long, I'll wait a few moments."

Five minutes or so later a man emerged from the inner office, and Max was conducted to Mr. Brockford's presence. The latter was a tall, thin man, with a somewhat hatchet-shaped face, clean-shaven cheeks, grey hair, and shaggy eyebrows. According to Brazilian custom, he was in his shirt-sleeves, and equally according to custom, the inevitable cigar was between his lips. Seeing that he had a gentleman, and one who was also a stranger to the country, to deal with, he invited Max to be seated, at the same time pushing a box of cigars towards him.

"What may I have the pleasure of doing for you?" he inquired in English, and with a courtesy that Max attributed to

the anticipation of a large order, but which was in reality habitual to him.

"Well," said Max, "to tell the truth, I have come to see you in the hope that you may be able to give me something to do. I arrived from England this morning in the steamship *Diamantina*, and as I've not much money, I want to find employment as soon as I possibly can. I've tried a number of offices, but cannot hear of anything."

The other glanced at his visitor's well-cut clothes, elegant boots, and general air of refined dandyism. He was not accustomed to receiving applications for employment from young men who looked like princes in disguise.

"I'm afraid I have nothing to offer you," he said after a momentary pause. "Things are very quiet in Rio just now, and we are more inclined to discharge our clerks than to take fresh ones on. What were you doing before you came out here?"

This was the question Max had been dreading. It had brought him to grief so many times that day.

"I was in the English army," he replied. "I held a commission in a cavalry regiment. I'm afraid I do not know much about business, but I am fairly quick at picking up things, and if you will give me a chance, I fancy you will not find me wanting in diligence."

The other drummed with his fingers on the desk before him, and as he did so he pulled almost savagely at his cigar. It was a trick he had when thinking.

"I don't ask you any questions as to why you gave up the army and came out to take a clerkship in Rio," he said at last; "but if I were you I should keep that part of my history to myself. An officer from a crack regiment seldom develops into a good clerk."

"You are probably right. I must try to remember it. And now to return to my request. Is it quite impossible for you to do anything for me?"

"I am afraid I can do nothing personally," the other replied. "That is to say, I cannot take you into my office, but I rather fancy I can help you in another direction. Do you speak Spanish?"

"I speak Spanish, German, Pannonian, and English, with equal fluency," Max answered, feeling that for once the education of a Crown Prince, in the matter of languages at least, had its uses.

"That is very much in your favour," said Mr. Brockford, "and now, perhaps, you will have no objection to telling me your name? I have not heard it yet."

"My name is Mortimer," Max returned, with a momentary hesitation, that was not lost on his companion--"Max Mortimer."

"Well then, Mr. Max Mortimer, I am prepared to tell you that although I never saw you until a few moments ago, although you have held a commission in a cavalry regiment in England, and have seen fit to give it up in order to take to clerking in Brazil, and last, but not least, although you call yourself Mortimer, which I feel quite certain is not your name, as I say, I am prepared----"

"Pardon me," said Max, interrupting him. "Since you have such a poor opinion of my character, it would perhaps be better that I should look elsewhere for employment."

He had risen and was going to leave the office, when the other signed to him to sit down again.

"Hoighty-toighty," he said, "what is the matter with you now? Why are you so thin-skinned? Surely you are not foolish enough to be offended because I speak my mind plainly to you when you want assistance? Leaving everything else out of the question, it is a poor return you are willing to make me for trying to help you."

Max saw the mistake he had made, and was quick to apologise for his apparent rudeness.

"Forgive me," he said. "I'm afraid I've a hasty temper. To be candid with you, I haven't quite shaken down yet to my lot in life."

Brockford blew a cloud of smoke before he answered.

"I was going to say, when you interrupted me, that although I cannot help you myself, I think I know of a man who may be able to do so. He is a Spaniard, but none the worse for that. His name is Senor Jose de Montezma. I happen to know that he is in want of an English corresponding clerk. We are on friendly terms, and I shall be very happy to take you along with me and introduce you to him at once; that is, of course, providing you think the position is likely to suit you."

It seemed to Max as if his luck were going to change at last, and, needless to say, he gladly accepted the invitation. Lighting another cigar, the senior partner led him from the office into the street, where they made their way along the pavement in the opposite direction to which Max had come. At length they reached the office of Montezma & Co.

Having requested his companion to wait in the counting house, while he interviewed the head of the firm, Brockford disappeared into the inner sanctum. Five minutes later he reappeared, and invited Max to enter. The latter did so, to find himself in the presence of a fat little man, who he soon discovered was one of the cheeriest and most popular merchants in Brazil.

"My friend, Senor Brockford, informs me that you are desirous of obtaining the position of corresponding clerk in my employment," observed the Spaniard.

"What Senor Brockford says is quite true," Max replied. "If you will give it to me, I will do my best to show you that your confidence is not misplaced."

The other smiled and rubbed his hands.

"On my friend Senor Brockford's introduction, I shall be happy to engage your services," he said, with as much dignity as if he had been conferring upon the other the order of the Golden Fleece.

After the disappointments of the morning Max felt that he had fallen upon his feet indeed.

"I only hope I shall be able to repay you for your kindness," he said. "Doubtless Mr. Brockford has informed you that I have had but little experience in business matters. If you will bear with me for a short time, however, I have no doubt I shall be able, in the end, to give you satisfaction."

"I have not the least doubt of it," the Senhor replied.

The office hours having been explained to him, the salary arranged, and various other minor details settled to their mutual satisfaction, Max and Mr. Brockford left the office together.

"I cannot tell you how thankful I am to you for what you have done for me," said the former when they were in the street once more. "It seems all the kinder for the reason that I am an entire stranger to you."

"One Englishman can never be an entire stranger to another in a foreign country," said Brockford oracularly. "We always feel called upon to do the best we can for each other. Besides----"

He stopped abruptly, as if he had suddenly changed his mind, and did not feel inclined to put his thoughts into words. Five minutes later they had reached his own office.

"You will feel rather lonely on your first night in a new country," he said. "Won't you dine with me, and spend the night at my house? I am a bachelor, and live on the Island of Paqueta. I shall have much pleasure in taking you back with me. No, don't thank me! You can do that later on if you like. You are staying at Candido's Hotel, I fancy you said? In that case, if you take the first turning to the left, and then the next to the right, and afterwards continue straight on, you will reach it. I shall expect to see you at half-past four."

Without giving Max time to accept or decline his invitation, he retired into his office, leaving him free to make his way back to his hotel. This he did with a heart overflowing with gratitude for the kindness he had received.

"I certainly can't grumble at my luck now," he said to himself, as he walked along.

Punctual to the moment he returned to Mr. Brockford's office. This time he entered it with the air of a man who occupied an assured position in the world. Even the clerks, having had evidence before them that their employer was well disposed towards the stranger, treated him in a different fashion to what they had done when he had first made his appearance.

"You are punctual," said Mr. Brockford, as soon as he was admitted to his presence. "It is a good omen in a country like this, where everything is put off to be done at a future date; a business habit of that description cannot be too highly commended. Though I fear, however well we start, we all fall into evil ways in the end. Even our friend Montezma, who is an excellent business man in his way, is no exception to the rule. Now, if you are ready, let us be off."

Then they set off in the direction of the quay. As they passed through the city Max had an opportunity of seeing how well his companion was known. He was occupied almost continually receiving and returning salutations. Reaching the waterside they descended a flight of steps, at the foot of which a neat steam launch was awaiting them. They took their places and were soon steaming down the bay, bound for the Island of Paqueta, one of the loveliest spots in Rio Bay, and ten miles distant from the city.

As Max was soon to discover, Mr. Brockford's residence was on a par with his reputation. It was a charming place in every way, exquisitely quiet and restful after the bustle and excitement of the city. The house itself, a long one-storied building, surrounded by a deep verandah, was comfortably, but not ostentatiously, furnished. In the dining-room were several good pictures, among others a view of Carisbrooke Castle. It was by a well-known artist, and Max stood for some little time before it.

"Is not this Carisbrooke?" he inquired, turning to his host, who was mixing a cool drink at the sideboard.

"Yes, Carisbrooke," the other replied, turning round. "When I was a boy I lived in the Isle of Wight, not a mile from the ruins. Do you know the place?"

"We drove over there one day when I was last at Osborne," said Max, without thinking. "It was one of the jolliest excursions I can remember."

Brockford looked at him sharply. The description of man who talked of staying at Osborne with all the assurance of an old friend did not often come within the sphere of his existence. For the second time he wondered what Max's history could be.

That evening's entertainment was destined to linger in Max's memory for many a long day to come. In his diary I find a note setting forth the fact that he looks upon his acquaintance with Mr. Brockford in the light of one of, if not the best, pieces of good fortune he met with during his life in Brazil. He might well say that. Next morning he returned with his host to the city to enter upon his new employment. The day's work at an end, he was able to call upon his benefactor, in order to inform him that it had not proved so difficult as he imagined it would, and that he felt quite capable of carrying out the work expected of him. By the end of the week he had settled down to his business life, and was feeling moderately comfortable and happy in his new surroundings. A surprise, however, was in store for him.

One afternoon, a month or so after he had entered Montezma's office, a note was brought to him by a diminutive nigger. It emanated from Mr. Brockford, who was anxious that Max should pay him a call on his homeward journey that afternoon, if he could do so without inconvenience to himself. Max sent a reply by the messenger, to the effect that it would give him great pleasure to do as his friend asked; and in due course he arrived at Messrs. Brockford, Brent, & Kerton's place of business. The day's work was over and the clerks were preparing for departure. The senior partner, however, was still in his sanctum.

"I'm glad you've come, Mortimer," he said, as they shook hands, "for I want to have a little talk with you? Sit down, will you? You'll find a cigar in that box."

Max seated himself, lit a cigar, and wondered what was coming next.

"By the way, you're still staying at Candido's, are you not?" the other inquired, in what was intended to be a matter-of-fact tone.

Max replied that he was still occupying his old room, and went on to add that he thought of looking for another elsewhere, as the hotel charges made rather too large an inroad into his slender resources.

"Well, I've a little suggestion to make to you before you do that," said Brockford. "I'm a bachelor, as you know. Now what I am going to propose is that you shall come over and take up your abode with me. I like you; I've already told you that we'd be first-rate company for each other; and if you don't mind putting up with my faddy ways, I fancy we should hit it off admirably together. What have you to say to my arrangement?"

For a moment Max was too overwhelmed to say anything.

"Good gracious!" he cried at last, "do you know what you are offering me? Do you realise what it means to a man like myself, situated as I am now, to be asked to share a home like yours? Mr. Brockford, your kindness overpowers me. I don't know what to say to you."

"Say nothing at all, or, at any rate, only say that you will accept my offer," he answered. "You have no idea what a kindness it will be to me."

"You hide your own kindness too well," said Max. "I do not know how to thank you. And I haven't the pluck to refuse."

"I should not allow you to do so," the other replied. "No, we've settled it very well, I think. Have your things ready to-morrow afternoon, and we'll take them over in the launch with us."

True to the terms of their agreement, Max next day transported himself and his belongings to Brockford's island home.

His life for the future seemed all smooth sailing. After the heat and bustle of the city, it was infinitely soothing at night to be able to cross to the island, and to stretch oneself out after a good dinner on a lounge chair in the broad verandah, and do nothing but listen to the sighing of the wind in the palms overhead, and the musical splash of the wavelets on the beach. He was not only bettering himself in this way, but the fact that he was living with a man so highly respected in the city was doing him a large amount of good from a social point of view. It was generally felt that if Brockford were prepared to stand sponsor for him, he might very well be admitted by other well-known men to their houses and to intercourse with their families.



CHAPTER IX.

From the moment that Mr. Brockford took Max to live with him the latter's lot in life seemed to change. Hitherto, apparently, no one had been aware of his existence; now scarcely a day passed in which he did not receive some sort of invitation from people who, as a rule, prided themselves upon their exclusiveness. Their favour may possibly have been due to the fact that he was of a different type to that to which they were accustomed. At any rate, his handsome face, charming manners, tall graceful figure, and *insouciant* cavalry swagger, possessed a fascination for them which they seemed incapable of resisting. It was not long before he had made himself extremely popular, not only with the English portion of the population, but also with the Spanish.

"Be careful, Mortimer, my boy," Brockford would say to him, when he greeted him on his return from a ball or similar social function. "When you have seen as much of this little corner of the world as I have, you will know how dangerous women can be, and how they have it in their power to mar a man's career at its commencement. Many an excellent young fellow have I seen out here, only too anxious and ready to make his way in the world; then he has fallen in love, been egged into matrimony, only to find himself shelved and done for by all save his wife's relations, as soon as the knot was tied. I don't want that to happen to you."

"You needn't have any fear on my account," answered Max with a laugh. "I'm not very likely to fall in love. I have been inoculated, and I fancy I am proof against the infection."

"No man is proof against it," replied Brockford solemnly. He was well acquainted with the traps and pitfalls of Rio society, and he did not want the man, to whom he had taken such a liking, to make a *flasco* of his life, just when there seemed a good chance of his succeeding in it. He need not have bothered himself about it just then, however, for another factor had been imported into the problem, and, before the week was over, Max was down with fever. For some time he lay at death's door, but, thanks to his wonderful constitution, he managed in the end to pull through. It was a near enough chance, however, to cause his friends a considerable amount of anxiety.

Indeed, from what I have since learned, there was one period in the course of the fever when the gravest apprehensions were entertained for his safety. All things considered, it was perhaps as well for him that Brockford was with him during his delirium. Although even then, he did not altogether reveal his secret, he said enough to show his friend that, in his old life, he had been something more than the mere cavalry officer he pretended.

"From the very first I felt sure there was some mystery about him," said the latter to himself one evening, when he had left the sick-room for a well-earned rest. "I don't fancy, however, that I have quite got to the bottom of it yet. But there, it's his secret and not mine, and, if he doesn't care to tell me, why should I bother myself?"

So saying, the kindly old fellow returned once more to the sick-room to minister as patiently to the wants of his restless patient as if he had been a nurse all his life. Strangely enough, as Brockford has since told me, it was of myself that Max talked most. "His constant cry," said the latter, "was something to this effect: 'As I cannot win her for myself, I will not spoil Paul's life. No! Paul shall have his chance with her!' and so he would continue for hours at a time. Sometimes he would vary it by informing the world that 'Paul should have her, for he could make her happier than I could ever do.' Then he would suddenly sit up in bed and call wildly for a horse, adding that he had made an appointment to meet the Princess in the Park, and must not, on any account, keep her waiting."

At last consciousness returned, and little by little he grew stronger, until, in due course, he was pronounced to be out of danger. Some time, however, elapsed before he was in a position to return to his duties. He had now been in Brazil upwards of eighteen months, and was beginning to regard himself as an old inhabitant.

On the day that he was sufficiently recovered to be able to return to the office he was invited to dine in the evening at the house of his employer.

It was a jovial party that sat down to dinner. The old merchant kept a liberal table, and he and the Senora, between them, did the honours with regal dignity. The two pretty daughters of the house laid themselves out to be charming, the younger, Estrella, taking care that Max wanted nothing. After dinner they adjourned to the verandah, where a lovely view of the city, stretched out on the plain below, and of the harbour was obtainable. Max was in the best possible spirits, and seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the society of the pretty Estrella, who was seated beside him, fanning herself, as only a Spanish girl can, with a coquettish lace fan, and airing her scanty knowledge of the English language. The elder sister, Maraquinha, who was an accomplished musician, was playing a variety of dreamy melodies in the room behind them. The Senora had gone to sleep, according to custom, and Brockford and the merchant were smoking like volcanoes, and talking politics, at the further end of the verandah.

When a young man, whose heart has once been shattered, is willing to admit that he has admired another young

woman, ever since he set eyes on her, it is only natural to suppose that his heart is still capable of feeling some emotion. Though Max was not in the least in love with the pretty Senorita, he could not but confess that he entertained a sincere regard for her. A great love, such as he had felt for the Princess Ottilie, for instance, could never come to him again; but he asked himself why, if it were true that he had decided never to return to his old life, he should not choose a wife from the people with whom he had thrown in his lot, and settle down to a quiet married life in his new home? Moreover, he was quite aware that Montezma was anxious that his daughters should marry, and he felt confident enough of the old man's liking for himself to be sure that, in spite of the difference in nationality, the union would be far from distasteful to him. On the contrary, it was just possible that—but there he came to a sudden stop. He had got on to dangerous ground, where it behoved him to walk warily.

At last it became time for Brockford and himself, if they wished to get back to the island before midnight, to bid the family good-bye. They accordingly entered the house to take a stirrup cup, and it was then that an event occurred which was destined to cause Max more uneasiness than anything that had happened since his arrival in Brazil, the fever excepted. They were standing beside the table in the dining-room, when Maraquinha, who, as I have already explained, had hitherto been occupied at the piano in the drawing-room, made her appearance, carrying in her hand an illustrated newspaper.

"Senor Mortimer," she cried, with a smile upon her face, "are you aware that we are fortunate enough to possess a portrait of yourself?"

At first Max did not realise the importance of her words. She was of a jocular disposition, and his first thought was that, following her favourite pastime, she had made a caricature of himself.

"I am honoured indeed, Senorita," he said. "I trust the likeness is a flattering one."

"You shall judge for yourself," she answered. "Here it is."

So saying, she opened the paper she had brought with her, and placed it on the table before him. One glance was sufficient to show him that it was a reproduction of an old photograph of himself, taken by a London firm of photographers shortly after he had joined his regiment. Underneath was printed "*The Missing Crown Prince of Pannonia.*"

As Max looked at it, he felt himself grow deadly pale. A great fear lest it should be noticed swept over him, and for a moment, do what he would, he could not recover his self-control. At last, almost by a superhuman effort, he managed to get himself in hand, and, while pretending to look more closely at the picture, said:

"All things considered, it is not a bad likeness, is it? I wonder if I were to go to England, and pretend to be the original, whether they would let me take his place in society. He does not look so tall as I am, but the likeness is certainly remarkable."

"So like that, without a very great stretch of imagination, we might even take it to be the same person," said Maraquinha suspiciously.

"Permit me to see it?" said Brockford, stretching his arm across the table.

The paper was accordingly handed to him, and he studied it attentively.

"What do you think of it?" asked Max, who felt as if a cold hand were being placed upon his heart.

"I'm afraid the likeness doesn't strike me as being such a good one," he answered, more to shield Max, I fancy, than for any other reason. "Judging from this picture, I should say the eyes of the Crown Prince must have been of a different colour to yours, and his hair would certainly not be so dark. However, dark or fair, it is time we were thinking of making a start for the island. Good-night, Senor Montezma; Senora and Senoritas, I have the honour to bid you good-night; your hospitality has charmed us."

Max followed his example, and five minutes later they were on their way back to the beach.

The journey back to the island that evening was a silent one. Max, for one, had more than sufficient wherewith to occupy his mind. The existence of the portrait had come to him as a decided shock. It had roused suspicions in other people's minds that years might not be able to allay. He had begun to think himself free of the old life and to feel convinced that it would never influence him again. And now, here it was, rising like a ghost of the past, to confront him at the very moment when a life of peaceful happiness seemed within his grasp.

When they reached the island they left the launch and walked up to the house, still in silence. For the first time since they had known each other, a dark shadow lay between them. As soon as they reached the verandah, however,

Brockford placed his hand upon Max's shoulder.

"You and I have got to have a talk together before we go to bed to-night," he said. "There are things that must be settled once and for all."

"I am at your disposal, of course," Max replied, but not with too much grace. "What is it you want to say to me?"

"There is nothing I *want* to say to you," Brockford answered, with an accent on the *want*. "It's what I feel I *must* say, both in your interests and my own. Don't think I am going to pry into your private affairs. My sole desire is to help you, if I possibly can. It's a delicate position for a man to be placed in; for, you see, I have only my suspicions to go upon, and I may give you pain without intending it. I think, however, that those suspicions are strong enough to bear the weight of what I'm going to say to you. The picture you saw to-night came to you as a painful surprise, did it not? And yet it did not astonish me, for I had seen it before. That you were not best pleased to be confronted with it, I gathered from your face, and, as I looked at it, I remembered certain things you had let slip in your delirium. No!" he cried, seeing that Max was about to speak, "let me finish before you begin. I have a young friend, I might even go so far as to say, a dear young friend, who came to me eighteen months ago, in rather an extraordinary fashion. He had been in an English cavalry regiment, he informed me; so, I reflected, had the Crown Prince of whom we have been speaking. He informed me in my own dining-room, by accident I will admit, that he had been a guest at Osborne; I believe the Crown Prince enjoyed a similar honour; the latter, so report says, has black hair and dark eyes, his height is about six feet one, and he is slimly built. If I wanted to carry the coincidence further, I might add that, when my friend, Max Mortimer, was ill, he spoke continually of a certain beautiful princess. 'Paul loves her and I will not stand in his way,' he cried. Now, strangely enough, the Crown Prince has an only brother whose name is Paul. I happen to know this, because the very next morning, while you were still lying at death's door, the newspapers announced the fact that Prince Paul of Pannonia had been betrothed to the Princess Otilie, daughter of Prince Ferdinand of Lilienhohe."

Whether Brockford intended his information to come as a surprise to Max I cannot say, but there is no doubt that the news of my engagement took the latter wholly aback. He clutched at the verandah rail, and for a moment seemed stunned by the intelligence. The only explanation I can furnish for his not having heard it before is, that while it was impossible for him to see any newspapers during his illness, he had not bothered to look up the back files afterwards, to see what had been going on in Europe during the time he was cut off from the world.

"That settles it," said Brockford to himself, as he watched him. "He is the Crown Prince, as I thought, and he left England in order that his brother might be in a position to marry the woman he loved. I thought such chivalry had vanished from the world."

A few moments later, when Max had recovered somewhat from the shock he had received, he turned to Brockford and held out his hand, which the other took.

"Forgive me," he said. "I was not quite myself a few moments ago. I am all right now, however. As you say, it is best that we should come to an understanding with each other. What is it you wish me to say or do?"

"Nothing," answered Brockford. "I have been reproaching myself for having said so much already. I am a meddlesome old fool, but I had not the least intention of hurting or offending you. I hope you will believe that. My only desire is to let you see plainly that you possess a friend in me, upon whom you can rely, happen what may."

"I am quite aware of that," returned Max. "You don't surely think I doubted it for a moment. You have proved yourself one of the best friends a man could possibly have, and I should be the meanest hound on earth if I did not remember that, and be grateful to you for it all the days of my life."

"Tut, tut! you must not talk like that," said Brockford. "I did no more for you than I should have done for anyone else. I helped you because I liked your face. But we are wandering away from the point. What I want to say to you is that, come what may, the Crown Prince's secret, if he has one, poor fellow, is quite safe with me. Not a hint concerning it shall pass my lips."

With that the kind-hearted old fellow shook Max heartily by the hand once more, and then, bidding him a hurried good-night, hastened into the house, and was seen no more.

Next morning when he and Mr. Brockford met at breakfast, they conducted themselves towards each other as if no such conversation as that I have described had taken place between them on the previous night. At the allotted hour they crossed the bay to the city and made their way to their respective places of business, parting at the same street corner, and with the usual commonplace farewell.

That week, on the other side of the globe, I received information that Max was alive, and that Rio de Janeiro was the name of his hiding-place.

CHAPTER X.

A few days later Max was walking along the Rua d'Ouvidor, when he heard his name called. Turning round, he found himself, much to his surprise, confronted by Moreas, the man who had accompanied him from England.

"This is well met, indeed," cried the latter, holding out his hand with great cordiality. "You are just the man, of all others, I wanted to see. I was only wondering this morning whether you were still in Brazil, and, if so, where I could find you. Your residence south of the Equator does not seem to have done much harm to your appearance."

Max replied that he thought, on the contrary, it had done him a large amount of good, and, having offered the country this justice, he was prepared to utter a few commonplaces, and then to pass on his way along the street. This, however, was not at all what Moreas desired or intended should happen. He explained at some length that he had only arrived in Rio that morning, and that he was going on to Buenos Ayres in the afternoon.

"In the interval you and I must have a chat," he said. "There is something I want to talk to you about. But that I have had a proper look at you, I had perhaps better not mention it. You seem to be prosperous. Had you been hard up, I was going to propose that you should join me in a little piece of business, which may prove to be worth nothing at all, or, on the other hand, may mean a gigantic fortune for both of us."

"You allow a good margin," said Max. "If I were allowed a preference, I should declare for the million. And pray what is this business?"

"Diamonds," answered Moreas quietly, as leaning across the table and clasping his hands together. "Diamonds such as you have never dreamed of. With the information I have received I tell you I am able to put my hand on the biggest diamond mine on the face of the habitable globe. How I obtained the information doesn't matter just now. I'll tell you about it another day. It is sufficient for the present that I am fully posted. Unfortunately, however, there are others, besides myself, who are acquainted with it. It is of those others that I am afraid. If the truth must be told, and you don't mind a simple pun, I might say it is a case of diamond cut diamond with us. I don't trust them, and I am not at all certain that they trust me. Now, situated as I am, what I want to do is to import another man into the concern, a man whose interests, though they must not be aware of it, will be identical with my own. Two of us would be a match for the whole pack of them. Particularly if I can get hold of a man who can use a pistol as you can. Taken all round, Mortimer, you're just the sort of fellow I want. You'd enjoy a piece of adventure of this kind. We should be away about four months, and I don't think you would be able to complain, when you returned, of having had a dull time of it. Now what have you to say?"

"It is impossible," said Max, though in his own mind he felt that he would have given anything to have been able to take a hand in it. "There was a time when I should have liked nothing better, but I have settled down to a staid business life now, and an affair such as you propose is quite out of the question."

"I am sorry for that," answered Moreas, his spirits visibly sinking as he heard the other's decision. "I had quite made up my mind that, when I told you about it, you would throw everything else to the dogs and go in for it with me. However, there is one good point about it. I have to go south to-day. I shall be back in Rio in about six weeks' time. Nobody knows how you may be situated then. If anything has happened, and it is possible for you to change your mind, all you have to do will be to send a letter to the old address, the same that I gave you eighteen months ago, and it will find me. We shall start as soon after I return as possible. Will you promise to bear this in mind?"

"I will remember it with pleasure," Max replied; "but you may rest assured it will be of no use. I am clinging to respectability like a limpet to his rock, and, so far as I can see now, nothing will shake me from it."

"You don't know how I had set my heart upon having you with me," answered Moreas. "It is at times like this that one wants a good man at one's elbow. I am not going alone with those other fellows; of that you may be very sure. If I did, I'd never come back alive. With you at my side, however, I wouldn't mind if there were a hundred of them."

"You pay me a very high compliment," said Max; "but I am afraid that, unless you can find somebody else to take my place, you will have to do as you fear, that is to say, go on alone."

"Well, I will put my trust in faith," said the other. "Stranger things than that have turned up trumps before now. I've got a very solid belief in my luck, and somehow I've got a fancy that it won't desert me."

"We shall see," replied Max, "and now, if you have no more to say to me, I think I must be going on."

"You're quite sure I can't tempt you?" said Moreas.

"Quite," Max answered. "If I had nothing else to do, I'd go with you to-morrow; but, situated as I am, wild horses would not shift me."

"Well, bear the fact in mind that I shall be back in a month," said Moreas. "And also that the address I have already given you will find me. Farewell, Senior."

"Farewell, and *bon voyage* to you," replied Max.

Then, with a wave of their hands, they parted, and Max continued his way towards the office for which he had been making when he had met Moreas.

He had been spending the greater portion of the day superintending the removal of some cargo on board a ship in the harbour, and, towards evening, made his way ashore again to meet Brockford. Leaving the landing-stage, he proceeded up the street till he reached the Rua Direita. As he crossed the road he came within an ace of being knocked down by a cab, which was coming at a swift pace towards him. He looked up, as if to expostulate with the driver, and then, as suddenly, turned and fled. Had anyone been near enough to see, he would have told you that his face was deathly pale, and that, when he reached the pavement, he trembled like a man with the palsy. *For the person in the cab was myself, his brother Paul!*

And yet, by some unhappy chance, I did not see him.

"Good heavens!" he muttered, when he had partially recovered. "Paul is searching for me. What am I to do now?"



CHAPTER XI.

In order to make my narrative more clear to you, it is necessary that I should hark back for a short distance and give you an account of my own doings, from the time Max left us up to that never-to-be-forgotten day, when I received the information that he was in Brazil.

Then some eighteen months had gone by, during which period we neither saw nor heard anything of, or from, him. He might have been dead for all we knew to the contrary. In the meantime my engagement to the Princess Ottilie of Lilienhohe was publicly announced. Of our happiness, and mine in particular, it is not necessary that I should speak. Let me sum it up by saying that if poor Max could have been found, there would not have been a cloud upon our horizon. If the truth must be told, however, I fear the match was not altogether what the Prince of Lilienhohe himself desired. Max was the Crown Prince, and he would rather have had him for his son-in-law; as, however, for reasons already stated, that was not possible, he was fain to content himself with the next best person, hoping, I suppose, that Max would never appear again, and that, in due course, I should take his place upon the throne. And now let me describe the day on which the information came to us that Max was in Brazil.

It was Christmas Day on which the first really reliable news of Max reached us. I remember that Ottilie and I had been to church alone together, my father and mother not feeling equal to accompanying us. Leaving the churchyard afterwards, we let ourselves into the park by means of a side gate.

"I wonder what Max is doing to-day?" I said to my companion, as we walked along.

"Poor Max!" she answered, and there was a world of sadness in her voice.

"Do you know, Ottilie," I said, "I have a sort of conviction that we shall hear something of him very soon. I don't know why I should think so, but the notion has been in my head for the last few days. Let us hope it may be true."

"God grant it may," she replied. "It would make a different woman of your mother. She is wearing her heart out thinking and grieving about him."

Ottilie and I let ourselves into the house by a side door, and, when we had removed our wraps, proceeded to the Queen's boudoir, where our Christmas mail awaited us. My mother, who had not left her room when we departed for church, received us very graciously. Poor lady, the trials and troubles with which her life had been afflicted were beginning to tell upon her. She seemed to be ageing faster than was consistent with her years. While we were talking, my father entered the room. Time had also laid his finger heavily upon him; his hair was almost snow-white; he walked with a stick, and, as we have been made aware, his heart had not been equal to the work demanded of it for some time past.

When we had saluted him, we sat down to the perusal of our mails. I had opened the greater portion of my correspondence, when I came upon a letter, the handwriting of which was quite unknown to me. Before reading it, I glanced at the signature, but "James Whittadge," or the fact that he was the house surgeon at the famous Samaritan Hospital, told me nothing. I accordingly turned the page and began to read the letter. This is what I found:

"THE SAMARITAN HOSPITAL, LONDON,

"*24th December, 18---*

"TO H.R.H. PRINCE PAUL OF PANNONIA.

"Sir,--

"The fact that I have been requested by a patient named Thomas Gulliver, now an inmate of this hospital, to communicate with you with as little delay as possible, must serve as my excuse for my presumption in addressing you direct. In common with all the world, I have heard of your Royal Highness' attempt to discover the whereabouts of your brother, the Crown Prince of Pannonia. I am not aware, however, whether you have since learnt his address; if not, it may be of service to you to know that the man Gulliver, to whom I referred just now, declares that he is in a position to give you important information upon that point. He is extremely reticent upon the subject, and avers that he will say nothing about it to anyone, until he has seen you. Should you deem his story worthy of your consideration, I would take the liberty of suggesting an immediate interview, as I fear the man, who is in an extremely dangerous condition, is scarcely likely to be alive for any length of time.

"I have the honour to be,

"Your Royal Highness' obedient servant,

"JAMES WHITTADGE,

"House Surgeon, Samaritan Hospital."

When I had finished the letter, I read it aloud to the others. Then there was a silence, which lasted while a man might have counted twenty. My mother was the first to speak.

"Can it be true, Paul, do you think? or is it only another attempt to extort money from us?" she asked, in a choking voice.

"It is impossible to answer that question until we have seen the man himself," I replied. "As far as the writer of the letter is concerned, it seems genuine enough. What do you think I had better do?"

"Would it not be advisable for you to go up to town and see the man at once?" said Ottilie, who, noticing that my mother was trembling, had crossed the room and taken her hand.

"Go to London at once, and see this Gulliver, Paul," said my father. "It is just possible he may have something to tell you. If you delay it may be too late."

"In that case I will go," I replied.

With that, I had a hurried lunch, and was driven to the station.

As good luck had it, a mail boat had arrived in Southampton that morning, and, in consequence, I was able to travel to town by the special train conveying the passengers and mails. It stopped only at Basingstoke; in consequence, Big Ben was striking four o'clock when my cab pulled up before the big doors of the Samaritan Hospital.

Having discharged my cabman, I ascended the steps, and rang the bell. A moment later the door was opened by a porter. He inquired my business in an off-hand manner, and, when I informed him that I wished to see a patient named Gulliver, told me to step inside, and sit down in the hall while he made the necessary inquiries.

"What name shall I say?" he asked, giving me very plainly to understand by his look that he reserved the right to say whether he would believe my statement or not.

"You might tell Dr. Whittadge that Prince Paul of Pannonia is here, in response to a letter he received from him this morning," I said.

The man's eyes opened, and his mouth followed suit. In a moment his manner had entirely changed.

"I beg your Royal Highness' pardon," he said apologetically, and then, with delightful ingenuousness, added, "I didn't know it was you. If your Royal Highness will be kind enough to step this way to the secretary's office, I will go in search of Dr. Whittadge at once."

I accordingly followed him down the stone corridor to a comfortably furnished apartment, where I waited while he went off on his errand. By this time I was as nervous as any schoolgirl. So much depended upon the next half-hour, that I could scarcely contain my impatience or my anxiety. I paced up and down the little room, examined the photos of various benefactors that decorated the walls, and then rejoiced, as my ears caught the sound of a business-like step on the stones outside. A moment later the door opened, and a tall, gentlemanly man, who I rightly guessed was none other than Doctor Whittadge, entered the room.

"Have I the honour of addressing Prince Paul of Pannonia?" he inquired, closing the door behind him.

"That is my name," I answered. "I received a letter from you this morning, informing me that a patient named Gulliver under your charge, declares that he knows the whereabouts of my brother."

"That is so," the doctor replied. "The man states that he has not only seen your brother, but has spoken to him. He will not, however, reveal the name of the place, or say anything more concerning it, to anyone save yourself. If you would care to see him, I will conduct you to the ward. I must ask, however, that you will make the interview as short as possible, for the man is in a highly dangerous condition."

"He is a sailor, and was badly injured two days ago by a fall from the rigging of a ship. If your Highness is ready, shall we proceed upstairs?"

"By all means," I answered.

Then without delay he led me upstairs to one of the principal wards.

"Gulliver is in here," he said in a whisper. Beckoning one of the nurses to him, he said something to her in a low voice, after which, inviting me to follow him, he led the way towards a bed at the further end of the room. A screen had been placed before it, and, when we approached, a nurse was feeding the sick man from an invalid cup. He proved to be a rough-looking fellow, between thirty and forty years of age.

The doctor felt his pulse, and then, placing a chair beside the bed, invited me to seat myself.

"Gulliver," he said, bending over him and speaking in a low voice, "this is Prince Paul of Pannonia, whose brother's whereabouts you profess to be able to reveal."

"So I can, sir," said the sick man feebly, turning his head and staring at me. "I know where 'e is, or ought to be, at this 'ere moment. But afore I gives it away, I want to know what I'm a-goin' to git for my information. That's only business, I reckon."

He paused for a moment to recover his breath.

"It isn't for meself I cares," he continued, "but the doctor 'ere tells me I'm a-goin' to slip me cable before long, and that bein' so, who's a-goin' to pervide for the missus and the kids?"

He gazed fixedly at me, as if he were waiting for an answer to his question.

"If your information is really valuable," I replied, "I shall be very happy to pay you a substantial price for it. But you must be able to convince me first that it is genuine. Have you any definite sum in your mind?"

"Well, sir," the man returned, "if I puts you on his track, I reckon it's worth a 'undred quid to yer, isn't it?"

"I will pay you a hundred pounds with pleasure," I answered.

"But you must let me see the brass first," he returned. "I can't afford to take no risks."

"Come, come, my man," said the doctor, shocked at his discourtesy, "if his Royal Highness is good enough to promise you the money, surely that should be sufficient. Remember with whom you are dealing."

"I shall be past rememberin' anything, d'rectly," the other replied. "I don't mean to offend, but wot I wants is to make sure of the blunt. Prince, or no Prince, I don't part with no information till I have seen that for myself. You wouldn't either if you was me."

Fortunately, I had brought my cheque-book with me, thinking circumstances might arise in which I might stand in need of it.

"Never mind," I said to the surgeon, "we won't dispute the matter. If you can let me have a pen and ink, I will draw a cheque in favour of his wife for the amount in question. Should his information prove to be worth it, she can keep the money; if not, well, in that case, the cheque can be destroyed."

The draft was soon completed, and we returned with it to the bedside. The dying man took the cheque in his hand and examined it carefully.

"I 'ate these 'ere bits of paper," he said. "But I reckon it's all right. Anyways, I'm willing to chance it. Now, sir, leastways, your Royal Highness, if you're ready, I'll tell yer all I knows. You mustn't mind if I'm a bit slow. Talking ain't as easy as it used to be."

He paused once more while the doctor glanced anxiously at him. Then he nodded his head, and the man commenced.

"It was this way, yer see, twelve months ago, come March, I shipped from Cardiff A.B. aboard the *Brazilian Monarch* steamer, owned by Guthrie, Blake & Williamson, bound for Rio, and consigned to Montezma & Co., merchants, of that city. As soon as we got in we anchored in the harbour, and the Spaniard's managin' clerk came aboard as usual to see the skipper. Now I make bold to say that the managin' clerk I saw that day was your Royal 'Ighness's own brother."

My heart sank. It did not look as if the information he was able to give me were likely to have any greater value than that we had received from other people.

"What reason have you for supposing that the individual in question was my brother?" I inquired. "Had you ever seen the Crown Prince?"

"Never, not as I knows on," the man replied. "But if you don't flummux me by asking questions, I'll do my best to tell

yer all about it, and yer'll see as I'm not very far out in my reckonin'. Maybe it will be the last yarn I shall spin, so I must make the most of it. How do I know it was the Crown Prince? Well, I'll tell ye. You see, it was this way. Among the passengers there was a gent a-goin' out to Buenos Ayres as took photographs. And precious well 'e did 'em too, when yer come to think on it. Well, after they'd had a bit o' dinner, the day we got into port, the captain, who was mighty friendly with this 'ere Mr. Mortimer, the agent's clerk, suggested that the passenger gent should take their likenesses, them sittin' together on the ladder to the poop. 'It will be somethin' to remember this day by, and also this 'ere werry nice company,' says he, and so the gent he dives down below to his cabin and fetches up his box of tricks. There they sat, as happy as yer please, smokin' of their segars while their photos was a-bein' took. Next morning we sailed for the Argentine, and about three bells the chief sings out for me to lend a hand to rig up the second officer's cabin for a dark room, so that the gent could fix up the photografs all right. The werry next day he 'ad 'em on deck to show the skipper, and everybody was askin' for one, 'cause they was done so natural. 'E was a free 'anded young gent, and one way an' the other I'd done a good deal for him while 'e was aboard. At last he ups alongside 'o me and says, 'Gulliver,' says he, 'I've got one of them picters left; would yer like to have it?' 'Thank yer kindly, sir,' says I, and with that 'e gives it to me."

The man paused, and whispered something to the nurse, who left him and went to the other side of the room. When she returned she handed him an envelope.

"Well, sir, when we got back to Liverpool again I left the *Brazilian Monarch* and shipped aboard one of the liners for the Cape. One day, on the homeward voyage, I was a-doin' something on the promenade deck--I forget what--while the passengers was below at their lunch. On one of the chairs was a lot of newspapers, and the one a-lyin' on the top had a big picter of a gent in milingtary uniform. 'Bill,' says I, turning to Bill Collings, who was a-coilin' of a rope alongside o' me, 'you're a scholar, what's the readin' under this 'ere picter?' Mind you I recognised it at once. 'The missing Crown Prince of Pannonia,' says Bill, as slick as the doctor there or you might do yourself. 'That's the cove,' said he--beggin' your 'Ighness's pardon--' 'as cleared out some time back. His family has been a searchin' for 'im 'igh and low, and can't lay their 'ands on him nohow.' 'Have they so?' says I to myself. 'Well, then, when I go home I reckon I can put 'em on his track! For you see I know'd that that photograft was at home if the missis hadn't throwed it away. Well, as soon as we was paid off, I went to the old place and rummaged a bit. There it was sure enough. Next day I took a job on down at the docks, went alof, and bein' a bit shaky, I suppose, after the drink I'd had the night afore, I missed me footin' and tumbled head over heels from the yard-arm to the deck below. And that's wot brought me 'ere. Now you know why I says I could tell where your 'Ighness's brother is."

"Is that the photograph to which you refer?" I inquired, pointing to the envelope he held in his hand.

"Yes, sir," he replied, "and just you see if you can pick out your brother from among the party."

The doctor took the envelope from the man's hand and passed it on to me. The photograph represented five men, all of whom were dressed in white. Three were seated on the ladder leading to the after part of a steamship, the poop, I suppose, while the other two had placed themselves on either side of it. With an eagerness that will be readily understood I scanned the various faces. Then my heart gave a leap, for the man standing on the left of the rails was without a doubt my brother Max. Quite overcome by my emotion, I continued to stare at it until my eyes ached. Then in a voice I scarcely recognised, I asked the man the name of the merchant's agent.

"Mortimer, sir," he replied. "The names of the party are written on the back. The gent had put 'em there afore he gave 'em to me."

I turned the card over, and there saw, corresponding with their respective positions in the photograph, the names of the sitters. The three seated on the steps were Messrs. Thompson, Elford, and Gallagher, respectively. He on the right, wearing the uniform cap, was Captain Ganesford, Commander of the *Brazilian Monarch*, while the other, the man whose identity I was so anxious to decide, was a Mr. Max Mortimer.

"Thank God!" I said earnestly to myself. "I really believe it is Max." Then turning to the man in the bed, I said, "You have rendered me a service for which I can never be sufficiently grateful. There can be no doubt that the individual you speak of is my brother."

"I am indeed glad to hear it," said the doctor. "I fancied, from the beginning, that there must be something in his tale. Your Christmas Day has not been wasted after all."

"Wasted!" I answered. "If this only leads to our finding him, it is likely to be the happiest day of my life. I never paid a hundred pounds away more willingly. May I keep this photograph?"

"Keep it, sir, by all means," said the man. "You're mighty welcome to it. Lord, it's the first time in my life I've ever given a present to a Prince or been worth a 'undred quid."

"I think we had better leave him now," said the doctor. "The excitement can only have a prejudicial effect upon his condition."

I accordingly rose to say farewell to the man.

"Good-bye, your Royal 'Ighness," he said, as I touched his hand, "and good luck to ye. When yer find your brother yer might tell him that it was old Tom Gulliver, of Shadwell, as laid yer on the scent of 'im."

I promised him that I would, though I did not fancy Max would appreciate the circumstance as much as he appeared to do.

Then, having wished him good-bye, I thanked the nurse, and left the ward, the doctor accompanying me as far as the main entrance. There I thanked him for his kindness, and for the trouble he had taken.

I must leave you to imagine how eager I was to reach home.

CHAPTER XII.

Late as it was when I reached Rendlehurst, I found my father, mother, and Otilie sitting up for me, consumed with anxiety, as you may suppose, to hear the news I had brought. When I entered the drawing-room there was complete silence, that spoke for the strain upon their nerves. Each seemed for the moment to be too anxious to venture a question. They had hoped so many times for news, and on each occasion had been so grievously disappointed, that they scarcely dared to place too much reliance in any fresh clue. I crossed the room and took my mother's hand.

"Mother," I said, "thank God I have good news for you at last!"

She uttered a little hysterical sob, and sank back into her chair, pale to the lips.

"Tell us what you have discovered, Paul," said my father, and even his voice trembled as he said it.

Thereupon I sat down and gave them a complete summary of all that had happened that afternoon. In conclusion I produced the photograph the dying man had given me, and handed it to my mother for her inspection.

"Yes, it is undoubtedly he," she began at last, when she had been gazing at it with tearful eyes for upwards of a minute. "It is my poor Max! God be thanked for His mercy!"

My father next examined it, after which he handed it to Otilie, whose opinion coincided with ours. Indeed there could be no possible doubt about the matter. Anyone who had ever seen Max would have been sure to recognise him in the picture.

It was indeed a happy party that retired to rest that night. At last it looked as if the lost one would be found, and the wandering sheep brought back to the fold.

Early next day, after bidding those at home a fond good-bye, I travelled to Southampton, and by nightfall was on board ship and in mid-Channel. Fortunately, there were no passengers travelling by the boat with whom I was acquainted, or who even knew me by sight. This at least was something to be thankful for. To make assurance doubly sure, however, I had adopted another plan. Feeling certain that, if it became known that Prince Paul of Pannonia were visiting Brazil, telegrams would be dispatched to the newspapers of that country, and thus Max would be given sufficient warning to enable him to get out of my way; I had followed his example, and booked my passage in the name of Mortimer. As plain Mr. Mortimer, therefore, I was known on board.

Of the voyage out nothing need be said. We touched at Lisbon and St. Vincent in due course, and, when that island lay behind us, settled ourselves down to while away the voyage across the Atlantic as pleasantly as we knew how.

At last we reached Rio. It would be impossible for me to describe the varied emotions that filled my breast as we steamed through those wonderful straits into the harbour behind. Save for short excursions to Paris, I had not been out of England since we had taken up our abode in it, and, in consequence, this South American port was like a new world to me. The brightness, the variety of colour, the picturesque placing of the city, and the giant mountain Corcovado, rising behind it, made up a picture that I shall never forget as long as I live. As soon as it was possible for me to do so, I made my way ashore, and, chartering a cab, set off in search of Senor Montezma's office. The cab drivers in Brazil are like their brothers all the world over. They are excellent drivers, but their workmanship is occasionally leavened with a recklessness that is sufficient to bring your heart into your mouth half a dozen times in a hundred yards. It was so in my case. We had not proceeded more than that distance before we as nearly as possible knocked down a pedestrian. Had I only known that that man was Max, what a very different tale I should have to tell! But I did not recognise him, and, in consequence, I drove on to Montezma's office, quite unconscious that I had warned him, and for all the good I could do now I might just as well be back in England. At last I reached the office. In response to my inquiries I was informed that Senor Mortimer was out at the moment, but that doubtless it would not be very long before he would return. While I was making my inquiries Montezma himself emerged from his private office.

"Do I understand that you are inquiring for Senor Mortimer?" he asked, rubbing his hands together as he spoke, and bowing like an automaton. "In that case, if you will honour me by stepping into my office, and taking a seat till he returns, you will place me under an obligation. Senor Mortimer's friends are mine."

With that he bowed once more, and spread his hands apart, presenting such a comical appearance that I could scarcely repress a smile. I accepted his invitation in the spirit in which it was offered, and when I had seated myself, lit the cigar he pressed upon me. Senor Montezma, I discovered, was a small, podgy man, with a round bullet head, and a most happy and humorous cast of countenance. He had evidently settled it in his own mind that I was a new arrival in Rio, and I could also see that, for the same reason, his curiosity was excited as to what my relationship with Mr. Mortimer could be.

"I'm afraid I'm inconveniencing you, Senor," I said, observing that he did not proceed with his work. "Perhaps my brother may be absent for some time. In that case it will be better for me to call later on."

"Your brother?" he cried, springing to his feet and running towards me. "Senor, why did you not say before that you were Senor Mortimer's brother? You overwhelm me! I wish you ten thousand welcomes to our city. No, no, you must not move; I could not let you stir. All I have is at your disposal."

He shook me effusively by the hand, while his face beamed all over.

"Your brother will be pleased beyond measure to see you," he went on, still in the same impulsive fashion. "That he knows nothing of your arrival, I pledge you my honour. It will come upon him as a surprise. He will be overcome with delight. He will be the happiest man in Brazil!"

I was not quite so sure of this. Nevertheless, I wished Max would return, in order that we might get the meeting over. However, time slipped by, and he did not put in an appearance. When our patience was well-nigh exhausted, a clerk was despatched to the office at which it was known that he had intended calling. Ten minutes later the lad returned with the information that Max had visited the office and had left it nearly an hour before. Once more we sat down, and possessed our souls in such patience as we could command. Still the time went by and there was no sign of Max.

"It is really very strange," said Montezma at last. "I cannot understand it at all. As a rule he is punctuality itself. It is just possible he might have gone round to see his friend Brockford, with whom he lives. If, Senor, you will honour me by accompanying me, I will conduct you there."

Needless to say I accepted his offer only too willingly, and we accordingly set off together. At any other time I should have enjoyed the bustle and variety of the streets, but this afternoon I was too nervous, too full of anxiety concerning Max, to have much attention to spare for anything else. When we reached Mr. Brockford's office, we went in, to find the gentleman himself at home.

"No," he said, in answer to our inquiries, "I have not seen him since this morning. Unless he has business to transact with me, he seldom calls here until it is time for us to return to Paqueta. I trust nothing serious is the matter?"

As he asked the question he looked at me with searching eyes.

"This gentleman is Senor Mortimer's brother," Montezma observed with great importance. "He has arrived from England this afternoon."

"His brother?" cried Brockford, with what was plainly an expression of alarm upon his face. "You don't mean to say that you are Prince Paul?"

"I *am* Prince Paul," I answered. "How do you come to be aware that my brother is the Crown Prince?"

"It is sufficient that I *am* aware of it," he replied gravely, "I have known it for some time."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," cried Montezma in alarm, "what does this mean? What is this I hear about Crown Princes?"

"It means, Senor Montezma," I answered earnestly, "that your clerk is no less a person than the missing Crown Prince of Pannonia, whose absence has caused such unending sorrow to his family. It is to persuade him to return to his friends that I am now in Rio."

The news seemed to stagger the old man. He could not take it in.

"A Crown Prince! a Crown Prince," he repeated, as if he were trying to convince himself of the truth of my announcement.

"If you will forgive me for saying so, I am afraid your brother will not be best pleased to see you," said Brockford, paying no attention to the other's state of bewilderment.

"It was necessary for me to come," I returned. "We have searched for him all the world over, but without success. His absence is breaking my mother's heart."

"Poor Max," said Brockford with a sigh, more to himself than to me.

Realising that it would be of little use our remaining where we were, we returned to Montezma's office, Mr. Brockford accompanying us. We had been absent something like half an hour, and were hoping that we should find Max awaiting us. To our dismay, however, this did not prove to be the case. The clerks had seen nothing of him. Once more we sat down to wait. The suspense, for me at least, was growing unbearable.

"What can have become of him?" I cried at last. "Do you think he has heard of my arrival, and is purposely keeping out of my way?"

Brockford shook his head.

"I should consider it very improbable," he answered. "He certainly had no idea of such a thing this morning, and, as I take it, you did not travel under your own name he would scarcely have penetrated the mystery of your alias."

In the interval, clerks had been sent out in all directions, in the hope that one of them might find him. They invariably returned, however, with the same reply: he was not at the place where they had searched. It was nearly six o'clock before we were confirmed in our belief that there was something more in his absence than met the eye. Our minds, mine especially, were filled with the gloomiest forebodings. At last, just as Brockford was beginning to wonder whether Max could have been taken ill, and have chartered a boat and returned to the Island before his time, a small nigger made his appearance in the outer office. He carried in his hand a letter, which was addressed to Senor de Montezma.

"It is from Senor Mortimer himself!" he cried. "Now we shall know the reason of his strange behaviour."

With that he opened the envelope, and, spreading the letter out upon the table, began to read it. It was not a very long one; but, such as it was, it was sufficient to cause him not only great astonishment, but also a considerable amount of pain. Tears trickled down his cheeks before he had finished, and when he laid it down it was with an audible sob.

"MY GENEROUS FRIEND AND BENEFACTOR (it began),

"How will you feel towards me, when I tell you that it is necessary I should leave Rio at once, perhaps never to return to it, I dare not think. A circumstance, so unexpected that I can scarcely realise it yet, renders it imperative that I should seek a hiding-place elsewhere and without a moment's delay. I can only ask you to believe, if you do not know it already, that the secret which forces me to take this step is not one of which I need be in any way ashamed. Were it so I should never have been your friend. That I should have treated you like this, after all you have done for me, cuts me to the heart. Forgive me, if you can, and believe that while I live, I shall remain,

"Yours in all gratitude and respect,

"MAXIMILIAN MORTIMER."

When he had finished reading a long silence fell upon us all.

CHAPTER XIII.

There was only one construction that could conscientiously be placed upon Max's behaviour. This was, that he had got wind of my arrival in Brazil. But how he had managed to do so--for, of course, I did not know then that he had recognised me as the occupant of the cab that had so nearly knocked him down--I could not imagine. No, I only knew that he was aware of my intentions, and was resolved that we should not come face to face.

"I feared as much," said Brockford gloomily. "But he cannot have succeeded in getting very far away in such a short space of time. The question is, where we are to look for him. Your Royal Highness would, of course, wish to accompany me on my search?"

I thanked him, and declared that I should be only too grateful, if he would allow me to do so. It was impossible that I could remain inactive at such a time. Under such circumstances I should have given way entirely.

We accordingly bade Montezma good-bye, and set off to the quay, where his launch was waiting for him, in order that we might interrogate Manuel, the engineer in charge. The latter, however, declared most emphatically that he had seen nothing of Senor Mortimer since he had brought him across from the Island that morning. Nor did he believe that he had returned thither by any other means. Having satisfied ourselves on this point we returned to Brockford's office, where, as we expected, we found a letter couched in similar terms to that received by Senor Montezma. It had, however, one significant addition. In the postscript were these words, "Should you see my brother, as you are almost certain to do, tell him that, dearly as I love him, I shall not let him find me if he tries for a hundred years. Tell him to return to England, to marry the woman of his heart, and henceforth to treat me as if I were dead."

"Would it be of any use our putting our case in the hands of the police?" I inquired. "It would not be necessary for us to tell them who my brother is."

Brockford shook his head.

"I am afraid they would not be of the least assistance to us," he answered. "No, if we are to find him at all, we must do it on our own initiative. One thing is quite certain: he would not be likely to remain in the city any longer than he could help. There would always be the risk of your discovering his whereabouts. Now, the question we have to decide for ourselves is, where would he and where could he, go at such short notice? To decide that, we must find out whether he possessed sufficient money to take him very far. The manager of his bank and I are on excellent terms, and I feel sure, if we call upon him, he will give us all the information in his power."

"Let us call on him by all means," I answered; "and with as little delay as possible."

We accordingly set off once more, and, in due course, reached the bank. Passing to the private door, Brockford inquired whether the manager was at home, and, if so, whether he would see us. The servant replied that he had just returned, and we were forthwith conducted to his presence.

Having apologised for the intrusion, Brockford explained the reason of our visit. Max and the manager had always been great friends, and, in consequence, the latter was only too glad to do all that lay in his power to help us in our search. Begging us to be seated for a few moments, he retired into the business portion of the house, to presently return with the information that Max had not visited the bank that day.

"I happen to be aware that he had only a small sum in his pocket this morning," said Brockford. "I asked him for some change, and he could not give it to me. If he has not called here, or drawn a cheque on you and cashed it elsewhere, which he wouldn't be very likely to do, that settles the question of the money. Our next course is to find out what vessels have left the port, or are leaving, this afternoon."

After thanking the manager for his courtesy, we left the bank and once more returned to the harbour. After diligent inquiry there, we discovered that only two vessels had left the port that afternoon. One was bound to Bahia and the north; the other for Buenos Ayres and the south. The first was only a small trading boat; the other a tramp steamer of three thousand five hundred tons. The first, after inquiry, we dismissed from consideration. To the agents of the second we repaired in hot haste. It was just possible we had the key to the mystery in our hands.

"No," said the clerk, who waited upon us, in response to our inquiries, "I am quite sure no fresh hand was taken on board in Rio, and I am equally certain that she carried no passengers."

So minute and searching were our inquiries that it was well-nigh midnight before we had finished them. As on the previous occasions, Max had disappeared without, apparently, leaving a clue of any sort behind, to tell us of his whereabouts.

Next morning we were early at work again. By mid-day we had visited all the principal hotels, and many of less repute, had made inquiries at the various labour offices, at the railway stations, had interrogated the police and harbour officials, but still without success.

All that afternoon we continued our inquiries, on the day following also, and so on, day after day, for upwards of a month. In Mr. Brockford's company I scoured the country in railway trains, on horseback, and on foot. But always with the same result.

Feeling certain at last that he must have left Brazil, I bade Brockford and Montezma, both of whom were most assiduous in the help they rendered me, good-bye, and proceeded to Buenos Ayres. I could hear nothing of him, however, in the Argentine Republic. Thence, almost heartbroken, I caught the mail steamer and returned to England, once more to confess myself a failure.



CHAPTER XIV.

Having described to you the failure of my attempt to find Max in Rio, I will now continue the record of his adventures, as narrated by himself in his diary, from the moment that he caught sight of me in the cab *en route* for Senor Montezma's office. Scarcely conscious of what he was doing, he had gained the pavement once more, muttering, as he did so, "Good heavens! Paul is searching for me. What am I to do?" A frantic desire to hasten after me and speak to me, so his diary confesses, took possession of him, but he put it away from him. He knew that to do so would only be to re-open the old wound, and later on to draw him back to the life he had made up his mind never to lead again. Consequently, he walked, even faster than before, in the opposite direction to which he had been proceeding when he caught sight of me. He scarcely knew what action to take. To return to Senor Montezma's office was impossible. But if he were going to give up his employment, what was he to do for a living? One thing was quite certain—he could not remain in Rio, and he could not starve. Then he remembered the offer Moreas had made him. If the latter had returned from Buenos Ayres, here was the chance he wanted. The thought was no sooner born in his brain than he searched his pocket-book for the piece of notepaper on which the address was written, and, having found it, set off to find the house. As he soon discovered, it was at the further end of the city, a fact for which he was more than grateful, when he remembered that I should scarcely be likely to venture so far in search of him. At last, after half an hour's walk, he reached the house. From the style Moreas had put on on board the steamer, he had expected to find a comfortable, if not a luxurious residence. To his great surprise, however, the house was situated in a back street, was tall, narrow, and inexpressibly dirty. Every window of that dismal thoroughfare was occupied by male and female heads, craned out in true Rio fashion to scrutinise the passers-by. His reason for being in the street at all, his personal appearance, even the very details of his walk were discussed. He paid no attention, however, but when he had located the house, entered it and made his way upstairs to the second floor. Having ascertained from a woman whom he met on the landing that he had selected the right door, he knocked. A voice within immediately bade him enter, and he did so, to find himself in a large room, scantily furnished, if indeed it could be said to have been furnished at all, and as dirty as the street outside. Moreas, in a state of *deshabille*, was reclining on a cane settee beside the window, and, as usual, he had a cigar in his mouth. On seeing Max he sprang to his feet.

"Senor Mortimer, by all that's wonderful!" he cried, with an expression of the liveliest satisfaction upon his face. "I was only thinking of you a few moments ago, and now you turn up like the genii in the children's fairy stories. I hope your appearance means that you have been thinking over what I said to you some weeks back, and that you are prepared to accept my offer?"

"It is for that purpose that I am here," Max answered. "If we can come to a satisfactory arrangement together, I shall be glad to fall in with your plans."

"My dear fellow," the other cried enthusiastically, "I am quite sure we can agree on that and every other point. What is it you want to know?"

"Well, in the first instance, I want you to tell me when you intend starting on this expedition?" asked Max. "It is most imperative."

"The deuce it is!" returned Moreas, "what is the reason of it all—forgery, murder, or only petty larceny? I thought you had settled down to a respectable business career, and that you were determined to emulate the clinging propensities of the limpet?"

"My business career, as you call it, has suddenly come to a standstill," said Max gloomily, without thinking or caring very much what construction the other might place upon his statement. "It is sufficient that I must not be seen in Rio for some time to come, if ever."

"That is where the wind sits, is it?" retorted Moreas. "Well, it's no business of mine, of course; but, without wishing to be rude, I must say that I didn't think you had it in you. Hadn't you better make a clean breast of it to me, and see what I can do to help you? I'm rather resourceful in such matters."

"Good heavens! man," Max cried, "you don't surely suppose I'm wanting to keep out of the way because I've done anything wrong, do you? If you should—"

"My dear fellow," said Moreas with a deprecatory wave of his hand, "I don't think anything of the kind. I never do. It only makes trouble. You have overrun the constable, I suppose, and want to lie by until the pursuit has ended. Most of us do that at some time or other in our lives."

"I've done nothing of the kind," said Max with warmth. "I don't owe a halfpenny in the world. What's more, I have a considerable sum of money lying to my credit at my bank. No, the sole reason I have for wanting to get away quickly is

because to-day I saw somebody connected with my old life. He's looking for me in Rio, and I want to make sure that he shall not find me."

"That is very easily managed."

"How am I to do it, then?"

"Stay here," said Moreas. "They will never think of looking for you in this quarter of the town. Until we leave, you will be as safe here as if you were in the centre of Africa. You don't surely suppose I haven't good and sufficient reasons for living in this hole? Of course I have, and this is one of them. If you think you can make yourself comfortable here, you are welcome to stay. What have you to say to my proposal?"

"That I shall be only too glad to accept your offer," Max replied. "The arrangement will suit me admirably. And now tell me something of the business in which you want my co-operation. You said, I think, that it was connected with diamonds."

"It is very much connected with diamonds," the other answered. "Eight or nine months ago I happened to be travelling in the diamond country, and it so happened that on this particular field there was a half-witted old lunatic who was everybody's butt. He was an extraordinary individual in many ways, and was always spying about for diamonds, and never finding them, in places where no sane man would dream of looking for them. He had theories of his own, he used to say, though there was no evidence that those theories ever turned up trumps. Every now and then he would mough off by himself into the wilds, be away for a month or six weeks, and when he put in an appearance again, look as near starvation as a man could well do and still live. But according to his own tale he had never brought anything of value back with him. He had just returned from one of these little expeditions when I tumbled across him. His friends in the mining camp were making great game of him. I should say they got more fun out of that poor old lunatic over that journey than they had ever had from him before. He took it well, however.

"'You laugh at my diamonds,' he would cry, when they had gone a little too far with him; 'well, never mind, Senors, mark my words, the time will come when I shall find more diamonds than all the rest of you put together.' Then he would take two or three old pebbles out of his pocket and fall to polishing them as if he expected to improve their value. I wouldn't have lived that old boy's life amongst those men for something. The practical jokes they played upon him would have raised the temper of a mummy.

"Somehow, I had got the notion in my head that there was more in the old boy than met the eye. He seemed to be sharp enough when there was nobody about. In consequence, I kept my weather eye upon him. As doubtless you know, some of those daft chaps have curious instincts, and, as I have said before, seem able to find things in places where men with better brains would never think of looking for them. I shouldn't have been at all surprised to hear that the old chap had got a *cache* hidden away somewhere. Having come to this conclusion, I made up my mind as to the part I was going to play. I had plenty of time on my hands just then, and if there was anything worth learning from the old boy I was going to learn it. Accordingly the next time they thought of playing one of their monkey tricks upon him, I determined to be present. Presently rumours got abroad that they were preparing a new joke. It was to be a wonder, I was given to understand. Then I found out what it was, and I tell you it fairly made my blood boil. The first part of the programme I discovered was to drug his liquor and to throw him into a deep sleep. 'Here,' thought I to myself, 'is my chance. As soon as they get everything fixed up and are ready to begin their performance, I'll step in and ring the curtain down.' Things had been a little flat in the district for some time, and a bit of amusement of this sort was just to their liking. The remainder of the day was devoted to anticipating the fun. A couple of hours before sundown, the old fellow looked in at the inn for his usual glass of *cachaca*. In due course the doctored spirit was handed to him. He was about to put his lips to it, when I crossed and took possession of the glass.

"'Don't touch that,' I said, removing it to a safe distance. 'Some of your friends here have been playing a trick upon you. I'll show you directly what is the matter with it.'

"On hearing this an ominous murmur rose in the room. The crowd were not going to be disappointed of their fun by my interference. Presently the principal author of the joke, a Portuguese, and the bully of the neighbourhood, advanced and began to threaten me. The old man looked from one to the other of us, as if he did not know quite what to make of it all. He had had many practical jokes played upon him, but never before had a person come forward as his defender. The Portuguese by this time was looking as dangerous as possible.

"'Be careful, my friend,' said I, as he flourished a pistol before my face, and talked of what he intended doing if I did not leave the room. 'It is my will that this old man shall not drink the stuff you have poured out for him. Surely that is sufficient.'

"'It is not sufficient,' he answered, his temper fairly getting the better of him. 'You have intruded where you are not

wanted, and I, for one, am not content to tolerate your behaviour.'

"Of course that is for you to decide,' I retorted. 'If you don't like it, you can go outside. I don't intend to budge.'

"I could see that he was anxious for a row, and determined to give him a little lesson in the proprieties. I had not been very popular for some time, and was glad of the opportunity to show them what I was able to accomplish if the occasion should arise. Accordingly, I took my revolver from my pocket, and, bidding one of the bystanders toss a coin into the air, clipped it first shot.

"Now,' I said, turning to the individual who, a moment before, had been so anxious to have my blood, 'you have seen what I can do with this little instrument. I am even better when the target is a man. Perhaps you are still dissatisfied with my behaviour.'

"No, Senor,' he replied. 'Allow me to say that I am more than satisfied.'

"Very good,' I answered. 'In that case you will oblige me by drinking with me.'

"Turning to the landlord, I ordered a glass of *Agoadente de Cana*, and when it had been supplied to me once more addressed my antagonist.

"Let us clink glasses together,' I said, holding mine out to him.

"But I have no glass,' he replied, and thinking that I did not intend to provide it, was about to order some refreshment for himself.

"One moment,' I answered; 'there is a glass upon the table. Oblige me by drinking what it contains.'

"This he absolutely refused to do, knowing, of course, that it was drugged. I was firm, however. He had had an opportunity of playing his game and had failed, and now I was going to try mine.

"Pick it up,' I said, 'and drink what it contains without further delay. If it is good enough for our friend here, it is surely good enough for you.'

"Once more he refused to do as I ordered.

"I am sorry for that,' I said. 'It seems a pity you should be so anxious to quarrel with me. Let me say, once and for all, that you must either drink, or show me your skill with that weapon in your belt. There is no middle course.'

"On hearing this his swarthy skin turned a sort of sickly green. The man was a coward right through. He did not want to fight after what he had seen of my skill with the revolver, and it was equally certain he had no desire to drink the mixture he had himself prepared. Eventually I gave him three minutes to decide, and, at the expiration of the time, had the happiness to persuade him to decide in favour of my proposal.

"Your health, Senor,' I said, tossing off the contents of my own glass. 'Your health, and, if you will permit me to wish them to you, pleasant dreams.'

"If he had had half an opportunity he would have upset the glass, but I was on the watch for that. My right hand was in my pocket; the same in which I had placed the revolver, and from the expression upon his face I gathered that he was aware of the fact. At last, seeing that there was nothing for it but to do as I desired, he lifted the glass and tossed off the contents. I assured myself that he had left no heel-tap, and then bade him be seated, returning myself to the game of cards which the old man's entry had interrupted. The strength of the drug must have been considerable, for we had not played more than a dozen hands before his head had fallen forward on the table, and he was fast asleep. I convinced myself that he was not shamming, and then turned to the old man.

"You see, my venerable friend,' I said, 'what your fate would have been had you drunk what was in that glass. For the future were I in your place, I should bestow my patronage elsewhere. This inn is not safe for you. And now let me escort you to your dwelling. Our friends here are none too amiably disposed towards you, and it is just possible they might take their revenge as soon as my back was turned.' With that we left the inn together and tramped along the track, till we reached the miserable hovel in which he lived. During our walk the old fellow had scarcely spoken. Now he became somewhat more communicative.

"I am obliged to you, Senor, for what you have done for me,' he began. 'They hate me over there because they think I know more about diamonds than they do.' He was silent again for a few moments. 'And it's quite true,' he added solemnly to himself.

"At the time I regarded this as only another proof of the old boy's idiocy. I had often seen him polishing his pebbles,

and, like every one else, had come to the conclusion that he believed them to be diamonds. Now, however, I have the very best of reasons for knowing that it was only another proof of his cleverness. It suited him to pose as a softy, and the pebbles were only a means he had adopted for putting us off the scent.

"When you come to think of it, it was rather a good thing for you that I visited the hospederia to-night,' I said, when I had seated myself on a log that did duty for a chair, and had lit a cigar. For you see I wanted him to understand plainly that I had rendered him a service, and also that I expected him to be grateful for the same. 'If I hadn't been at hand they'd have played a nice game on you.' I thereupon furnished him with a brief outline of the intended amusement.

"As I proceeded I noticed the same look on his face that I had observed on a previous occasion. Had the jokers seen it, I fancy they would have treated him with more respect than they had hitherto done.

"It was certainly good for me that you were there,' he replied, 'and I am very grateful to you, Senor, for the service you have rendered me.'

"After that he went to a corner of his hut, and having fumbled about for some time, produced a small leather bag. Taking his place once more on the log beside me, he unlaced the bag, and tilted half a dozen medium-sized stones into the palm of his hand. If the others he carried about with him, and of which he appeared to be proud, were only glittering pebbles, these were undoubtedly diamonds. Possibly they were not as valuable as he supposed, but, at any rate, they were worth quite enough to show me that what I had suspected was correct, namely, that his supposed ignorance was only a blind to cover his real cleverness. 'If the Senor will honour me by accepting one of these stones, he will add to the debt I already owe him,' he observed with a certain quiet dignity. 'It may remind him, in days to come, of his kindness to an old man who had no sort of claim upon him.'

"But I was not to be caught napping. The old fellow wanted me to believe that these few stones were the collection of a lifetime, stored as a provision against a rainy day. I knew better, however. My common sense told me that he wouldn't have been so ready to give them away if they had been the sole result of so much misery and toil. I accordingly declined his generous offer, taking a high hand, and stating that I had no desire to be paid for doing what was, after all, only a friendly act. The old fellow pretended to be hurt by my decision, and stowed the diamonds away once more in their hiding-place. Well, to make a long story short, I kept in close touch with him for the next fortnight. The practical jokers in the neighbourhood had had a lesson, and, seeing that I had constituted myself his protector, they left him severely alone. Presently I saw that he was contemplating some important step. A couple of fresh mules had made their appearance in his *corral*, and there were evident signs in the hut itself that he intended clearing out. I wondered what this could mean, and, since he had said nothing to me on the subject, I resolved to watch him the more closely. Knowing what I did, and guessing the rest, I had no intention of allowing him to give me the slip. For several days I watched him in this fashion. Then I noticed that his visits to the village became less and less frequent, and, when he did put in an appearance there, he invariably talked in such a way as to lead people to suppose that he had quite settled down in the neighbourhood, and had not the least intention of removing elsewhere for many a long day to come. Being aware of his character, this in itself was sufficient to put me on my guard.

"A night or two later, and fortunately when I was spending the evening with him, the climax came. The old fellow had, or pretended to have, taken a great fancy to me, and more than once he reiterated his desire that I should accept the diamond he had first offered to me. I steadfastly refused to do so, however, and could see that my decision increased his good opinion of me. On this occasion it was nearly ten o'clock before I left the hut. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and so still that you could have heard a leaf drop a hundred yards away. It was his own proposal that he should walk a portion of the way with me. We therefore set out, and had proceeded about half the distance, when there was a loud report of a rifle in the bushes close beside us, and a second later he uttered a cry and fell into my arms. That the shot was intended for myself, and that it was fired by one of my enemies in the village, I had not the least doubt. Bending over the old fellow, I asked him how he felt, but he did not answer. Then, carrying him as best I could, I retraced my steps as quickly as possible. When I reached the hut I laid him upon his bed, and, by the light of a lamp, endeavoured to discover the nature of his wound. The bullet, it appeared, had penetrated his right breast, and, from such knowledge of gun wounds as I possessed, it was evident to me that it was a fatal one. He was breathing heavily and with a considerable amount of difficulty, and must have realised that it was all up with him, for, when he spoke, he said as much.

"Lay me down on the bed,' he said. 'They've got me this time, the cowardly dogs! If only I had been able to get away from here safe and sound, they'd have treated me a bit different when they next met me. In three months' time, if all had gone well, I should have been one of the richest men in the world. But I suppose it wasn't to be, so what's the use of grumbling?'

"After this philosophical expression of his feelings he was silent for a while. Once more I wiped the blood from his lips, and once more he spoke.

"Senor Moreas,' he said, 'you're the only friend I've had these many years past. You wouldn't take what I offered you here, but I can give you some information now that will make it up to you a dozen times over. You may think I am not quite right in my head, but, right or not right, I know of the whereabouts of a place in this country where the finest diamonds in all Brazil are to be found.'

"From what he told me I gathered that he had learnt about the place from an old Indian woman for whom he had in his turn done a kindness. Twice he had made attempts to reach the place, but on each occasion he had been unsuccessful. That it existed, however, he was quite convinced. With his dying breath he gave me full particulars, informing me in what direction I was to proceed, and how I should recognise the place when I did come upon it. Then, having told me where to find several small bags of stones in the hut, and which, I might add, I afterwards sold for upwards of two thousand pounds in English money, he breathed his last in my arms. As soon as I was sure that he was dead, I made a final examination of the hut, took what I thought would be of service to me, and then returned to the village.

"A fortnight later I was on my way to Europe, and when I met you on board the *Diamantina*, I had found a market for the stones the old fellow had given me. They proved to be more valuable than I had supposed, and when I was convinced of this, I was anxious, as you may believe, not to let the grass grow under my feet before I set out in search of the place of which he had spoken to me. Circumstances, however, combined to prevent my doing so at once. A year went by, and still the opportunity did not arrive. If the truth must be told, the money I had brought from England I had lost at cards, and until I could find more, I knew it was impossible for me to embark upon such a costly expedition. What was more, I discovered that I was being shadowed by three men who were, to all intents and purposes, participators in my secret. How they obtained their knowledge, unless they had got it from the old man some time before, when he was drunk and talkative, I cannot say; but that they knew I had it, and that they did not intend to let me escape with it, soon became painfully apparent. Wherever I went those three men followed me, until at last their leader, an Englishman, came boldly up and placed a proposal before me. If I were prepared to allow them to participate to a certain extent, they were willing to find a proportion of the necessary money; they would also accompany me, and do their best to find the place in question. If I would not consent, then they would not allow me to go without them. I argued, threatened, and even attempted to buy them off, but it was of no use. They stuck to their point like bulldogs. Either they must be permitted to go with me, or I should not go at all. At last, seeing that I could do nothing else, I was perforce compelled to agree to their terms."

"And what do you intend doing now?" Max inquired.

"To-night we are going to meet here, and make the final arrangements; after that we shall start away on our journey."

"And what part am I to play in the performance?"

"That's exactly what we have to arrange," Moreas replied. "As I have already told you, these fellows are none too well disposed towards myself. If it should come to fighting, as it may very well do, they could act as they please with me. I should be powerless to resist them. My idea, therefore, is to get hold of some good man, and import him into the business, not as a friend of my own, but in the capacity of another enemy. To all appearances he would be hand-in-glove with them, but in reality he would be my ally, ready to step up and turn the tables, should they make themselves objectionable. Do you understand?"

Max replied that he understood perfectly well, but he was not quite certain that he altogether liked the idea. He was certainly not going to act in the capacity of a spy, either for Moreas or for anyone else. He said as much to the other, who laughed the matter off.

"My dear fellow, I don't want you to be a spy at all," he said. "What on earth put that notion into your head? I should be the last to suggest such a thing. No, all I want you to do is to prevent them from playing me false. If you come with me as my friend, they'll turn you out again. Don't you see? They're much too sharp to let me employ a bodyguard to act against themselves. All you will have to do will be to stand between us in the capacity of an umpire, and see that there is fair play on both sides. Now, what have you to say?"

"Under those circumstances I have no objection to acting as you propose."

"Very good; that settles it. Now we'd better arrange one or two other little matters while we're about it, and then postpone the remainder until they arrive."

It was not until nearly nine o'clock that evening that the three men, whom Moreas had informed Max were so determined to share the chances of the expedition with him, put in an appearance. It was part of the plan, that Max and he had arranged together, that the former should not be in the room when they arrived. He was to drop in half an hour or so later, as if by chance, and then to appear annoyed at finding them there. When he did so, Moreas greeted him with well-simulated surprise. The others stared at the intruder, as if they scarcely knew what to make of him, and then at

Moreas, as if they were suspicious of his action in the matter. On his part Max studied them with equal interest. The taller of the trio was an Englishman, possibly thirty-five years of age, who boasted a frank and extremely pleasing countenance. His name was Bertram, and, as Max discovered later, he had occupied a good position in the world, from which he had fallen, more by his own folly than on account of any material wrong-doing. The other two were unmistakably Spaniards. The name of one was Diego Pereira, that of the other Antonio Rodriguez. Neither of them were particularly pleasant-looking fellows, and Max wondered as he looked at them what it was that had made the Englishman associate with them.

At the moment Max entered, the two Spaniards were talking vociferously. From what he could catch of their conversation it appeared that they were extremely dissatisfied with something Moreas had done, and desired to make trouble out of it if only such a thing were possible. Their grievance eventually proved to be his own importation into the affair, of which Moreas had been telling them.

"But what can I do?" the latter asked snappishly. "He swears that he will come with us, and how am I to prevent him?"

"As it appears that I am the subject of your conversation," said Max coolly, seating himself on the table, "perhaps I may be permitted to say a word. Let me inform you, therefore, once and for all, that it is not a bit of use Moreas or anybody else trying to keep me out of the business. I know all the ins and outs of it, and, I tell you plainly, our friend here doesn't leave Rio without me. You can buy me off if you're willing to pay my price, but, I give you fair warning, it will be a stiff one. Otherwise, I go. Take your choice."

"What did I tell you?" said Moreas angrily to the others. "I wish to goodness you were all at the bottom of the sea."

"That is very likely," returned Max. "But as we're not, you've got to give yourself the pleasure of our society. Has anyone else any objection to raise?"

He looked round at the assembled company. His coolness had evidently impressed them.

"If you are determined to go, and Moreas is willing to give half of his share to you, I don't know that anything more need be said," observed the Englishman. "Personally, I think it's a pity to bring a fifth person in; but, as he says, it is his affair, not ours. I'll give you one piece of advice, however, if you are coming; don't try to play any tricks with us."

"Or with me," put in Moreas sulkily. "If you do, you'll find yourself in the wrong box. By the time I've paid all of you your shares there will be nothing left for myself. I only hope nothing will go wrong."

"It had better not," answered Max. "At least, so far as you are concerned. You know me, I think, and I know you."

Moreas instinctively thought of the game of cards they had played together on the *Diamantina*, and of the pistol practice that had followed it. Was Max's speech only a part of the game of bluff they were both playing, or was it really intended as a warning to himself? A look of real apprehension flashed across his face. The Englishman observed it, and, if he had entertained suspicions before as to their complicity in the affair, this effectually dispersed them. They thereupon proceeded to make the final arrangements for the journey. A rendezvous was agreed upon for the following morning, and, this done, Max rose to take his leave.

"Adeos, Senors," he said, bowing to them with graceful insolence. "I have the honour to bid you farewell until to-morrow."

Then he left the room and went downstairs. But he did not leave the neighbourhood. According to the plan they had arranged, he took up his position in a dark corner of the street until he had seen the others depart. Then he returned to the house and rejoined Moreas.

"You played your part extremely well," said the latter patronisingly. "It's a long time since I witnessed a prettier bit of acting than when you told me I had better see that nothing went wrong while we were away."

"Don't be too sure it was all acting," replied Max quietly. "You have brought me into it to look after *your* interests; but I fancy you'll agree with me that a man's first duty, in affairs like this at any rate, is to look after his own."

Moreas tried to laugh unconcernedly, but the result was a comparative failure.

CHAPTER XV.

To attempt a detailed description of Max's wanderings for the next few months would, even with the help of his diary, prove, I fear, a task altogether beyond my abilities. On the morning following the interview I have just described as taking place at Moreas' house, they embarked upon the train at a wayside station, a few miles out of Rio, and remained in it until they had proceeded as far as it was possible for the line to take them. Having reached the end of the construction, they alighted at a miserable village consisting of some twenty or thirty houses of the typical Brazilian type, and collected their impedimenta. Such stores and equipments as they intended carrying with them had already arrived, as also had the mules which had been purchased for the journey. Moreas, by virtue of being the only person who knew the secret, was duly installed as leader of the expedition; and, seeing that the day was too far advanced for them to make a start, he decided on remaining in the village that night, and proceeding as soon as it was light next morning. Being anxious to obtain as much information as possible concerning the track they were to follow for the next hundred miles, Moreas invited certain of the leading inhabitants to sup with them that night. This gave rise to a regular orgie. By midnight Moreas was decidedly intoxicated, while the two Spaniards were incapable of even sitting upright, so were stretched at full length upon the floor. Disgusted beyond measure with what he saw, Max left the room and passed into the verandah. There he found the Englishman, Bertram, smoking a cigar. He had taken a liking to the man, and cherished a belief that the feeling was reciprocated. "So you have had enough of it, too," said the latter as Max approached. "I couldn't stand any more of it, so I came out here."

"My case is very similar," answered Max. "It's a good thing this sort of thing is not likely to occur very often."

"I agree with you," returned the other. "Moreas and the Spaniards are very well when they are sober, but when they are drunk they are altogether impossible. Forgive me asking the question, but have you known Moreas very long?"

"A matter of two years," Max replied. "I met him first on the steamer that brought me out from England."

"Ah! I was right then," said Bertram, in a somewhat kindlier tone than he had yet spoken. "I felt certain that you were an Englishman when I saw you yesterday; and yet, do you know, if you don't mind my saying so, you don't altogether look like one."

"I'm not," said Max. "By birth I am a Pannonian, but I have lived in England since I was quite a youngster. You, of course, are English. There can be no sort of doubt about that."

"Am I so dreadfully insular, then?" the other inquired with a laugh. "I thought the knocking about the world I have had would have rubbed the edges off. Yes, I am an Englishman, I suppose, if ever there was one. I hail from Gainsthorpe, in Yorkshire. Do you happen to know the place?"

"I should think so," said Max, with sudden animation. "I've stayed there often."

After that they were both silent. The simple fact that they both happened to be acquainted with the same obscure village struck them as a marvellous coincidence; after a time, however, it became a bond that bound them very closely together. Later on, for some reason not altogether explainable, they left England, and talked of Brazil and life in South America generally. Of the subject upon which they were for the time being engaged they said nothing. They did not know each other particularly well yet, and both felt it would be safer to let it alone. Presently Moreas staggered into the verandah, stared wildly about him for a few seconds, as if he were looking for some one, and then reeled towards them.

"Come, come, Senors," he said with a hiccup, "I don't call this sociable at all. Here we are enjoying ourselves in the room yonder, and you keep away from us as if you don't desire our company. It isn't the sort of thing to make us friendly."

He seized Max by the arm, and attempted to lead him in the direction of the door, but the other shook him off.

"You must excuse me," he said. "I don't feel up to it to-night. Besides, if the noise you are making is any criterion, you are getting along well enough without us."

The other's mood had changed by this time. He turned and faced them, supporting himself by the verandah rails.

"I suppose you don't want to offend me on the first evening of this mem--mem--(*hic*) memorable journey?" he said.

"I have not the least desire to offend you," Max retorted. "Nevertheless, I am not coming in. It is useless for you to ask me."

Moreas thereupon transferred his attentions to Bertram, who proved equally intractable.

"Very well," he said at last, when he had tried to arrive at a proper understanding of the position; "if you won't come I suppose you won't, so I'll go myself, and leave you to conspire against me in peace."

With that he took himself off, and the two men were left to construe his last speech according to their inclinations.

"That is a cur who will require some watching," said Bertram, when they were alone once more together. "Thank goodness, however, I'm up to most of his tricks."

Max offered no reply to this remark. Angry as he was with Moreas, he felt that he himself was in an invidious position. To all intents and purpose he was the other's servant, and an innate feeling of loyalty, to however unworthy a master, kept him silent.

"If we are to be up as early to-morrow morning as we arranged had we not better begin to think about bed?" said Max at last.

"Perhaps we had. But I am rather afraid the others will not be in a condition after their carouse to-night to travel as soon as we imagine. However, if you are tired, by all means let us turn in."

They walked towards the door. Suddenly Bertram stopped, and, with a little hesitation, addressed his companion once more.

"I want to ask you," he said, "whether you have any objection to telling me the name of your friend; I mean the man who you visited at Gainsthorpe. It's just possible I might know him."

"His name was Beverley," Max replied, without thinking of the trouble to which his answer might possibly give rise.

"Do you mean Dick Beverley, the cross-country man?" said Bertram, after a momentary pause.

"The same," said Max. "Do you know him?"

"I ought to," the other replied, and then, after another display of hesitation, added, "Dick Beverley is my brother. Bertram is only my assumed name."

Max uttered an exclamation, that was partly one of surprise and partly one of pain. "Good heavens! can it be possible that you are Beverley's brother?" he cried. "I can scarcely credit it."

"It's more than possible, however, it's a certainty," returned his companion. "And now, d'you know, I fancy I can tell who you are. Your face has been haunting me ever since I first saw it. I knew I had seen it somewhere. You don't remember me, because I never saw you at the old place, but, the year after I cleared out of England, Dick sent me a photograph of himself, taken with a group of his brother officers. You and he were standing side by side, I remember. If you don't mind my saying so, you are the man who has been missing for so long, and about whom there has been so much talk--the Crown Prince of Pannonia."

"Hush, hush!" cried Max, as if he were afraid some one might overhear the other's words. "For heaven's sake don't talk so loud. You see, I don't deny the truth of your words. I suppose it would be no use. What a strange world it is, to be sure! My only reason for coming on this journey was because I was afraid of being recognised in Rio. Now it appears that it is destined for one of the men I am travelling with to find me out. What a fool I was ever to talk to you about Yorkshire!"

"It was I who started it," said the other apologetically, as if he were anxious to bear his proper share of the blame. "I'm sorry I asked you such questions, since it has caused you pain. I'm not much of a fellow, and I suppose there are a good many people who wouldn't trust me as far as they can see me; all the same, if you like, I will give you my word that your secret shall never pass my lips. I'll do that for the sake of poor old Dick, whose friend and comrade you once were."

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart," said Max. "Since my reasons were of sufficient importance to induce me to leave home, and give up everything that a man ought to hold dear, it may be supposed I am not anxious that other people should recognise me and drive me further afield again. If you will keep my secret, you will lay me under an everlasting obligation."

"Your secret is safe with me," answered Bertram solemnly. "I will pledge you my word on it, if you like."

"I'll believe you without that," said Max. "Let us shake hands upon it."

They accordingly did so. Though they could not, of course, realise it then, that hand-shake was significant in a variety of ways. Among other things, it laid the foundation of a friendship that was as sincere as it was mutual.

A few minutes later they retired into the house, and, when they had found a corner in which the night might be spent in comparative peace, if not in any degree of comfort, they wrapped themselves in their blankets and were soon asleep. Max and Bertram were early astir next morning. Not so the revellers of the previous evening. Like warriors on a battlefield, they lay just where they had fallen. Moreas was in the verandah, Rodriguez and his compatriot rested under the table, while the others were scattered in various picturesque, but undignified, attitudes about the different rooms.

"My prophecy of last night is likely to prove a true one," said Bertram, as they stood side by side surveying the prostrate figures. "They will not open their eyes till mid-day, and it will be some hours afterwards before we shall be able to get upon the road."

It turned out as he had said. Mid-day had arrived and passed before the remainder of the party seemed capable of getting upon their feet, much less of exerting themselves. Even then, the two Spaniards, Rodriguez, and Pereira, would have needed but little persuasion to make them continue the orgie for another night. Of this, however, Max and the Englishman would not hear, and even Moreas, who was by this time comparatively himself once more, joined in the chorus of disapproval. Accordingly, the horses and mules were caught and saddled, and, half an hour later, the party bade the village farewell and embarked upon their journey proper. For three days they traversed through well-vegetated forests, and over long rolling plains, with never a bush or a tree, until they entered a forbidding mountain range, and some stiff climbing became the order of the day. By the time they had had twenty-four hours of this, the strength and temper of both mules and men were well-nigh exhausted. It was in one of these gloomy passes, or canons, as perhaps it should be properly termed, that an incident occurred that might very well have ended disastrously for the whole company concerned. It happened in this way. Ever since they had left the forest and set foot upon the sterile plateau, the commissariat, once so plentifully supplied, had been impoverished to a degree that bordered upon starvation. As a result, they were compelled to fall back upon the preserved food they had brought with them, and which was only to be used in case of emergency. This had given rise to a considerable amount of grumbling, and from grumbling certain members of the party found it a very short step to open quarrelling. Antonio Rodriguez and Moreas were the principal offenders in this respect. Indeed, it was noticeable to more than one that, in the last few days, the latter's character had changed completely. He was silent, morose, rarely smiled, and equally seldom allowed an opportunity to pass him of saying something that was likely to give offence. What was perhaps worse, he had become exceedingly jealous of the attention paid to him. Because he took it into his head that Max preferred Bertram's company to his own, he held aloof from him and conversed only with the Spaniards. But, in thus describing the change that had come over his character, I have wandered away from the incident I was about to put on record.

As I have said, the commissariat stood in great need of replenishment. Being anxious to give the animals a rest, it was agreed that the party should remain in camp for another day. This being so, Bertram took his rifle and started off into the mountains in search of game. When he had been gone about half an hour, Moreas, who had been in one of his tantrums all day, also decided to set out upon the same errand. Climbing the side of the mountain, he, in his turn, disappeared from view, and Max, who had been watching him, returned to the tailoring operations upon which he had hitherto been busily engaged. As he worked, the recollection of a quarrel that had taken place in the morning between Moreas and Bertram returned to his mind. It had been brewing for a long time, and, had it not been for Max's own repeated interventions, it would long since have taken a serious turn. Both men were equally ready to fight, but Max was aware that Bertram, good shot as he was, when pitted against such a man as Moreas, would stand but a small chance of success. He was still pondering over this, when another thought occurred to him. It placed a more serious aspect upon the case. He liked Bertram, and he had no intention of allowing the Spaniard to do him a mischief, if he could help it. He accordingly rose, stowed away his work in his saddle-bag, and, having explained to the two other men, that he felt inclined for a walk, and was going after Moreas, he also climbed the side of the hill. On reaching the summit he looked anxiously about him for the man he was seeking, both on the neighbouring hills and also in the valley below. For a long time, however, he was unsuccessful. Then a mile or so distant, along the hillside to the right, his quick eye detected a small black object, creeping slowly but steadily towards the west. He was evidently stalking something, and Max, remembering Moreas' skill with the rifle, resolved to follow him, in the hope that he might be of some service in helping to carry home the game.

Seeing the slow pace at which the other was travelling, it was not very long before he was close behind him. Moreas was now crouching behind a rock, as if he were anxious that the game he was pursuing, and which Max could not see, should not become aware of his presence. A moment later he rose and peeped over the boulder, at the same time lifting his gun into position. Being some distance above him, it was possible for Max to see over his head into the valley in the direction in which the rifle was pointing. Then, to his horrified amazement, he beheld Bertram leave a little coppice, and walk out into a piece of open ground, a couple of hundred yards or so distant from where the other man was waiting. *In a flash the whole truth dawned upon him. It was Bertram whom Moreas was stalking so carefully, and it was Bertram he intended to shoot.* He was about to call out in the hope of diverting the Spaniard's attention, or of warning the Englishman; but, before he could do so, the other had pulled the trigger. There was a report, and when

Max, who had closed his eyes, as if he were afraid of what he might be called upon to witness, opened them again, Moreas was once more crouching down behind the rock, while Bertram was examining something, evidently, the splash of a bullet, on the face of a boulder behind him. Moreas had failed in his attempt; but the man he had aimed at had been standing directly before the rock, and it could only have been by a few inches that he had missed him.

"This is a terrible state of things," said Max to himself, when he had recovered a little from the shock Moreas' treachery had caused him. "What on earth am I to do?"

At first he felt inclined to descend hastily upon Moreas, and accuse him, there and then, of attempting to murder the Englishman. A moment later, however, the folly of this proceeding became apparent to him. Had he done so, it would have been necessary for the others to know of it, and, in that case, it was very probable that Moreas' life would have paid forfeit. This, for a variety of reasons, was undesirable. At the same time, he felt that he must protect his friend against any similar attacks. Bearing this in mind he watched Moreas' movements with the greatest anxiety. He was not at all certain that the latter, finding that his first shot had proved unsuccessful, might not attempt a second. Moreas, however, did not do so; he knew that Bertram, once placed upon his guard, would be on the look out, and he had no intention of allowing himself to be captured red-handed, which would certainly have been his fate had he missed. He accordingly remained in hiding until the Englishman had passed round the bend of the hill and was safely on his way back to the camp. Then he emerged, and, in his turn, retraced his steps by the way he had come, in so doing passing within fifty yards of the spot where Max lay concealed. When the latter reached the camp he found the evening meal prepared, and the two men amicably seated, side by side, near the fire, to all appearances better friends than they had been for some time past. Max fancied that Moreas looked rather apprehensively at him as he came into the firelight; but whatever he may have thought, he said nothing to him, either then or on a subsequent occasion, concerning that mysterious shot upon the hill. Bertram also followed his example, and, though he had plenty of opportunity, he did not once refer, either directly or indirectly, to the attempt that had been made upon his life that afternoon.

Next day they resumed their march, and twenty-four hours later left the mountains behind them, and once more entered a zone of fertile country. This continued for upwards of three hundred miles, until Moreas informed them that he felt sure they must be approaching the second range, that it would be necessary for them to cross before they could reach the country in which the old woman had declared that the diamonds existed. This proved to be the case, for the next day a faint blue haze on the northern horizon showed them that they were nearing what they might consider the half-way house to their destination. It was true that they had been warned that the road over these mountains would be likely to prove a serious obstacle in their path, and also that the long stretches of desert on the further side were good for neither man nor beast. They did not give that much consideration, however. Great though the present difficulties might be, the reward at the end would be much larger, if all they had been told were true. When, however, they reached the foot of the mountains they were able to realise something of what lay before them. Unlike the other range through which they had passed a fortnight before, this one consisted of high, rocky peaks, where even a goat could scarcely retain his footing, and dark, gloomy canons, both almost grassless and entirely destitute of water. What was worse, their animals by this time were sadly out of condition, and often it was as much as the poor beasts could do to drag one foot after the other. Still they persevered. The Spaniards grumbled incessantly, it is true. Moreas, on the other hand, scarcely spoke at all, while Max thought he could even detect on the Englishman's handsome face a growing belief that they had attempted something that was beyond the power of human beings to accomplish. Whatever his feelings may have been, however, he never once permitted a word of complaint to pass his lips. The outlook was by no means a cheerful one. After the privations the party had been through so far, it seemed hard, indeed, that they should not be able to reach the goal for which they had been aiming. With such overwhelming odds against them, however, it seemed impossible that they could hope to succeed. But they were slow to own themselves beaten. Indeed, it was not until they stood face to face with almost certain death, that they realised how futile it was to continue the fight. Then, in one of the loneliest canons of all that lonely range, they called a halt and took counsel with each other. The two Spaniards, as on a previous occasion, were openly mutinous, and showered black looks on everyone, each other included. Remembering what he had seen a fortnight before, Max never once permitted Moreas to leave the camp unaccompanied. The man's temper was by this time in such a condition that it was within the bounds of possibility that he would have chosen a vantage on the hill side above, and have shot them down without either a second thought, or a feeling of compunction.

"It seems to me we're in a pretty sort of a fix," said Bertram after some little discussion had taken place on their position. "The animals are giving way, and if we go on like this, it won't be long before we all follow suit. Now the question for us to decide is, what are we going to do. If the remainder of you are desirous of pushing ahead, then I'm willing to do the same. If not, let us turn back without further parleying. The matter, however, must be decided once and for all. There has been too much grumbling lately, and it seems to me the best thing we can do is to hold a meeting now, and settle everything. What do you say, Mortimer?"

"I quite agree with you," Max answered, "and so I feel sure does Moreas. Let us talk the question over like sensible

men, and come to some definite decision."

Popular feeling being in favour of a discussion, they sat down by the camp fire and talked it over, as quietly and rationally as the racial tendencies of the various members of the party would permit. The result was as follows.

It was decided that, while it was out of the question that the entire party could succeed in reaching the spot for which they were making, it was still possible that two men, taking with them the best of the animals, might be able to do so. But who those two men should be was rather more difficult to determine. It was certain that Moreas must go, since he was the only man who was acquainted with the secret, and he was scarcely likely to impart it to anyone else. On his side, however, he flatly declined even to think of taking either of the two Spaniards with him. They might fume and curse as much as they pleased, he said, but their bluster would not alter his decision. The man who went with him must be either Bertram or Max. For his own part he professed not to care very much which of them it was.

A solemn silence descended upon the group.

"Perhaps we had better draw lots for it," began Bertram. "I may say that, if I am chosen, I am perfectly willing to go; if it falls upon you, Mortimer, I have no doubt you will not raise any objection. What do you say?"

"Let us draw lots for it by all means," Max answered. "But how shall we decide?"

One of the Spaniards, true son of a gambling race, immediately produced a dice box, which he still carried with him, long after he had parted with other apparently more valuable possessions. By the flickering light of the camp fire, the two men threw, to decide which should have the honour of courting what, each must have felt in his own heart, was almost certain death. As a result Max was declared to be the winner.

"It is settled then," said Moreas, with what Max could not help feeling was a note of satisfaction in his voice. "You are perfectly satisfied? Well, to-morrow, Senor Mortimer, if you are prepared, we will push on together, and see what fate has in store for us."

"I shall be quite ready," Max replied. "And, as I understand it, the remainder of the party will retrace their steps to the fertile country at the entrance to the Ranges, and await our coming there."

"That is how I understand it also," replied Bertram, looking steadily at Max. "We shall give you three months' grace, and if you have not returned by the end of that time, we shall conclude that you are dead, and will either attempt to reach you, or return to civilisation, as circumstances may dictate."

"That is the arrangement," said Moreas.

After that the party lapsed into silence once more.

As nobody seemed inclined for conversation when these details had been settled, they rolled themselves up in their blankets and said good-night to the world. Silence had not taken possession of the camp more than half an hour before Max felt the pressure of a hand upon his arm. He rolled over to find Bertram making signals to him. He accordingly arose and followed him to a spot at some little distance from the camp. When they had assured themselves that they were not being followed, the Englishman spoke.

"Your Royal Highness," he said; then, seeing that the other was about to interrupt him, held up his hand. "Pardon me, but for a few minutes it is necessary that I should forget our supposed equality, and remember that you are a royal personage, and I only the son of a Yorkshire gentleman. I'm not as a rule a man who thinks very much of titles, but there is no getting away from the fact that a man who is, or should be, going to rule a country, is called upon to take more care of his life than other people. When we drew lots to-night as to who should accompany Moreas, I hoped and believed that chance would favour myself. Fate, however, willed otherwise. Now, sir, what I am going to say to you is this; if you will consent to allow me to go forward in your place, it will be conferring an honour upon me for which I shall be grateful to you to my dying day. I can easily make an excuse to Moreas, and convince him that we have come to the arrangement together. Nobody will suspect, and so you will be saved from doing, what I really and truly believe to be, a wrong act."

Max was more touched by the other's words than he could say.

"I thank you," he said, holding out his hand. "I know that you speak out of kindness to me, but what you ask is impossible--quite impossible! Really it is! The lot has fallen upon me, and, indeed, I can only ask you to believe that I would not have it otherwise. I am quite willing to go forward, and, when all is said and done, I believe I am the best person for the work. You and Moreas are not particularly friendly, as you must be aware, and there is no saying what might happen if you were thrown so much into each other's society, without any one to see fair play."

"You are thinking of the day when he fired that rifle at me in the mountains, I suppose," Bertram replied. "I suppose you did not think I was aware of it. I was, however, and I knew also that you were behind him. If it hadn't been for that fact, I should have taxed him with his treachery on my return to the camp. But we are wasting time. Is it quite impossible for me to make you change your mind?"

"Quite," said Max. "Though I am none the less grateful to you for your kindness in offering to go, I cannot accept it."

"Are you quite sure that no argument on my part will make you alter your decision?"

"I am quite sure," Max replied. "My mind is irrevocably made up."

"So be it," returned Bertram quietly. "In that case, I suppose, we may as well return to the camp. Should Moreas have seen us leave it, he may have got the idea into his head that you are scheming against him. That would be a bad beginning as far as you are concerned."

They accordingly retraced their steps, and, so far as they knew, reached the camp without anyone being the wiser that they had absented themselves from it.

Next morning, as soon as it was light, the camp was roused by Moreas. The best mules had been set apart for the onward journey, and, as soon as the morning meal had been eaten, and the beasts were saddled, the two adventurers prepared to set off. When all the final arrangements had been made, and the place of meeting, should the pair return, settled, it was time for them to bid the rest of the party farewell. It was a solemn moment in their lives, and every one seemed aware of the fact. Moreas shook hands with the two Spaniards first, and then approached Bertram.

"Farewell, Senor," he said, with a bow. "I trust I shall have good news for you when next I see you."

Max observed that they did not shake hands. The hatred that existed between them was so mutual and so strong, that even the fact that, in all human probability, they would never see each other again, was not sufficient to make them part friends. Then came Max's turn. He shook hands with Antonio and Diego, and, having done so, approached the man for whom he entertained such a genuine liking.

"Good-bye," he said. Then looking him straight in the face, he added, "If by any chance I should not return, you know whom to make acquainted with my fate. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," answered the other, his voice shaking as he said it. Then, seeing that Moreas was out of earshot, he added, "For heaven's sake, your Highness, run no undue risks. If you will not think of yourself, think of those in England who love you."

"You may be sure I shall do that," Max replied. Then, uttering another hearty good-bye, and shaking Bertram once more by the hand, he set off in pursuit of his partner.

As they turned the corner of the canon, he looked back and waved his hand. Bertram was standing where he had left him, still looking after him.



CHAPTER XVI.

The first day's march, after they left the main camp, could not be said to have been, in any sense of the word, either a pleasant or a comfortable one. Both the men were ill at ease, not only with their present lot, but also with each other. Moreas entertained the unpleasant suspicion that Max, while he never failed in his duty, was, in reality, more in sympathy with Bertram than with himself. The anxiety of what was before them lay heavily upon their minds, while there was a nameless, indescribable something that Max could not understand, and yet which stood like a shadow between them. It soon became apparent to him that the dangers to which they were to be subjected had not been in the least exaggerated. For no less than four days they continued on through the mountains, and it was only after incredible hardships that they managed to reach the plains on the other side. Here, however, as it turned out, they were in scarcely a better plight. As they expected, on leaving the mountains they found themselves confronted by a stretch of desert. To attempt to cross it seemed to be to run too great a risk, and yet to turn back, when they were so near the end, seemed an equally foolish undertaking. With a dogged determination, worthy of a better cause, and with which Max had never credited him, Moreas decided in favour of pushing on. It was a rash decision, for with every hour the condition of the mules was becoming more and more pitiable, while the men themselves were in scarcely a better case. Still Moreas remained in a state of sullenness. When the animals were no longer able to bear their weights, he got off and walked sulkily beside his own beast, grudged them the delay when they rested, and after they had prepared their camp at night, went so far as to insinuate that Max had been keeping the mules back to serve his own purpose. It was indeed a dreary resting-place they had that night. There was no shelter; no water, save that they had brought with them; no food to revive their starving animals, save a few mouthfuls of corn and half a dozen handfuls of parched grass. As soon as his own meal was eaten, Moreas rolled himself up in his blankets and went to sleep, leaving Max by the fire, watching its dull glow and wondering whether he was destined to come safely out of this perilous adventure or not. Overhead the great stars shone brilliantly, while the low wind moaned like a banshee across the waste. He thought of those who loved him in England, of Otilie, and later of myself. At such a moment his curiosity was excited as to what I had done when I discovered he had left Rio.

Next morning, as soon as it was daylight, they saddled up once more, and continued their march. For the moment the country, which consisted of barren plains in front, behind, and on either side, showed no signs of changing. As on the previous day, Moreas stalked grimly in front, never looking behind him, and to all appearances oblivious of his companion's presence.

One thing was growing more certain every hour, and that was the fact that the hardships through which they had passed had combined, with natural greed, to turn Moreas' brain.

"I shall have to keep my eyes on him, day and night," said Max to himself. "In his present condition there is no saying what he may do."

This knowledge added a fresh horror to the situation. It is bad enough to be starving anywhere, but it is a thousand times worse to have to do so when alone in the wilds with a madman. As soon as they got into camp that night, the second on that awful plain, Moreas commenced to walk in circles round the fire, talking to himself meanwhile, and shaking his fist at the darkening desert. When Max offered him a portion of the dried *biltong*--all that remained to them in the way of food--he refused it with an oath, adding, that he could not eat when they should be pushing towards their destination!

"You won't be strong enough to reach it at all, if you don't eat something," said Max philosophically.

He, himself, made as good a meal as possible, and then lay down to rest, but he was too anxious for his own safety to fall asleep, until he was quite convinced that Moreas was asleep also. He had no desire that the other should steal a march on him during the night. What he had seen that day in the mountains, when Moreas had stalked Bertram, was quite sufficient to show him that his companion was not one who would stick at trifles. At last, however, he dozed off.

As the afternoon of the next day approached, they saw before them another low range of hills. These, when they approached them, proved to be of iron-stone formation, a fact, which, as soon as he heard it, caused Moreas to utter a cry of joy.

"We are nearly there!" he cried. "Those are the hills of which the Indian told the old man. We have only to cross them, and we shall be at the place where the diamonds are. Let us push on, push on. For heaven's sake, man, stir yourself; there is not a moment to lose."

At last they reached the summit of the last hill, and looked down upon the plains on the other side.

"It is the place! it is the place!" cried Moreas, almost beside himself with excitement. "Yonder is the river he spoke of,

and there, away to the right, is its old course. You can even see the big black rocks that he told me of, rising out of the sand. The Saints be praised, we are here at last! We are here at last!"

So overcome was he by his excitement, that it was as much as Max could do to prevent him from setting off at a run down the hillside. This was the place, then, of which the poor, old, half-witted diamond hunter had told Moreas. The place where diamonds were as large as hazel nuts, and could be had for the picking up. He wondered how true the story would prove to be. For his own part, he was not going to pin too much faith upon it. If it turned out trumps, well and good; if not, he could console himself with the reflection that the old fellow had played off on Moreas a grimmer practical joke than had ever been perpetrated on himself. The afternoon was well spent before they reached a spot which they considered favourable for a camp. Max had already noticed with satisfaction that there was a fair amount of game to be had for the shooting, water was abundant, while for the animals there was a greater supply of herbage than they had seen for many a long day. By this time Moreas' head appeared to be quite turned. They had scarcely reached their camp before he was off to try his luck among the sands of the old river bed.

It was almost dark when he returned. When he did so, however, he shook like a man with the palsy.

"Look what I have found!" he said, scarcely able to contain himself for joy. "The old man did not deceive me after all. They are here. Here, I tell you. I shall be the richest man on earth."

As he spoke he unclasped his fist, and showed Max *two fair-sized diamonds* lying in the hollow of his hand.



CHAPTER XVII.

The week following their arrival at their destination was remarkable in more senses than one. After the success which had attended Moreas' search among the sands of the river-bed it was impossible for him to be idle for a moment. It was no sooner light than he was at work; he kept at it with feverish eagerness until darkness fell; and grudged every hour until dawn should reappear again. Under the influence of their success his old antagonism for Max seemed to have left him. If he were not quite so friendly as he had once been, it seemed as if he were at least anxious to make amends for his conduct in the immediate past. One thing, however, puzzled Max more than he liked to say, and made him suspicious of the other's overtures. This was the fact that Moreas invariably preferred to do his work alone, and did not appear to mind very much what excuse he made so long as he achieved his object. It is true that in the evening he invariably added his day's findings to the general store with scrupulous exactness, but on no account would he allow his companion to be present at the washings. Scarcely a day passed without their discovering something of value.

By the end of the month they had discovered six stones of considerable size, fourteen medium, and some twenty or thirty small ones, varying from a quarter to a carat each. These they placed in a small bag and religiously counted every evening.

Influenced by such a run of luck, Moreas' manner underwent yet another change. He became geniality itself, upbraided himself for his former treatment of Max, and declared that if he had searched the whole world through he could not have found a better companion. He vowed that he entertained the affection of a brother for him.

How, considering all this, Max's suspicions were first aroused, I cannot say. It may have been that the other's excessive eagerness to recognise the honesty with which every evening he himself handed over the stones he had collected may have had something to do with it. It is certain, however, that, little by little, a feeling of positive distrust was born in his mind. In vain he tried to dismiss it from his thoughts. The more he told himself that he was doing the other an injustice, the stronger the feeling became that Moreas was playing a double game. He determined to watch him closely, and did so without, however, detecting anything suspicious. For the reason that they worked in different places, it was impossible for him to check all that was found. To propose to work with him, in order that he might keep an eye on him, was equally out of the question.

No, there was nothing for it but for him to watch and wait, hoping that if anything were wrong, some happy chance would enable him to detect and rectify it.

When they had been two months upon the field, and had explored the river up and down for a distance of nearly twenty miles, Max inquired of Moreas whether he did not think it was time for them to return to their friends.

"Perhaps it is," said Moreas slowly. "And I think it will be better if we tried the other route, through Peru into Brazil. It is just possible it might be both safer and quicker than the way we came."

"It's just possible it might," Max answered, realising at once what the other was driving at.

"But what about the party who are waiting for us on the other side of the mountains? How would it affect them?"

"They would in all probability return to civilisation," said Moreas, "believing us to be dead. I can't see that it would be altogether to our disadvantage if they did. What do you say?"

Max was silent for a moment. When he spoke again there was a note in his voice that should have warned the other not to proceed too far with his suggestions.

"Look here, Moreas," he said, "I can see quite plainly what is in your mind, and, once and for all, let me tell you I will not have it. We are here in the interests of Bertram and the others, as well as to look after ourselves. We have pledged our honour to return within a certain time, and that is what we are going to do! You know me, I think, and you are aware that if I say a thing I mean it. Let that end the matter."

"Well, well, let it be as you wish," said Moreas, with extraordinary calmness. "Perhaps it wouldn't be the thing, and if you are determined to play straight with them I will do the same. You're a good fellow, Max, and I'm sorry I suggested anything else. Try to forget it."

Though he spoke so fair and appeared so repentant, Max did not feel any the more inclined to trust him. As a matter of fact, the other's ready compliance had made him even more suspicious of his motives than before. He knew that unless Moreas had some other plan in his mind he would not have given up his point or dismissed the matter so calmly.

"The rascal has got something up his sleeve," said Max to himself, when he thought the matter over. "I wish I could

discover what it is. The fellow is a thorough-paced thief as well as a would-be murderer. And I'm not going to trust him as far as I can see him."

For some days after the conversation just recorded, they continued their work as if the subject of their return to civilisation had never been mentioned. Max noticed, however, that his companion did not show as good results as before, the stones were small, milky, and very poor in quality. He spoke to him on the subject.

"The place seems to have suddenly panned out," the other replied angrily. "Above the bend there is not even an indication of the *formacao diamante*. I am beginning to think that for the future it is only on the flat we shall discover them."

Yet even this disastrous intelligence did not prevent him from returning next day to work at the same place. From a vantage spot on the side of the hill to which Max had climbed for the purpose, he could see him busily engaged there, digging and washing as if for dear life. This set Max thinking. Moreas, he knew, would not waste his time, every second of which he valued like so much gold, on unprofitable labour. Then an idea occurred to him, and he determined to act upon it. He had noticed that, every afternoon, a considerable interval elapsed between the time that Moreas had ceased work and his appearance at the camp. What did he do during the time? Max determined to find out. Accordingly, that afternoon, a quarter of an hour or so before the usual time for returning to their camp, he set off along the side of the hill, keeping under cover of the rocks. At last he was near enough to be able to see Moreas in the river-bed, working away with his usual persistence. Five minutes later the other put down his tools and began making his way in an opposite direction to the camp. From the stealthy way in which he walked, and the manner in which he constantly looked behind him, it was plain that he was afraid of being followed. But, as Max asked himself, if his motives were honest, what should he have to fear?

At last he reached what was evidently his destination, a peculiar cluster of rocks some three-quarters of a mile from the camp. A moment later he had disappeared from view, not to reappear for something like a quarter of an hour. When he did so he looked anxiously about him as before, and then, as soon as he had satisfied himself that his proceedings had not been overlooked, started back for the river-bed, keeping as much cover as possible between himself and the place where he supposed Max to be still working.

Max, in his turn, waited until the other was out of sight and then, skirting the base of the hill, approached the rocks where, a quarter of an hour or so before, Moreas had been so mysteriously engaged. He was quite aware that if by any chance Moreas should return and find him there, it would put an end to their partnership.

"Let that be as it may," he said to himself, "I'm determined to find out what it was that brought him here."

When he reached the open space between the rocks, he looked eagerly about him. No sign, however, of anything unusual was to be discovered there. He could not see that the ground had been touched, nor could he find any place where things, such as he was thinking of, could be hidden. The ground was of a sandy description, bare for the most part, but varied here and there with tufts of rough grass, some eight to ten inches in height. After patient investigation he found that one of these showed signs of having lately been pressed down by a heavy weight.

"Now I think I understand," he said to himself, and immediately resolved to overhaul the smaller rocks in its neighbourhood.

A few minutes later he uttered a cry of delight, and immediately replaced the stone he had lifted. Moving to the other side of the circle he carefully overhauled the neighbourhood, in order to make quite sure that Moreas was not returning. Nothing was to be seen of him, however. He accordingly returned to his examination of the hole. As it proved, he was not wrong in his conjecture. In it reposed what he had quite expected to find there, namely, a small leather bag, similar to that in which the diamonds at the camp were kept.

"So, friend Moreas, you turn out to be a thief after all," he said, as he sat down upon the ground and opened the bag. "You hand over to me, for the welfare of the syndicate, the small stones you find, while the more valuable you hide here for your own benefit."

So saying he shot the contents of the bag into the palm of his hand and studied them attentively. It was impossible to say what the collection was worth in its entirety, but the total could scarcely have been less than thirty thousand pounds.

He placed the bag in his pocket, and retraced his steps to the hillside. Once there he sat down and considered the position. To have taken his haul back to the camp, as things stood, would have been the height of folly. In that case they would have been ready at hand for Moreas to take possession of them, should he be lucky enough to put a bullet into Max before the latter could defend himself. No! he must find a new hiding-place for them. He looked the hillside up

and down without discovering what he wanted. Then half way to the summit, and a quarter of a mile on his right, he saw a conspicuous rock, the shape of which reminded him irresistibly of a church steeple. For some distance to the eastward the hill was entirely bare. He accordingly hurried thither, and having measured the distance carefully, foot by foot, dug a large hole, seventy-one feet due east from the rock just mentioned. In this hole he placed the bag containing the precious stones, and afterwards returned the soil to its former position, covering it with a small rock, in order that the fact that he had been digging should not be apparent to the casual observer, should one ever chance to pass that way. Then, to make sure that there was no error in his calculations, he carefully stepped the distance once more. As before, it was seventy-one feet exactly. To further impress this fact upon his memory, he took his hunting-knife, bared his breast, and drew, regardless of the pain, a rough picture of the spire rock, and below it the number "seventy-one," with a large E to indicate the east. The blood gushed out before he had finished, the pain was excruciating, but he showed no sign of flinching. When he had done this he picked up his rifle once more and set off for camp.

On his arrival there he found Moreas seated on a log beside the fire. He looked up as Max came near, and seeing that he was carrying his rifle, asked what sort of luck he had had. The other noticed that there was the same shifty look upon his face that always heralded the approach of mischief. However, since he was prepared for all eventualities, he did not mind so very much. It was when Moreas was genially disposed that he feared him.

"I did not see anything to shoot," Max replied, as he approached the fire. "What luck have you had?"

"Only two small stones," answered the other; "One runs, perhaps, to a carat, and the other to about a half. To tell the truth, I'm getting tired of it. Our luck is but half so good as it was."

"Surely you are not dissatisfied," said Max, seeing that the moment had come for him to bring his accusation. "You should be the last to say that, seeing the nest-egg you've got in the bag under that stone yonder. What more could you want?"

Moreas sprang to his feet with a cry.

"You have taken my stones!" he cried, at the same time producing his pistol. "What have you done with them? Curse you!"

"I have hidden them where you will never find them," answered Max. Then, seeing that the other was advancing threateningly towards him, he cried, "Stand back, Moreas! I warn you, stand back! If you come a step closer, your blood be upon your own head."

"Damn your waste of words!" stormed the other, scarcely able to speak for the rage that was consuming him. "Give me my stones. Tell me where you have hidden them."

"I'll tell you nothing," retorted Max, "save that you had better not come any nearer. I know you for the traitorous cur you are, and if you advance another step I'll shoot you."

But Moreas was too far gone to hear or heed him. A fit of demoniacal rage had taken possession of him. The madness he had shown in the desert, and which had since died down, had returned to him once more and with a yell of fury he pointed his revolver at Max and fired. The bullet whistled past the other's ear. He fired again, this time with better execution, for Max felt a stab, as of a red-hot knitting needle passing through his shoulder, and knew that he was hit. Still able, however, to lift his arm, he raised his rifle, pointed it, and pulled the trigger. Moreas leapt into the air with a cry, and an instant later fell forward on his face. His body quivered for a moment, and then all was still.

"Exit Moreas," said Max quietly, and then, letting his rifle fall, put up his right hand to his face. The world was swimming before his eyes. He staggered and fell to the ground in a dead faint. How long he lay there he could not tell, but when his senses returned to him it was night and the stars were shining brightly. His shoulder hurt him terribly, but he gave it scarcely a thought. "What shall I do?" he muttered, as he staggered to his feet. "I cannot stay here. This place is accursed."

His one all-mastering desire was to be done with that plain for ever. He felt that it would drive him mad to stay on it another hour. The fire was still burning, though very faintly; sufficient light, however, came from it to show him Moreas' body still lying beside it. The man's dying shriek rang in his ears, as it would ring so long as he could hear anything. He shuddered, as the recollection of the scene occurred to him. There was no doubt about it, he must get away at once. With as much haste as he could command, he stumbled about the camp, collecting the two mules and loading them with such things as he desired to carry away with him. The small bag of diamonds, to which Moreas had contributed a minor share, he resolved to take with him. With the others, however, which had been the cause of all the trouble, and for which Moreas had paid with his life, he would have nothing to do. If the other members of the party desired to

possess them, let them come after them and find them for themselves. For his part, he was not going to handle them again. Then, throwing another shuddering glance at his dead foe, he reeled away in the dark up the hillside, *en route* for civilisation once more. The spirit of Moreas seemed to be walking beside him, and it was as if his last dreadful shriek echoed continually among the hills. Scarcely knowing what he was doing, weak and exhausted from loss of blood, he staggered on as best he could, willing to do or bear anything rather than remain in a place, the mere thought of which was as bitter to him as hell. At last, unable to go any further, he threw himself down upon the ground and fell into a deep sleep that was something more than a mere slumber. He can remember nothing more save that one longing continually possessed him, namely, to push on in search of Bertram, and never to see that plain again.

How he managed to accomplish it in the condition in which he was then, no one will ever know. It is quite certain that he himself could not tell. Cross the range, however, and that terrible desert on the other side of it, he certainly did. A month later, with both mules missing, though where he had lost them he could not tell, and his own frame reduced to a skeleton, he reached the spot in the mountains where he and Bertram had drawn lots and had said good-bye to each other so many months before. Then he dropped, as he thought, to die.



CHAPTER XVIII.

Max's surprise may be imagined when, after he had fallen unconscious, he opened his eyes to find Bertram kneeling beside him.

"Thank God!" said the latter, as soon as he saw that his friend recognised him. "We had begun to think it was all over with you."

Max endeavoured to speak, but his voice was too weak to utter a word. A moment later he had closed his eyes once more. Though so near death's door, he had managed to slip out before that grim portal had actually closed upon him. The effect of all that he had been through, however, was not to be shaken off in a day. For a week he hovered between life and death, devotedly attended by Bertram, who scarcely left his side for a moment. Needless to say, the curiosity of the trio was painfully excited to know what had become of Moreas, and how it was that Max had returned alone. The bullet-wound in his shoulder and the marks upon his chest, which, by the way, were beginning to heal, only added to their wonderment. But, anxious as they were to hear the story, Bertram would not allow him to give them as much as a hint of it until he was strong enough to do so without fear of injury to himself. Then, for one never-to-be-forgotten hour, Max spoke. He described all that had befallen them since they had said farewell to each other; he told them of the success that had attended their labours on the field, and then went on to speak of Moreas' treachery, and of the last great discovery he had made.

"Feeling that it was the only thing to be done, I returned to the camp and taxed him with it," he continued. "As soon as he knew that he was discovered, and not only discovered, but that his precious stones had been found and hidden elsewhere, he was beside himself with rage. For my own part, I believe it was his intention, in any case, to have shot me as soon as I should return; be that as it may, however, he certainly fired at me, and his bullet pierced my shoulder. In return, I shot him dead. Then, without thought of anything else, save to see the last of it, I gathered my goods together and fairly bolted from the plain."

"But what about the second bag of diamonds?" cried Rodriguez, and Pereira echoed the question.

"I left them in the place I had chosen for them," Max replied. "There let them remain."

"Hear, hear!" said Bertram. "I for one will have nothing to do with them."

The two Spaniards, however, thought otherwise. If Moreas were dead, and the two others were willing to forego their share, here was a chance of a glorious fortune for both of them. Max, however, encouraged by Bertram, remained obstinate. He was determined that the two men, even provided they were willing to run the risks attendant on reaching the plain, should not obtain the stones. They might curse, implore, threaten, and cajole, but without success.

"There are diamonds there," said Max. "If you are desirous of making your fortunes, go and search for yourselves; but the stones which cost Moreas his life, and very nearly cost me mine, shall remain where they are hidden."

With that decision the two men were compelled to be content, but black looks and sinister mutterings became the order of the day, and more than once it was necessary for Bertram to give them very plainly to understand what course he should adopt in the event of certain contingencies arising.

"And what are we going to do now?" Bertram inquired of Max, when the latter had recovered sufficiently to make it possible for them to think of retracing their steps to civilisation.

"That's more than I can say," Max replied. "Let us get back into the world first."

Next day they accordingly started on their homeward journey, but for the first week they were compelled to travel slowly, on account of Max's still enfeebled condition. Little by little, however, his strength returned to him, until, by the time they had reached the forest, which alone separated them from the village at the end of the railway, the same at which they had purchased the mules, he was almost himself again. On arrival they installed themselves at the *hospederia*, the same at which Bertram had announced his recognition of Max as the Crown Prince of Pannonia, and at which Moreas and the Spaniards had indulged in their orgie so many months before. What a variety of things had happened since they had said good-bye to it! Then, they had been setting out on the expedition, full of hope and confidence; now, they had returned, minus one of their party, and without the great wealth which they expected to bring with them. They had, however, the small bag which Max had brought with him, and this being so, on the morning following their arrival, Bertram set off for Rio, returning next day with an elderly individual who weighed, tested, and valued the stones. A price having been agreed upon between them, the money was paid over and each man received his share, after which the old gentleman returned to the capital, and all that was left was for Max and Bertram to decide what their future movements should be. The two Spaniards had determined to take a holiday, then they intended

purchasing fresh mules with which to make another attempt to reach the place where the diamonds were hidden. Again and again they had endeavoured to induce Max to reveal the hiding-place, but without success. Finding entreaty useless, they attempted to bribe him, promising him first a quarter and at last half the stones, if he would supply them with the necessary information. But he was not to be tempted. Bertram and he had decided that since Moreas had paid for the stones with his life, they should not be touched. Accordingly, they departed next day for Rio.

"Have you formed any plans for the future?" inquired Bertram of Max, when they were alone together.

"None," Max replied, "except that I am determined to leave Brazil as soon as possible. Have you anything to propose?"

"Not at present," the other replied. "If only there were some fighting to be had, I should have liked to have tried my hand at soldiering. But when we left the world was so confoundedly peaceful, and I suppose it is still. There's one idea that I have at the back of my head, however. I don't know whether it would commend itself to you?"

"Tell me about it," said Max.

"Well, it concerns the South Sea Islands," said Bertram a little diffidently. "Ever since I was a youngster I've had a hankering to visit them. In fact, it was my original intention to do so, and if I hadn't got stranded in this country, who knows but what I might have been a king by this time."

"The South Sea Islands?" said Max at once. "I'm inclined to think that's not by any means a bad idea. And what was it your intention to do there besides founding a kingdom?"

"I thought of purchasing a schooner and going in for the island trade," the other answered. "It must be a jolly life, if all one hears is true. Sailing continually across blue seas, amongst the loveliest islands man can imagine, dealing with the pleasantest people on earth----"

"And figuring as the *piece de resistance* at some native banquet, I suppose," answered Max with a laugh. "Seriously, I like the idea immensely. Why shouldn't we try it together? We're both in possession of a decent sum of money, and if we make our way to Buenos Ayres, and then across the Andes into Chili, we could easily get a boat from Valparaiso to Honolulu. We shouldn't find much difficulty in picking up a handy schooner I expect, and then the firm of Bertram & Mortimer could be placed on a definite footing. What do you say?"

"It's just the very thing I should enjoy," answered Bertram. "But what about yourself? Are you as determined as ever not to return to Europe?"

"Every bit as determined," Max replied. "In point of fact, I intend going a step further. As soon as we get to Rio I shall have a document drawn up in which I shall renounce, once and for all, any claim I may have upon the throne. Let my brother take it; he is a far better man in every way, and though you may think me a fool for saying so, I have felt for many years positively certain in my own mind that he is decreed by fate to occupy it."

With that, Max told Bertram the old legend of Michael's cross, and of the gipsy's prophecy concerning it.

"Do you really mean to say that you believe it?" asked Bertram when he had finished.

"I certainly do," Max answered, "and you can see for yourself how much of it has come true. Paul has Michael's cross upon his brow, and he will sit upon the throne as soon as the Republic shall come to an end. I am as confident of that as I am of anything. And now let us discuss the pros and cons of this South Seas business. I am all eagerness to embark upon it."

They did as he suggested, and for over an hour were busily engaged working out the details of the scheme. Eventually it was arranged that they should start for Rio next morning, and find some one there to draw up the deed of which Max had just spoken, and who could be trusted to keep his secret, and when it had been despatched to the proper quarter, make for the capital of the Argentine, and thence across the Andes into Chili, embarking as soon as a vessel could be found for the islands. That night Max dreamed of tropical islands lifting their palm-clad heads out of azure seas, of fast-sailing schooners, and a life that was all sunshine and excitement. When he woke he was even more keen on the notion than he had been on the previous day. They caught an early train for Rio, and towards the middle of the afternoon found themselves once more in the capital of the Republic. Now what Max had to do was to get his money out of the bank and to transact his legal business without Brockford or De Montezma becoming aware of it.

"I will give you my cheque," he said to Bertram, when they had taken up their abode at a small hotel at the opposite end of the town to that at which his friends had their offices. "You can cash it while I remain in the background."

Bertram agreed, and set off upon his errand. On entering the bank he placed the cheque upon the counter. The cashier picked it up and examined the signature with a look of surprise upon his face. The manager happened to be passing at

the moment, and when the draft was shown to him he glanced sharply at Bertram.

"Pardon me," he began, "but might I request the favour of a few moments' conversation with you while the cashier is counting the money?"

"I shall be very pleased," said Bertram, and when the manager had given an instruction in an undertone to one of his clerks, he followed him into his private room. The door having been closed, and when the other had pushed forward a chair, Bertram inquired what he could do for him.

"I notice that you have presented a draft signed by Mr. Mortimer, who, a few months since, was employed in the firm of Montezma & Co., of this city. I also notice that the cheque is dated to-day, a circumstance which would seem to point to the fact that Mr. Mortimer is in Rio at the present moment."

"That is quite possible," Bertram returned stiffly. "He may be or he may not. I don't see how it concerns anyone but himself. I am not aware that he has done anything to necessitate his keeping out of the way!"

"I am afraid we are playing at cross purposes," said Doubleday. "Pray do not imagine that I am in any way antagonistic to his Royal----"

Bertram pricked up his ears. So the manager was also aware that Max was the Crown Prince of Pannonia? He was sorry for that; it might lead to complications.

"My only desire," the other continued, "for speaking to you about--well, about Mr. Mortimer, was that, should you know his address, you might be able to tell him how anxiously his friends have been seeking his whereabouts. If he would only grant them an interview, they would be so thankful."

"That, I feel sure, he will not do," said Bertram. "Nothing would induce him to think of such a thing."

The manager sighed.

"It seems a pity," he went on. "I cannot think why he should be so wilful."

"Nor I," answered Bertram. "The fact, however, remains that it is his own business, and he is entitled to conduct it as he pleases." As he said this he rose.

"I will see if your money is prepared," said the manager, following him.

"Many thanks," returned Bertram, and when he had received it from the cashier, he left the bank, the manager bidding him good-bye upon the doorstep. Then, having made sure he was not being followed by anyone from the bank, he set off as fast as he could go in the direction of the inn where he and Max had taken up their abode. He was not aware that Mr. Brockford had been standing on the opposite side of the street waiting for him to come out, and that as soon as he did so and had started on his walk, the other followed him, keeping a safe distance behind, but never for one moment losing sight of him. Reaching the inn, Bertram made his way to their sitting-room and handed Max the money. He was in the act of informing him of what had taken place at the bank, when there was a tap at the door. A moment later it opened, and Brockford stood before them.

Max sprang to his feet with an exclamation of astonishment.

"Brockford!" he cried, "what on earth does this mean? How did you know I was here?"

He looked at Bertram as if he thought he must be responsible for the other's presence.

"You do your friend an injustice if you suspect him," said Brockford. "He did not know that I was following him. It was Doubleday, the bank manager, who put me on the trail. He sent word to me that your friend was at the bank, and when he left I followed him here. Thank God, I have found you at last. We have searched the country for you. Oh, you foolish man, why did you run away like that?"

"Because my brother Paul was in Rio looking for me," Max replied simply. "To have remained here would have been to have fallen into his hands."

"And could you have fallen into kinder hands?"

"That is beside the point," said Max. "It is because of his love for me that I must keep out of the way. It may sound paradoxical to say so, but it is the truth."

"Well, you can keep out of the way no longer now," answered Brockford. "You have returned in the nick of time."

"Returned for what?" Max inquired in astonishment.

"Do you mean to say that you don't know?" asked the other.

"I know nothing," Max replied, with an unmistakable faltering in his voice. "We have been in the wilds so long that we are ignorant of all that has happened elsewhere. What is it?"

Bertram noticed that the hand resting on the back of the chair trembled.

"What have you to tell me?" he asked again.

"Is it possible that you are not aware that you are the King of Pannonia?" continued Brockford in an awed voice.

Max started back with an exclamation of horror.

"King!" he cried in a choking voice. "My God, man! What do you mean? You don't mean--that--that----"

"I mean that your father is dead, Sire," said Brockford quietly. "He died three months ago, and your mother followed him six weeks later."

This was more than Max could bear. He dropped into a chair and covered his face with his hands. For some minutes silence reigned in the room. Then he rose and, with a face white and haggard as a sere cloth, turned to Brockford.

"Tell me everything," he said. "I'm stronger now and can bear it."

Thereupon, Brockford, to whom I had written, in case he should hear of him, gave a complete *resume* of all that had occurred during his absence. He informed him of our father's death, just at the time when there was a possibility of Pannonia becoming a Monarchy once more. He told him of our mother's end such a short time afterwards; of the gradual crumbling away of the Republic, and of the war with Mandravia to which it had given rise. He revealed to him the fact that being unable to find Max, search how I would, and seeing that there was no time to lose, I had sprung into the breach, and, supported by the Count von Marquart, now a very old man, but as keen and self-assertive as of yore, and the majority of the nobles, had seized the throne and declared myself Regent in his stead. Max's face, so Brockford has since told me, when he heard the news, was almost transformed.

"I have heard a great deal during my life," said the latter, "of what is called kingly dignity. I never realised what it was, however, until I looked at his. At that moment he was every inch a king."

"Father and mother dead," he said, "and my country in danger. There is no doubt now; no doubt at all."

The others did not understand what he meant at the time, but they have learnt since.

"My friends," he began in a softer voice than he had yet used, "my kind friends, you see how this news has affected me. Will you give me time to think it over?"

They were about to withdraw in order to leave him alone with his thoughts.

"Will your Majesty believe that all I have is at your Majesty's disposal?" said Brockford, in an undertone before he left.

Max started as if he had been stung.

"No, no!" he cried, "you must not call me that."

An hour later he was back at Brockford's house at Paqueta, where for some hours he shut himself up and would see nobody. He was fighting the greatest battle of his life. During the afternoon he called for all the newspapers that could be procured, in order that he might study the war from its commencement. Later on he left his room and found the other two men in the garden. Traces of the struggle he had passed through still lingered on his face as he greeted them. It was plainly seen that he had arrived at a decision.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I ask you to give me your words of honour, that what I am about to say shall never pass your lips."

He waited for them to speak. They looked first at each other and then at him. At last they gave him their assurance that his wish should be respected.

"I have fought it out by myself," he said, "and have come to a conclusion. I shall return to Pannonia at once!"

"God bless you!" muttered Brockford, but not so low that Max could not hear it.

"My country is at war, and if she is to be victorious, every son who has the strength to wield a sword should rally to

her assistance. It is my intention to go back and offer my services, not in the capacity of her king, but taking my place beside the humblest in the ranks. I place my life in the hands of God, and leave the issue with Him. If Pannonia is victorious, then I shall have proved my love for her, and it is possible that what you wish may some day come to pass. If not, then I shall have done what I shall always believe to have been my duty."

"In that case, I have a request to make," said Bertram nervously.

"What is it?" Max inquired. "It would be hard if I could not grant it, seeing that I already owe you a debt I never can repay."

"It is that, if you are going, you will allow me to accompany you?"

"You shall do so if you wish," said Max quietly, and as he said it he held out his hand, which the other took.

Two days later Max and Bertram sailed for Europe.

CHAPTER XIX.

Of the various vicissitudes which befell our unhappy country from the time that, egged on to ruin by unscrupulous men, she drove her sovereign across the border to seek an asylum elsewhere, it would be impossible for me to speak in anything like detail. It must suffice, therefore, that the long record of chicanery and blundering, of mismanagement and oppression found its climax in the war to which I referred at the end of the previous chapter. Dark as the outlook seemed, it was destined to become even blacker before many months were passed. The battles which marked the opening of the campaign have long since become a matter of history, partly by reason of the desperate heroism shown by our troops, but more, I fear, on account of the inability and blunderings of their leaders. How heartrending that time was to us I must leave my readers to imagine. Max seemed lost for ever; I was in exile, and yet we were compelled to remain inactive, watching our devoted country rushing headlong to the ruin which had been so long prophesied for it. Had it not been for the counsels of my friends I should have returned to Pannonia at the outbreak of hostilities, and have offered myself for service in her army in any capacity they might have chosen for me. This, however, I was earnestly implored not to do. Accordingly I remained in England, watching the struggle with an aching heart, dreading the worst, yet unable to do anything to avert the catastrophe I felt sure must come. Then came the chance I was so eagerly awaiting, and, as all the world knows, on the sixteenth of September, a most fateful day in Pannonia's history, the Republic was overthrown, and, at the unanimous wish of the country, I returned to act as Regent until my brother's whereabouts should be discovered. Of the emotions I experienced when once more I set foot upon Pannonian soil, I will not speak here. They are too sacred for the cold publicity of print.

Having thus roughly summarised the events that occurred between the time that Max and Bertram had decided to see service in Pannonia, and my return to that country, I must now follow the record of my brother's doings. Of all the strange events in Max's life, there was not one stranger or more characteristic of him than his decision in this matter. It was on the 31st of July, that is to say, a fortnight before the battle of Depzig, the same in which our forces suffered such a disastrous defeat, that he set foot with his faithful companion upon his native soil. A week later, as if to make amends, General Groplau, with a zeal and gallantry that is beyond all praise, met and defeated a force of the enemy much greater than his own. It was with his army that Max took service, not as became his rank, but in the capacity of a private soldier. That he and his companion had seen service before soon became apparent, but little did anyone guess that the stalwart, handsome man, who did not know the meaning of the word fear, who was never tired, and whose only apparent desire was to be placed where the danger was greatest, was none other than their king. During the first month of his new life he was present at no less than three battles, in each of which he displayed conspicuous heroism. Brave as our soldiers were, such valour as his could scarcely fail to have passed unnoticed. But it was not until that dreadful day when Gredlau was lost, and all the officers of his own regiment had been killed, and he had rallied what remained of the men, continuing the fight until they were nearly all disabled and shot down, that any recognition of his bravery was afforded him. Then he was summoned to the general's presence. He had been wounded in the arm, and was still weak from loss of blood.

"Your conduct has been reported to me," said the general, who, being a brave man himself, could recognise courage in others. "I can only regret that your efforts were not rewarded with success. I am proud to offer you a commission in the regiment you have served so well. I know of no man who has a better right to it."

Max saluted.

"Pardon me, general," he said respectfully, but firmly, "but--but, with your permission, I must decline the honour."

"Decline the honour!" cried the other in surprise, and also with some asperity. "What do you mean? Surely you understand the honour that has been done you?"

"I understand perfectly," Max replied. "Yet I would prefer to remain as I am."

Whatever the general's thoughts may have been, it is certain that his surprise equalled them. His experience of men had shown them to be more ready to seek rewards than to decline them. However, he had no time to analyse such a phenomenon just then.

"As you please, as you please," he answered. "Remain in the ranks if you prefer it. It seems to me, however, that you are throwing away the one chance of your life."

Then calling one of his aides-de-camp, he turned his attention to another matter, and Max, having saluted, returned to his bivouac. But though the general appeared to have set the matter aside, it did not seem as if he had altogether forgotten it, for later on, commenting on the incident, he said to one of his officers, "That man's face worries me. He is like a person I have seen before, but I cannot, for the life of me, think whose face it is, or where I met its owner."

On two other occasions Max came even nearer to being discovered. A week or so later he was on sentry duty, when a man, who had for many years acted as intermediary between the Count von Marquart and our father in England, stopped his horse and addressed a question to him. For a moment Max thought he could scarcely fail to recognise him, but the beard he wore, and the uniform of a private soldier must have changed his appearance, for the officer passed on without comment. The third occasion, however, was more desperate than either I have yet described.

It was in the early morning on the day when the battle of Hehnsdorff was fought, and Max's regiment, with two others of the line, were sent to occupy the village on the right bank of the river. For hours they defended it with the tenacity of despair. At last, the general, seeing that it was hopeless to continue to hold it, despatched an aide with an order to the officer in command to abandon it and to fall back upon a wood some three-quarters of a mile or so to the rear. The aide had scarcely entered the main street of the little hamlet, when a shell burst in the road, killing his horse and tearing a great gaping wound in the young fellow's side. Seeing what had happened, Max, who, with Bertram and several others, was in a cottage close at hand, ran to his assistance. It was a shocking spectacle they had before them, but, despite the blood, Max recognised the man. Picking him up as tenderly as possible, he bore him to the cottage where the commander was located.

The poor fellow had just strength enough left to say, "The general bids you retire, and take up your position in the wood behind the church," when his head fell forward and he fainted. A moment later the order was given, the village was vacated, and the troops were slowly and sullenly retiring in the direction indicated. The aide-de-camp still lay where they had placed him, his life-blood slowly ebbing from him and forming a pool by his side.

"He's a man I've known all my life," said Max hoarsely to Bertram. "I can't leave him here. Between us we'll carry him to the rear, though I fear the surgeons can do nothing for him."

Thus encumbered they set off across the open ground, now being ploughed by the shells of the enemy. How it was they were not hit is impossible to say, yet, incredible as it may appear, they reached the wood in safety. On the further side the surgeons were at work, and thither they bore the dying man. But officer or no officer, it was necessary that he should wait his turn, and seeing this, Max placed him upon the ground and endeavoured to make him as comfortable as possible. That his case was hopeless there could be no sort of doubt. Indeed, he was little more than a dead man as it was. Rising to his feet, for he had been kneeling beside the other, Max was about to return to where his comrades had taken up their position, when the wounded man opened his eyes and looked up at him. Max saw that he was trying to speak, and he accordingly knelt down beside him, for he saw that the other had recognised him.

"Your Majesty," he whispered. Then after a pause he added, "Thank God you are found at last!"

"Hush! hush!" Max replied. "I am no king, only a Pannonian soldier!"

"You are both," gasped the dying man. "They have searched everywhere for you. This must be told."

"No, no!" answered Max. "I can never consent."

But the other was not to be denied. Putting forth all the strength that remained in him, he raised himself and called one of the doctors by name.

The surgeon, who happened to be disengaged at the moment, hastened towards him. Before he could reach him, however, the poor fellow had fallen upon the ground, and was dead. With a cold sweat upon his forehead, such as the fear of battle had never been able to produce, Max staggered to his feet.

"He is dead," said the doctor, after a brief examination. "Poor Fritz! poor Fritz! it will break his mother's heart. Where did this happen, my man?"

"In the village yonder," Max replied. "He was conveying an order to our colonel to retire."

Then with a choking feeling in his throat he made his way, accompanied by Bertram, to the wood.

"That was a very near thing for you," said the latter, as they hurried along. "Oh, why won't you declare yourself and take up the position which is yours by right?"

"Not yet, not yet," said Max, shaking his head. "Fate will decide everything for me in good time. I intend to leave it to her."

Fate very nearly decided it for him on three occasions during the next few hours. Once his helmet was knocked off by a bullet, once he was only saved by the butt of his rifle, which he had lowered to reload, while on the third occasion he was giving water to a wounded man, who had fallen beside him, when a bullet shattered the bottle he held in his hand.

Next morning it was rumoured in the camp that I, Prince Paul, had returned to Pannonia, that the Republic was no more, and that the Ramonyi dynasty had come to its own again. Later in the day the news was officially communicated to the troops, and with his comrades, ragged, tattered, weary, half-starved, and altogether forlorn, Max swore allegiance to himself. A more grotesque situation could scarcely be imagined.

"Prince Paul is declared Regent for his brother," said a grey-haired sergeant, as they ate their frugal supper by the camp fire. "I wonder where the king is?"

I have often conjectured what he would have said had he known that the missing man was at that moment seated beside him.

Strange though it may seem, from the very moment of the return of our family to Pannonia, a change took place in the war. Success after success crowned our efforts, in consequence of which our troops took heart, until, at last, instead of carrying on the strife in our own country, on the twenty-second day of October we, for the first time, crossed the borders, driving the enemy before us. Little by little, but with a sureness and steadiness there could be no mistaking or denying, Groplau was working out the plan he had long since formed in his mind. With what sort of good fortune it was attended all those who have followed the history of the war will be familiar. They will recall how fifty thousand troops, by culpable negligence on the part of the enemy's leaders, were divided into two portions and were prevented from uniting again; how the Count von Leckstein, by a swift flank movement, cut off their retreat, thus compelling them to take refuge in the city of Zaarburg. No success could have been more complete, no movement more thoroughly prepared, or more admirably carried out. Contesting every inch of the way, fighting with the fury that was the outcome of despair, for they must have known that they were lost, hemmed in on every side, they at length entered the gates of the same city as that into which Rudolf the Brave had once brought a victorious army and more than two thousand prisoners. Still working with the same mathematical precision, Groplau's army took up its position on the plain that surrounded it, and there and then the siege commenced. Winter came and found the garrison still holding out. It was, however, as impossible for them to escape as it was for us to get in. Their vigilance was only equalled by our own. In other parts of the country the war was proceeding with varying success; here, however, save for the continual artillery duel, there was little or no fighting. The suspense, to say nothing of the inactivity, was wearying in the extreme, until, at last, every one felt convinced that something must be done to relieve it.

"It seems strange," said Bertram to Max one day, as they stood watching the picturesque old city across the river, "that it should be so difficult to get inside those walls. Surely there must be some way of managing it?"

"That's just what I've been thinking lately," answered Max. "I should very much like to make the attempt. It would be an adventure after my own heart."

"If you are willing to try," returned the other, "I would go into it with you. What a grand thing it would be!"

"If only we could open the gates to admit our troops!" said Max. "It seems impossible at first glance, but we might do our best. Even if we did not succeed it would not very much matter. I've a good mind to ask permission to make the attempt."

That evening he announced that he had been fortunate enough to obtain his commanding officer's consent to investigate the walls and river bank with a view to entering the city.

"You can never succeed," said that gruff and grim old officer when he had heard everything, "and your life will in all probability pay the forfeit. But you have earned the right to make the attempt, my lad, and if you are willing to be such a fool as to run the risk, Heaven forbid that I should attempt to prevent you. Try your luck, and let me know, if you are not killed, how you succeed."

Permission having been thus grudgingly obtained, Max and Bertram repaired to their quarters to work out their plans and to make the preparations for the adventures of the evening. Undeterred by any thought of the risk they would run, they worked away as happily as schoolboys. A little before midnight they left the camp and made their way cautiously across the open country toward the somewhat sluggish river that made the circuit of the city walls. Fortunately for them the night was dark, and a thick drizzle was falling, blotting out the landscape effectually, and making it extremely difficult to see more than a few yards ahead. Though they knew that for this reason the guards would in all probability be more on the alert than usual, they had the consolation of knowing that the chances were that, hidden by the mist, their presence would be less likely to be discovered than on other occasions. For some time past a certain portion of the wall had exercised a great fascination for Max. The particular section in question was not a great distance removed from the main gate, and, for more reasons than one, it seemed to him that if an attack was to be made at all this was the place at which it should be attempted. It was towards this point, accordingly, that they directed their steps, proceeding with the greatest caution, until at length they reached the river's bank.

"It strikes me we're likely to have a cold swim," Max whispered to his companion, as he looked across the water. "Keep as close to me as you can, and, above all, make no noise. If you do they'll fire upon us that instant."

A few moments later they were in the water, striking out for the opposite bank. As Max had predicted, the water was bitterly cold; fortunately, however, they were both strong swimmers, and the distance was not sufficiently great to subject them to any great amount of risk so far as cramp was concerned.

As they got a footing on the opposite bank, above them towered the city wall, rising to a height of scarcely less than forty feet. At its foot, and directly in front of them, was a strip of sloping bank some six or eight feet in width. Taking care to make no noise, even though it would be scarcely likely to be heard had they done so, they climbed up, and then carefully walked along this narrow platform, pausing now and again to carefully examine the wall and to make a note of the facilities it presented for effecting the purpose they had in view. Much to their disappointment, however, no fitting place presented itself. It is true that with the assistance of a ladder it might have been possible to scale the wall, but the strip of bank before referred to was so short and narrow, and the height of the wall itself was so great, that the number of ladders which could have been set upon it would have been quite inadequate to carry the force of men necessary to ensure the success of such a gigantic undertaking.

"And yet it is the only place," said Max, in a disappointed whisper, "in the whole circuit of the walls where it would be safe to try. Let me get fifty men over at this point and I guarantee to seize the main gate and to have the troops in the city before anyone could tell what had happened. As it is, there is nothing for it but for us to return and to test some other place another night."

Seeing that it was no use their remaining, and remembering that every moment they delayed added to their danger, they determined to set off. As noiselessly as otters, therefore, they slipped into the water and re-crossed the river. Immediately on their return to camp, Max reported himself to his commanding officer and informed him of the ill-success which had followed their enterprise.

"As I expected," he answered, when they had unfolded to him the various details of the attempt.

"However, it's a good thing you got back safely and without arousing their suspicions. Do I understand you to say that you desire to try your luck again?"

"Again and again until we succeed," Max replied. "There must be some way of getting in, if it can only be found. I mean to find it."

The colonel looked curiously at the man before him. He noticed that he did not speak like a common soldier, and he wondered what his history could be. He asked one or two further questions, and then bade him return to his quarters, giving them permission to make the attempt again, if they were still crack-brained enough to desire to do so.

The next night proved too fine for the attempt, but on the night following, having made a careful inspection of the neighbourhood during the day, and finding that it was sufficiently dark for them to cross the river, they set off. This time, however, they met with no better success than before, and returned from their expedition disappointed, but by no means disheartened.

"No," said Max to Bertram, when they discussed the matter in solemn conclave afterwards, "there can be no sort of doubt about one thing, and that is the fact that the place we first tried near the main gates is the point, and the only one that is likely to serve our purpose."

For the next few days he was occupied in a brown study, turning and twisting the situation in his mind. Then an idea occurred to him, an idea so luminous that he wondered he had not thought of it before. He described it to Bertram, who, sanguine as ever, declared that it could not be anything but successful. They therefore set off once more to interview the colonel, to whom Max explained his scheme.

"I scarcely know what to say," the other replied, when he had heard him out. "The notion certainly seems feasible enough, and, given a considerable slice of luck, might possibly succeed; the question is, however, whether the enemy would allow it to be carried out. One small slip and it would result in a *fiasco*. However, I will lay it before General Groplau without delay, and hear what he has to say. If there is any chance of success in it you may be sure it will be tried. The Prince Regent is expected here next week, and I have no doubt the general would like to present him with the keys of the city as a souvenir of his first visit to his army."

Bertram has since informed me that Max turned very pale on hearing this. The colonel, however, was too much occupied with another matter, which had just been presented to him to notice his consternation. Even had he done so, I doubt very much whether he would have had any suspicion of the cause which had given rise to it. Later that evening he sent an orderly to call Max to his presence once more.

"I have spoken to the general," he said, "and I may tell you that he is favourably inclined towards the scheme you have submitted. He desires to question you upon the subject personally, so that you had better make your way to his quarters with me and tell him everything."

Max did as he was directed, and followed his colonel along the hillside to the chateau, where General Groplau had taken up his residence. The General was in his study.

"Your commanding officer," he said, as Max entered, "has informed me that you and one of your fellow-men are desirous of making an attempt to enter the city. Furnish me, in detail, with your plan."

Thus encouraged, Max set to work and gave the general an outline of the idea he had formed in his own mind. After he had finished, the other rapped upon the writing-table softly with his fingers, and his brow was knitted in thought. On his calling for a plan it was brought to him, and he studied it attentively.

"I hear you have already crossed the river under cover of night. Is this so?"

Max respectfully replied that it was, whereupon the other put several further questions to him. When he had heard the answers he once more turned to the plan before him.

"You have an adventurous spirit," he said, looking up after some minutes had elapsed, "I have heard of you before. If I am not mistaken, you are the man to whom I offered a commission, and who surprised me by declining it. Is not that so?"

Max replied in the affirmative, and when he saw the searching way in which the general scanned his face, began to wish he had not been so ready to come to headquarters.

"Well, well," said the other at last, "you have your own reasons, I suppose; reasons which have nothing whatsoever to do with me. However, with regard to this scheme of yours, it seems feasible, and if you are willing to make the attempt I shall be pleased to grant you the necessary permission. A dark night must be chosen, however, and the men must be selected with the utmost care. If your attempt is successful, you will have done a deed which I do not think you will have reason ever to regret. If it fails, I don't suppose we shall hear of you again. Now you can go and make your preparations. Inform your commanding officer of everything you do. And, above all, do not act until you hear from me."

Thus encouraged, Max spent the next few days in preparing for the desperate attempt upon which he and Bertram had so set their hearts. There was so much to be done, so many matters to be arranged; there were competent and trustworthy men to be chosen and instructed in the parts they were to play, and, above all, there was the necessity of preventing the enemy from having any suspicion of what they were about to do.

December 12th, as, alas! many unfortunate families have good reason to remember, opened with sunshine, and was more like a spring than a winter's day. Towards noon, however, clouds appeared in the sky, and as day closed in, snow commenced to fall, and showed every sign of continuing. Nothing could have been better suited to the expedition Max had in view. To his commanding officer he applied for permission to act that night, which permission, all the necessary preparations being made, was readily accorded him. It was still snowing heavily, and, in consequence, the night was so dark and thick that it was scarcely possible to see half a dozen steps ahead. Sad though the recollections of that dreadful time must naturally be to me, for the honour of my House, I like to try and picture Max as he was at that moment. It was his fertile brain which had originated the scheme; it was he who was leading the assault. His valour was well known to the men who were accompanying him, and they would follow wherever he might lead; nevertheless, I fancy they would have gone with him with even greater eagerness had they been aware that their leader was also their king. In order that their presence should run no risk of attracting attention, the order was given to advance towards the river in skirmishing order. Once there they laid themselves down in a sheltered spot upon the bank and waited while Max, who this time would not permit Bertram to accompany him, made his preparations for crossing the river. A small raft, capable of carrying the implements and the stores it was necessary he should take with him, had already been built, and this, with its precious cargo, was now placed in the stream. The men had been instructed before setting out that not a word was to be spoken or a movement made until Max rejoined them. Then, creeping down the bank he lowered himself into the black, icy water below, and struck out for mid-stream, pushing his raft before him as he went. So heavy was the snowstorm, and consequently so dark was the night, that he could see nothing of his direction, and was therefore compelled to trust mainly to chance, in order to arrive safely at the proper spot on the other side. Above all, he knew he must make no noise. While, under existing conditions, he had small fear of being observed by the sentries on the battlements above, yet he had no desire to run any unnecessary risks.

Only let one of them, he argued, entertain the least suspicion of what was going on below, and farewell to the success of his plans. As events turned out, he was luckier than he expected to be. Having made better allowance for the

sluggish current than he had imagined, he was at last rewarded by feeling the further side of the raft grating against the bank. Next moment his feet touched the bottom, and he knew that he was at his destination. So far, everything had progressed admirably, but it was at this point that his real work began. Having reached the security of the bank, he removed the various articles from the raft, drew it out of the water, and placed it carefully against the wall. He feared that if he sent it floating on down stream, it might chance to be observed from the gates, and thus suspicion be aroused. Then, with as little noise as possible, he set to work to dig a hole at the foot of the wall; this finished, he began another one, a short distance further along the shelving bank. The ground was frozen, and so loud did the ring of the pick seem upon it that every moment he expected to receive a challenge from the walls above and to hear a bullet whistle across the water.

In something less than an hour, however, the mines with which he had been furnished were properly laid, after the fashion in which he had been instructed by the engineers. Now, if only he could manage to apply the match to the slow fuses unseen by the enemy, and to make his way back to the men who were waiting for him on the opposite bank, all appeared as if it would be well. Using the raft he had brought with him as a screen, he lit a match and applied it to the fuse. As soon as it had ignited, he crept along the bank and did the same to the second mine; then, having reassured himself that both were burning steadily, he slipped into the water and struck out to join his comrades, and to await the result of his labours. As he reached the opposite shore the clocks in the beleaguered city struck midnight, the hour at which the remainder of troops were to take up their positions at the various posts assigned to them. Snow was still falling heavily, and the wind blew mournfully across the plain as if in anticipation of the agonising drama that was soon to be acted. The fuses were timed to burn in twenty minutes, and before that time had elapsed it was certain that the guards would be changed at the main gates, the objective it was so necessary they should reach. To the hundred men crouching upon the bank every minute seemed an hour. To Max, wet and cold as he was, each was like an eternity. He was possessed by all sorts of fears. What if the fuses should have gone out! What if any mistake should have been made in the arrangements, and the troops not be in their proper places at the stipulated time! What if, when they had broken in, the garrison should turn out and intercept them before they could reach the main gate and overpower the guard! In the horrible uncertainty of the moment, anything seemed likely to happen. Again and again he tried to be patient, but his efforts were in vain. Surely the fuses must be near the mines by this time. If daylight should come all would be lost. He looked about him as the thought occurred, almost expecting to see the dawn breaking over the mountains. Then, with a suddenness that was terrifying, and with a roar that might have been heard for many miles, and with a wealth of flame that lit up the country-side, the first of the mines exploded, followed scarcely an instant later by its fellow. For a moment the air was filled with the shattered fragments of the walls, some of which fell among the men waiting on the river bank, some in the river itself, but none in the doomed city. Then Max sprang to his feet.

"Come, my lads," he cried, "follow me!"

Rifle in hand he dashed into the river, the men imitated his example, and almost before anyone could have told what had happened they were half-way to the other side. Before they reached the opposite bank, however, the sound of another explosion on the further side of the city came to them, followed by a heavy cannonading and the shrieking of shells. It was the ruse which they had arranged to adopt in order to make the enemy believe that the principal attack would take place on that side. Panting after their swim, the men clambered up the bank, which was now littered with fragments of masonry. A breach between thirty and forty feet in length had been made in the wall, and through this they dashed. In the city, by this time, the bells were pealing and bugles sounding. The street, however, immediately behind the breach was empty, and now a distance of scarcely a hundred yards separated them from the main gate.

"On, on, my lads!" cried Max; and with his party behind him he dashed along the thoroughfare. As he was well aware, the success of their enterprise depended upon the next few minutes. If they could not capture the gate, all the rest was useless. At last they reached the corner of the street in which stands the ancient church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. It looked very peaceful in its white mantle, but, sad to say, that mantle was destined to be stained with crimson soon enough. Only a few yards now separated them from the gate, and already, by the light of the great lantern above the arch, they could discern the hurrying figures of the guard.

"Charge!" cried Max, in a voice that rang through the deserted square like a trumpet-call. A moment later, they were upon the enemy, and the ghastly carnage had commenced. Never before had the old church looked down upon such a scene. The issue, however, was never for a moment in doubt. Outnumbered as they were, desperate as were their efforts to hold the gate, the struggle had scarcely begun before it was ended. The main entrance to the city being now in their possession, Max struck a match and applied it to the precious rocket he had brought with him for that purpose. There was a slight hissing noise, and then the fiery note of triumph shot up into the darkness, throwing out myriad blue lights to acquaint the troops who were waiting outside that the capture of the gate had been effected. By this time, however, the guns which had been trained upon the bridge from the market square were manned by gunners, and a hail of grape was showered upon the gallant little band. The keys of the gate were, of course, in the possession of the governor of the city, but Max knew that before many minutes could elapse the engineers would be blowing it in, as if it

were of tissue paper. All this time the three guns were doing terrible execution. Almost half of his small force had fallen, and he knew that unless they were stopped certain death would be the portion of the remainder.

"Those guns must be silenced!" he cried. "Forward, my lads, and let us do it!"

The gallant fellows replied with a cheer, and, regardless of the storm of bullets that was being poured in upon them, dashed across the stones of the market-place towards the spot where the guns stood. It was madness even to dream that they could be successful, but the madness, if madness it were, was certainly heroic. Rudolf Kellerman, the giant corporal of Max's own company, fell, shot through the heart, before they had advanced ten yards; fair-haired Otto Stedicz, who looked like a poet, and who fought like a devil, was struck down a few yards further on. The heavy fire was more than flesh and blood could face, and for a moment the men wavered. Max, however, called to them to come on. Gaining fresh courage by his example, they hurled themselves upon the gunners. Once there nothing could stand against them. The men went down like corn before the sickle. They had scarcely captured them, however, before the welcome sound of an explosion reached them from the main gate. The great doors, which had remained closed for so long, were burst asunder, and immediately our troops poured into the city. Furious cannonading was still proceeding on the other side, while the garrison, roused from sleep, and surrounded on every hand, were unable to tell what to do or whom to attack first. One portion of the troops hastened to the west side, the remainder, marching to the east, were met by the brigade which had entered through the main gate. Meanwhile, another strong detachment of our army had crossed the river, and having made its way in, by means of the breach by which Max and his party had entered, passed quickly through the streets to the great square of the city, thus effectually preventing the two forces from joining company again. So swiftly and well were these arrangements carried out, that no hitch of any sort occurred, and though for some little time the fighting was very severe in certain quarters, when day dawned the enemy's general, seeing how futile further resistance would be, capitulated, and thus the city fell into our hands.

All the arrangements having been completed, and as soon as General Groplau was at liberty to think of other things, he gave orders that inquiries should be made concerning the whereabouts of the man to whom their great success was mainly due.

To take up the thread of my story again at the point where I left off, in order to describe the victory gained by our troops, it is necessary that I should revert to the disastrous effect upon Max's small force. Feeling sure that it would only be a question of time before the guns would be retaken from him, and realising that if they were left in their present position, they would in all human probability be turned upon the brigade now entering by the main gate, he and his men between them dragged them from the spot to a dark alley on the other side of the square, where it was unlikely they would be found in time to work further mischief. They had scarcely done this before they, in their turn, were compelled to beat a retreat before a regiment that was coming towards them at the double. Nothing was left, therefore, but for them to ascend the steps leading to the old church to which I have before referred. Seeing them, the enemy poured a volley into the portico of the sacred building, and then prepared to drive them out with the bayonet. Here, however, the small band that was left had somewhat of an advantage. Being in the dark themselves, and having what light there was in front of them, they could see their foes, who could not see them. Wearied, however, as they were, it was impossible that they could hold out for long. The pile of the dead that lay at the foot of the steps when dawn broke was a proof, if any were wanted, of the gallantry with which they fought. It was not long before a force was despatched to their assistance, and the enemy retired, having lost thirty men in that short encounter.

"Who are you, and how do you come to be here?" inquired the officer of the relieving force, as he ascended the steps. Max informed him, but had scarcely sufficient strength left to articulate the words. When he had finished he fell back against the wall, knowing that he was wounded, and believing it to be to the death. The officer--it was Fritz von Mulhaus--caught him in his arms before he could touch the ground, while Bertram, who was unwounded, hastened to his side. Between them they laid him gently down.

"Let me lie so," said Max; "I think it is all over with me now. Can you tell me if the city is ours?"

"There is not the least doubt about it, I should say," Mulhaus replied. "And if it is, we owe it to you."

"And to the brave fellows who accompanied me," answered Max, faintly. "I could have done nothing without them. And now you must not stay with me. I shall be quite comfortable here."

But Mulhaus would not be sent away. Whatever the circumstances might be, he would not leave him until he had seen him conveyed to a house near by, and until he himself had given orders that a surgeon should be sent for.

"Have you discovered what became of the man who led the storming party?" inquired General Groplau, when his aide-camp returned to the house which he had made his headquarters.

"I have seen him, sir," the officer replied; "and I have questioned the surgeon who is attending him. If he is not a dead

man by this time, he very soon will be."

"That is sad news, indeed," answered the general. "He was a brave man, and there is no doubt that we owe all our success to him. I should have liked to have presented him to Prince Paul. He would have rewarded him as he deserves. Well, well, it's the fortune of war."

Two hours earlier I had crossed the Border, and at mid-day, if all went well, I should be with the army. At ten o'clock, as we halted in a tiny village, news was brought me from the front, and, for the first time, I learnt the story of the city's downfall. The officer who brought it gave me a description of a certain private soldier's bravery, and informed me that the brave fellow was reported to be mortally wounded.

"God grant he may live till I have an opportunity of giving him my thanks for the service he has rendered his king and country."

Then turning to one of the equerries, with whom Max had played as a boy, I continued, "This is a deed which the king would have loved to share."

Then we pushed on for the city, little knowing the surprise that awaited me there.

CHAPTER XX.

It was with feelings of the liveliest gratitude to Providence, and pride in our gallant soldiers, that I reached the city of Zaarfburg, some ten hours or so after its capitulation. A large proportion of the army corps which had so long invested it was drawn up on the plain to receive me. The remainder were occupied in the city itself, where also, at the time of my arrival, was General Groplau himself, busied with affairs of State. A more triumphal progress than I made through the cheering soldiery could scarcely be imagined; indeed, if any proof were wanting of the popularity of the return of our house to Pannonia, it might have been discovered in their enthusiasm. For the time being discipline appeared to be thrown to the winds; helmets were waved on bayonet points, salvo after salvo of cheering followed me along the line, until, at one point, it was with the utmost difficulty I could urge my horse forward, so eager were the men to press about me and to assure me of their loyalty and devotion. At last, however, we reached the bridge, the same which leads to the now famous city. What would I not have given to have had Ottilie beside me then? It was a moment to be remembered all one's life long. As I write, the whole scene rises before my eyes. Once more I can see the old stone gateway, the long wall on either side of it, broken in one place, where Max and his storming party had made their desperate entry, and from the gateway itself General Groplau and his staff advancing to receive me. There were tears in the old man's eyes as he came forward to welcome me in the name of the army, and an unaccustomed huskiness in his voice as he spoke the words. He had done his duty, and the pleasure of being in a position to hand me the keys of the city, whose fall it was well known would practically bring about the end of the war, was not the smallest part of his reward. Side by side we passed under the arch, and emerging into the city itself, made our way towards the Council House, which, for the time being, he had made his headquarters. Here a State Council was convened, at which many important matters connected with the capture of the city and the treatment of the prisoners were discussed. After this the various officers who had especially distinguished themselves during the siege, and also in the capture of the city that day, were presented to me.

"And now, General," said I, this latter ceremony being at an end, "what news have you to give me of the man to whose bravery we, to all intents and purposes, owe the city? The messenger you sent to me this morning informed me that he was seriously wounded, and that the gravest doubts were entertained as to his recovery."

"I regret having to inform your Royal Highness that the man's condition is desperate in the extreme," the general replied. "He now lies in the house to which he was conveyed immediately after he was discovered. All that is possible has been done, but I fear without avail. His condition was hopeless from the first."

"Pray take me to him," I said, "in order that I may thank him for the service he has rendered his king and country. Since his condition is so dangerous, it would be inadvisable to postpone the matter for any length of time. Let us, therefore, set off at once."

So saying, we left the Council Hall, and made our way towards the house to which the dying man had been carried. There is nothing in this world presents a sadder picture, I think, than a city a few hours after it has been captured by the enemy. While the actual fighting continues there is an excitement which relieves the tension, but when all is over, and nothing more remains to be done, its condition is pitiable in the extreme. Traces of the recent struggle were to be observed on every hand. Half-starved men, women, and children wandered aimlessly about the streets, patrols marched by continually with prisoners; here and there were bodies of dead men, which the bearers had not yet had time to collect and remove; while the guns, which had wrought such havoc on the little band who had first entered the city and seized the main gate, still stood in the place to which they had been dragged, bearing eloquent testimony to the heroism which had conveyed them thither. At last we reached the house for which we were making. It was the residence of one Jacob Hertz, a watchmaker, whom, when we entered, we found seated on his bench, as deeply immersed in his work as if there had been no such thing as war, and nothing worth attending to in life save the mechanism of the chronicles of time on the shelf beside him. It was not until later that we learnt that his wife and daughter had died during the siege, and that his only remaining son had been killed that morning in the attack upon the gate. Providence, more merciful than man, had deprived him of his senses, and thus his misery sat more lightly upon him than others. I made it my business, when everything was settled, in memory of the brother I loved so well, to provide for his remaining days. It was reported to me, however, that my action, well intended though it was, was of small avail, for he took no interest in anything save his business, remaining to the end an eloquent, though a by no means solitary, witness of one of the most sanguinary struggles this nineteenth century has seen.

A messenger had previously informed the doctor in charge of the sick man of our coming, and that official now waited upon us. Groplau presented him to me, and I inquired the condition of his patient.

"I fear it is a hopeless case," he answered, shaking his head, "'Tis a wonder indeed that he is alive now to see your Highness. All that science can do has been done for him, and now I think it would be more charitable to allow him to

reach the end without subjecting him to any further torture."

"I am sorry to hear that," I said. "It certainly seems hard that he should not live to reap the reward of his bravery. By the way, have you any idea of his history? General Groplau informs me that some time since, when he offered him a commission, he declined the honour for reasons of his own. I should like to know all you can tell me concerning him, that I may help him if possible."

"I can tell your Highness nothing," the doctor replied. "From what I know of him, he is a very reserved fellow, and though his comrades have for a long time regarded him as a hero, and would do anything for him, he has only one friend, an Englishman, who is in the room with him now, and who seldom leaves his side."

"An Englishman?" I said, with some surprise. "That is strange. The man himself is, of course, a Pannonian?"

"Without a doubt," the doctor replied. "But since he converses fluently in English with his friend, I should say it is probable that he has spent some considerable time in that country."

Fearing to waste more time, I bade the doctor conduct me to the dying man's room. How little did I dream the discovery I was to make there!

The chamber was situated on the first floor, and looked out upon the street. When I entered the room, a private soldier was bending over the bed, smoothing the pillow beneath the dying man's head. His figure came between us, and for this reason the other's face was hidden from me. The doctor advanced to the bedside, and felt the man's pulse.

"My friend," said he, "let me tell you that you are the recipient of a great honour. His Royal Highness the Prince Regent has paid you the compliment of coming himself to see you."

The man did not answer, but, knowing all that I do now, I can well understand the struggle that was going on within his breast. Then I advanced to the bedside.

"My man," I said, "it is seldom one hears of such bravery as yours. Your general has told me everything, and I have come to thank you in the name of your----"

I had progressed no further than this when I stopped suddenly. A fear such as I had never known in my life before had taken possession of me, rendering me speechless and almost paralysed. No, it could not be true! It was impossible that such a thing could be even thought of. Scarcely daring to trust the evidence of my eyes, I looked again. No, there could be no doubt of it, no doubt at all. The man lying upon the bed before me was none other than Max, Max my brother, the man for whom I had searched throughout the world. With a cry that came from my heart I threw myself beside the bed and took his hand in mine.

"Max! Max!" I cried, regardless of the people standing by, "have I found you at last? At last, Max, at last?"

"At last, Paul," he answered, with a curious smile upon his face. "Yes, you have found me at last."

I could not utter another word, but repeated his name again and again. I had found him, the man for whom I had searched so long, and whom I had scarcely even dared to hope to see again. Yes, it was quite true that I had found him, but in what a state! Mad, indeed, had I been not to have looked for him in the ranks of Pannonia's army. I might have known that when she called he would not be the last to answer. And yet to think of him as he was now.

"Max," I faltered, "why did you not let me know you were here?"

"Because you would have sought me out," he answered. "Believe me, Paul, it is far better as it is. I have no regrets. I have fought for you and for her, and that makes me quite happy."

"You do not know how we have loved you, or how we have searched for you," I said; "and to meet like this! Oh, Max! it is more than I can bear."

At this point the doctor came forward and examined him. I glanced anxiously at the former's face, but what I saw there was not calculated to reassure me. I accordingly drew him on one side.

"Tell me frankly," I said, "is his condition quite hopeless?"

"Quite," he replied. "It is marvellous that he has lingered for so long."

"You are quite sure that nothing can be done for him? Remember that he is the King!"

"I regret having to say that nothing more can be done," said the doctor, visibly moved at my distress.

I turned to Groplau, who was standing at the foot of the bed.

"General," I said, "unknown to you, it was your King who won for you the city."

The general came forward and dropped upon his knee.

"Oh, if your Majesty had only told me!" he said; "if only I had not been so blind!"

"So blind?" asked Max, as if he did not quite understand what the other implied.

"Yes, so blind," the general continued. "Ever since that day on which I offered you the commission, your face has haunted me. I felt sure I had seen it before, but I could not tell where. I did not think of the days when you were a little boy, and played with my sword. If only I had known, how different things would have been!"

"I would rather have them as they are," said Max feebly. "Tis better so, believe me. If I had to live my life again, I would not omit this portion of it for anything. And now leave me alone with my brother. Something tells me we shall not have much more time together."

The others did as he commanded, and when the door was closed upon them once more, I took my place at his side. He took my hand in his, and his dark eyes looked lovingly upon me.

"Paul," he said, "that old gipsy woman was right after all when she inferred that you would be King. My dear old brother, don't think I grudge you the honour. Heaven knows I do not. You will make a better king than I should ever have done. I have never even been able to rule myself; how much less, then, should I have been able to rule others? And now tell me of yourself. There is not much time to waste. Our mother and father are dead?"

"Yes," I answered; "and they died loving you and speaking of you to the last."

"And Otilie?"

"She loves you too," I replied. "She has encouraged me in my search for you, and will be stricken with grief when she hears that I have found you too late."

Here I broke down altogether, and sobbed with my head upon my hands.

"My dear old fellow," said Max, stroking my hair, "you must not give way like this. There is nothing to be sorry for. I have fought for my country, and have given my life for her, as so many thousands of other men have done. Fate has played with me all my life, but in death she is kinder than she has ever been before."

There was another short pause, during which I knelt beside him, his hand resting upon my shoulder. Never in my life before had I suffered such agony as I did then. Max, on the other hand, was quite calm; he spoke of our father and mother; later, of our country and her future.

"Please God, happier days are in store for her," he said. "You will make a good king, Paul, and under your rule she will prosper as she has not done for years past. Otilie will make you a noble queen, and together you will win the love and admiration of your people. I should have liked to see you happy together."

At this I again broke down completely.

"Oh, Max!" I faltered, "do not talk of us. What will anything mean to Otilie and myself when we have lost you?"

As I spoke I thought of our boyhood, of the old, happy days in Pannonia, when we had been such firm and dear companions. I could recall nothing in Max's character that was not self-sacrificing, and to think that his life should end like this! I took his hand and held it tenderly in mine. Oh, why could I not give my life for his, and thus draw him back from that dark land into which he was so swiftly passing? That the end was very near there could be no doubt. Once more opening his eyes, which had remained closed for upwards of a minute, he whispered to me that he would like to bid farewell to the general and to the man who had been his companion in so many strange places and under such different circumstances. Accordingly, I went to the door and called them in. Groplau was the first to advance towards the bed. The old man was genuinely affected. Max looked up at him and gave him his hand. Not a word passed between them; indeed, speech was unnecessary. There was a long silence, a hand-grip, and then Groplau stepped back, and Bertram, the Englishman, took his place. He made no attempt to conceal his grief. "Good-bye," said Max. "You have been a good friend to me, Bertram; be as faithful to my brother. It is my wish that you should serve him. God bless you both!"

Bertram tried to speak, but his voice failed him, and he turned away with the tears streaming down his face. Then Max looked at me, and I went to him again.

"Paul," he said, but so feebly that I could scarcely hear the words, "it is very near now. God bless you, Paul. Kiss me, dear old brother; we've been----"

Stooping, I kissed him on the forehead, on which the dews of death were quickly gathering.

Then, softly as a tired child, he fell asleep.

Maximilian, the uncrowned King of Pannonia, was dead!

CHAPTER XXI.

The last moments of a loved friend or relative are, and must be, sacred. Let it suffice, therefore, that for some minutes after my poor brother had drawn his last breath I knelt beside the bed in silent prayer, then, with one last look at the face I loved so well, I left the room, taking Bertram with me. General Groplau would, I knew, make all the necessary arrangements. In the meantime it behoved me to summon another council, and that done, to despatch messengers to the capital with the sad intelligence. Within an hour a proclamation had been issued, and it was known that the King, who had been missing for so long, had in reality been serving with his army, and had given his life, as unostentatiously as its humblest unit, for the country he loved so well. The announcement was received with a sort of stupefaction by the army. If the news caused a sensation in their ranks, however, I could imagine how much greater the surprise would be in Europe generally. Remembering this, one of my first acts was to communicate with Ottilie, in order that she might hear the sad intelligence from me personally, before receiving it from any other source. For you to realise the effect that the finding of Max, under such mournful circumstances, had upon me would be impossible. Indeed, every one and everything around me seemed to share the impression. The silent, almost deserted streets, the unhappy townfolk (though they were unhappy from another cause), and even the dull, leaden sky overhead, seemed to mourn with me. We had won a great victory, it is true, but at what a cost to me and to the nation of which I was now the head!

The council being over, and the official communication of the news sent forth to the world, I gave orders that Bertram should be admitted to my presence. So far I had not had much opportunity of observing him; now, however, I found him a tall, well-set-up young Englishman of the higher middle class.

"Mr. Bertram," I said in English, "you may remember what my poor brother said to me concerning you, just before he died. He said he trusted that you would be as good a friend to me as you had been to him. May I hope that you will enter my service, as he wished?"

"I will do so, if your Majesty really desires it," he answered. "Though I scarcely know in what capacity I can serve you."

"You can do so by proving yourself my friend," I answered.

Traces of grief still remained upon his face. It was certain that the affection he had shown to Max was genuine, and that he mourned him almost as sincerely as I did myself.

"And now," I said, "I want you to tell me as much as you can of his life since you first met him. Remember, I know nothing. It is all mystery to me. Where did you meet him, and how does it come about that you're in Pannonia together?"

Thereupon he furnished me with a summary of Max's life from the time when they first met in Brazil, beginning with the unhappy diamond expedition, and continuing until the moment was reached when Max fell mortally wounded on the steps of the church in the market-square. From his narrative, I was able to gather something, not only of Max's past life, but also of the character of the man I had before me now. Never once during his recital of the tale did he sound his own praises, or represent himself as playing anything but a secondary part in the drama that was destined to end so tragically. Instinctively I took a liking to the man; perhaps not so much because of the fact that he had been Max's friend as because of what I felt to be his inherent good qualities. When, at my request, he consented to serve me as one of my gentlemen-in-waiting, I felt that I had secured a friend whose fidelity was in no way dependent upon the rewards or emoluments he might receive.

That evening the body of my brother was to be conveyed to the Council Hall, where it would remain closely guarded until the time should arrive for it to be removed to the capital for interment in our grand cathedral, where repose so many of our House. Before Max's remains were taken from the house, I had a last look at his face, and Bertram and I walked quickly back, for the night was cold, to the residence where I had taken up my abode. We had only just left the market-square, and were approaching our destination, when we were suddenly confronted by a man. So cutting was the wind, so keen the sleet that was now driving straight into our faces, that we did not become aware of his proximity until he had collided with Bertram.

"Why don't you look where you are going, my friend?" inquired the other, with a somewhat foreign accent. "Have you no eyes in your head?"

Then he uttered a cry of surprise, and next moment was running down the street as fast as his legs could carry him.

"That was an unmannerly fellow," I said to Bertram, who was standing on the pavement watching the other's receding figure.

To my surprise, however, he did not answer. When he turned his face to me again, dark though it was, I could see that there was a look of extreme astonishment, if not of almost consternation, upon it.

"What is the matter?" I inquired, I fear a little sharply. "Why do you look like that?"

"That man," he answered. "I must be mistaken, and yet----"

"And yet what?" I inquired. "Come, my friend, tell me the reason of your extraordinary behaviour."

Bertram hesitated again before he replied.

"I only caught a glimpse of his face," he said at length, "and yet I feel almost certain that the person who ran into me, and who bade me look where I was going, was none other than Rodriguez, one of the men who accompanied us on that fatal journey to the diamond fields in Brazil."

For a moment, for some reason that was not quite apparent to me, he seemed almost beside himself. He must have communicated this feeling to me, for I remember taking him by the arm and laughing loudly, though, Heaven knows, I was not in the humour to laugh at anything.

"Have you taken leave of your senses?" I inquired scornfully, as soon as I had somewhat recovered my self-control. "How could he be here now, and why, since he was then in South America, should he be in Zaarburg, of all places in the world?"

But Bertram did not answer. For the moment it looked as if the shock he had received had been too much for him. Whoever, or whatever, this man Rodriguez may have been, it is quite certain that the mere thought of meeting him again was sufficient to exert a powerful influence over Max's faithful friend. In silence we resumed our walk, and presently reached the house in which I had, for the time being, taken up my residence. Two hours later my poor brother's coffin was conveyed from the clockmaker's house to the city hall, the great council chamber of which had been converted into an impromptu *chappelle ardente*. A guard was placed upon it, while additional sentries were posted at the outer doors.

At the council meeting that evening, it had been arranged that the remains should be conveyed to Pannonia on the day following, and that I should accompany them to the capital. Accordingly, at noon, amidst the thunder of artillery and the respectful homage of the army, we set out, escorted by a regiment of cavalry, of which Max, as a boy, had been colonel-in-chief. Bertram, who was now a recognised member of my suite, accompanied me.

My story has taken so long to tell that I have no time or space left me in which to do more than briefly summarise that mournful journey. Let it suffice, therefore, that every hamlet and town through which we passed received us with tokens of respect and sorrow. Whenever I think of that mournful time, the picture of our return rises before my mind's eye. Dusk was falling as we entered our ancient capital--the dusk of a cold, raw day, quite in keeping with the sorrow which filled our hearts. We found the streets crowded to their utmost holding capacity. Signs of mourning were to be observed on every hand. Short though the notice had been, the majority of the houses were draped in black, while overhead sounded the mournful tolling of bells. At the entrance to the city I gave up my horse, and for the remainder of the distance followed the *cortege* my suite, the governor of the city and his staff, the chief burgomaster and his councillors, imitating my example. As we passed slowly along the Graben towards the cathedral, I recalled the night when Max and I, with our father and mother, had said good-bye to the capital, and had gone into exile. My father and mother had never seen their country again, and now Max was coming back to it, unconscious of the fact, to take his last long rest in the old grey cathedral in which so many of our race lay buried. Slowly and solemnly, to the accompaniment of wailing bands, we crossed the King's Square and approached the majestic pile, whose roofs and parapets towered above us, thickly coated with snow. The deep tones of the bell echoed mournfully in the gathering darkness, while the troops that lined the streets presented arms, and the crowd stood bareheaded as we passed. At last we reached the foot of the cathedral steps, where the white-robed clergy, with the archbishop--the same who had baptised us--at their head, were waiting to receive us. The coffin having been removed from the hearse, and a new procession formed, we entered the church and passed up the central aisle, to the music of the Dead March, towards the spot where a catafalque had been prepared for the lying-in-state. Upon this we placed the casket that contained the remains of our dear one, and when a short service had been conducted, and the guard of honour mounted, we left the cathedral and returned, through the still waiting crowd, to the palace on the other side of the square. On the morrow and the next day there was to be a public lying-in-state; and on the day following, the funeral would take place. In the meantime there was much for us to do. There were the representatives of the various European sovereigns to be received and lodged, the precedence of each to be settled, and their positions allotted by the chamberlains; while there was also the progress of the war, to which it was necessary that I should give almost unremitting attention. Fortunately, however, that was nearly at an end. Indeed, it was as if Max's death had set the final seal upon it. As a matter of fact, it was rumoured that proposals for peace were already in course of formation, and were soon to be submitted. Later in the evening came the news by telegram that Otilie and her father had crossed the Channel, and were on their way to

Pannonia. I had scarcely received it when old Antoine, my ever-faithful groom of the chambers, entered my study to inform me that the Count von Marquart had arrived at the palace, and craved an audience with me.

"Admit him at once," I said; and, indeed, I was glad to see him. His devotion to our House had never wavered. He had been one of the first to greet me on my return to Pannonia, and it seemed only fit and proper that he should hasten to my side when I was in such dire distress as now. Needless to say I greeted him most cordially, and I could see that he was much touched by my reception of him.

"This is a sad meeting indeed," said he, as I gave him my hand. "It has affected me more deeply than I can say."

I could see that what he said was true, for the old man, as he stood before me, was visibly overcome. He asked me certain questions concerning all that had transpired, and furnished me with an outline of the various arrangements he had made. Never before had I realised the extent of the ceremonial which must be observed in such cases. We were still discussing this important matter when Antoine, with a scared expression upon his face, an expression which even his long training could not conceal, entered the room. Through the half-open door I could see old Strekwitz, the Grand Chamberlain, and several people standing outside. Something was undoubtedly wrong, but what that something was I could not even conjecture.

"The Count von Strekwitz craves an audience," said Antoine, more abruptly, I think, than he had ever addressed me before.

"Ask him to be good enough to see me in the morning," I answered sharply. "Do you not notice that I am engaged with the Count von Marquart?"

"But, your Majesty, he states that his business is of the most important nature," Antoine persisted. "He implores you to see him at once, and says that there is not a moment to lose."

"Something has evidently gone wrong with his arrangements," said von Marquart. "Perhaps it would be as well if he were admitted."

"As you please, as you please," I continued, I am afraid, with a little irritation. Then, pulling out my watch, I added, as I looked at it, "It is nearly eleven o'clock. What possible business can he have with me that will not keep until the morning?"

"You will very soon discover," the Count replied. "Perhaps you would wish me to withdraw?"

"By no means," I answered. "It is possible I may stand in need of your advice."

A moment later Strekwitz entered the room, and from the moment that I looked at his face I saw that, whatever his news might be, it was certain he had not disturbed me without good cause. The man was more upset than I had ever yet seen him; his face was as white as the paper upon which I am now writing, while his hand, when he rested it upon the table beside which he stood, shook so that the pens upon the pen-rack trembled and rattled against each other.

"Well, Count, what is the matter?" I inquired. "What brings you here at this hour of the night?"

"The saddest news possible," he replied. "I scarcely know how to tell your Highness."

On hearing this a great fear took possession of me. What was I to learn? Could any disaster have befallen Ottilie? Had that been so, however, von Marquart would have known it before Strekwitz, and I should have heard before both; but it was impossible to be logical at such a moment. When next I spoke I scarcely recognised my own voice, so anxious was it.

"There is nothing to be gained by beating about the bush," I said. "Whatever your tidings may be, let me know the worst. Have you bad news concerning the Princess?"

He shook his head.

"No, it does not concern her Highness," he answered, "yet I fear it will distress your Majesty as much. For my own part, I do not know what to think."

"For goodness sake, man, get on with what you have to say," I answered. "Can't you see how you are distressing me? Let me hear your story at once."

"Your Majesty gave me orders to make the necessary arrangements for the lying-in-state of your lamented brother."

"I did," I replied. "What of that? I know you better than to imagine that you have failed in your duties. What has occurred?"

"Your Majesty informed me that you had brought the body from Zaarfburg?"

"I did. And you were present when it was admitted to the cathedral. What has happened since? Why do you not speak, man?"

"I fear that I must so far contradict your Majesty as to say that I was not present when it was admitted to the cathedral. A great crime has been committed. I mean that it cannot be laid in state, *since it is not there!*"

"Not there?" I cried, springing to my feet, scarcely able to believe that I had heard aright. "What do you mean by making such a statement? What makes you say such a thing? Are you not aware that I brought it with me from Zaarfburg?"

"I venture to say that it is not there," he returned. "The necessary preparations were made in my presence. On opening the coffin, however, we were amazed to find it empty, save for a few heavy weights. If the body had ever been placed in it while in the city, it must have been removed, either there or *en route* for this place."

"My God! what can this mean?" I cried. "Can you swear, Strekwitz, that what you say is correct? Be careful, for I give you my word I am in no mood to be played with."

"Your Majesty should know me well enough by this time to be aware that I would not trifle with you upon such a matter," he answered, somewhat reproachfully. "It has caused me the acutest sorrow. Alas! however, it is as I state."

"In that case what is to be done?"

For the moment the news stunned me, but it was not very long before I realised its dread importance. Von Marquart must also have done so, for once more came the question, this time from him: "What is to be done?" We had not only ourselves, and the country, but the whole of Europe to consider. Von Marquart was the first to recover his composure. Turning to Strekwitz, he said,--

"How many people know this?"

From what the other said it appeared that there were only three people in the secret, in which number he included himself. As soon as the direful discovery was made he had been quick to insist upon the others keeping the intelligence to themselves. He had been so imperative on this point that there was very little fear, he assured me, of their making mischief. To make sure, however, I gave orders that they should be admitted to my presence in the morning, that I might further caution them. Then addressing myself to von Marquart, I said:

"My poor brother's body must be recovered at any cost. But that will take time, and how are we to set about the task? To offer a reward would only be to publish the news abroad."

"Impossible, your Majesty, impossible," von Marquart replied. "In the interests of the country that is not to be thought of. It would be taken as a bad omen, and until the dynasty has been more firmly established, public opinion must be considered before everything else. Let us review the facts of the case and endeavour to discover when and where the crime could have been perpetrated. Where did your Majesty see the dead man for the last time?"

"In the clockmaker's house at Zaarfburg," I replied.

"And the house itself?"

"Was closely guarded," I answered. "From the house the coffin was conveyed to the city hall, where it lay until we started on the journey here."

"Would it have been possible, think you, for it to have been tampered with while at the city hall?"

"Quite impossible, I should say. There were guards at the entrance to the room itself, and sentries were posted at the great doors below. In fact, I would be prepared to swear that no one entered the room save myself and my brother's faithful friend."

"Your brother's friend?" von Marquart repeated suspiciously. "Who is he? Perhaps he can throw some light upon the affair."

This point had never struck me, and I thereupon told Strekwitz to summon Bertram to my presence without delay. He did so, and a few minutes later, the man we wanted entered the room. Strekwitz had told him nothing, so that he was quite unprepared for the news I had to give him. On hearing it his grief was as great, and plainly as sincere, as my own had been.

"I can scarcely believe it," he said, after he had heard what we had to tell. "What possible motive can anyone have had

for such a dastardly deed?"

I could furnish him with no answer that would be in any way satisfactory. Strekwitz inclined to the belief that it was the work of the enemy--an act of revenge, in fact, for the defeat they had suffered at our hands. Von Marquart, however, ridiculed the notion.

"No," he said, "there is more behind it than meets the eye. We must look elsewhere for a solution of the mystery."

Suddenly Bertram uttered an exclamation.

"Why on earth didn't I think of it sooner?" he cried. "If I'm not mistaken, I can explain everything."

"What do you mean?" I asked impatiently. "What do you remember? Tell us quickly."

"The man I ran into, in the street at Zaarburg," he replied. "Rodriguez, who was with us in South America. Was it possible that his appearance in the city was only a coincidence, or had he some more sinister object in view? He was aware of the mysterious marks upon your brother's body, and knew they were connected with the hidden diamonds. Seeing that he was dead, and that he might never have another opportunity, is it not quite possible that he would be anxious to penetrate the secret before it was too late?"

All this was so much Greek to von Marquart and Strekwitz. They knew nothing, it must be remembered, of Max's past life, consequently they had not heard of Moreas, or of the now famous expedition in search of the diamonds. In a few words I enlightened them, and then we fell to considering the problem that Bertram had set before us. His theory, though extraordinary, certainly seemed feasible enough.

"This is what puzzles me, however," said Bertram, who had been silent for a few moments. "If he were able to get near enough to the body to examine it, why did he take it away? It would be of no use to him, and would be a source of continual danger. No! I am very much afraid that there is something else behind it. Some other person is pulling the strings. Rodriguez would be a mere tool."

"One thing is quite certain," said von Marquart, walking towards the fireplace as he spoke, "and that is that we must find this man. If we can once get hold of him we shall be able to discover a way to make him speak. The rest should then be easy."

"But how on earth are we to catch him?" I inquired. "He would scarcely be likely to remain in Zaarburg. Besides, there is no time. It is only three days before the State funeral will take place, and it is most improbable that we shall be able to regain possession of the body in that short space of time. It will be sad news indeed to give to the world."

"It must not be given," said von Marquart imperatively. "They must know nothing of it."

"But, good heavens! man," I cried, "how is the funeral to take place if the body is still missing?"

"Very easily," he replied. "The public did not doubt you to-night when you passed through the city to the cathedral; the archbishop did not doubt you when he led the way up the aisle; and if every one else holds his tongue, why should not the coffin be placed in the vault without suspicion having been aroused?" Then, dropping his voice a little, and speaking with even greater emphasis than before, he continued: "I tell you as plainly as I can speak that we have no other course open to us. After struggling with what at one time appeared to be insurmountable difficulties, we have at last succeeded in replacing the Ramonyi dynasty upon the throne. It behooves us, therefore, to proceed with the greatest caution possible. One false step may result in destruction to all our hopes. Your poor brother's mysterious absence did a vast amount of harm; his death, however, fighting for his country as he did, retrieved it. I must leave you to understand what the result will be if you reveal to the nation this fresh catastrophe. The sensible will describe it as a regrettable incident; the foolish will declare it to be a sign that Heaven is against your house. That will be the opportunity your enemies want, and they will be sure to make capital out of it."

"And when we have recovered that which we are seeking? What then?"

"Then his body can be laid to its rest, and what has been placed in the vault in the meantime can be removed."

"Very well," I answered. "I suppose it must be so. And who is to carry out the search?"

"There is one man who most certainly must go," von Marquart replied, "since he is the only person who is familiar with the features of the man you saw at Zaarburg; our friend here must undertake the mission." Then, turning to Bertram, he continued: "You understand, sir, I presume, the difficulty of the task we are setting you? Believe me, it will be no light one. Nor will the responsibility be lighter. You will have to proceed with the utmost circumspection. His Majesty's honour, and the honour of the country, will be in your hands. I do not doubt your integrity, but I should like to be also

assured of your discretion."

"I will answer for Mr. Bertram," I said. Then, turning to him, I continued: "Mr. Bertram, my poor brother trusted you when he was alive; I am sure you will do what you can for him, and for me, now that he is dead."

"Your Majesty may trust me in everything," he returned simply, and with a sincerity that spoke for itself. "I loved him, and would serve him alive or dead."

For a minute we were all silent, then Bertram inquired when he should start.

"The sooner the better," I answered. "I will give you a letter to General Groplau, informing him that you are on personal business for myself, and asking him to give you all the assistance that lies in his power. You may imagine with what eagerness I shall await news from you. And now you had better retire to rest. I will see you before you start."

Bertram accordingly left the room, and when he had gone Strekwitz received his final instructions.

We discussed the arrangements for the funeral for a little longer, and then Strekwitz and von Marquart withdrew, and I was left alone with my gloomy thoughts.

When I retired to rest, I lay awake hour after hour, thinking of Max, and of the vile deed of which his poor body was the innocent victim. Long before it was light I had said good-bye to Bertram, and he had left the city, after which I set myself to wait and hope. Of what transpired during the next three days I scarcely like to think, even now. The grim mockery that was daily taking place in the cathedral, and the knowledge of the still grimmer one that was to follow it, weighed upon my heart like lead. All day long, from my study window, I could see the crowd passing into the building by one door and out by another. I could not but watch it, though the sight irritated me beyond measure. Had it not been for the constant letters of love and sympathy that I received from Ottilie, I believe I could not have borne it as well as I did.

Of the funeral ceremony itself I will say but little. Its grandeur and pomp could not have been excelled. I did my best to bear myself as a man should, but as I looked at the coffin, and thought of what it contained, my feelings well-nigh overcame me. When all was over, I left the cathedral and entered the carriage that awaited me at the foot of the steps. The great square was crowded, till it resembled one vast sea of heads, upon which a gleam of wintry sunshine played as if with a caressing hand. Slowly I drove along to the accompaniment of the respectful salutations of the people, though, wrapt as I was in my own thoughts, I was scarcely conscious of their presence. We were not half-way across the square, however, before my feelings underwent a complete change. Looking from the carriage I saw among the multitude of faces one that stung me to instant action. I could scarcely believe the evidence of my own eyes. I looked again, only to become doubly certain that there was no mistake. To the best of my belief, there, looking up at me, was the man we suspected, the individual who had cannoned into Bertram at Zaarburg, and to search for whom Bertram had returned to the scene of Max's death. A moment later it had disappeared, and I was left wondering what I should do. To stop the procession and to go in search of the man was out of the question, and yet to continue our journey to the palace would be to run the risk of allowing him to escape. Situated as I was, there was nothing for it but to go on and to trust to Providence for the rest. One thing, however, was quite certain. A message must be sent to Bertram telling him to return to Pannonia at once. Drawing Strekwitz aside as soon as we reached the palace, I told him what had happened, and gave him the necessary instructions.

For the remainder of the day the memory of the face I had seen in the crowd haunted me like that of a ghoul. Please God, Bertram would not be too late to catch him after all.

CHAPTER XXII.

I was well aware that, even should my telegram have the good fortune to catch him at once, Bertram could not reach the capital in less than twenty-four hours. During that time, however, I had not much leisure to think of him; I was kept incessantly busy, bidding my guests farewell, and attending to the various important matters of state, which had perforce been neglected under the stress of the last few days. Busy as I was, however, the face of the man I had seen in the crowd was continually before my eyes. Whenever I went abroad, I scanned the countenances of the people I met, in the hope that I might discover him again. But I was not successful. Look as I would I could find no trace of him. Could I have been mistaken? No! I felt certain I had not. The man's image had printed itself so firmly upon my memory that I could entertain no doubt upon the matter. I was still thinking of this when word was brought to me that my father-in-law elect, the Prince of Lilienhohe, had reached the palace and desired an audience. On the previous day, that is to say, the day of the funeral, I had only time to salute him. Having received no letter from Otilie that morning, his presence was the more welcome. I bade them conduct him to my presence.

"You are surprised to see me," he said, as we shook hands. "I have come to acquaint you with the fact that Otilie is in the city."

"Otilie here?" I cried, my heart leaping at his words. "When did she arrive?"

"This morning," he answered. "She bids me say that it will give her great pleasure to see you, whenever you can spare the time to come to her. When I left the house she was resting after her journey."

The old city looked brighter now that I knew Otilie was within its confines. An hour or so later I drove to the Lilienhohe Palace, where I found her in her boudoir eagerly awaiting my coming. Never had she looked more beautiful than at that moment.

"My poor Paul," she said, as I took her in my arms and kissed her, "you have indeed known great sorrow lately. But, please God, happier times are in store for us."

She spoke of Max, referring to him as a loving and sorrowing sister might have done. Her soft voice and tender words soothed me, and when we walked to the window and looked out upon the great square, I was happier than I had been for many days. The significance of my action did not at first strike me, but presently, when a cheer went up from the street below, and I saw that a crowd had gathered and was watching us, I realised the thought that was in the public mind. Otilie would have drawn back, but I prevented her.

"Let them see us together," I said, and led her a little nearer the window.

Our action pleased the people below, and cheer after cheer went up. Suddenly, pushing his way through the crowd, I saw the tall figure of Bertram. He had, indeed, returned from Zaarburg with dispatch. Having learnt my destination at the palace, he had lost no time in following me. On he came, not perhaps as gently as he might have done. Then I saw him stop and look towards his left. A moment later he had turned, and was moving back through the crowd. What could be the matter with him? With straining eyes I watched him pushing and squeezing his way through the throng, then I lost sight of him altogether. Had he seen anything of the man whose whereabouts we were so anxious to discover? I had to wait for an answer to that question.

At last, my impatience quite getting the better of me, I bade Otilie good-bye, and descended to the courtyard, where my carriage was waiting. Slowly I drove across the yard, and passed out through the great gates. By this time the crowd was so great that it was only with difficulty sufficient space could be cleared for my horses to pass through. Cheer after cheer was given me with the heartiest goodwill. I could see that my being without equerry or escort gave them pleasure. When we turned towards the palace I looked back at the house I had just left, and could see Otilie's white figure still standing at the window watching me. At the same moment something white was thrown into the carriage. It was a letter without address or writing of any description upon the envelope.

"A petition of some sort," I said to myself, and placed it in my pocket to read at my leisure. As it happened, however, when I reached the palace I found von Marquart there. Important despatches had reached him from the war, and a council meeting was to be called without delay. Though I made inquiries, I could hear nothing of Bertram, save that he had reached there soon after my departure, and had set off for the Lilienhohe Palace in search of me. It was almost evening by the time he returned, and when he was admitted to my presence there was a look of disappointment upon his face. I praised his diligence in returning so quickly on receipt of my message from Zaarburg, but this did not make him happy.

"To think that I should have let such a chance slip through my fingers!" he cried angrily.

"To what do you refer?" I inquired.

"I saw Rodriguez in the crowd outside the Prince of Lilienhohe's gates this morning," he answered. "Unfortunately, however, he also saw me. Only a dozen paces or so separated us, but, try how I would I could not get near him. I searched the crowd through and through, but he had managed to give me the slip. I've been hunting the city for him ever since, but not another sign or trace of him can I discover. What I fear is, that, as he must be aware that I recognised him, he may derive the impression that the game is up, and then they will take to flight. However, with your Majesty's permission, I will go out again to-night and see if I can run across him."

I readily gave that permission, and then bade him go to his room and rest, for the poor fellow looked worn out. He promised to do so, and withdrew. When he had gone I crossed to my writing-table, and sat down before it. The letter which had been thrown into the carriage that morning lay before me.

Scarcely conscious of what I was doing I opened it. On the paper I drew from the envelope were about five lines of writing, which read as follows:

"If it is desired to find that which is lost, hasten to the Buchengasse; enter the fifth house on the right-hand side, and proceed up the stairs to the room on the top floor, overlooking the street, and there will be found that for which you are seeking."

That was all. But the effect it produced upon me I must leave you to imagine. I rang my bell violently.

"Request Herr Bertram to come to me immediately," I said to the servant who appeared in answer to it. Then, when the door had been closed behind the man, I read the message again. Was it a hoax? or was it an attempt to draw us into a trap? Whichever it might be, I was determined to see the matter through. A few minutes later, for he had not had time to retire to rest, Bertram put in an appearance. His quick eye saw that something unusual had happened.

"What is it, your Majesty?" he inquired. "I can see that you have had some news."

"Read that," I said, handing him the letter.

He took it, and did as I commanded.

"Thank God!" I heard him mutter when he had carefully perused the contents of the note.

"What do you think of it?" I inquired. "Can it be true?"

"Let us hope so," he replied. "At any rate, it would be as well for me to go to the house and make certain."

"Yes," I answered; "and I will accompany you. We will start at once."

"Is it wise for your Majesty to come?" Bertram asked anxiously. "If you will entrust the errand to me----"

"It is useless for you to argue," I answered sharply. "My mind is made up, and go with you I must, and will. Prepare yourself, and return here."

Seeing that it would be a waste of time to expostulate further, he departed without another word. Ten minutes or so later we had left the palace by the same door which had witnessed our departure into exile so many years before. Before leaving the palace I had taken the precaution to slip a revolver into my pocket, and, on inquiry, I found that Bertram had done the same. If we were to be the victims of a conspiracy, we should at least be able to render a good account of ourselves. Having crossed the great square, and passed the Lilienhohe Palace, in the windows of which many lights still showed themselves, we steered for the southern portion of the city, where we had discovered the Buchengasse was situated. It was not a savoury neighbourhood, I had been given to understand, and certainly, when we had left the more fashionable portion of the town behind us, we found ourselves in a quarter where the streets were narrow, and the houses far from prepossessing. Muffled up as we were, it was scarcely likely that anyone would have recognised us, even had the thoroughfares been thronged with pedestrians. As it was, however, they were well-nigh deserted, and for this reason we were able to reach the street, for which we were directing our steps without hindrance.

"This is evidently the one," I said, as we turned into a narrow alley, which was, if anything, darker and more unsavoury than those through which we had hitherto been walking. "Now we have to discover the fifth house on the right-hand side."

We accordingly proceeded down it, counting the houses as we went. They were tall, rambling edifices, and must have ranked amongst the oldest in the city. The upper stories projected far beyond the lower, so that, the street itself being narrow, the roofs were almost within touching distance of each other. One solitary lamp illumined it, but that might as well have been dispensed with, for the wind-tossed jet of flame only served to make the place look even more desolate

than before. Number five differed from its fellows in the fact that it was, if possible, dirtier and more uncared for than the remainder of the houses. A faint light shone from one of the upper windows, but the lower portion of the house was in total darkness. Approaching the door, I knocked upon it with my stick. No answer, however, rewarded us. I did so again, with the same result. Once more I knocked; this time with greater success. The first-floor window of the adjoining house was opened, and a man's head appeared.

"What do you want?" said its owner. "This is not the time of night to come banging at peaceable folk's doors."

"We want to gain admittance to this house," I replied, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. "Is there anyone in it?"

"Nobody," the man replied. "He who was there went away this afternoon. He left the key with me."

"In that case, I beg you will be good enough to give it to me."

"Not till I know you are the right man," he answered. "The fellow said I was to be sure to only hand it to one person. Have you got the letter he sent you?"

"I have," I hastened to reply, producing the letter from my pocket as I spoke. "Here it is."

When I had passed it up to him he withdrew with it into the room again, to reappear a few moments later with the letter and a key in his hand.

"I suppose it's all right," he said. "At any rate, I'll risk it. Bear in mind, however, that I know nothing of the business that brings you here. I'm only following his instructions."

I took the key and inserted it in the lock. Then we entered the house, and Bertram struck a match and lit a taper he had brought with him. Holding the revolver in my right hand, in case it should be wanted, I passed into the room opening out of the little passage. It was untenanted, save by a mouse, that scuttled away across the floor on seeing us. Finding nothing to reward us there, we passed out into the passage again, and made for the flight of stairs at the further end. The letter had mentioned the top floor, and for this reason our failure to find anything in this room did not disappoint us.

"We must look higher," I whispered to Bertram as we began our climb. The next floor, however, was as barren as its predecessor, and now only the top remained to us. The last flight of stairs was somewhat narrower than the others, and there was an awkward turn in it, which would have been just the spot to have served as a hiding-place for an enemy. We passed it, however, in safety, and at last stood upon the top landing of that strange house. Here there were only two doors. One was in the rear, while the other overlooked the street. Once more recalling the wording of the letter, we decided upon investigating the latter room first. This must be the chamber in which the light we had observed from the street was located. Our revolvers ready in our hands, we approached the door, and I turned the handle.

When we entered the room it was a strange and terrible picture we had before us. The room was only a small one. Its furniture consisted of a bed and two chairs, one of which was overturned upon the floor, a large box, which also served as a table, a bucket, and a number of medicine bottles. Upon the bed lay the body of poor Max, while, half-supported upon the bed and half-resting upon the floor, was the figure of a man lying face downwards. Stepping softly across the room, as if I feared I might wake them, I approached the stranger, for a stranger to me he certainly was. By this time Bertram had also approached the bed, and was leaning over me in order to examine him. Suddenly he uttered a cry and staggered back, as if he had received a blow.

"My God!" he cried. "What does this mean? Am I going mad?"

"What is it, man?" I inquired, springing to my feet and wondering what fresh horror he was going to bring to light.

Once more he advanced towards the bed. His face was ashen in its pallor as he stooped over the dead man.

"It's Moreas!" he said. "Good God, it's Moreas!"

"Moreas!" I repeated, as if I could scarcely believe I heard aright. "How can it be Moreas? Did you not tell me that Max shot him on the plains where they found the diamonds?"

"Yet it is Moreas sure enough," Bertram asserted, still speaking in the same strained voice. "And see, he has been stabbed from behind. This is Rodriguez's handiwork."

He continued to stare from one dead man to the other, as if he were still unable to comprehend the situation. As for me, I had no attention to spare for anyone or anything save that I had once more recovered what had been lost, and that I must act without loss of time. At last I made up my mind as to what was best to be done.

"Return to the palace at once," I said to Bertram, who by this time had somewhat recovered his presence of mind, "and send Strekwitz to me. Afterwards go on to the Count von Marquart's house. He must see the archbishop and arrange the matter of the real burial without delay. It must take place within the next few hours; at any rate, before dawn. Go now as quickly as you can, and when you have seen them return to me here."

"But to leave your Majesty here with----" he began.

I cut him short.

"Never mind me," I replied. "I shall be quite safe. Hasten away to fulfil your errand. There is no time to lose."

Very reluctantly he did as I commanded him, and I heard him go down the stairs and presently leave the house.

In something less than an hour Strekwitz arrived with Bertram following close upon his heels. The latter had seen Von Marquart, who, in his turn, had set off to arrange matters with the archbishop. Within an hour of our entering the room for the first time, everything was settled. From Von Marquart, who received us at the archbishop's palace, I learnt that the good old man had been greatly pained at the news the count had communicated to him. Nevertheless, he was quite agreed that the course we had adopted was the best, both for State and personal reasons. Realising that the fewer people who became cognisant of our secret the less chance there would be of its becoming public property, he took the direction of affairs into his own hands. It was he who unlocked the postern door and admitted our party to the cathedral. It was he who waited with me in the sacristy while the necessary arrangements were being made for the interment, and who conducted me through the great building, so vast and eerie in the light of the lantern he carried in his hand, into the little chapel near the vault. A short service followed, then Maximilian of Pannonia was carried by loving hands, and placed in his last resting-place in the vaults below. When all was over, like a band of conspirators we left the cathedral, and with the archbishop's blessing ringing in my ears, I returned to the palace, to obtain what rest I could before I should be called upon to begin the duties of the day. Dawn was breaking as we let ourselves in; a soft grey light stole across the heavens like an augury of still happier days to come.

And now a few words of explanation before I put down my pen.

It was only after the most careful inquiries had been made, and when we had put together the various items of information we had been able to obtain, that we were in a position to derive any notion as to how, where, and why the dastardly plot, that had caused me so much unhappiness, had been carried out. That Max had not shot Moreas in Brazil, as he had imagined, was only too certain; though how the latter managed to escape from the plain, and ultimately to track his enemy to Zaarfburg, is not quite clear. One thing is certain, however. He must have discovered Rodriguez, possibly in Rio de Janeiro, have heard from him of the curious marks Max had cut upon his chest, after leaving the plain, and having convinced himself that they referred to the cache of diamonds, he had determined to spare no effort to get possession of the information he required. Unfortunately for his own schemes, he fell ill in Pannonia, *en route* to Zaarfburg. Finding himself unable to push on, Rodriguez was dispatched to the city in hot haste. On the night of his arrival the body was stolen from the clockmaker's house, with the assistance of one of the family, who had been heavily bribed. Pretending that it was the body of his brother, who had perished in the war, he brought it to the capital, and to the house where Moreas lay hidden in the Buchengasse. There the latter was able to read the signs, which were unintelligible to Rodriguez, for the reason that he was not familiar with the topography of that villainous plain. What happened after that is only conjecture. Doubtless, the two men had quarrelled, when Rodriguez, taking advantage of an opportunity that presented itself, stabbed the other in the back, and then fled for his life. And so ends the life story of my brother, the man I loved best in the world; he who, had he lived, would have been Maximilian, King of Pannonia.

And now, as it is possible there may be some who have been induced to take an interest in myself and my fortunes, let me bring my long story to a close by saying that if there is any country in Europe that boasts a happier sovereign than does Pannonia, I do not know it. No man's life, however, is altogether free from trouble; but in these days, thank God, I fancy I have less than most men. I have a good wife and happy, healthy children, the eldest of whom, little Max, bids fair to equal his ever-lamented uncle, the National Hero, in disposition and good looks. In one thing, however, he differs from poor Max; low down between his eyebrows are two curious little lines, that form something not unlike a cross.

"Superstition or not," says my sweet wife, "I can only say that I am glad it is there."

Then for my edification she proceeds to recite the old distich:--

"Pannonia's King shall surely sit
So long as Michael's cross doth fit."

THE END.

Ward, Lock & Co.'s SEVENPENNY NOVELS.

- 1 The Garden of Lies by JUSTUS M. FORMAN
- 2 Anna, the Adventuress by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM
- 3 Rainbow Island by LOUIS TRACY
- 4 The Beautiful White Devil by GUY BOOTHBY
- 5 The Impostor by HAROLD BINDLOSS
- 6 The Lodestar by MAX PEMBERTON
- 7 A Study in Scarlet by A. CONAN DOYLE
- 8 Young Lord Stranleigh by ROBERT BARR
- 9 The Mother by EDEN PHILLPOTTS
- 10 The Crimson Blind by FRED M. WHITE
- 11 When I Was Czar by A. W. MARCHMONT
- 12 In White Raiment by WM. LE QUEUX
- 13 Not Proven by A. AND C. ASKEW
- 14 A Maker of History by E. P. OPPENHEIM
- 15 Buchanan's Wife by JUSTUS M. FORMAN
- 16 The Pillar of Light by LOUIS TRACY
- 17 A Bid for Fortune by GUY BOOTHBY
- 18 The Dust of Conflict by HAROLD BINDLOSS
- 19 The Day of Temptation by WM. LE QUEUX
- 20 Two Bad Blue Eyes by "RITA"
- 21 Mr. Wingrave, Millionaire by E. P. OPPENHEIM
- 22 The Corner House by FRED M. WHITE
- 23 In Strange Company by GUY BOOTHBY
- 24 The Sporting Chance by A. AND C. ASKEW
- 25 The Gold Wolf by MAX PEMBERTON
- 26 A Damaged Reputation by HAROLD BINDLOSS
- 27 The Soul of Gold by JUSTUS M. FORMAN
- 28 The Marriage of Esther by GUY BOOTHBY
- 29 By Wit of Woman by A. W. MARCHMONT

- 30 Lady Barbarity by J. C. SNAITH
- 31 The Secret by E. P. OPPENHEIM
- 32 The Wheel of Fortune by LOUIS TRACY
- 33 The Slave of Silence by FRED M. WHITE
- 34 Darby and Joan by "RITA"
- 35 The Red Chancellor by SIR WM. MAGNAY
- 36 The Temptress by WM. LE QUEUX
- 37 Pro Patria by MAX PEMBERTON
- 38 The Fascination of the King by GUY BOOTHBY
- 39 Wild Sheba by A. AND C. ASKEW
- 40 By Snare of Love by A. W. MARCHMONT
- 41 Beneath Her Station by HAROLD BINDLOSS
- 42 Hope, My Wife by L. G. MOBERLY
- 43 The Missioner by E. P. OPPENHEIM
- 44 The Message of Fate by LOUIS TRACY
- 45 The Wayfarers by J. C. SNAITH
- 46 Tommy Carteret by JUSTUS M. FORMAN
- 47 Dr. Nikola by GUY BOOTHBY
- 48 The Sundial by FRED M. WHITE
- 49 Wiles of the Wicked by WM. LE QUEUX
- 50 Across the World for a Wife by GUY BOOTHBY
- 51 A Lost Leader by E. P. OPPENHEIM
- 52 The Etonian by A. AND C. ASKEW
- 53 His Lady's Pleasure by HAROLD BINDLOSS
- 54 A Courier of Fortune by A. W. MARCHMONT
- 55 Journeys End by JUSTUS M. FORMAN
- 56 Pharos the Egyptian by GUY BOOTHBY
- 57 Lord Stranleigh, Philanthropist by ROBERT BARR
- 58 Heart of Gold by L. G. MOBERLY
- 59 Netta by FRED M. WHITE
- 60 Sylvia's Chauffeur by LOUIS TRACY
- 61 The Trifler by ARCHIBALD EYRE
- 62 An Eye for an Eye by WM. LE QUEUX

- 63 The Governors by E. P. OPPENHEIM
- 64 The Stolen Lady by A. AND C. ASKEW
- 65 Hawtrey's Deputy by HAROLD BINDLOSS
- 66 The Queen's Advocate by A. W. MARCHMONT
- 67 A Maker of Nations by GUY BOOTHBY
- 68 As We Forgive Them by WM. LE QUEUX
- 69 A Millionaire of Yesterday by E. P. OPPENHEIM
- 70 A Red Red Rose by KATHARINE TYNAN
- 71 A Crime on Canvas by FRED M. WHITE
- 72 Long Live the King by GUY BOOTHBY
- 73 Ravenshaw of Rietholme by BERTRAM MITFORD
- 74 The King of Diamonds by LOUIS TRACY
- 75 The World's Great Snare by E. P. OPPENHEIM