GEORGE MEREDITH

THE ADVENTURES OF HARRY RICHMOND. VOLUME 3

George Meredith

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Meredith G.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER XV
WE ARE ACCOSTED BY A BEAUTIFUL LITTLE LADY IN THE FOREST

Bowls of hot coffee and milk, with white rolls of bread to dip in them, refreshed us at a forest inn. For some minutes after the meal Temple and I talked like interchangeing puffs of steam, but soon subsided to our staring fit. The pipes were lit again. What we heard sounded like a language of the rocks and caves, and roots plucked up, a language of gluttons feasting; the word ja was like a door always on the hinge in every mouth. Dumpy children, bulky men, compressed old women with baked faces, and comical squat dogs, kept the villages partly alive. We observed one young urchin sitting on a stone opposite a dog, and he and the dog took alternate bites off a platter-shaped cake, big enough to require both his hands to hold it. Whether the dog ever snapped more than his share was matter of speculation to us. It was an education for him in good manners, and when we were sitting at dinner we wished our companions had enjoyed it. They fed with their heads in their plates, splashed and clattered jaws, without paying us any hospitable attention whatever, so that we had the dish of Lazarus. They were perfectly kind, notwithstanding, and allowed a portion of my great map of Germany to lie spread over their knees in the diligence, whilst Temple and I pored along the lines of the rivers. One would thrust his square-nailed finger to the name of a city and pronounce it; one gave us lessons in the expression of the vowels, with the softening of three of them, which seemed like a regulation drill movement for taking an egg into the mouth, and showing repentance of the act. 'Sarkeld,' we exclaimed mutually, and they made a galloping motion of their hands, pointing beyond the hills. Sarkeld was to the right, Sarkeld to the left, as the road wound on. Sarkeld was straight in front of us when the conductor, according to directions he had received, requested us to alight and push through this endless fir-forest up a hilly branch road, and away his hand galloped beyond it, coming to a deep place, and then to grapes, then to a tip-toe station, and under it lay Sarkeld. The pantomime was not bad. We waved our hand to the diligence, and set out cheerfully, with our bags at our backs, entering a gorge in the fir-covered hills before sunset, after starting the proposition—Does the sun himself look foreign in a foreign country?

'Yes, he does,' said Temple; and so I thought, but denied it, for by the sun's favour I hoped to see my father that night, and hail Apollo joyfully in the morning; a hope that grew with exercise of my limbs. Beautiful cascades of dark bright water leaped down the gorge; we chased an invisible animal. Suddenly one of us exclaimed, 'We 're in a German forest'; and we remembered grim tales of these forests, their awful castles, barons, knights, ladies, long-bearded dwarfs, gnomes and thin people. I commenced a legend off-hand.

'No, no,' said Temple, as if curdling; 'let's call this place the mouth of Hades. Greek things don't make you feel funny.'

I laughed louder than was necessary, and remarked that I never had cared so much for Greek as on board Captain Welsh's vessel.

'It's because he was all on the opposite tack I went on quoting,' said Temple. 'I used to read with my father in the holidays, and your Rev. Simon has kept you up to the mark; so it was all fair. It 's not on our consciences that we crammed the captain about our knowledge.'

'No. I'm glad of it,' said I.

Temple pursued, 'Whatever happens to a fellow, he can meet anything so long as he can say—I 've behaved like a man of honour. And those German tales—they only upset you. You don't see the reason of the thing. Why is a man to be haunted half his life? Well, suppose he did commit a murder. But if he didn't, can't he walk through an old castle without meeting ghosts? or a forest?'

The dusky scenery of a strange land was influencing Temple. It affected me so, I made the worst of it for a cure.

'Fancy those pines saying, "There go two more," Temple. Well; and fancy this—a little earth-dwarf as broad as I'm long and high as my shoulder. One day he met the loveliest girl in the whole country, and she promised to marry him in twenty years' time, in return for a sack of jewels worth all Germany and half England. You should have seen her dragging it home. People thought it full of charcoal. She married the man she loved, and the twenty years passed over, and at the stroke of the hour when she first met the dwarf, thousands of bells began ringing through the forest, and her husband cries out, "What is the meaning of it?" and they rode up to a garland of fresh flowers that dropped on her head, and right into a gold ring that closed on her finger, and—look, Temple, look!'

'Where?' asked the dear little fellow, looking in all earnest, from which the gloom of the place may be imagined, for, by suddenly mixing it with my absurd story, I discomposed his air of sovereign indifference as much as one does the surface of a lake by casting a stone in it.

We rounded the rocky corner of the gorge at a slightly accelerated pace in dead silence. It opened out to restorative daylight, and we breathed better and chaffed one another, and, beholding a house with pendent gold grapes, applauded the diligence conductor's expressive pantomime. The opportunity was offered for a draught of wine, but we held water preferable, so we toasted the Priscilla out of the palms of our hands in draughts of water from a rill that had the sound of aspen-leaves, such as I used to listen to in the Riversley meadows, pleasantly familiar.

Several commanding elevations were in sight, some wooded, some bare. We chose the nearest, to observe the sunset, and concurred in thinking it unlike English sunsets, though not so very unlike the sunset we had taken for sunrise on board the Priscilla. A tumbled, dark and light green country of swelling forest-land and slopes of meadow ran to the West, and the West from flaming yellow burned down to smoky crimson across it. Temple bade—me 'catch the disc—that was English enough.' A glance at the sun's disc confirmed the truth of his observation. Gazing on the outline of the orb, one might have fancied oneself in England. Yet the moment it had sunk under the hill this feeling of ours vanished with it. The coloured clouds drew me ages away from the recollection of home.

A tower on a distant hill, white among pines, led us to suppose that Sarkeld must lie somewhere beneath it. We therefore descended straight toward the tower, instead of returning to the road, and struck confidently into a rugged path. Recent events had given me the assurance that in my search for my father I was subject to a special governing direction. I had aimed at the Bench—missed it—been shipped across sea and precipitated into the arms of friends who had seen him and could tell me I was on his actual track, only blindly, and no longer blindly now.

'Follow the path,' I said, when Temple wanted to have a consultation.

'So we did in the London fog!' said he, with some gloom.

But my retort: 'Hasn't it brought us here?' was a silencer.

Dark night came on. Every height stood for a ruin in our eyes, every dip an abyss. It grew bewilderingly dark, but the path did not forsake us, and we expected, at half-hour intervals, to perceive the lights of Sarkeld, soon to be thundering at one of the inns for admission and supper. I could hear Temple rehearsing his German vocabulary, 'Brod, butter, wasser, fleisch, bett,' as we stumbled along. Then it fell to 'Brod, wasser, bett,' and then, 'Bett' by itself, his confession of fatigue. Our path had frequently the nature of a waterway, and was very fatiguing, more agreeable to mount than descend, for in mounting the knees and shins bore the brunt of it, and these sufferers are not such important servants of the footfarer as toes and ankles in danger of tripping and being turned.

I was walking on leveller ground, my head bent and eyes half-shut, when a flash of light in a brook at my feet caused me to look aloft. The tower we had marked after sunset was close above us, shining in a light of torches. We adopted the sensible explanation of this mysterious sight, but were rather in the grip of the superstitious absurd one, until we discerned a number of reddened men.

'Robbers!' exclaimed one of us. Our common thought was, 'No; robbers would never meet on a height in that manner'; and we were emboldened to mount and request their help.

Fronting the tower, which was of white marble, a high tent had been pitched on a green platform semicircled by pines. Torches were stuck in clefts of the trees, or in the fork of the branches, or held by boys and men, and there were clearly men at work beneath the tent at a busy rate. We could hear the paviour's breath escape from them. Outside the ring of torchbearers and others was a long cart with a dozen horses harnessed to it. All the men appeared occupied too much for chatter and laughter. What could be underneath the tent? Seeing a boy occasionally lift one of the flapping corners, we took licence from his example to appease our curiosity. It was the statue of a bronze horse rearing spiritedly. The workmen were engaged fixing its pedestal in the earth.

Our curiosity being satisfied, we held debate upon our immediate prospects. The difficulty of making sure of a bed when you are once detached from your home, was the philosophical reflection we arrived at, for nothing practical presented itself. To arm ourselves we pulled out Miss Goodwin's paper. 'Gasthof is the word!' cried Temple. ' Gasthof, zimmer, bett; that means inn, hot supper, and bed. We'll ask.' We asked several of the men. Those in motion shot a stare at us; the torchbearers pointed at the tent and at an unseen height, muttering 'Morgen.' Referring to Miss Goodwin's paper we discovered this to signify the unintelligible word morning, which was no answer at all; but the men, apparently deeming our conduct suspicious, gave us to understand by rather menacing gestures that we were not wanted there, so we passed into the dusk of the trees, angry at their incivility. Had it been Summer we should have dropped and slept. The night air of a sharp season obliged us to keep active, yet we were not willing to get far away from the torches. But after a time they were hidden; then we saw one moving ahead. The holder of it proved to be a workman of the gang, and between us and him the strangest parley ensued. He repeated the word morgen, and we insisted on zimmer and bett.

'He takes us for twin Caspar Hausers,' sighed Temple.

'Nein,' said the man, and, perhaps enlightened by hearing a foreign tongue, beckoned for us to step at his heels.

His lodging was a woodman's hut. He offered us bread to eat, milk to drink, and straw to lie on: we desired nothing more, and were happy, though the bread was black, the milk sour, the straw mouldy.

Our breakfast was like a continuation of supper, but two little girls of our host, whose heads were cased in tight-fitting dirty linen caps, munched the black bread and drank the sour milk so thankfully, while fixing solemn eyes of wonder upon us, that to assure them we were the same sort of creature as themselves we pretended to relish the stuff. Rather to our amazement we did relish it. 'Mutter!' I said to them. They pointed to the room overhead. Temple laid his cheek on his hand. One of the little girls laid hers on the table. I said 'Doctor?' They nodded and answered 'Princess,' which seemed perfectly good English, and sent our conjectures as to the state of their mother's health astray. I shut a silver English coin in one of their fat little hands.

We now, with the name Sarkeld, craved of their father a direction to that place. At the door of his but he waved his hand carelessly South for Sarkeld, and vigorously West where the tower stood, then swept both hands up to the tower, bellowed a fire of cannon, waved his hat, and stamped and cheered. Temple, glancing the way of the tower, performed on a trumpet of his joined fists to show we understood that prodigious attractions were presented by the tower; we said ja and ja, and nevertheless turned into the Sarkeld path.

Some minutes later the sound of hoofs led us to imagine he had despatched a messenger after us. A little lady on a pony, attended by a tawny-faced great square-shouldered groom on a tall horse,

rode past, drew up on one side, and awaited our coming. She was dressed in a grey riding-habit and a warm winter-jacket of gleaming grey fur, a soft white boa loose round her neck, crossed at her waist, white gauntlets, and a pretty black felt hat with flowing rim and plume. There she passed as under review. It was a curious scene: the iron-faced great-sized groom on his bony black charger dead still: his mistress, a girl of about eleven or twelve or thirteen, with an arm bowed at her side, whip and reins in one hand, and slips of golden brown hair straying on her flushed cheek; rocks and trees, high silver firs rising behind her, and a slender water that fell from the rocks running at her pony's feet. Half-a-dozen yards were between the charger's head and the pony's flanks. She waited for us to march by, without attempting to conceal that we were the objects of her inspection, and we in good easy swing of the feet gave her a look as we lifted our hats. That look was to me like a net thrown into moonlighted water: it brought nothing back but broken lights of a miraculous beauty.

Burning to catch an excuse for another look over my shoulder, I heard her voice:

'Young English gentlemen!'

We turned sharp round.

It was she without a doubt who had addressed us: she spurred her pony to meet us, stopped him, and said with the sweetest painful attempt at accuracy in pronouncing a foreign tongue:

'I sthink you go a wrong way?'

Our hats flew off again, and bareheaded, I seized the reply before Temple could speak.

'Is not this, may I ask you, the way to Sarkeld?'

She gathered up her knowledge of English deliberately.

'Yes, one goes to Sarkeld by sthis way here, but to-day goes everybody up to our Bella Vista, and I entreat you do not miss it, for it is some-s- thing to write to your home of.'

'Up at the tower, then? Oh, we were there last night, and saw the bronze horse, mademoiselle.'

'Yes, I know. I called on my poor sick woman in a but where you fell asleep, sirs. Her little ones are my lambs; she has been of our household; she is good; and they said, two young, strange, small gentlemen have gone for Sarkeld; and I supposed, sthey cannot know all go to our Bella Vista to-day.'

'You knew at once we were English, mademoiselle?'

'Yes, I could read it off your backs, and truly too your English eyes are quite open at a glance. It is of you both I speak. If I but make my words plain! My "th" I cannot always. And to understand, your English is indeed heavy speech! not so in books. I have my English governess. We read English tales, English poetry—and sthat is your excellence. And so, will you not come, sirs, up when a way is to be shown to you? It is my question.'

Temple thanked her for the kindness of the offer.

I was hesitating, half conscious of surprise that I should ever be hesitating in doubt of taking the direction toward my father. Hearing Temple's boldness I thanked her also, and accepted. Then she said, bowing:

'I beg you will cover your heads.'

We passed the huge groom bolt upright on his towering horse; he raised two fingers to the level of his eyebrows in the form of a salute.

Temple murmured: 'I shouldn't mind entering the German Army,' just as after our interview with Captain Bulsted he had wished to enter the British Navy.

This was no more than a sign that he was highly pleased. For my part delight fluttered the words in my mouth, so that I had to repeat half I uttered to the attentive ears of our gracious new friend and guide:

'Ah,' she said, 'one does sthink one knows almost all before experiment. I am ashamed, yet I will talk, for is it not so? experiment is a school. And you, if you please, will speak slow. For I say of you English gentlemen, silk you spin from your lips; it is not as a language of an alphabet; it is pleasant to hear when one would lull, but Italian can do that, and do it more—am I right? soft?

'Bella Vista, lovely view,' said I.

'Lovely view,' she repeated.

She ran on in the most musical tongue, to my thinking, ever heard:

'And see my little pensioners' poor cottage, who are out up to Lovely View. Miles round go the people to it. Good, and I will tell you strangers: sthe Prince von Eppenwelzen had his great ancestor, and his sister Markgrafin von Rippau said, "Erect a statue of him, for he was a great warrior." He could not, or he would not, we know not. So she said, "I will," she said, "I will do it in seven days." She does constantly amuse him, everybody at de Court. Immense excitement! For suppose it!—a statue of a warrior on horseback, in perfect likeness, chapeau tricorne, perruque, all of bronze, and his marshal's baton. Eh bien, well, a bronze horse is come at a gallop from Berlin; sthat we know. By fortune a most exalted sculptor in Berlin has him ready,—and many horses pulled him to here, to Lovely View, by post-haste; sthat we know. But we are in extremity of puzzlement. For where is the statue to ride him? where—am I plain to you, sirs?—is sthe Marshal Furst von Eppenwelzen, our great ancestor? Yet the Markgrafin says, "It is right, wait!" She nods, she smiles. Our Court is all at de lake-palace odder side sthe tower, and it is bets of gems, of feathers, of lace, not to be numbered! The Markgrafin says—sthere to-day you see him, Albrecht Wohlgemuth Furst von Eppenwelzen! But no sculptor can have cast him in bronze—not copied him and cast him in a time of seven days! And we say sthis:—Has she given a secret order to a sculptor—you understand me, sirs, commission—where, how, has he sthe likeness copied? Or did he come to our speisesaal of our lake-palace disguised? Oh! but to see, to copy, to model, to cast in bronze, to travel betwixt Berlin and Sarkeld in a time of seven days? No! so-oh! we guess, we guess, we are in exhaustion. And to-day is like an eagle we have sent an arrow to shoot and know not if he will come down. For shall we see our ancestor on horseback? It will be a not-scribable joy! Or not? So we guess, we are worried. At near eleven o'clock a cannon fires, sthe tent is lifted, and we see; but I am impatient wid my breaths for de gun to go.'

I said it would be a fine sight.

'For strangers, yes; you should be of de palace to know what a fine sight! sthe finest! And you are for Sarkeld? You have friends in Sarkeld?'

'My father is in Sarkeld, mademoiselle. I am told he is at the palace.'

'Indeed; and he is English, your fater?'

'Yes. I have not seen him for years; I have come to find him.'

'Indeed; it is for love of him, your fater, sir, you come, and not speak

German?'

I signified that it was so.

'She stroked her pony's neck musing.

'Because, of love is not much in de family in England, it is said,' she remarked very shyly, and in recovering her self-possession asked the name of my father.

'His name, mademoiselle, is Mr. Richmond.'

'Mr. Richmond?'

'Mr. Richmond Roy.'

She sprang in her saddle.

'You are son to Mr. Richmond Roy? Oh! it is wonderful.'

'Mademoiselle, then you have seen him lately?'

'Yes, yes! I have seen him. I have heard of his beautiful child, his son; and you it is?'

She studied my countenance a moment.

'Tell me, is he well?' mademoiselle, is he quite well?'

'Oh, yes,' she answered, and broke into smiles of merriment, and then seemed to bite her underlip. 'He is our fun-maker. He must always be well. I owe to him some of my English. You are his son? you were for Sarkeld? You will see him up at our Bella Vista. Quick, let us run.'

She put her pony to a canter up the brown path between the fir-trees, crying that she should take our breath; but we were tight runners, and I, though my heart beat wildly, was full of fire to

reach the tower on the height; so when she slackened her pace, finding us close on her pony's hoofs, she laughed and called us brave boys. Temple's being no more than my friend, who had made the expedition with me out of friendship, surprised her. Not that she would not have expected it to be done by Germans; further she was unable to explain her astonishment.

At a turning of the ascent she pointed her whip at the dark knots and lines of the multitude mounting by various paths to behold the ceremony of unveiling the monument.

I besought her to waste no time.

'You must, if you please, attend my pleasure, if I guide you,' she said, tossing her chin.

'I thank you, I can't tell you how much, mademoiselle,' said I.

She answered: 'You were kind to my two pet lambs, sir.'

So we moved forward.

CHAPTER XVI
THE STATUE ON THE PROMONTORY

The little lady was soon bowing to respectful salutations from crowds of rustics and others on a broad carriage-way circling level with the height. I could not help thinking how doubly foreign I was to all the world here—I who was about to set eyes on my lost living father, while these people were tip-toe to gaze on a statue. But as my father might also be taking an interest in the statue, I got myself round to a moderate sentiment of curiosity and a partial share of the general excitement. Temple and mademoiselle did most of the conversation, which related to glimpses of scenery, pine, oak, beech-wood, and lake-water, until we gained the plateau where the tower stood, when the giant groom trotted to the front, and worked a clear way for us through a mass of travelling sight-seers, and she leaned to me, talking quite inaudibly amid the laughter and chatting. A band of wind instruments burst out. 'This is glorious!' I conceived Temple to cry like an open-mouthed mute. I found it inspiriting.

The rush of pride and pleasure produced by the music was irresistible. We marched past the tower, all of us, I am sure, with splendid feelings. A stone's throw beyond it was the lofty tent; over it drooped a flag, and flags were on poles round a wide ring of rope guarded by foresters and gendarmes, mounted and afoot. The band, dressed in green, with black plumes to their hats, played in the middle of the ring. Outside were carriages, and ladies and gentlemen on horseback, full of animation; rustics, foresters, town and village people, men, women, and children, pressed against the ropes. It was a day of rays of sunshine, now from off one edge, now from another of large slow clouds, so that at times we and the tower were in a blaze; next the lake-palace was illuminated, or the long grey lake and the woods of pine and of bare brown twigs making bays in it.

Several hands beckoned on our coming in sight of the carriages. 'There he is, then!' I thought; and it was like swallowing my heart in one solid lump. Mademoiselle had free space to trot ahead of us. We saw a tall- sitting lady, attired in sables, raise a finger to her, and nip her chin. Away the little lady flew to a second carriage, and on again, as one may when alive with an inquiry. I observed to Temple, 'I wonder whether she says in her German, "It is my question"; do you remember?' There was no weight whatever in what I said or thought.

She rode back, exclaiming, 'Nowhere. He is nowhere, and nobody knows. He will arrive. But he is not yet. Now,' she bent coaxingly down to me, 'can you not a few words of German? Only a smallest sum! It is the Markgrafin, my good aunt, would speak wid you, and she can no English- only she is eager to behold you, and come! You will know, for my sake, some scrap of German—ja? You will—nicht wahr? Or French? Make your glom-pudding of it, will you?'

I made a shocking plum-pudding of it. Temple was no happier.

The margravine, a fine vigorous lady with a lively mouth and livelier eyes of a restless grey that rarely dwelt on you when she spoke, and constantly started off on a new idea, did me the honour to examine me, much as if I had offered myself for service in her corps of grenadiers, and might do in time, but was decreed to be temporarily wanting in manly proportions.

She smiled a form of excuse of my bungling half-English horrid French, talked over me and at me, forgot me, and recollected me, all within a minute, and fished poor Temple for intelligible replies to incomprehensible language in the same manner, then threw her head back to gather the pair of us in her sight, then eyed me alone.

'C'est peut-etre le fils de son petit papa, et c'est tout dire.'

Such was her summary comment.

But not satisfied with that, she leaned out of the carriage, and, making an extraordinary grimace appear the mother in labour of the difficult words, said, 'Doos yo' laff?'

There was no helping it: I laughed like a madman, giving one outburst and a dead stop.

Far from looking displeased, she nodded. I was again put to the dreadful test.

'Can yo' mak' laff?'

It spurred my wits. I had no speech to 'mak' laff' with. At the very instant of my dilemma I chanced to see a soberly-clad old townsman hustled between two helpless women of the crowd, his pipe in his mouth, and his hat, wig, and handkerchief sliding over his face, showing his bald crown, and he not daring to cry out, for fear his pipe should be trodden under foot.

'He can, your Highness.'

Her quick eyes caught the absurd scene. She turned to one of her ladies and touched her forehead. Her hand was reached out to me; Temple she patted on the shoulder.

'He can—ja: du auch.'

A grand gentleman rode up. They whispered, gazed at the tent, and appeared to speak vehemently. All the men's faces were foreign: none of them had the slightest resemblance to my father's. I fancied I might detect him disguised. I stared vainly. Temple, to judge by the expression of his features, was thinking. Yes, thought I, we might as well be at home at old Riversley, that distant spot! We 're as out of place here as frogs in the desert!

Riding to and fro, and chattering, and commotion, of which the margravine was the centre, went on, and the band played beautiful waltzes. The workmen in and out of the tent were full of their business, like seamen under a storm.

'Fraulein Sibley,' the margravine called.

I hoped it might be an English name. So it proved to be; and the delight of hearing English spoken, and, what was more, having English ears to speak to, was blissful as the leap to daylight out of a nightmare.

'I have the honour to be your countrywoman,' said a lady, English all over to our struggling senses.

We became immediately attached to her as a pair of shipwrecked boats lacking provender of every sort are taken in tow by a well-stored vessel. She knew my father, knew him intimately. I related all I had to tell, and we learnt that we had made acquaintance with her pupil, the Princess Ottilia Wilhelmina Frederika Hedwig, only child of the Prince of Eppenwelzen.

'Your father will certainly be here; he is generally the margravine's right hand, and it's wonderful the margravine can do without him so long,' said Miss Sibley, and conversed with the margravine; after which she informed me that she had been graciously directed to assure me my father would be on the field when the cannon sounded.

'Perhaps you know nothing of Court life?' she resumed. 'We have very curious performances in Sarkeld, and we owe it to the margravine that we are frequently enlivened. You see the tall gentleman who is riding away from her. I mean the one with the black hussar jacket and thick brown moustache. That is the prince. Do you not think him handsome? He is very kind—rather capricious; but that is a way with princes. Indeed, I have no reason to complain. He has lost his wife, the Princess Frederika, and depends upon his sister the margravine for amusement. He has had it since she discovered your papa.'

'Is the gun never going off?' I groaned.

'If they would only conduct their ceremonies without their guns!' exclaimed Miss Sibley. 'The origin of the present ceremony is this: the margravine wished to have a statue erected to an ancestor, a renowned soldier—and I would infinitely prefer talking of England. But never mind. Oh, you won't understand what you gaze at. Well, the prince did not care to expend the money. Instead of urging that as the ground of his refusal, he declared there were no sculptors to do justice to Prince Albrecht Wohlgemuth, and one could not rely on their effecting a likeness. We have him in the dining-hall; he was strikingly handsome. Afterward he pretended—I'm speaking now of the existing Prince Ernest — that it would be ages before the statue was completed. One day the margravine induced him to agree to pay the sum stipulated for by the sculptor, on condition of the statue being completed for

public inspection within eight days of the hour of their agreement. The whole Court was witness to it. They arranged for the statue, horse and man, to be exhibited for a quarter of an hour. Of course, the margravine did not signify it would be a perfectly finished work. We are kept at a great distance, that we may not scrutinize it too closely. They unveil it to show she has been as good as her word, and then cover it up to fix the rider to the horse,—a screw is employed, I imagine. For one thing we know about it, we know that the horse and the horseman travelled hither separately. In all probability, the margravine gave the order for the statue last autumn in Berlin. Now look at the prince. He has his eye on you. Look down. Now he has forgotten you. He is impatient to behold the statue. Our chief fear is that the statue will not maintain its balance. Fortunately, we have plenty of guards to keep the people from pushing against it. If all turns out well, I shall really say the margravine has done wonders. She does not look anxious; but then she is not one ever to show it. The prince does. Every other minute he is glancing at the tent and at his watch. Can you guess my idea? Your father's absence leads me to think-oh! only a passing glimmer of an idea —the statue has not arrived, and he is bringing it on. Otherwise, he would be sure to be here. The margravine beckons me.'

'Don't go!' we cried simultaneously.

The Princess Ottilia supplied her place.

'I have sent to our stables for two little pretty Hungarian horses for you two to ride,' she said. 'No, I have not yet seen him. He is asked for, and de Markgrafin knows not at all. He bades in our lake; he has been seen since. The man is exciteable; but he is so sensible. Oh, no. And he is full of laughter. We shall soon see him. Would he not ever be cautious of himself for a son like you?'

Her compliment raised a blush on me.

The patience of the people was creditable to their phlegm. The smoke of pipes curling over the numberless heads was the most stirring thing about them.

Temple observed to me,

'We'll give the old statue a British cheer, won't we, Richie?'

'After coming all the way from England!' said I, in dejection.

'No, no, Richie; you're sure of him now. He 's somewhere directing affairs, I suspect. I say, do let us show them we can ring out the right tune upon occasion. By jingo! there goes a fellow with a match.'

We saw the cannonier march up to the margravine's carriage for orders. She summoned the prince to her side. Ladies in a dozen carriages were standing up, handkerchief in hand, and the gentlemen got their horses' heads on a line. Temple counted nearly sixty persons of quality stationed there. The workmen were trooping out of the tent.

Miss Sibley ran to us, saying,—

'The gun-horror has been commanded. Now then: the prince can scarcely contain himself. The gunner is ready near his gun; he has his frightful match lifted. See, the manager-superintendent is receiving the margravine's last injunctions. How firm women's nerves are! Now the margravine insists on the prince's reading the exact time by her watch. Everybody is doing it. Let us see. By my watch it is all but fifteen minutes to eleven, A.M. Dearest,' she addressed the little princess; 'would you not like to hold my hand until the gun is fired?'

'Dearest,' replied the princess, whether in childish earnest or irony I could not divine, 'if I would hold a hand it would be a gentleman's.'

All eyes were on the Prince of Eppenwelzen, as he gazed toward the covered statue. With imposing deliberation his hand rose to his hat. We saw the hat raised. The cannon was fired and roared; the band struck up a pompous slow march: and the tent-veil broke apart and rolled off. It was like the dawn flying and sunrise mounting.

I confess I forgot all thought of my father for awhile; the shouts of the people, the braying of the brass instruments, the ladies cheering sweetly, the gentlemen giving short, hearty expressions

of applause, intoxicated me. And the statue was superb-horse and rider in new bronze polished by sunlight.

'It is life-like! it is really noble! it is a true Prince!' exclaimed Miss Sibley. She translated several exclamations of the ladies and gentlemen in German: they were entirely to the same effect. The horse gave us a gleam of his neck as he pawed a forefoot, just reined in. We knew him; he was a gallant horse; but it was the figure of the Prince Albrecht that was so fine. I had always laughed at sculptured figures on horseback. This one overawed me. The Marshal was acknowledging the salute of his army after a famous victory over the infidel Turks. He sat upright, almost imperceptibly but effectively bending his head in harmony with the curve of his horse's neck, and his baton swept the air low in proud submission to the honours cast on him by his acclaiming soldiery. His three-cornered lace hat, curled wig, heavy-trimmed surcoat, and high boots, reminded me of Prince Eugene. No Prince Eugene—nay, nor Marlborough, had such a martial figure, such an animated high old warrior's visage. The bronze features reeked of battle.

Temple and I felt humiliated (without cause, I granted) at the success of a work of Art that struck us as a new military triumph of these Germans, and it was impossible not to admire it. The little Princess Ottilia clapped hands by fits. What words she addressed to me I know not. I dealt out my stock of German—'Ja, ja—to her English. We were drawn by her to congratulate the margravine, whose hand was then being kissed by the prince: he did it most courteously and affectionately. Other gentlemen, counts and barons, bowed over her hand. Ladies, according to their rank and privileges, saluted her on the cheek or in some graceful fashion. When our turn arrived, Miss Sibley translated for us, and as we were at concert pitch we did not acquit ourselves badly. Temple's remark was, that he wished she and all her family had been English. Nothing was left for me to say but that the margravine almost made us wish we had been German.

Smiling cordially, the margravine spoke, Miss Sibley translated:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.