

Stevenson Robert Louis

**The Works of
Robert Louis Stevenson –
Swanston Edition. Volume...**



Роберт Льюис Стивенсон

**The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson
– Swanston Edition. Volume 7**

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PRINCE OTTO

TO

NELLY VAN DE GRIFT

(MRS. ADULFO SANCHEZ, OF MONTEREY)

At last, after so many years, I have the pleasure of re-introducing you to “Prince Otto,” whom you will remember a very little fellow, no bigger, in fact, than a few sheets of memoranda written for me by your kind hand. The sight of his name will carry you back to an old wooden house embowered in creepers; a house that was far gone in the respectable stages of antiquity, and seemed indissoluble from the green garden in which it stood, and that yet was a sea-traveller in its younger days, and had come round the Horn piecemeal in the belly of a ship, and might have heard the seamen stamping and shouting and the note of the boatswain’s whistle. It will recall to you the nondescript inhabitants, now so widely scattered: – the two horses, the dog, and the four cats, some of them still looking in your face as you read these lines; – the poor lady, so unfortunately married to an author; – the China boy, by this time, perhaps, baiting his line by the banks of a river in the Flowery Land; – and in particular the Scot who was then sick apparently unto death, and whom you did so much to cheer and keep in good behaviour.

You may remember that he was full of ambitions and designs: so soon as he had his health again completely, you may remember the fortune he was to earn, the journeys he was to go upon, the delights he was to enjoy and confer, and (among other matters) the masterpiece he was to make of “Prince Otto”!

Well, we will not give in that we are finally beaten. Wered together in those days the story of Braddock, and how, as he was carried dying from the scene of his defeat, he promised himself to do better another time: a story that will always touch a brave heart, and a dying speech worthy of a more fortunate commander. I try to be of Braddock’s mind. I still mean to get my health again; I still purpose, by hook or crook, this book or the next, to launch a masterpiece; and I still intend – somehow, some time or other – to see your face and to hold your hand.

Meanwhile, this little paper traveller goes forth instead, crosses the great seas and the long plains and the dark mountains, and comes at last to your door in Monterey, charged with tender greetings. Pray you, take him in. He comes from a house where (even as in your own) there are gathered together some of the waifs of our company at Oakland; a house – for all its outlandish Gaelic name and distant station – where you are well-beloved.

R. L. S.

Skerryvore, Bournemouth.

BOOK I

PRINCE ERRANT

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THE PRINCE DEPARTS ON AN ADVENTURE

You shall seek in vain upon the map of Europe for the bygone state of Grünewald. An independent principality, an infinitesimal member of the German Empire, she played, for several centuries, her part in the discord of Europe; and, at last, in the ripeness of time and at the spiring of several bald diplomatists, vanished like a morning ghost. Less fortunate than Poland, she left not a regret behind her; and the very memory of her boundaries has faded.

It was a patch of hilly country covered with thick wood. Many streams took their beginning in the glens of Grünewald, turning mills for the inhabitants. There was one town, Mittwalden, and many brown, wooden hamlets, climbing roof above roof, along the steep bottom of dells, and communicating by covered bridges over the larger of the torrents. The hum of watermills, the splash of running water, the clean odour of pine sawdust, the sound and smell of the pleasant wind among the innumerable army of the mountain pines, the dropping fire of huntsmen, the dull stroke of the wood-axe, intolerable roads, fresh trout for supper in the clean bare chamber of an inn, and the song of birds and the music of the village-bells – these were the recollections of the Grünewald tourist.

North and east the foothills of Grünewald sank with varying profile into a vast plain. On these sides many small states bordered with the principality, Gerolstein, an extinct grand duchy, among the number. On the south it marched with the comparatively powerful kingdom of Seaboard Bohemia, celebrated for its flowers and mountain bears, and inhabited by a people of singular simplicity and tenderness of heart. Several intermarriages had, in the course of centuries, united the crowned families of Grünewald and Maritime Bohemia; and the last Prince of Grünewald, whose history I purpose to relate, drew his descent through Perdita, the only daughter of King Florizel the First of Bohemia. That these intermarriages had in some degree mitigated the rough, manly stock of the first Grünewalds, was an opinion widely held within the borders of the principality. The charcoal burner, the mountain sawyer, the wielder of the broad axe among the congregated pines of Grünewald, proud of their hard hands, proud of their shrewd ignorance and almost savage lore, looked with an unfeigned contempt on the soft character and manners of the sovereign race.

The precise year of grace in which this tale begins shall be left to the conjecture of the reader. But for the season of the year (which, in such a story, is the more important of the two) it was already so far forward in the spring, that when mountain people heard horns echoing all day about the north-west corner of the principality, they told themselves that Prince Otto and his hunt were up and out for the last time till the return of autumn.

At this point the borders of Grünewald descend somewhat steeply, here and there breaking into crags; and this shaggy and trackless country stands in a bold contrast to the cultivated plain below. It was traversed at that period by two roads alone; one, the imperial highway, bound to Brandenau in Gerolstein, descended the slope obliquely and by the easiest gradients. The other ran like a fillet across the very forehead of the hills, dipping into savage gorges, and wetted by the spray of tiny waterfalls. Once it passed beside a certain tower or castle, built sheer upon the margin of a formidable cliff, and commanding a vast prospect of the skirts of Grünewald and the busy plains of Gerolstein. The Felsenburg (so this tower was called) served now as a prison, now as a hunting-seat; and for all it stood so lonesome to the naked eye, with the aid of a good glass the burghers of Brandenau could count its windows from the lime-tree terrace where they walked at night.

In the wedge of forest hillside enclosed between the roads, the horns continued all day long to scatter tumult; and at length, as the sun began to draw near to the horizon of the plain, a rousing triumph announced the slaughter of the quarry. The first and second huntsman had drawn somewhat aside, and from the summit of a knoll gazed down before them on the drooping shoulders of the hill and across the expanse of plain. They covered their eyes, for the sun was in their faces. The glory of its going down was somewhat pale. Through the confused tracery of many thousands of naked poplars, the smoke of so many houses, and the evening steam ascending from the fields, the sails of a windmill on a gentle eminence moved very conspicuously, like a donkey's ears. And hard by, like an open gash, the imperial high-road ran straight sunward, an artery of travel.

There is one of nature's spiritual ditties, that has not yet been set to words or human music: "The Invitation to the Road"; an air continually sounding in the ears of gipsies, and to whose inspiration our nomadic fathers journeyed all their days. The hour, the season, and the scene, all were in delicate accord. The air was full of birds of passage, steering westward and northward over Grünewald, an army of specks to the up-looking eye. And below, the great practicable road was bound for the same quarter.

But to the two horsemen on the knoll this spiritual ditty was unheard. They were, indeed, in some concern of mind, scanning every fold of the subjacent forest, and betraying both anger and dismay in their impatient gestures.

"I do not see him, Kuno," said the first huntsman, "nowhere – not a trace, not a hair of the mare's tail! No, sir, he's off; broke cover and got away. Why, for twopence I would hunt him with the dogs!"

"Mayhap, he's gone home," said Kuno, but without conviction.

"Home!" sneered the other. "I give him twelve days to get home. No, it's begun again; it's as it was three years ago, before he married; a disgrace! Hereditary prince, hereditary fool! There goes the government over the borders on a grey mare. What's that? No, nothing – no, I tell you, on my word, I set more store by a good gelding or an English dog. That for your Otto!"

"He's not my Otto," growled Kuno.

"Then I don't know whose he is," was the retort.

"You would put your hand in the fire for him to-morrow," said Kuno, facing round.

"Me!" cried the huntsman. "I would see him hanged! I'm a Grünewald patriot – enrolled, and have my medal, too; and I would help a prince! I'm for liberty and Gondremark."

"Well, it's all one," said Kuno. "If anybody said what you said, you would have his blood, and you know it."

"You have him on the brain," retorted his companion. – "There he goes!" he cried, the next moment.

And sure enough, about a mile down the mountain, a rider on a white horse was seen to flit rapidly across a heathy open and vanish among the trees on the farther side.

"In ten minutes he'll be over the border into Gerolstein," said Kuno. "It's past cure."

"Well, if he founders that mare, I'll never forgive him," added the other, gathering his reins.

And as they turned down from the knoll to rejoin their comrades, the sun dipped and disappeared, and the woods fell instantly into the gravity and greyness of the early night.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH THE PRINCE PLAYS HAROUN-AL-RASCHID

The night fell upon the Prince while he was threading green tracks in the lower valleys of the wood; and though the stars came out overhead and displayed the interminable order of the pine-tree pyramids, regular and dark like cypresses, their light was of small service to a traveller in such lonely paths, and from thenceforth he rode at random. The austere face of nature, the uncertain issue of his

course, the open sky and the free air, delighted him like wine; and the hoarse chafing of a river on his left sounded in his ears agreeably.

It was past eight at night before his toil was rewarded and he issued at last out of the forest on the firm white high-road. It lay downhill before him with a sweeping eastward trend, faintly bright between the thickets; and Otto paused and gazed upon it. So it ran, league after league, still joining others, to the farthest ends of Europe, there skirting the sea-surge, here gleaming in the lights of cities; and the innumerable army of tramps and travellers moved upon it in all lands as by a common impulse, and were now in all places drawing near to the inn door and the night's rest. The pictures swarmed and vanished in his brain; a surge of temptation, a beat of all his blood, went over him, to set spur to the mare and to go on into the unknown for ever. And then it passed away; hunger and fatigue, and that habit of middling actions which we call common sense, resumed their empire; and in that changed mood his eye lighted upon two bright windows on his left hand, between the road and river.

He turned off by a by-road, and in a few minutes he was knocking with his whip on the door of a large farmhouse, and a chorus of dogs from the farmyard were making angry answer. A very tall, old, white-headed man came, shading a candle, at the summons. He had been of great strength in his time, and of a handsome countenance; but now he was fallen away, his teeth were quite gone, and his voice when he spoke was broken and falsetto.

“You will pardon me,” said Otto. “I am a traveller and have entirely lost my way.”

“Sir,” said the old man, in a very stately, shaky manner, “you are at the River Farm, and I am Killian Gottesheim, at your disposal. We are here, sir, at about an equal distance from Mittwalden in Grünewald and Brandenau in Gerolstein: six leagues to either, and the road excellent; but there is not a wine-bush, not a carter's alehouse, anywhere between. You will have to accept my hospitality for the night; rough hospitality, to which I make you freely welcome; for, sir,” he added, with a bow, “it is God who sends the guest.”

“Amen. And I most heartily thank you,” replied Otto, bowing in his turn.

“Fritz,” said the old man, turning towards the interior, “lead round this gentleman's horse; and you, sir, condescend to enter.”

Otto entered a chamber occupying the greater part of the ground-floor of the building. It had probably once been divided; for the farther end was raised by a long step above the nearer, and the blazing fire and the white supper-table seemed to stand upon a dais. All around were dark, brass-mounted cabinets and cupboards; dark shelves carrying ancient country crockery; guns and antlers and broadside ballads on the wall; a tall old clock with roses on the dial; and down in one corner the comfortable promise of a wine-barrel. It was homely, elegant, and quaint.

A powerful youth hurried out to attend on the grey mare; and when Mr. Killian Gottesheim had presented him to his daughter Ottilia, Otto followed to the stable as became, not perhaps the Prince, but the good horseman. When he returned, a smoking omelette and some slices of home-cured ham were waiting him; these were followed by a ragout and a cheese; and it was not until his guest had entirely satisfied his hunger, and the whole party drew about the fire over the wine-jug, that Killian Gottesheim's elaborate courtesy permitted him to address a question to the Prince.

“You have perhaps ridden far, sir?” he inquired.

“I have, as you say, ridden far,” replied Otto; “and, as you have seen, I was prepared to do justice to your daughter's cookery.”

“Possibly, sir, from the direction of Brandenau?” continued Killian.

“Precisely: and I should have slept to-night, had I not wandered, in Mittwalden,” answered the Prince, weaving in a patch of truth, according to the habit of all liars.

“Business leads you to Mittwalden?” was the next question.

“Mere curiosity,” said Otto. “I have never yet visited the principality of Grünewald.”

“A pleasant state, sir,” piped the old man, nodding, “a very pleasant state, and a fine race, both pines and people. We reckon ourselves part Grünewalders here, lying so near the borders; and the

river there is all good Grünewald water, every drop of it. Yes, sir, a fine state. A man of Grünewald now will swing me an axe over his head that many a man of Gerolstein could hardly lift; and the pines, why, deary me, there must be more pines in that little state, sir, than people in this whole big world. 'Tis twenty years now since I crossed the marshes, for we grow home-keepers in old age; but I mind it as if it was yesterday. Up and down, the road keeps right on from here to Mittwalden; and nothing all the way but the good green pine-trees, big and little, and water-power! water-power at every step, sir. We once sold a bit of forest, up there beside the high-road; and the sight of minted money that we got for it has set me ciphering ever since what all the pines in Grünewald would amount to."

"I suppose you see nothing of the Prince?" inquired Otto.

"No," said the young man, speaking for the first time, "nor want to."

"Why so? is he so much disliked?" asked Otto.

"Not what you might call disliked," replied the old gentleman, "but despised, sir."

"Indeed," said the Prince, somewhat faintly.

"Yes, sir, despised," nodded Killian, filling a long pipe, "and, to my way of thinking, justly despised. Here is a man with great opportunities, and what does he do with them? He hunts, and he dresses very prettily – which is a thing to be ashamed of in a man – and he acts plays; and if he does aught else, the news of it has not come here."

"Yet these are all innocent," said Otto. "What would you have him do – make war?"

"No, sir," replied the old man. "But here it is: I have been fifty years upon this River Farm, and wrought in it, day in, day out; I have ploughed and sowed and reaped, and risen early, and waked late; and this is the upshot: that all these years it has supported me and my family; and been the best friend that ever I had, set aside my wife; and now, when my time comes, I leave it a better farm than when I found it. So it is, if a man works hearty in the order of nature, he gets bread and he receives comfort, and whatever he touches breeds. And it humbly appears to me, if that Prince was to labour on his throne, as I have laboured and wrought in my farm, he would find both an increase and a blessing."

"I believe with you, sir," Otto said; "and yet the parallel is inexact. For the farmer's life is natural and simple; but the prince's is both artificial and complicated. It is easy to do right in the one, and exceedingly difficult not to do wrong in the other. If your crop is blighted, you can take off your bonnet and say, 'God's will be done'; but if the prince meets with a reverse, he may have to blame himself for the attempt. And, perhaps, if all the kings in Europe were to confine themselves to innocent amusement, the subjects would be the better off."

"Ay," said the young man Fritz, "you are in the right of it there. That was a true word spoken. And I see you are like me, a good patriot and an enemy to princes."

Otto was somewhat abashed at this deduction, and he made haste to change his ground. "But," said he, "you surprise me by what you say of this Prince Otto. I have heard him, I must own, more favourably painted. I was told he was, in his heart, a good fellow, and the enemy of no one but himself."

"And so he is, sir," said the girl, "a very handsome, pleasant prince; and we know some who would shed their blood for him."

"O! Kuno!" said Fritz. "An ignoramus!"

"Ay, Kuno, to be sure," quavered the old farmer. "Well, since this gentleman is a stranger to these parts, and curious about the Prince, I do believe that story might divert him. This Kuno, you must know, sir, is one of the hunt servants, and a most ignorant, intemperate man: a right Grünewalder, as we say in Gerolstein. We know him well, in this house; for he has come as far as here after his stray dogs; and I make all welcome, sir, without account of state or nation. And, indeed, between Gerolstein and Grünewald the peace has held so long that the roads stand open like my door; and a man will make no more of the frontier than the very birds themselves."

"Ay," said Otto, "it has been a long peace – a peace of centuries."

"Centuries, as you say," returned Killian: "the more the pity that it should not be for ever. Well, sir, this Kuno was one day in fault, and Otto, who has a quick temper, up with his whip and thrashed

him, they do say, soundly. Kuno took it as best he could, but at last he broke out, and dared the Prince to throw his whip away and wrestle like a man; for we are all great at wrestling in these parts, and it's so that we generally settle our disputes. Well, sir, the Prince did so; and, being a weakly creature, found the tables turned; for the man whom he had just been thrashing like a negro slave, lifted him with a back grip and threw him heels overhead."

"He broke his bridle-arm," cried Fritz – "and some say his nose. Serve him right, say I! Man to man, which is the better at that?"

"And then?" asked Otto.

"O, then Kuno carried him home; and they were the best of friends from that day forth. I don't say it's a discreditable story, you observe," continued Mr. Gottesheim; "but it's droll, and that's the fact. A man should think before he strikes; for, as my nephew says, man to man was the old valuation."

"Now, if you were to ask me," said Otto, "I should perhaps surprise you. I think it was the Prince that conquered."

"And, sir, you would be right," replied Killian seriously. "In the eyes of God, I do not question but you would be right; but men, sir, look at these things differently, and they laugh."

"They made a song of it," observed Fritz. "How does it go? Ta-tum-ta-ra..."

"Well," interrupted Otto, who had no great anxiety to hear the song, "the Prince is young; he may yet mend."

"Not so young, by your leave," cried Fritz. "A man of forty."

"Thirty-six," corrected Mr. Gottesheim.

"O," cried Ottilia, in obvious disillusion, "a man of middle age! And they said he was so handsome when he was young!"

"And bald, too," added Fritz.

Otto passed his hand among his locks. At that moment he was far from happy, and even the tedious evenings at Mittwalden Palace began to smile upon him by comparison.

"O, six-and-thirty!" he protested. "A man is not yet old at six-and-thirty. I am that age myself."

"I should have taken you for more, sir," piped the old farmer. "But if that be so, you are of an age with Master Ottekin, as people call him; and, I would wager a crown, have done more service in your time. Though it seems young by comparison with men of a great age like me, yet it's some way through life for all that; and the mere fools and fiddlers are beginning to grow weary and to look old. Yes, sir, by six-and-thirty, if a man be a follower of God's laws, he should have made himself a home and a good name to live by; he should have got a wife and a blessing on his marriage; and his works, as the Word says, should begin to follow him."

"Ah, well, the Prince is married," cried Fritz, with a coarse burst of laughter.

"That seems to entertain you, sir," said Otto.

"Ay," said the young boor. "Did you not know that? I thought all Europe knew it!" And he added a pantomime of a nature to explain his accusation to the dullest.

"Ah sir," said Mr. Gottesheim, "it is very plain that you are not from hereabouts! But the truth is, that the whole princely family and Court are rips and rascals, not one to mend another. They live, sir, in idleness and – what most commonly follows it – corruption. The Princess has a lover; a Baron, as he calls himself, from East Prussia; and the Prince is so little of a man, sir, that he holds the candle. Nor is that the worst of it, for this foreigner and his paramour are suffered to transact the state affairs, while the Prince takes the salary and leaves all things to go to wrack. There will follow upon this some manifest judgment which, though I am old, I may survive to see."

"Good man, you are in the wrong about Gondremark," said Fritz, showing a greatly increased animation; "but for all the rest, you speak the God's truth like a good patriot. As for the Prince, if he would take and strangle his wife, I would forgive him yet."

“Nay, Fritz,” said the old man, “that would be to add iniquity to evil. For you perceive, sir,” he continued, once more addressing himself to the unfortunate Prince, “this Otto has himself to thank for these disorders. He has his young wife, and his principality, and he has sworn to cherish both.”

“Sworn at the altar!” echoed Fritz. “But put your faith in princes!”

“Well, sir, he leaves them both to an adventurer from East Prussia,” pursued the farmer: “leaves the girl to be seduced and to go on from bad to worse, till her name’s become a tap-room by-word, and she not yet twenty; leaves the country to be overtaxed, and bullied with armaments, and jockeyed into war – ”

“War!” cried Otto.

“So they say, sir; those that watch their ongoings, say to war,” asseverated Killian. “Well, sir, that is very sad; it is a sad thing for this poor, wicked girl to go down to hell with people’s curses; it’s a sad thing for a tight little happy country to be misconducted; but whoever may complain, I humbly conceive, sir, that this Otto cannot. What he has worked for, that he has got; and may God have pity on his soul, for a great and a silly sinner’s!”

“He has broke his oath; then he is a perjurer. He takes the money and leaves the work; why, then plainly he’s a thief. A cuckold he was before, and a fool by birth. Better me that!” cried Fritz, and snapped his fingers.

“And now, sir, you will see a little,” continued the farmer, “why we think so poorly of this Prince Otto. There’s such a thing as a man being pious and honest in the private way; and there is such a thing, sir, as a public virtue; but when a man has neither, the Lord lighten him! Even this Gondremark, that Fritz here thinks so much of – ”

“Ay,” interrupted Fritz, “Gondremark’s the man for me. I would we had his like in Gerolstein.”

“He is a bad man,” said the old farmer, shaking his head; “and there was never good begun by the breach of God’s commandments. But so far I will go with you: he is a man that works for what he has.”

“I tell you he’s the hope of Grünewald,” cried Fritz. “He doesn’t suit some of your high-and-dry, old, ancient ideas; but he’s a downright modern man – a man of the new lights and the progress of the age. He does some things wrong; so they all do; but he has the people’s interests next his heart; and you mark me – you, sir, who are a Liberal, and the enemy of all their governments, you please to mark my words – the day will come in Grünewald, when they take out that yellow-headed skulk of a Prince and that dough-faced Messalina of a Princess, march ’em back foremost over the borders, and proclaim the Baron Gondremark first President. I’ve heard them say it in a speech. I was at a meeting once at Brandenau, and the Mittwalden delegates spoke up for fifteen thousand. Fifteen thousand, all brigaded, and each man with a medal round his neck to rally by. That’s all Gondremark.”

“Ay, sir, you see what it leads to: wild talk to-day, and wilder doings to-morrow,” said the old man. “For there is one thing certain: that this Gondremark has one foot in the Court backstairs, and the other in the Masons’ lodges. He gives himself out, sir, for what nowadays they call a patriot: a man from East Prussia!”

“Give himself out!” cried Fritz. “He is! He is to lay by his title as soon as the Republic is declared; I heard it in a speech.”

“Lay by Baron to take up President?” returned Killian. “King Log, King Stork. But you’ll live longer than I, and you will see the fruits of it.”

“Father,” whispered Ottilia, pulling at the speaker’s coat, “surely the gentleman is ill.”

“I beg your pardon,” cried the farmer, re-waking to hospitable thoughts; “can I offer you anything?”

“I thank you. I am very weary,” answered Otto. “I have presumed upon my strength. If you would show me to a bed, I should be grateful.”

“Ottilia, a candle!” said the old man. “Indeed sir, you look pale. A little cordial water? No? Then follow me, I beseech you, and I will bring you to the stranger’s bed. You are not the first by

many who has slept well below my roof,” continued the old gentleman, mounting the stairs before his guest; “for good food, honest wine, a grateful conscience, and a little pleasant chat before a man retires, are worth all the possets and apothecary’s drugs. See, sir,” and here he opened a door and ushered Otto into a little whitewashed sleeping-room, “here you are in port. It is small, but it is airy, and the sheets are clean and kept in lavender. The window, too, looks out above the river, and there’s no music like a little river’s. It plays the same tune (and that’s the favourite) over and over again, and yet does not weary of it like men fiddlers. It takes the mind out of doors; and though we should be grateful for good houses, there is, after all, no house like God’s out-of-doors. And lastly, sir, it quiets a man down like saying his prayers. So here, sir, I take my kind leave of you until to-morrow; and it is my prayerful wish that you may slumber like a prince.”

And the old man, with the twentieth courteous inclination, left his guest alone.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH THE PRINCE COMFORTS AGE AND BEAUTY AND DELIVERS A LECTURE ON DISCRETION IN LOVE

The Prince was early abroad: in the time of the first chorus of birds, of the pure and quiet air, of the slanting sunlight and the mile-long shadows. To one who had passed a miserable night, the freshness of that hour was tonic and reviving; to steal a march upon his slumbering fellows, to be the Adam of the coming day, composed and fortified his spirits; and the Prince, breathing deep and pausing as he went, walked in the wet fields beside his shadow, and was glad.

A trellised path led down into the valley of the brook, and he turned to follow it. The stream was a break-neck, boiling highland river. Hard by the farm, it leaped a little precipice in a thick grey-mare’s tail of twisted filaments, and then lay and worked and bubbled in a lynn. Into the middle of this quaking pool a rock protruded, shelving to a cape; and thither Otto scrambled and sat down to ponder.

Soon the sun struck through the screen of branches and thin early leaves that made a hanging bower above the fall; and the golden lights and flitting shadows fell upon and marbled the surface of that seething pot; and rays plunged deep among the turning waters; and a spark, as bright as a diamond, lit upon the swaying eddy. It began to grow warm where Otto lingered, warm and heady; the lights swam, weaving their maze across the shaken pool; on the impending rock, reflections danced 24 like butterflies; and the air was fanned by the waterfall as by a swinging curtain.

Otto, who was weary with tossing and beset with horrid phantoms of remorse and jealousy, instantly fell dead in love with that sun-chequered, echoing corner. Holding his feet, he stared out of a drowsy trance, wondering, admiring, musing, losing his way among uncertain thoughts. There is nothing that so apes the external bearing of free will as that unconscious bustle, obscurely following liquid laws, with which a river contends among obstructions. It seems the very play of man and destiny, and as Otto pored on these recurrent changes, he grew, by equal steps, the sleepier and the more profound. Eddy and Prince were alike jostled in their purpose, alike anchored by intangible influences in one corner of the world. Eddy and Prince were alike useless, starkly useless, in the cosmology of men. Eddy and Prince – Prince and Eddy.

It is probable he had been some while asleep when a voice recalled him from oblivion. “Sir,” it was saying; and looking round, he saw Mr. Killian’s daughter, terrified by her boldness, and making bashful signals from the shore. She was a plain, honest lass, healthy and happy and good, and with that sort of beauty that comes of happiness and health. But her confusion lent her for the moment an additional charm.

“Good-morning,” said Otto, rising and moving towards her. “I arose early and was in a dream.”

“O, sir!” she cried, “I wish to beg of you to spare my father; for I assure your Highness, if he had known who you was, he would have bitten his tongue out sooner. And Fritz, too – how he went on! But I had a notion; and this morning I went straight down into the stable, and there was your

Highness's crown upon the stirrup-irons! But, O, sir, I made certain you would spare them; for they were as innocent as lambs.”

“My dear,” said Otto, both amused and gratified, “you do not understand. It is I who am in the wrong; for I had no business to conceal my name and lead on these gentlemen to speak of me. And it is I who have to beg of you that you will keep my secret and not betray the discourtesy of which I was guilty. As for any fear of me, your friends are safe in Gerolstein; and even in my own territory, you must be well aware I have no power.”

“O, sir,” she said, curtsying, “I would not say that: the huntsmen would all die for you.”

“Happy Prince!” said Otto. “But although you are too courteous to avow the knowledge, you have had many opportunities of learning that I am a vain show. Only last night we heard it very clearly stated. You see the shadow flitting on this hard rock? Prince Otto, I am afraid, is but the moving shadow, and the name of the rock is Gondremark. Ah! if your friends had fallen foul of Gondremark! But happily the younger of the two admires him. But as for the old gentleman your father, he is a wise man and an excellent talker, and I would take a long wager he is honest.”

“O, for honest, your Highness, that he is!” exclaimed the girl. “And Fritz is as honest as he. And as for all they said, it was just talk and nonsense. When countryfolk get gossiping, they go on, I do assure you, for the fun; they don't as much as think of what they say. If you went to the next farm, it's my belief you would hear as much against my father.”

“Nay, nay,” said Otto, “there you go too fast. For all that was said against Prince Otto – ” “O, it was shameful!” cried the girl.

“Not shameful – true,” returned Otto. “O, yes – true. I am all they said of me – all that and worse.”

“I never!” cried Ottilia. “Is that how you do? Well, you would never be a soldier. Now, if anyone accuses me, I get up and give it them. O, I defend myself. I wouldn't take a fault at another person's hands, no, not if I had it on my forehead. And that's what you must do, if you mean to live it out. But, indeed, I never heard such nonsense. I should think you was ashamed of yourself! You're bald, then, I suppose?”

“O, no,” said Otto, fairly laughing. “There I acquit myself: not bald!”

“Well, and good?” pursued the girl. “Come now, you know you are good, and I'll make you say so... Your Highness, I beg your humble pardon. But there's no disrespect intended. And anyhow, you know you are.”

“Why, now, what am I to say?” replied Otto. “You are a cook, and excellently well you do it; I embrace the chance of thanking you for the ragout. Well now, have you not seen good food so bedevilled by unskilful cookery that no one could be brought to eat the pudding? That is me, my dear. I am full of good ingredients, but the dish is worthless. I am – I give it you in one word – sugar in the salad.”

“Well, I don't care, you're good,” reiterated Ottilia, a little flushed by having failed to understand.

“I will tell you one thing,” replied Otto: “You are!”

“Ah, well, that's what they all said of you,” moralised the girl; “such a tongue to come round – such a flattering tongue!”

“O, you forget, I am a man of middle age,” the Prince chuckled.

“Well, to speak to you, I should think you was a boy; and Prince or no Prince, if you came worrying where I was cooking, I would pin a napkin to your tails... And, O Lord, I declare I hope your Highness will forgive me,” the girl added. “I can't keep it in my mind.”

“No more can I,” cried Otto. “That is just what they complain of!”

They made a lovely-looking couple; only the heavy pouring of that horse-tail of water made them raise their voices above lovers' pitch. But to a jealous onlooker from above, their mirth and

close proximity might easily give umbrage; and a rough voice out of a tuft of brambles began calling on Ottilia by name. She changed colour at that. “It is Fritz,” she said. “I must go.”

“Go, my dear, and I need not bid you go in peace, for I think you have discovered that I am not formidable at close quarters,” said the Prince, and made her a fine gesture of dismissal.

So Ottilia skipped up the bank, and disappeared into the thicket, stopping once for a single blushing bob – blushing, because she had in the interval once more forgotten and remembered the stranger’s quality.

Otto returned to his rock promontory; but his humour had in the meantime changed. The sun now shone more fairly on the pool; and over its brown, welling surface, the blue of heaven and the golden green of the spring foliage danced in fleeting arabesque. The eddies laughed and brightened with essential colour. And the beauty of the dell began to rankle in the Prince’s mind; it was so near to his own borders, yet without. He had never had much of the joy of possession in any of the thousand and one beautiful and curious things that were his; and now he was conscious of envy for what was another’s. It was, indeed, a smiling, dilettante sort of envy; but yet there it was: the passion of Ahab for the vineyard, done in little; and he was relieved when Mr. Killian appeared upon the scene.

“I hope, sir, that you have slept well under my plain roof,” said the old farmer.

“I am admiring this sweet spot that you are privileged to dwell in,” replied Otto, evading the inquiry.

“It is rustic,” returned Mr. Gottesheim, looking around him with complacency, “a very rustic corner; and some of the land to the west is most excellent fat land, excellent deep soil. You should see my wheat in the ten-acre field. There is not a farm in Grünewald, no, nor many in Gerolstein, to match the River Farm. Some sixty – I keep thinking when I sow – some sixty, and some seventy, and some an hundredfold; and my own place, six score! But that, sir, is partly the farming.”

“And the stream has fish?” asked Otto.

“A fish-pond,” said the farmer. “Ay, it is a pleasant bit. It is pleasant even here, if one had time, with the brook drumming in that black pool, and the green things hanging all about the rocks, and, dear heart, to see the very pebbles! all turned to gold and precious stones! But you have come to that time of life, sir, when, if you will excuse me, you must look to have the rheumatism set in. Thirty to forty is, as one may say, their seed-time. And this is a damp, cold corner for the early morning and an empty stomach. If I might humbly advise you, sir, I would be moving.”

“With all my heart,” said Otto gravely. “And so you have lived your life here?” he added, as they turned to go.

“Here I was born,” replied the farmer, “and here I wish I could say I was to die. But fortune, sir, fortune turns the wheel. They say she is blind, but we will hope she only sees a little farther on. My grandfather and my father and I, we have all tilled these acres, my furrow following theirs. All the three names are on the garden bench, two Killians and one Johann. Yes, sir, good men have prepared themselves for the great change in my old garden. Well do I mind my father, in a woollen night-cap, the good soul, going round and round to see the last of it, ‘Killian,’ said he, ‘do you see the smoke of my tobacco? Why,’ said he, ‘that is man’s life.’ It was his last pipe, and I believe he knew it; and it was a strange thing, without doubt, to leave the trees that he had planted, and the son that he had begotten, ay, sir, and even the old pipe with the Turk’s head that he had smoked since he was a lad and went a-courting. But here we have no continuing city; and as for the eternal, it’s a comfortable thought that we have other merits than our own. And yet you would hardly think how sore it goes against the grain with me, to die in a strange bed.”

“And must you do so? For what reason?” Otto asked.

“The reason? The place is to be sold: three thousand crowns,” replied Mr. Gottesheim. “Had it been a third of that, I may say without boasting that, what with my credit and my savings, I could have met the sum. But at three thousand, unless I have singular good fortune and the new proprietor continues me in office, there is nothing left me but to budge.”

Otto's fancy for the place redoubled at the news, and became joined with other feelings. If all he heard were true, Grünewald was growing very hot for a sovereign Prince; it might be well to have a refuge; and if so, what more delightful hermitage could man imagine? Mr. Gottesheim, besides, had touched his sympathies. Every man loves in his soul to play the part of the stage deity. And to step down to the aid of the old farmer, who had so roughly handled him in talk, was the ideal of a Fair Revenge. Otto's thoughts brightened at the prospect, and he began to regard himself with a renewed respect.

"I can find you, I believe, a purchaser," he said, "and one who would continue to avail himself of your skill."

"Can you, sir, indeed?" said the old man. "Well, I shall be heartily obliged; for I begin to find a man may practise resignation all his days, as he takes physic, and not come to like it in the end."

"If you will have the papers drawn, you may even burthen the purchase with your interest," said Otto. "Let it be assured to you through life."

"Your friend, sir," insinuated Killian, "would not, perhaps, care to make the interest reversible? Fritz is a good lad."

"Fritz is young," said the Prince drily; "he must earn consideration, not inherit."

"He has long worked upon the place, sir," insisted Mr. Gottesheim; "and at my great age, for I am seventy-eight come harvest, it would be a troublesome thought to the proprietor how to fill my shoes. It would be a care spared to assure yourself of Fritz. And I believe he might be tempted by a permanency."

"The young man has unsettled views," returned Otto.

"Possibly the purchaser –" began Killian.

A little spot of anger burned in Otto's cheek. "I am the purchaser," he said.

"It was what I might have guessed," replied the farmer, bowing with an aged, obsequious dignity. "You have made an old man very happy; and I may say, indeed, that I have entertained an angel unawares. Sir, the great people of this world – and by that I mean those who are great in station – if they had only hearts like yours, how they would make the fires burn and the poor sing!"

"I would not judge them hardly, sir," said Otto. "We all have our frailties."

"Truly, sir," said Mr. Gottesheim, with unction. "And by what name, sir, am I to address my generous landlord?"

The double recollection of an English traveller, whom he had received the week before at court, and of an old English rogue called Transome, whom he had known in youth, came pertinently to the Prince's help. "Transome," he answered, "is my name. I am an English traveller. It is, to-day, Tuesday. On Thursday, before noon, the money shall be ready. Let us meet, if you please, in Mittwalden, at the 'Morning Star.'"

"I am, in all things lawful, your servant to command," replied the farmer. "An Englishman! You are a great race of travellers. And has your lordship some experience of land?"

"I have had some interest of the kind before," returned the Prince; "not in Gerolstein, indeed. But fortune, as you say, turns the wheel, and I desire to be beforehand with her revolutions."

"Very right, sir, I am sure," said Mr. Killian.

They had been strolling with deliberation; but they were now drawing near to the farmhouse, mounting by the trellised pathway to the level of the meadow. A little before them the sound of voices had been some while audible, and now grew louder and more distinct with every step of their advance. Presently, when they emerged upon the top of the bank, they beheld Fritz and Ottilia some way off; he, very black and bloodshot, emphasising his hoarse speech with the smacking of his fist against his palm; she, standing a little way off in blowsy, voluble distress.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Gottesheim, and made as if he would turn aside.

But Otto went straight towards the lovers, in whose dissension he believed himself to have a share. And, indeed, as soon as he had seen the Prince, Fritz had stood tragic, as if awaiting and defying his approach.

“O, here you are!” he cried, as soon as they were near enough for easy speech. “You are a man at least, and must reply. What were you after? Why were you two skulking in the bush? God!” he broke out, turning again upon Ottilia, “to think that I should waste my heart on you!”

“I beg your pardon,” Otto cut in. “You were addressing me. In virtue of what circumstance am I to render you an account of this young lady’s conduct? Are you her father? her brother? her husband?”

“O, sir, you know as well as I,” returned the peasant. “We keep company, she and I. I love her, and she is by way of loving me; but all shall be above-board, I would have her to know. I have a good pride of my own.”

“Why, I perceive I must explain to you what love is,” said Otto. “Its measure is kindness. It is very possible that you are proud; but she, too, may have some self-esteem; I do not speak for myself. And perhaps, if your own doings were so curiously examined, you might find it inconvenient to reply.”

“These are all set-offs,” said the young man. “You know very well that a man is a man, and a woman only a woman. That holds good all over, up and down. I ask you a question, I ask it again, and here I stand.” He drew a mark and toed it.

“When you have studied liberal doctrines somewhat deeper,” said the Prince, “you will perhaps change your note. You are a man of false weights and measures, my young friend. You have one scale for women, another for men; one for princes, and one for farmer-folk. On the prince who neglects his wife you can be most severe. But what of the lover who insults his mistress? You use the name of love. I should think this lady might very fairly ask to be delivered from love of such a nature. For if I, a stranger, had been one-tenth part so gross and so discourteous, you would most righteously have broke my head. It would have been in your part, as lover, to protect her from such insolence. Protect her first, then, from yourself.”

“Ay,” quoth Mr. Gottesheim, who had been looking on with his hands behind his tall old back, “ay, that’s Scripture truth.”

Fritz was staggered, not only by the Prince’s imperturbable superiority of manner, but by a glimmering consciousness that he himself was in the wrong. The appeal to liberal doctrines had, besides, unmanned him.

“Well,” said he, “if I was rude, I’ll own to it. I meant no ill, and did nothing out of my just rights; but I am above all these old vulgar notions too; and if I spoke sharp, I’ll ask her pardon.”

“Freely granted, Fritz,” said Ottilia.

“But all this doesn’t answer me,” cried Fritz. “I ask what you two spoke about. She says she promised not to tell; well, then, I mean to know. Civility is civility; but I’ll be no man’s gull. I have a right to common justice, if I *do* keep company!”

“If you will ask Mr. Gottesheim,” replied Otto, “you will find I have not spent my hours in idleness. I have, since I arose this morning, agreed to buy the farm. So far I will go to satisfy a curiosity which I condemn.”

“O, well, if there was business, that’s another matter,” returned Fritz. “Though it beats me why you could not tell. But, of course, if the gentleman is to buy the farm, I suppose there would naturally be an end.”

“To be sure,” said Mr. Gottesheim, with a strong accent of conviction.

But Ottilia was much braver. “There now!” she cried in triumph. “What did I tell you? I told you I was fighting your battles. Now you see! Think shame of your suspicious temper! You should go down upon your bended knees both to that gentleman and me.”

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH THE PRINCE COLLECTS OPINIONS BY THE WAY

A little before noon, Otto, by a triumph of manœuvring, effected his escape. He was quit in this way of the ponderous gratitude of Mr. Killian, and of the confidential gratitude of poor Ottilia; but of Fritz he was not quit so readily. That young politician, brimming with mysterious glances, offered to lend his conveyance as far as to the high-road; and Otto, in fear of some residuary jealousy, and for the girl's sake, had not the courage to gainsay him; but he regarded his companion with uneasy glances, and devoutly wished the business at an end. For some time Fritz walked by the mare in silence; and they had already traversed more than half the proposed distance when, with something of a blush, he looked up and opened fire.

“Are you not,” he asked, “what they call a socialist?”

“Why, no,” returned Otto, “not precisely what they call so. Why do you ask?”

“I will tell you why,” said the young man. “I saw from the first that you were a red progressionist, and nothing but the fear of old Killian kept you back. And there, sir, you were right: old men are always cowards. But nowadays, you see, there are so many groups: you can never tell how far the likeliest kind of man may be prepared to go; and I was never sure you were one of the strong thinkers, till you hinted about women and free love.”

“Indeed,” cried Otto, “I never said a word of such a thing.”

“Not you!” cried Fritz. “Never a word to compromise! You was sowing seed: ground-bait, our president calls it. But it's hard to deceive me, for I know all the agitators and their ways, and all the doctrines; and between you and me,” lowering his voice, “I am myself affiliated. O yes, I am a secret society man, and here is my medal.” And drawing out a green ribbon that he wore about his neck, he held up, for Otto's inspection, a pewter medal bearing the imprint of a Phoenix and the legend *Libertas*. “And so now you see you may trust me,” added Fritz. “I am none of your alehouse talkers; I am a convinced revolutionary.” And he looked meltingly upon Otto.

“I see,” replied the Prince; “that is very gratifying. Well, sir, the great thing for the good of one's country is, first of all, to be a good man. All springs from there. For my part, although you are right in thinking that I have to do with politics, I am unfit by intellect and temper for a leading rôle. I was intended, I fear, for a subaltern. Yet we have all something to command, Mr. Fritz, if it be only our own temper; and a man about to marry must look closely to himself. The husband's, like the prince's, is a very artificial standing; and it is hard to be kind in either. Do you follow that?”

“O yes, I follow that,” replied the young man, sadly chop-fallen over the nature of the information he had elicited; and then brightening up: “Is it,” he ventured, “is it for an arsenal that you have bought the farm?”

“We'll see about that,” the Prince answered, laughing. “You must not be too zealous. And in the meantime, if I were you, I would say nothing on the subject.”

“O, trust me, sir, for that,” cried Fritz, as he pocketed a crown. “And you've let nothing out; for I suspected – I might say I knew it – from the first. And mind you, when a guide is required,” he added, “I know all the forest paths.”

Otto rode away, chuckling. This talk with Fritz had vastly entertained him; nor was he altogether discontented with his bearing at the farm; men, he was able to tell himself, had behaved worse under smaller provocation. And, to harmonise all, the road and the April air were both delightful to his soul.

Up and down, and to and fro, ever mounting through the wooded foothills, the broad, white high-road wound onward into Grünewald. On either hand the pines stood coolly rooted – green moss prospering, springs welling forth between their knuckled spurs; and though some were broad and stalwart, and others spiry and slender, yet all stood firm in the same attitude and with the same expression, like a silent army presenting arms.

The road lay all the way apart from towns and villages, which it left on either hand. Here and there, indeed, in the bottom of green glens, the Prince could spy a few congregated roofs, or perhaps above him, on a shoulder, the solitary cabin of a woodman. But the highway was an international undertaking, and with its face set for distant cities, scorned the little life of Grünewald. Hence it was exceeding solitary. Near the frontier Otto met a detachment of his own troops marching in the hot dust; and he was recognised and somewhat feebly cheered as he rode by. But from that time forth and for a long while he was alone with the great woods.

Gradually the spell of pleasure relaxed; his own thoughts returned, like stinging insects, in a cloud; and the talk of the night before, like a shower of buffets, fell upon his memory. He looked east and west for any comforter; and presently he was aware of a cross-road coming steeply down hill, and a horseman cautiously descending. A human voice or presence, like a spring in the desert, was now welcome in itself, and Otto drew bridle to await the coming of this stranger. He proved to be a very red-faced, thick-lipped countryman, with a pair of fat saddle-bags and a stone bottle at his waist; who, as soon as the Prince hailed him, jovially, if somewhat thickly, answered. At the same time he gave a beery yaw in the saddle. It was clear his bottle was no longer full.

“Do you ride towards Mittwalden?” asked the Prince.

“As far as the cross-road to Tannenbrunn,” the man replied. “Will you bear company?”

“With pleasure. I have even waited for you on the chance,” answered Otto.

By this time they were close alongside; and the man, with the country-folk instinct, turned his cloudy vision first of all on his companion’s mount. “The devil!” he cried. “You ride a bonny mare, friend!” And then his curiosity being satisfied about the essential, he turned his attention to that merely secondary matter, his companion’s face. He started. “The Prince!” he cried, saluting, with another yaw that came near dismounting him. “I beg your pardon, your Highness, not to have recognised you at once.”

The Prince was vexed out of his self-possession. “Since you know me,” he said, “it is unnecessary we should ride together. I will precede you, if you please.” And he was about to set spur to the grey mare, when the half-drunken fellow, reaching over, laid his hand upon the rein.

“Hark you,” he said, “prince or no prince, that is not how one man should conduct himself with another. What! You’ll ride with me incog. and set me talking! But if I know you, you’ll preshede me, if you please! Spy!” And the fellow, crimson with drink and injured vanity, almost spat the word into the Prince’s face.

A horrid confusion came over Otto. He perceived that he had acted rudely, grossly presuming on his station. And perhaps a little shiver of physical alarm mingled with his remorse, for the fellow was very powerful, and not more than half in the possession of his senses. “Take your hand from my rein,” he said, with a sufficient assumption of command; and when the man, rather to his wonder, had obeyed: “You should understand, sir,” he added, “that while I might be glad to ride with you as one person of sagacity with another, and so receive your true opinions, it would amuse me very little to hear the empty compliments you would address to me as Prince.”

“You think I would lie, do you?” cried the man with the bottle, purpling deeper.

“I know you would,” returned Otto, entering entirely into his self-possession. “You would not even show me the medal you wear about your neck.” For he had caught a glimpse of a green ribbon at the fellow’s throat.

The change was instantaneous: the red face became mottled with yellow; a thick-fingered, tottering hand made a clutch at the tell-tale ribbon. “Medal!” the man cried, wonderfully sobered. “I have no medal.”

“Pardon me,” said the Prince. “I will even tell you what that medal bears: a Phoenix burning, with the word *Libertas*.” The medallist remaining speechless, “You are a pretty fellow,” continued Otto, smiling, “to complain of incivility from the man whom you conspire to murder.”

“Murder!” protested the man. “Nay, never that; nothing criminal for me!”

“You are strangely misinformed,” said Otto. “Conspiracy itself is criminal, and ensures the pain of death. Nay, sir, death it is; I will guarantee my accuracy. Not that you need be so deplorably affected, for I am no officer. But those who mingle with politics should look at both sides of the medal.”

“Your Highness ...” began the knight of the bottle.

“Nonsense! you are a Republican,” cried Otto; “what have you to do with highnesses? But let us continue to ride forward. Since you so much desire it, I cannot find it in my heart to deprive you of my company. And for that matter, I have a question to address to you. Why, being so great a body of men – for you are a great body – fifteen thousand, I have heard, but that will be understated; am I right?”

The man gurgled in his throat.

“Why, then, being so considerable a party,” resumed Otto, “do you not come before me boldly with your wants? – what do I say? with your commands? Have I the name of being passionately devoted to my throne? I can scarce suppose it. Come, then; show me your majority, and I will instantly resign. Tell this to your friends; assure them from me of my docility; assure them that, however they conceive of my deficiencies, they cannot suppose me more unfit to be a ruler than I do myself. I am one of the worst princes in Europe; will they improve on that?”

“Far be it from me ...” the man began.

“See, now, if you will not defend my government!” cried Otto. “If I were you, I would leave conspiracies. You are as little fit to be a conspirator as I to be a king.”

“One thing I will say out,” said the man. “It is not so much you that we complain of, it’s your lady.”

“Not a word, sir,” said the Prince; and then after a moment’s pause, and in tones of some anger and contempt: “I once more advise you to have done with politics,” he added; “and when next I see you, let me see you sober. A morning drunkard is the last man to sit in judgment even upon the worst of princes.”

“I have had a drop, but I had not been drinking,” the man replied, triumphing in a sound distinction. “And if I had, what then? Nobody hangs by me. But my mill is standing idle, and I blame it on your wife. Am I alone in that? Go round and ask. Where are the mills? Where are the young men that should be working? Where is the currency? All paralysed. No, sir, it is not equal; for I suffer for your faults – I pay for them, by George, out of a poor man’s pocket. And what have you to do with mine? Drunk or sober, I can see my country going to hell, and I can see whose fault it is. And so now, I’ve said my say, and you may drag me to a stinking dungeon; what care I? I’ve spoke the truth, and so I’ll hold hard, and not intrude upon your Highness’s society.”

And the miller reined up and, clumsily enough, saluted.

“You will observe, I have not asked your name,” said Otto. “I wish you a good ride,” and he rode on hard. But let him ride as he pleased, this interview with the miller was a chokepear, which he could not swallow. He had begun by receiving a reproof in manners, and ended by sustaining a defeat in logic, both from a man whom he despised. All his old thoughts returned with fresher venom. And by three in the afternoon, coming to the cross-roads for Beckstein, Otto decided to turn aside and dine there leisurely. Nothing at least could be worse than to go on as he was going.

In the inn at Beckstein he remarked, immediately upon his entrance, an intelligent young gentleman dining, with a book in front of him. He had his own place laid close to the reader, and with a proper apology, broke ground by asking what he read.

“I am perusing,” answered the young gentleman, “the last work of the Herr Doctor Hohenstockwitz, cousin and librarian of your Prince here in Grünwald – a man of great erudition and some lambencies of wit.”

“I am acquainted,” said Otto, “with the Herr Doctor, though not yet with his work.”

“Two privileges that I must envy you,” replied the young man politely: “an honour in hand, a pleasure in the bush.”

“The Herr Doctor is a man much respected, I believe, for his attainments?” asked the Prince.

“He is, sir, a remarkable instance of the force of intellect,” replied the reader. “Who of our young men know anything of his cousin, all-reigning Prince although he be? Who but has heard of Dr. Gotthold? But intellectual merit, alone of all distinctions, has its base in nature.”

“I have the gratification of addressing a student – perhaps an author?” Otto suggested.

The young man somewhat flushed. “I have some claim to both distinctions, sir, as you suppose,” said he; “there is my card. I am the licentiate Roederer, author of several works on the theory and practice of politics.”

“You immensely interest me,” said the Prince; “the more so as I gather that here in Grünewald we are on the brink of revolution. Pray, since these have been your special studies, would you augur hopefully of such a movement?”

“I perceive,” said the young author, with a certain vinegary twitch, “that you are unacquainted with my opuscula. I am a convinced authoritarian. I share none of those illusory, Utopian fancies with which empirics blind themselves and exasperate the ignorant. The day of these ideas is, believe me, past, or at least passing.”

“When I look about me – ” began Otto.

“When you look about you,” interrupted the licentiate, “you behold the ignorant. But in the laboratory of opinion, beside the studious lamp, we begin already to discard these figments. We begin to return to nature’s order, to what I might call, if I were to borrow from the language of therapeutics, the expectant treatment of abuses. You will not misunderstand me,” he continued: “a country in the condition in which we find Grünewald, a prince such as your Prince Otto, we must explicitly condemn; they are behind the age. But I would look for a remedy not to brute convulsions, but to the natural supervenience of a more able sovereign. I should amuse you, perhaps,” added the licentiate, with a smile, “I think I should amuse you if I were to explain my notion of a prince. We who have studied in the closet, no longer, in this age, propose ourselves for active service. The paths, we have perceived, are incompatible. I would not have a student on the throne, though I would have one near by for an adviser. I would set forward as prince a man of a good, medium understanding, lively rather than deep; a man of courtly manner, possessed of the double art to ingratiate and to command; receptive, accommodating, seductive. I have been observing you since your first entrance. Well, sir, were I a subject of Grünewald I should pray Heaven to set upon the seat of government just such another as yourself.”

“The devil you would!” exclaimed the Prince.

The licentiate Roederer laughed most heartily. “I thought I should astonish you,” he said. “These are not the ideas of the masses.”

“They are not, I can assure you,” Otto said.

“Or rather,” distinguished the licentiate, “not to-day. The time will come, however, when these ideas shall prevail.”

“You will permit me, sir, to doubt it,” said Otto.

“Modesty is always admirable,” chuckled the theorist. “But yet I assure you, a man like you, with such a man as, say, Dr. Gotthold at your elbow, would be, for all practical issues, my ideal ruler.”

At this rate the hours sped pleasantly for Otto. But the licentiate unfortunately slept that night at Beckstein, where he was, being dainty in the saddle and given to half stages. And to find a convoy to Mittwalden, and thus mitigate the company of his own thoughts, the Prince had to make favour with a certain party of wood-merchants from various states of the empire, who had been drinking together somewhat noisily at the far end of the apartment.

The night had already fallen when they took the saddle. The merchants were very loud and mirthful; each had a face like a nor’-west moon; and they played pranks with each other’s horses, and mingled songs and choruses, and alternately remembered and forgot the companion of their ride. Otto thus combined society and solitude, hearkening now to their chattering and empty talk, now

to the voices of the encircling forest. The star-lit dark, the faint wood airs, the clank of the horse-shoes making broken music, accorded together and attuned his mind, and he was still in a most equal temper when the party reached the top of that long hill that overlooks Mittwalden.

Down in the bottom of a bowl of forest, the lights of the little formal town glittered in a pattern, street crossing street; away by itself on the right, the palace was glowing like a factory.

Although he knew not Otto, one of the wood-merchants was a native of the state. "There," said he, pointing to the palace with his whip, "there is Jezebel's inn."

"What, do you call it that?" cried another, laughing.

"Ay that's what they call it," returned the Grünewalder; and he broke into a song, which the rest, as people well acquainted with the words and air, instantly took up in chorus. Her Serene Highness Amalia Seraphina, Princess of Grünewald, was the heroine, Gondremark the hero of this ballad. Shame hissed in Otto's ears. He reined up short and sat stunned in the saddle; and the singers continued to descend the hill without him.

The song went to a rough, swashing, popular air; and long after the words became inaudible the swing of the music, rising and falling, echoed insult in the Prince's brain. He fled the sounds. Hard by him on his right a road struck towards the palace, and he followed it through the thick shadows and branching alleys of the park. It was a busy place on a fine summer's afternoon, when the court and burghers met and saluted; but at that hour of the night in the early spring it was deserted to the roosting birds. Hares rustled among the covert; here and there a statue stood glimmering, with its eternal gesture; here and there the echo of an imitation temple clattered ghostly to the trampling of the mare. Ten minutes brought him to the upper end of his own home garden, where the small stables opened, over a bridge, upon the park. The yard clock was striking the hour of ten; so was the big bell in the palace bell-tower; and, farther off, the belfries of the town. About the stable all else was silent but the stamping of stalled horses and the rattle of halters. Otto dismounted; and as he did so a memory came back to him: a whisper of dishonest grooms and stolen corn, once heard, long forgotten, and now recurring in the nick of opportunity. He crossed the bridge, and, going up to a window, knocked six or seven heavy blows in a particular cadence, and, as he did so, smiled. Presently a wicket was opened in the gate, and a man's head appeared in the dim starlight.

"Nothing to-night," said a voice.

"Bring a lantern," said the Prince.

"Dear heart a' mercy!" cried the groom. "Who's that?"

"It is I, the Prince," replied Otto. "Bring a lantern, take in the mare, and let me through into the garden."

The man remained silent for a while, his head still projecting through the wicket.

"His Highness!" he said at last. "And why did your Highness knock so strange?"

"It is a superstition in Mittwalden," answered Otto, "that it cheapens corn."

With a sound like a sob the groom fled. He was very white when he returned, even by the light of the lantern; and his hand trembled as he undid the fastenings and took the mare.

"Your Highness," he began at last, "for God's sake..." And there he paused, oppressed with guilt.

"For God's sake, what?" asked Otto cheerfully. "For God's sake let us have cheaper corn, say I. Good-night!" And he strode off into the garden, leaving the groom petrified once more.

The garden descended by a succession of stone terraces to the level of the fish-pond. On the far side the ground rose again, and was crowned by the confused roofs and gables of the palace. The modern pillared front, the ball-room, the great library, the princely apartments, the busy and illuminated quarters of that great house, all faced the town. The garden side was much older; and here it was almost dark; only a few windows quietly lighted at various elevations. The great square tower rose, thinning by stages like a telescope; and on the top of all the flag hung motionless.

The garden, as it now lay in the dusk and glimmer of the starshine, breathed of April violets. Under night's cavern arch the shrubs obscurely bustled. Through the plotted terraces and down the marble stairs the Prince rapidly descended, fleeing before uncomfortable thoughts. But, alas! from these there is no city of refuge. And now, when he was about midway of the descent, distant strains of music began to fall upon his ear from the ball-room, where the court was dancing. They reached him faint and broken, but they touched the keys of memory; and through and above them, Otto heard the ranting melody of the wood-merchants' song. Mere blackness seized upon his mind. Here he was coming home; the wife was dancing, the husband had been playing a trick upon a lackey; and meanwhile, all about them, they were a by-word to their subjects. Such a prince, such a husband, such a man, as this Otto had become! And he sped the faster onward.

Some way below he came unexpectedly upon a sentry; yet a little farther, and he was challenged by a second; and as he crossed the bridge over the fish-pond, an officer making the rounds stopped him once more. The parade of watch was more than usual; but curiosity was dead in Otto's mind, and he only chafed at the interruption. The porter of the back postern admitted him, and started to behold him so disordered. Thence, hasting by private stairs and passages, he came at length unseen to his own chamber, tore off his clothes, and threw himself upon his bed in the dark. The music of the ball-room still continued to a very lively measure; and still, behind that, he heard in spirit the chorus of the merchants clanking down the hill.

BOOK II OF LOVE AND POLITICS

CHAPTER I WHAT HAPPENED IN THE LIBRARY

At a quarter before six on the following morning Dr. Gotthold was already at his desk in the library; and with a small cup of black coffee at his elbow, and an eye occasionally wandering to the busts and the long array of many-coloured books, was quietly reviewing the labours of the day before. He was a man of about forty, flaxen-haired, with refined features a little worn, and bright eyes somewhat faded. Early to bed and early to rise, his life was devoted to two things: erudition and Rhine wine. An ancient friendship existed latent between him and Otto; they rarely met, but when they did it was to take up at once the thread of their suspended intimacy. Gotthold, the virgin priest of knowledge, had envied his cousin, for half a day, when he was married; he had never envied him his throne.

Reading was not a popular diversion at the court of Grünewald; and that great, pleasant, sunshiny gallery of books and statues was, in practice, Gotthold's private cabinet. On this particular Wednesday morning, however, he had not been long about his manuscript when a door opened and the Prince stepped into the apartment. The Doctor watched him as he drew near, receiving, from each of the embayed windows in succession, a flush of morning sun; and Otto looked so gay, and walked so airily, he was so well dressed and brushed and frizzled, so *point-device*, and of such a sovereign elegance, that the heart of his cousin the recluse was rather moved against him.

“Good-morning, Gotthold,” said Otto, dropping in a chair.

“Good-morning, Otto,” returned the librarian. “You are an early bird. Is this an accident, or do you begin reforming?”

“It is about time, I fancy,” answered the Prince.

“I cannot imagine,” said the Doctor. “I am too sceptical to be an ethical adviser; and as for good resolutions, I believed in them when I was young. They are the colours of hope's rainbow.”

“If you come to think of it,” said Otto, “I am not a popular sovereign.” And with a look he changed his statement to a question.

“Popular? Well, there I would distinguish,” answered Gotthold, leaning back and joining the tips of his fingers. “There are various kinds of popularity: the bookish, which is perfectly impersonal, as unreal as the nightmare; the politician's, a mixed variety; and yours, which is the most personal of all. Women take to you; footmen adore you; it is as natural to like you as to pat a dog; and were you a saw-miller you would be the most popular citizen in Grünewald. As a prince – well, you are in the wrong trade. It is perhaps philosophical to recognise it as you do.”

“Perhaps philosophical?” repeated Otto.

“Yes, perhaps. I would not be dogmatic,” answered Gotthold.

“Perhaps philosophical, and certainly not virtuous,” Otto resumed.

“Not of a Roman virtue,” chuckled the recluse.

Otto drew his chair nearer to the table, leaned upon it with his elbow, and looked his cousin squarely in the face. “In short,” he asked, “not manly?”

“Well,” Gotthold hesitated, “not manly, if you will.” And then, with a laugh, “I did not know that you gave yourself out to be manly,” he added. “It was one of the points that I inclined to like about you; inclined, I believe, to admire. The names of virtues exercise a charm on most of us; we must lay claim to all of them, however incompatible; we must all be both daring and prudent; we

must all vaunt our pride and go to the stake for our humility. Not so you. Without compromise you were yourself: a pretty sight. I have always said it: none so void of all pretence as Otto.”

“Pretence and effort both!” cried Otto. “A dead dog in a canal is more alive. And the question, Gotthold, the question that I have to face is this: Can I not, with effort and self-denial, can I not become a tolerable sovereign?”

“Never,” replied Gotthold. “Dismiss the notion. And besides, dear child, you would not try.”

“Nay, Gotthold, I am not to be put by,” said Otto. “If I am constitutionally unfit to be a sovereign, what am I doing with this money, with this palace, with these guards? And I – a thief – am I to execute the law on others?”

“I admit the difficulty,” said Gotthold.

“Well, can I not try?” continued Otto. “Am I not bound to try? And with the advice and help of such a man as you – ”

“Me!” cried the librarian. “Now, God forbid!”

Otto, though he was in no very smiling humour, could not forbear to smile. “Yet I was told last night,” he laughed, “that with a man like me to impersonate, and a man like you to touch the springs, a very possible government could be composed.”

“Now I wonder in what diseased imagination,” Gotthold said, “that preposterous monster saw the light of day?”

“It was one of your own trade – a writer: one Roederer,” said Otto.

“Roederer! an ignorant puppy!” cried the librarian.

“You are ungrateful,” said Otto. “He is one of your professed admirers.”

“Is he?” cried Gotthold, obviously impressed. “Come, that is a good account of the young man. I must read his stuff again. It is the rather to his credit, as our views are opposite. The east and west are not more opposite. Can I have converted him? But no; the incident belongs to Fairyland.”

“You are not then,” asked the Prince, “an authoritarian?”

“I? God bless me, no!” said Gotthold. “I am a red, dear child.”

“That brings me then to my next point, and by a natural transition. If I am so clearly unfitted for my post,” the Prince asked: “if my friends admit it, if my subjects clamour for my downfall, if revolution is preparing at this hour, must I not go forth to meet the inevitable? should I not save these horrors and be done with these absurdities? in a word, should I not abdicate? O, believe me, I feel the ridicule, the vast abuse of language,” he added, wincing, “but even a principulus like me cannot resign; he must make a great gesture, and come buskined forth, and abdicate.”

“Ay,” said Gotthold, “or else stay where he is. What gnat has bitten you to-day? Do you not know that you are touching, with lay hands, the very holiest inwards of philosophy, where madness dwells? Ay, Otto, madness; for in the serene temples of the wise, the inmost shrine, which we carefully keep locked, is full of spiders’ webs. All men, all, are fundamentally useless; nature tolerates, she does not need, she does not use them: sterile flowers! All – down to the fellow swinking in a byre, whom fools point out for the exception – all are useless; all weave ropes of sand; or, like a child that has breathed on a window, write and obliterate, write and obliterate, idle words! Talk of it no more. That way, I tell you, madness lies.” The speaker rose from his chair and then sat down again. He laughed a little laugh, and then, changing his tone, resumed: “Yes, dear child, we are not here to do battle with giants; we are here to be happy like the flowers, if we can be. It is because you could, that I have always secretly admired you. Cling to that trade; believe me, it is the right one. Be happy, be idle, be airy. To the devil with all casuistry! and leave the state to Gondremark, as heretofore. He does it well enough, they say; and his vanity enjoys the situation.”

“Gotthold,” cried Otto, “what is this to me? Useless is not the question; I cannot rest at uselessness; I must be useful or I must be noxious – one or other. I grant you the whole thing, prince and principality alike, is pure absurdity, a stroke of satire; and that a banker or the man who keeps an inn has graver duties. But now, when I have washed my hands of it three years, and left all – labour,

responsibility, and honour and enjoyment too, if there be any – to Gondremark and to – Seraphina –” He hesitated at the name, and Gotthold glanced aside. “Well,” the Prince continued, “what has come of it? Taxes, army, cannon – why, it’s like a box of lead soldiers! And the people sick at the folly of it, and fired with the injustice! And war, too – I hear of war – war in this teapot! What a complication of absurdity and disgrace! And when the inevitable end arrives – the revolution – who will be to blame in the sight of God, who will be gibbeted in public opinion? I! Prince Puppet!”

“I thought you had despised public opinion,” said Gotthold.

“I did,” said Otto sombrely, “but now I do not. I am growing old. And then, Gotthold, there is Seraphina. She is loathed in this country that I brought her to and suffered her to spoil. Yes, I gave it her as a plaything, and she has broken it: a fine Prince, an admirable Princess! Even her life – I ask you, Gotthold, is her life safe?”

“It is safe enough to-day,” replied the librarian: “but since you ask me seriously, I would not answer for to-morrow. She is ill-advised.”

“And by whom? By this Gondremark, to whom you counsel me to leave my country,” cried the Prince. “Rare advice! The course that I have been following all these years, to come at last to this. O, ill-advised! if that were all! See now, there is no sense in beating about the bush between two men: you know what scandal says of her?”

Gotthold, with pursed lips, silently nodded.

“Well, come, you are not very cheering as to my conduct as the Prince; have I even done my duty as a husband?” Otto asked.

“Nay, nay,” said Gotthold, earnestly and eagerly, “this is another chapter. I am an old celibate, an old monk. I cannot advise you in your marriage.”

“Nor do I require advice,” said Otto, rising. “All of this must cease.” And he began to walk to and fro with his hands behind his back.

“Well, Otto, may God guide you!” said Gotthold, after a considerable silence. “I cannot.”

“From what does all this spring?” said the Prince, stopping in his walk. “What am I to call it? Diffidence? The fear of ridicule? Inverted vanity? What matter names, if it has brought me to this? I could never bear to be bustling about nothing; I was ashamed of this toy kingdom from the first; I could not tolerate that people should fancy I believed in a thing so patently absurd! I would do nothing that cannot be done smiling. I have a sense of humour, forsooth! I must know better than my Maker. And it was the same thing in my marriage,” he added more hoarsely. “I did not believe this girl could care for me; I must not intrude; I must preserve the foppery of my indifference. What an impotent picture!”

“Ay, we have the same blood,” moralised Gotthold. “You are drawing, with fine strokes, the character of the born sceptic.”

“Sceptic? – coward!” cried Otto. “Coward is the word. A springless, putty-hearted, cowering coward!”

And as the Prince rapped out the words in tones of unusual vigour, a little, stout old gentleman, opening a door behind Gotthold, received them fairly in the face. With his parrot’s beak for a nose, his pursed mouth, his little goggling eyes, he was the picture of formality; and in ordinary circumstances, strutting behind the drum of his corporation, he impressed the beholder with a certain air of frozen dignity and wisdom. But at the smallest contrariety, his trembling hands and disconnected gestures betrayed the weakness at the root. And now, when he was thus surprisingly received in that library of Mittwalden Palace, which was the customary haunt of silence, his hands went up into the air as if he had been shot, and he cried aloud with the scream of an old woman.

“O!” he gasped, recovering, “your Highness! I beg ten thousand pardons. But your Highness at such an hour in the library! – a circumstance so unusual as your Highness’s presence was a thing I could not be expected to foresee.”

“There is no harm done, Herr Cancellarius,” said Otto.

“I came upon the errand of a moment: some papers I left over-night with the Herr Doctor,” said the Chancellor of Grünewald. – “Herr Doctor, if you will kindly give me them, I will intrude no longer.”

Gotthold unlocked a drawer and handed a bundle of manuscript to the old gentleman, who prepared, with fitting salutations, to take his departure.

“Herr Greisengesang, since we have met,” said Otto, “let us talk.”

“I am honoured by his Highness’s commands,” replied the Chancellor.

“All has been quiet since I left?” asked the Prince, resuming his seat.

“The usual business, your Highness,” answered Greisengesang; “punctual trifles: huge, indeed, if neglected, but trifles when discharged. Your Highness is most zealously obeyed.”

“Obeyed, Herr Cancellarius?” returned the Prince. “And when have I obliged you with an order? Replaced, let us rather say. But to touch upon these trifles; instance me a few.”

“The routine of government, from which your Highness has so wisely dissociated his leisure ...” began Greisengesang.

“We will leave my leisure, sir,” said Otto. “Approach the facts.”

“The routine of business was proceeded with,” replied the official, now visibly twittering.

“It is very strange, Herr Cancellarius, that you should so persistently avoid my questions,” said the Prince. “You tempt me to suppose a purpose in your dulness. I have asked you whether all was quiet; do me the pleasure to reply.”

“Perfectly – O, perfectly quiet,” jerked the ancient puppet, with every signal of untruth.

“I make a note of these words,” said the Prince gravely. “You assure me, your sovereign, that since the date of my departure nothing has occurred of which you owe me an account.”

“I take your Highness, I take the Herr Doctor to witness,” cried Greisengesang, “that I have had no such expression.”

“Halt!” said the Prince; and then, after a pause: “Herr Greisengesang, you are an old man, and you served my father before you served me,” he added. “It consists neither with your dignity nor mine that you should babble excuses and stumble possibly upon untruths. Collect your thoughts; and then categorically inform me of all you have been charged to hide.”

Gotthold, stooping very low over his desk, appeared to have resumed his labours; but his shoulders heaved with subterranean merriment. The Prince waited, drawing his handkerchief quietly through his fingers.

“Your Highness, in this informal manner,” said the old gentleman at last, “and being unavoidably deprived of documents, it would be difficult, it would be impossible, to do justice to the somewhat grave occurrences which have transpired.”

“I will not criticise your attitude,” replied the Prince. “I desire that, between you and me, all should be done gently; for I have not forgotten, my old friend, that you were kind to me from the first, and for a period of years a faithful servant. I will thus dismiss the matters on which you waive immediate inquiry. But you have certain papers actually in your hand. Come, Herr Greisengesang, there is at least one point for which you have authority. Enlighten me on that.”

“On that?” cried the old gentleman. “O, that is a trifle; a matter, your Highness, of police; a detail of a purely administrative order. These are simply a selection of the papers seized upon the English traveller.”

“Seized?” echoed Otto. “In what sense? Explain yourself.”

“Sir John Crabtree,” interposed Gotthold, looking up, “was arrested yesterday evening.”

“Is this so, Herr Cancellarius?” demanded Otto sternly.

“It was judged right, your Highness,” protested Greisengesang. “The decree was in due form, invested with your Highness’s authority by procuration. I am but an agent; I had no status to prevent the measure.”

“This man, my guest, has been arrested,” said the Prince. “On what grounds, sir? With what colour of pretence?”

The Chancellor stammered.

“Your Highness will perhaps find the reason in these documents,” said Gotthold, pointing with the tail of his pen.

Otto thanked his cousin with a look. “Give them to me,” he said, addressing the Chancellor.

But that gentleman visibly hesitated to obey. “Baron von Gondremark,” he said, “has made the affair his own. I am in this case a mere messenger; and as such, I am not clothed with any capacity to communicate the documents I carry. Herr Doctor, I am convinced you will not fail to bear me out.”

“I have heard a great deal of nonsense,” said Gotthold, “and most of it from you; but this beats all.”

“Come, sir,” said Otto, rising, “the papers. I command.”

Herr Greisengesang instantly gave way.

“With your Highness’s permission,” he said, “and laying at his feet my most submissive apologies, I will now hasten to attend his further orders in the Chancery.”

“Herr Cancellarius, do you see this chair?” said Otto. “There is where you shall attend my further orders. Oh, now, no more!” he cried, with a gesture, as the old man opened his lips. “You have sufficiently marked your zeal to your employer; and I begin to weary of a moderation you abuse.”

The Chancellor moved to the appointed chair and took his seat in silence.

“And now,” said Otto, opening the roll, “what is all this? It looks like the manuscript of a book.”

“It is,” said Gotthold, “the manuscript of a book of travels.”

“You have read it, Dr. Hohenstockwitz?” asked the Prince.

“Nay, I but saw the title-page,” replied Gotthold. “But the roll was given to me open, and I heard no word of any secrecy.”

Otto dealt the Chancellor an angry glance.

“I see,” he went on. “The papers of an author seized at this date of the world’s history, in a state so petty and so ignorant as Grünewald, here is indeed an ignominious folly. Sir,” to the Chancellor, “I marvel to find you in so scurvy an employment. On your conduct to your Prince I will not dwell; but to descend to be a spy! For what else can it be called? To seize the papers of this gentleman, the private papers of a stranger, the toil of a life, perhaps – to open, and to read them. And what have we to do with books? The Herr Doctor might perhaps be asked for his advice; but we have no *index expurgatorius* in Grünewald. Had we but that, we should be the most absolute parody and farce upon this tawdry earth.”

Yet, even while Otto spoke, he had continued to unfold the roll; and now, when it lay fully open, his eye rested on the title-page elaborately written in red ink. It ran thus:

MEMOIRS

OF A VISIT TO THE VARIOUS

COURTS OF EUROPE

BY

SIR JOHN CRABTREE, BARONET

Below was a list of chapters, each bearing the name of one of the European Courts; and among these the nineteenth and the last upon the list was dedicated to Grünewald.

“Ah! The Court of Grünewald!” said Otto, “that should be droll reading.” And his curiosity itched for it.

“A methodical dog, this English Baronet,” said Gotthold. “Each chapter written and finished on the spot. I shall look for his work when it appears.”

“It would be odd, now, just to glance at it,” said Otto, wavering.

Gotthold’s brow darkened, and he looked out of window.

But though the Prince understood the reproof, his weakness prevailed. “I will,” he said, with an uneasy laugh, “I will, I think, just glance at it.”

So saying, he resumed his seat and spread the traveller’s manuscript upon the table.

CHAPTER II

“ON THE COURT OF GRÜNEWALD,” BEING A

PORTION OF THE TRAVELLER’S MANUSCRIPT

It may well be asked (*it was thus the English traveller began his nineteenth chapter*) why I should have chosen Grünewald out of so many other states equally petty, formal, dull, and corrupt. Accident, indeed, decided, and not I; but I have seen no reason to regret my visit. The spectacle of this small society macerating in its own abuses was not perhaps instructive, but I have found it exceedingly diverting.

The reigning Prince, Otto Johann Friedrich, a young man of imperfect education, questionable valour, and no scintilla of capacity, has fallen into entire public contempt. It was with difficulty that I obtained an interview, for he is frequently absent from a court where his presence is unheeded, and where his only rôle is to be a cloak for the amours of his wife. At last, however, on the third occasion when I visited the palace, I found this sovereign in the exercise of his inglorious function, with the wife on one hand and the lover on the other. He is not ill-looking; he has hair of a ruddy gold, which naturally curls, and his eyes are dark, a combination which I always regard as the mark of some congenital deficiency, physical or moral; his features are irregular but pleasing; the nose perhaps a little short, and the mouth a little womanish; his address is excellent, and he can express himself with point. But to pierce below these externals is to come on a vacuity of any sterling quality, a deliquescence of the moral nature, a frivolity and inconsequence of purpose that mark the nearly

perfect fruit of a decadent age. He has a worthless smattering of many subjects, but a grasp of none. “I soon weary of a pursuit,” he said to me, laughing; it would almost appear as if he took a pride in his incapacity and lack of moral courage. The results of his dilettanteism are to be seen in every field; he is a bad fencer, a second-rate horseman, dancer, shot; he sings – I have heard him – and he sings like a child; he writes intolerable verses in more than doubtful French; he acts like the common amateur; and in short there is no end to the number of things that he does, and does badly. His one manly taste is for the chase. In sum, he is but a plexus of weaknesses; the singing chambermaid of the stage, tricked out in man’s apparel, and mounted on a circus horse. I have seen this poor phantom of a prince riding out alone or with a few huntsmen, disregarded by all, and I have been even grieved for the bearer of so futile and melancholy an existence. The last Merovingians may have looked not otherwise.

The Princess Amalia Seraphina, a daughter of the Grand-Ducal house of Toggenburg-Tannhäuser, would be equally inconsiderable if she were not a cutting instrument in the hands of an ambitious man. She is much younger than the Prince, a girl of two-and-twenty, sick with vanity, superficially clever, and fundamentally a fool. She has a red-brown rolling eye, too large for her face, and with sparks of both levity and ferocity; her forehead is high and narrow, her figure thin and a little stooping. Her manners, her conversation, which she interlards with French, her very tastes and ambitions, are alike assumed, and the assumption is ungracefully apparent: Hoyden playing Cleopatra. I should judge her to be incapable of truth. In private life a girl of this description embroils the peace of families, walks attended by a troop of scowling swains, and passes, once at least, through the divorce court; it is a common and, except to the cynic, an uninteresting type. On the throne, however, and in the hands of a man like Gondremark, she may become the authoress of serious public evils.

Gondremark, the true ruler of this unfortunate country, is a more complex study. His position in Grünewald, to which he is a foreigner, is eminently false; and that he should maintain it as he does, a very miracle of impudence and dexterity. His speech, his face, his policy, are all double: heads and tails. Which of the two extremes may be his actual design he were a bold man who should offer to decide. Yet I will hazard the guess that he follows both experimentally, and awaits, at the hand of destiny, one of those directing hints of which she is so lavish to the wise.

On the one hand, as *Maire du Palais* to the incompetent Otto, and using the love-sick Princess for a tool and mouthpiece, he pursues a policy of arbitrary power and territorial aggrandisement. He has called out the whole capable male population of the state to military service; he has bought cannon; he has tempted away promising officers from foreign armies; and he now begins, in his international relations, to assume the swaggering port and the vague threatful language of a bully. The idea of extending Grünewald may appear absurd, but the little state is advantageously placed, its neighbours are all defenceless; and if at any moment the jealousies of the greater courts should neutralise each other, an active policy might double the principality both in population and extent. Certainly at least the scheme is entertained in the court of Mittwalden; nor do I myself regard it as entirely desperate. The margravate of Brandenburg has grown from as small beginnings to a formidable power; and though it is late in the day to try adventurous policies, and the age of war seems ended, Fortune, we must not forget, still blindly turns her wheel for men and nations. Concurrently with, and tributary to, these warlike preparations, crushing taxes have been levied, journals have been suppressed, and the country, which three years ago was prosperous and happy, now stagnates in a forced inaction, gold has become a curiosity, and the mills stand idle on the mountain streams.

On the other hand, in his second capacity of popular tribune, Gondremark is the incarnation of the free lodges, and sits at the centre of an organised conspiracy against the state. To any such movement my sympathies were early acquired, and I would not willingly let fall a word that might embarrass or retard the revolution. But to show that I speak of knowledge, and not as the reporter of mere gossip, I may mention that I have myself been present at a meeting where the details of a republican Constitution were minutely debated and arranged; and I may add that Gondremark was throughout referred to by the speakers as their captain in action and the arbiter of their disputes.

He has taught his dupes (for so I must regard them) that his power of resistance to the Princess is limited, and at each fresh stretch of authority persuades them, with specious reasons, to postpone the hour of insurrection. Thus (to give some instances of his astute diplomacy) he salved over the decree enforcing military service, under the plea that to be well drilled and exercised in arms was even a necessary preparation for revolt. And the other day, when it began to be rumoured abroad that a war was being forced on a reluctant neighbour, the Grand Duke of Gerolstein, and I made sure it would be the signal for an instant rising, I was struck dumb with wonder to find that even this had been prepared and was to be accepted. I went from one to another in the Liberal camp, and all were in the same story, all had been drilled and schooled and fitted out with vacuous argument. “The lads had better see some real fighting,” they said; “and besides, it will be as well to capture Gerolstein; we can then extend to our neighbours the blessing of liberty on the same day that we snatch it for ourselves; and the republic will be all the stronger to resist, if the kings of Europe should band themselves together to reduce it.” I know not which of the two I should admire the more: the simplicity of the multitude or the audacity of the adventurer. But such are the subtleties, such the quibbling reasons, with which he blinds and leads this people. How long a course so tortuous can be pursued with safety I am incapable of guessing; not long, one would suppose; and yet this singular man has been treading the mazes for five years, and his favour at court and his popularity among the lodges still endure unbroken.

I have the privilege of slightly knowing him. Heavily and somewhat clumsily built, of a vast, disjointed, rambling frame, he can still pull himself together, and figure, not without admiration, in the saloon or the ball-room. His hue and temperament are plentifully bilious; he has a saturnine eye; his cheek is of a dark blue where he has been shaven. Essentially he is to be numbered among the man-haters, a convinced contemner of his fellows. Yet he is himself of a most commonplace ambition and greedy of applause. In talk, he is remarkable for a thirst of information, loving rather to hear than to communicate; for sound and studious views; and, judging by the extreme short-sightedness of common politicians, for a remarkable prevision of events. All this, however, without grace, pleasantry, or charm, heavily set forth, with a dull countenance. In our numerous conversations, although he has always heard me with deference, I have been conscious throughout of a sort of ponderous finessing hard to tolerate. He produces none of the effect of a gentleman; devoid not merely of pleasantry, but of all attention or communicative warmth of bearing. No gentleman, besides, would so parade his amours with the Princess; still less repay the Prince for his long-suffering with the studied insolence of demeanour and the fabrication of insulting nicknames, such as Prince Featherhead, which run from ear to ear and create a laugh throughout the country. Gondremark has thus some of the clumsier characters of the self-made man, combined with an inordinate, almost a besotted, pride of intellect and birth. Heavy, bilious, selfish, inornate, he sits upon this court and country like an incubus.

But it is probable that he preserves softer gifts for necessary purposes. Indeed, it is certain, although he vouchsafed none of it to me, that this cold and stolid politician possesses to a great degree the art of ingratiating, and can be all things to all men. Hence there has probably sprung up the idle legend that in private life he is a gross romping voluptuary. Nothing, at least, can well be more surprising than the terms of his connection with the Princess. Older than her husband, certainly uglier, and, according to the feeble ideas common among women, in every particular less pleasing, he has not only seized the complete command of all her thought and action, but has imposed on her in public a humiliating part. I do not here refer to the complete sacrifice of every rag of her reputation; for to many women these extremities are in themselves attractive. But there is about the court a certain lady of a dishevelled reputation, a Countess von Rosen, wife or widow of a cloudy count, no longer in her second youth, and already bereft of some of her attractions, who unequivocally occupies the station of the Baron’s mistress. I had thought, at first, that she was but a hired accomplice, a mere blind or buffer for the more important sinner. A few hours’ acquaintance with Madame von Rosen for ever dispelled the illusion. She is one rather to make than to prevent a scandal, and she values none of

those bribes – money, honours, or employment – with which the situation might be gilded. Indeed, as a person frankly bad, she pleased me, in the court of Grünewald, like a piece of nature.

The power of this man over the Princess is, therefore, without bounds. She has sacrificed to the adoration with which he has inspired her not only her marriage vow and every shred of public decency, but that vice of jealousy which is so much dearer to the female sex than either intrinsic honour or outward consideration. Nay, more: a young, although not a very attractive woman, and a princess both by birth and fact, she submits to the triumphant rivalry of one who might be her mother as to years, and who is so manifestly her inferior in station. This is one of the mysteries of the human heart. But the rage of illicit love, when it is once indulged, appears to grow by feeding; and to a person of the character and temperament of this unfortunate young lady, almost any depth of degradation is within the reach of possibility.

CHAPTER III

THE PRINCE AND THE ENGLISH TRAVELLER

So far Otto read, with waxing indignation; and here his fury overflowed. He tossed the roll upon the table and stood up. “This man,” he said, “is a devil. A filthy imagination, an ear greedy of evil, a ponderous malignity of thought and language: I grow like him by the reading! Chancellor, where is this fellow lodged?”

“He was committed to the Flag Tower,” replied Greisengesang, “in the Gamiani apartment.”

“Lead me to him,” said the Prince; and then, a thought striking him, “Was it for that,” he asked, “that I found so many sentries in the garden?”

“Your Highness, I am unaware,” answered Greisengesang, true to his policy. “The disposition of the guards is a matter distinct from my functions.”

Otto turned upon the old man fiercely, but ere he had time to speak, Gotthold touched him on the arm. He swallowed his wrath with a great effort. “It is well,” he said, taking the roll. “Follow me to the Flag Tower.”

The Chancellor gathered himself together, and the two set forward. It was a long and complicated voyage; for the library was in the wing of the new buildings, and the tower which carried the flag was in the old schloss upon the garden. By a great variety of stairs and corridors, they came out at last upon a patch of gravelled court; the garden peeped through a high grating with a flash of green; tall, old, gabled buildings mounted on every side; the Flag Tower climbed, stage after stage, into the blue; and high over all, among the building daws, the yellow flag wavered in the wind. A sentinel at the foot of the tower stairs presented arms; another paced the first landing; and a third was stationed before the door of the extemporised prison.

“We guard this mud-bag like a jewel,” Otto sneered.

The Gamiani apartment was so called from an Italian doctor who had imposed on the credulity of a former prince. The rooms were large, airy, pleasant, and looked upon the garden; but the walls were of great thickness (for the tower was old), and the windows were heavily barred. The Prince, followed by the Chancellor, still trotting to keep up with him, brushed swiftly through the little library and the long saloon, and burst like a thunderbolt into the bedroom at the farther end. Sir John was finishing his toilet; a man of fifty, hard, uncompromising, able, with the eye and teeth of physical courage. He was unmoved by the irruption, and bowed with a sort of sneering ease.

“To what am I to attribute the honour of this visit?” he asked.

“You have eaten my bread,” replied Otto, “you have taken my hand, you have been received under my roof. When did I fail you in courtesy? What have you asked that was not granted as to an honoured guest? And here, sir,” tapping fiercely on the manuscript, “here is your return.”

“Your Highness has read my papers?” said the Baronet. “I am honoured indeed. But the sketch is most imperfect. I shall now have much to add. I can say that the Prince, whom I had accused

of idleness, is zealous in the department of police, taking upon himself those duties that are most distasteful. I shall be able to relate the burlesque incident of my arrest, and the singular interview with which you honour me at present. For the rest, I have already communicated with my Ambassador at Vienna; and unless you propose to murder me, I shall be at liberty, whether you please or not, within the week. For I hardly fancy the future empire of Grünewald is yet ripe to go to war with England. I conceive I am a little more than quits. I owe you no explanation; yours has been the wrong. You, if you have studied my writing with intelligence, owe me a large debt of gratitude. And to conclude, as I have not yet finished my toilet, I imagine the courtesy of a turnkey to a prisoner would induce you to withdraw.”

There was some paper on the table, and Otto, sitting down, wrote a passport in the name of Sir John Crabtree.

“Affix the seal, Herr Cancellarius,” he said, in his most princely manner, as he rose.

Greisengesang produced a red portfolio, and affixed the seal in the unpoetic guise of an adhesive stamp; nor did his perturbed and clumsy movements at all lessen the comedy of the performance. Sir John looked on with a malign enjoyment; and Otto chafed, regretting, when too late, the unnecessary royalty of his command and gesture. But at length the Chancellor had finished his piece of prestidigitation, and, without waiting for an order, had countersigned the passport. Thus regularised, he returned it to Otto with a bow.

“You will now,” said the Prince, “order one of my own carriages to be prepared; see it, with your own eyes, charged with Sir John’s effects, and have it waiting within the hour behind the Pheasant House. Sir John departs this morning for Vienna.”

The Chancellor took his elaborate departure.

“Here, sir, is your passport,” said Otto, turning to the Baronet. “I regret it from my heart that you have met inhospitable usage.”

“Well, there will be no English war,” returned Sir John.

“Nay, sir,” said Otto; “you surely owe me your civility. Matters are now changed, and we stand again upon the footing of two gentlemen. It was not I who ordered your arrest; I returned late last night from hunting; and as you cannot blame me for your imprisonment, you may even thank me for your freedom.”

“And yet you read my papers,” said the traveller shrewdly.

“There, sir, I was wrong,” returned Otto; “and for that I ask your pardon. You can scarce refuse it, for your own dignity, to one who is a plexus of weaknesses. Nor was the fault entirely mine. Had the papers been innocent, it would have been at most an indiscretion. Your own guilt is the sting of my offence.”

Sir John regarded Otto with an approving twinkle; then he bowed, but still in silence.

“Well, sir, as you are now at your entire disposal, I have a favour to beg of your indulgence,” continued the Prince. “I have to request that you will walk with me alone into the garden so soon as your convenience permits.”

“From the moment that I am a free man,” Sir John replied, this time with perfect courtesy, “I am wholly at your Highness’s command; and if you will excuse a rather summary toilet, I will even follow you as I am.”

“I thank you, sir,” said Otto.

So without more delay, the Prince leading, the pair proceeded down through the echoing stairway of the tower, and out through the grating, into the ample air and sunshine of the morning, and among the terraces and flower-beds of the garden. They crossed the fish-pond, where the carp were leaping as thick as bees; they mounted, one after another, the various flights of stairs, snowed upon, as they went, with April blossoms, and marching in time to the great orchestra of birds. Nor did Otto pause till they had reached the highest terrace of the garden. Here was a gate into the park, and hard by, under a tuft of laurel, a marble garden seat. Hence they looked down on the green tops

of many elm-trees, where the rooks were busy; and, beyond that, upon the palace roof, and the yellow banner flying in the blue. “I pray you to be seated, sir,” said Otto.

Sir John complied without a word; and for some seconds Otto walked to and fro before him, plunged in angry thought. The birds were all singing for a wager.

“Sir,” said the Prince at length, turning towards the Englishman, “you are to me, except by the conventions of society, a perfect stranger. Of your character and wishes I am ignorant. I have never wittingly disoblged you. There is a difference in station, which I desire to waive. I would, if you still think me entitled to so much consideration – I would be regarded simply as a gentleman. Now, sir, I did wrong to glance at these papers, which I here return to you; but if curiosity be undignified, as I am free to own, falsehood is both cowardly and cruel. I opened your roll; and what did I find – what did I find about my wife? Lies!” he broke out. “They are lies! There are not, so help me God! four words of truth in your intolerable libel! You are a man; you are old, and might be the girl’s father; you are a gentleman; you are a scholar, and have learned refinement; and you rake together all this vulgar scandal, and propose to print it in a public book! Such is your chivalry! But, thank God, sir, she has still a husband. You say, sir, in that paper in your hand, that I am a bad fencer; I have to request from you a lesson in the art. The park is close behind; yonder is the Pheasant House, where you will find your carriage; should I fall, you know, sir – you have written it in your paper – how little my movements are regarded; I am in the custom of disappearing: it will be one more disappearance; and long before it has awakened a remark, you may be safe across the border.”

“You will observe,” said Sir John, “that what you ask is impossible.”

“And if I struck you?” cried the Prince, with a sudden menacing flash.

“It would be a cowardly blow,” returned the Baronet, unmoved, “for it would make no change. I cannot draw upon a reigning sovereign.”

“And it is this man, to whom you dare not offer satisfaction, that you choose to insult!” cried Otto.

“Pardon me,” said the traveller, “you are unjust. It is because you are a reigning sovereign that I cannot fight with you; and it is for the same reason that I have a right to criticise your action and your wife. You are in everything a public creature; you belong to the public, body and bone. You have with you the law, the muskets of the army, and the eyes of spies. We, on our side, have but one weapon – truth.”

“Truth!” echoed the Prince, with a gesture.

There was another silence.

“Your Highness,” said Sir John at last, “you must not expect grapes from a thistle. I am old and a cynic. Nobody cares a rush for me; and on the whole, after the present interview, I scarce know anybody that I like better than yourself. You see, I have changed my mind, and have the uncommon virtue to avow the change. I tear up this stuff before you, here in your own garden; I ask your pardon, I ask the pardon of the Princess; and I give you my word of honour as a gentleman and an old man, that when my book of travels shall appear it shall not contain so much as the name of Grünewald. And yet it was a racy chapter! But had your Highness only read about the other courts! I am a carrion crow; but it is not my fault, after all, that the world is such a nauseous kennel.”

“Sir,” said Otto, “is the eye not jaundiced?”

“Nay,” cried the traveller, “very likely. I am one who goes sniffing; I am no poet. I believe in a better future for the world; or, at all accounts, I do most potently disbelieve in the present. Rotten eggs is the burthen of my song. But indeed, your Highness, when I meet with any merit, I do not think that I am slow to recognise it. This is a day that I shall still recall with gratitude, for I have found a sovereign with some manly virtues; and for once – old courtier and old radical as I am – it is from the heart and quite sincerely that I can request the honour of kissing your Highness’s hand?”

“Nay, sir,” said Otto, “to my heart!”

And the Englishman, taken at unawares, was clasped for a moment in the Prince’s arms.

“And now, sir,” added Otto, “there is the Pheasant House; close behind it you will find my carriage, which I pray you to accept. God speed you to Vienna!”

“In the impetuosity of youth,” replied Sir John, “your Highness has overlooked one circumstance: I am still fasting.”

“Well, sir,” said Otto, smiling, “you are your own master; you may go or stay. But I warn you, your friend may prove less powerful than your enemies. The Prince, indeed, is thoroughly on your side; he has all the will to help; but to whom do I speak? – you know better than I do, he is not alone in Grünewald.”

“There is a deal in position,” returned the traveller, gravely nodding. “Gondremark loves to temporise; his policy is below ground, and he fears all open courses; and now that I have seen you act with so much spirit, I will cheerfully risk myself on your protection. Who knows? You may be yet the better man.”

“Do you indeed believe so?” cried the Prince. “You put life into my heart!”

“I will give up sketching portraits,” said the Baronet. “I am a blind owl; I had misread you strangely. And yet remember this: a sprint is one thing, and to run all day another. For I still mistrust your constitution; the short nose, the hair and eyes of several complexions; no, they are diagnostic; and I must end, I see, as I began.”

“I am still a singing chambermaid?” said Otto.

“Nay, your Highness, I pray you to forget what I had written,” said Sir John; “I am not like Pilate; and the chapter is no more. Bury it, if you love me.”

CHAPTER IV

WHILE THE PRINCE IS IN THE ANTE-ROOM...

Greatly comforted by the exploits of the morning, the Prince turned towards the Princess’s ante-room, bent on a more difficult enterprise. The curtains rose before him, the usher called his name, and he entered the room with an exaggeration of his usual mincing and airy dignity. There were about a score of persons waiting, principally ladies; it was one of the few societies in Grünewald where Otto knew himself to be popular; and while a maid of honour made her exit by a side door to announce his arrival to the Princess, he moved round the apartment, collecting homage and bestowing compliments with friendly grace. Had this been the sum of his duties, he had been an admirable monarch. Lady after lady was impartially honoured by his attention.

“Madam,” he said to one, “how does this happen? I find you daily more adorable.”

“And your Highness daily browner,” replied the lady. “We began equal; oh, there I will be bold: we have both beautiful complexions. But while I study mine, your Highness tans himself.”

“A perfect negro, madam; and what so fitly – being beauty’s slave?” said Otto. – “Madame Grafinski, when is our next play? I have just heard that I am a bad actor.”

“*O ciel!*” cried Madame Grafinski. “Who could venture? What a bear!”

“An excellent man, I can assure you,” returned Otto.

“O, never! O, is it possible!” fluted the lady. “Your Highness plays like an angel.”

“You must be right, madam; who could speak falsely and yet look so charming?” said the Prince. “But this gentleman, it seems, would have preferred me playing like an actor.”

A sort of hum, a falsetto, feminine cooing, greeted the tiny sally; and Otto expanded like a peacock. This warm atmosphere of women and flattery and idle chatter pleased him to the marrow.

“Madame von Eisenthal, your coiffure is delicious,” he remarked.

“Everyone was saying so,” said one.

“If I have pleased Prince Charming?” And Madame von Eisenthal swept him a deep curtsy with a killing glance of adoration.

“It is new?” he asked. “Vienna fashion.”

“Mint new,” replied the lady, “for your Highness’s return. I felt young this morning; it was a premonition. But why, Prince, do you ever leave us?”

“For the pleasure of the return,” said Otto. “I am like a dog; I must bury my bone, and then come back to gloat upon it.”

“O, a bone! Fie, what a comparison! You have brought back the manners of the wood,” returned the lady.

“Madam, it is what the dog has dearest,” said the Prince. “But I observe Madame von Rosen.”

And Otto, leaving the group to which he had been piping, stepped towards the embrasure of a window where a lady stood.

The Countess von Rosen had hitherto been silent, and a thought depressed, but on the approach of Otto she began to brighten. She was tall, slim as a nymph, and of a very airy carriage; and her face, which was already beautiful in repose, lightened and changed, flashed into smiles, and glowed with a lovely colour at the touch of animation. She was a good vocalist; and, even in speech, her voice commanded a great range of changes, the low notes rich with tenor quality, the upper ringing, on the brink of laughter, into music. A gem of many facets, and variable hues of fire; a woman who withheld the better portion of her beauty, and then, in a caressing second, flashed it like a weapon full on the beholder; now merely a tall figure and a sallow handsome face, with the evidences of a reckless temper; anon opening like a flower to life and colour, mirth and tenderness: – Madame von Rosen had always a dagger in reserve for the despatch of ill-assured admirers. She met Otto with the dart of tender gaiety.

“You have come to me at last, Prince Cruel,” she said. “Butterfly! Well, and am I not to kiss your hand?” she added.

“Madam, it is I who must kiss yours.” And Otto bowed and kissed it.

“You deny me every indulgence,” she said, smiling.

“And now what news in court?” inquired the Prince. “I come to you for my gazette.”

“Ditch-water!” she replied. “The world is all asleep, grown grey in slumber; I do not remember any waking movement since quite an eternity; and the last thing in the nature of a sensation was the last time my governess was allowed to box my ears. But yet I do myself and your unfortunate enchanted palace some injustice. Here is the last – O positively!” And she told him the story from behind her fan, with many glances, many cunning strokes of the narrator’s art. The others had drawn away, for it was understood that Madame von Rosen was in favour with the Prince. None the less, however, did the Countess lower her voice at times to within a semitone of whispering; and the pair leaned together over the narrative.

“Do you know,” said Otto, laughing, “you are the only entertaining woman on this earth!”

“O, you have found out so much,” she cried.

“Yes, madam, I grow wiser with advancing years,” he returned.

“Years!” she repeated. “Do you name the traitors? I do not believe in years; the calendar is a delusion.”

“You must be right, madam,” replied the Prince. “For six years that we have been good friends, I have observed you to grow younger.”

“Flatterer,” cried she, and then, with a change, “But why should I say so,” she added, “when I protest I think the same? A week ago I had a council with my father director, the glass; and the glass replied, ‘Not yet!’ I confess my face in this way once a month. O! a very solemn moment. Do you know what I shall do when the mirror answers, ‘Now?’”

“I cannot guess,” said he.

“No more can I,” returned the Countess. “There is such a choice! Suicide, gambling, a nunnery, a volume of memoirs, or politics – the last, I am afraid.”

“It is a dull trade,” said Otto.

“Nay,” she replied, “it is a trade I rather like. It is, after all, first cousin to gossip, which no one can deny to be amusing. For instance, if I were to tell you that the Princess and the Baron rode out together daily to inspect the cannon, it is either a piece of politics or scandal, as I turn my phrase. I am the alchemist that makes the transmutation. They have been everywhere together since you left,” she continued, brightening as she saw Otto darken; “that is a poor snippet of malicious gossip – and they were everywhere cheered – and with that addition all becomes political intelligence.”

“Let us change the subject,” said Otto.

“I was about to propose it,” she replied, “or rather to pursue the politics. Do you know? this war is popular – popular to the length of cheering Princess Seraphina.”

“All things, madam, are possible,” said the Prince; “and this among others, that we may be going into war, but I give you my word of honour I do not know with whom.”

“And you put up with it?” she cried. “I have no pretensions to morality; and I confess I have always abominated the lamb, and nourished a romantic feeling for the wolf. O, be done with lambiness! Let us see there is a prince, for I am weary of the distaff.”

“Madam,” said Otto, “I thought you were of that faction.”

“I should be of yours, *mon Prince*, if you had one,” she retorted. “Is it true that you have no ambition? There was a man once in England whom they call the kingmaker. Do you know,” she added, “I fancy I could make a prince?”

“Some day, madam,” said Otto, “I may ask you to help make a farmer.”

“Is that a riddle?” asked the Countess.

“It is,” replied the Prince, “and a very good one too.”

“Tit for tat. I will ask you another,” she returned. “Where is Gondremark?”

“The Prime Minister? In the prime-ministry, no doubt,” said Otto.

“Precisely,” said the Countess; and she pointed with her fan to the door of the Princess’s apartments. “You and I, *mon Prince*, are in the ante-room. You think me unkind,” she added. “Try me and you will see. Set me a task, put me a question; there is no enormity I am not capable of doing to oblige you, and no secret that I am not ready to betray.”

“Nay, madam, but I respect my friend too much,” he answered, kissing her hand. “I would rather remain ignorant of all. We fraternise like foemen soldiers at the outposts, but let each be true to his own army.”

“Ah,” she cried, “if all men were generous like you, it would be worth while to be a woman!” Yet, judging by her looks, his generosity, if anything, had disappointed her; she seemed to seek a remedy, and, having found it, brightened once more. “And now,” she said, “may I dismiss my sovereign? This is rebellion and a *cas pendable*; but what am I to do? My bear is jealous!”

“Madam, enough!” cried Otto. “Ahasuerus reaches you the sceptre; more, he will obey you in all points. I should have been a dog to come to whistling.”

And so the Prince departed, and fluttered round Grafinski and von Eisenthal. But the Countess knew the use of her offensive weapons, and had left a pleasant arrow in the Prince’s heart. That Gondremark was jealous – here was an agreeable revenge! And Madame von Rosen, as the occasion of the jealousy, appeared to him in a new light.

CHAPTER V

... GONDREMARK IS IN MY LADY’S CHAMBER

The Countess von Rosen spoke the truth. The great Prime Minister of Grünewald was already closeted with Seraphina. The toilet was over; and the Princess, tastefully arrayed, sat face to face with a tall mirror. Sir John’s description was unkindly true, true in terms and yet a libel, a misogynistic masterpiece. Her forehead was perhaps too high, but it became her; her figure somewhat stooped, but every detail was formed and finished like a gem; her hand, her foot, her ear, the set of her comely head,

were all dainty and accordant; if she was not beautiful, she was vivid, changeful, coloured, and pretty with a thousand various prettinesses; and her eyes, if they indeed rolled too consciously, yet rolled to purpose. They were her most attractive feature, yet they continually bore eloquent false witness to her thoughts; for while she herself, in the depths of her immature, unsoftened heart, was given altogether to man-like ambition and the desire of power, the eyes were by turns bold, inviting, fiery, melting, and artful, like the eyes of a rapacious siren. And artful, in a sense, she was. Chafing that she was not a man, and could not shine by action, she had, conceived a woman's part, of answerable domination; she sought to subjugate for by-ends, to rain influence and be fancy free; and, while she loved not man, loved to see man obey her. It is a common girl's ambition. Such was perhaps that lady of the glove, who sent her lover to the lions. But the snare is laid alike for male and female, and the world most artfully contrived.

Near her, in a low chair, Gondremark had arranged his limbs into a cat-like attitude, high-shouldered, stooping, and submissive. The formidable blue jowl of the man, and the dull bilious eye, set perhaps a higher value on his evident desire to please. His face was marked by capacity, temper, and a kind of bold, piratical dishonesty which it would be calumnious to call deceit. His manners, as he smiled upon the Princess, were over-fine, yet hardly elegant.

"Possibly," said the Baron, "I should now proceed to take my leave. I must not keep my sovereign in the ante-room. Let us come at once to a decision."

"It cannot, cannot be put off?" she asked.

"It is impossible," answered Gondremark. "Your Highness sees it for herself. In the earlier stages we might imitate the serpent; but for the ultimatum, there is no choice but to be bold like lions. Had the Prince chosen to remain away, it had been better; but we have gone too far forward to delay."

"What can have brought him?" she cried. "To-day of all days?"

"The marplot, madam, has the instinct of his nature," returned Gondremark. "But you exaggerate the peril. Think, madam, how far we have prospered, and against what odds! Shall a Featherhead? – but no!" And he blew upon his fingers lightly with a laugh.

"Featherhead," she replied, "is still the Prince of Grünewald."

"On your sufferance only, and so long as you shall please to be indulgent," said the Baron. "There are rights of nature; power to the powerful is the law. If he shall think to cross your destiny – well, you have heard of the brazen and the earthen pot."

"Do you call me pot? You are ungallant, Baron," laughed the Princess.

"Before we are done with your glory, I shall have called you by many different titles," he replied.

The girl flushed with pleasure. "But Frédéric is still the Prince, *monsieur le flatteur*," she said. "You do not propose a revolution? – you of all men?"

"Dear madam, when it is already made!" he cried. "The Prince reigns indeed in the almanac; but my Princess reigns and rules." And he looked at her with a fond admiration that made the heart of Seraphina swell. Looking on her huge slave, she drank the intoxicating joys of power. Meanwhile he continued, with that sort of massive archness that so ill became him, "She has but one fault; there is but one danger in the great career that I foresee for her. May I name it? may I be so irreverent? It is in herself – her heart is soft."

"Her courage is faint, Baron," said the Princess. "Suppose we have judged ill, suppose we were defeated?"

"Defeated, madam?" returned the Baron, with a touch of ill-humour. "Is the dog defeated by the hare? Our troops are all cantoned along the frontier; in five hours the vanguard of five thousand bayonets shall be hammering on the gates of Brandenau; and in all Gerolstein there are not fifteen hundred men who can manoeuvre. It is as simple as a sum. There can be no resistance."

"It is no great exploit," she said. "Is that what you call glory? It is like beating a child."

"The courage, madam, is diplomatic," he replied. "We take a grave step; we fix the eyes of Europe, for the first time, on Grünewald; and in the negotiations of the next three months, mark me,

we stand or fall. It is there, madam, that I shall have to depend upon your counsels,” he added, almost gloomily. “If I had not seen you at work, if I did not know the fertility of your mind, I own I should tremble for the consequence. But It is in this field that men must recognise their inability. All the great negotiators, when they have not been women, have had women at their elbows. Madame de Pompadour was ill served; she had not found her Gondremark; but what a mighty politician! Catherine de’ Medici, too, what justice of sight, what readiness of means, what elasticity against defeat! But alas! madam, her Featherheads were her own children; and she had that one touch of vulgarity, that one trait of the good-wife, that she suffered family ties and affections to confine her liberty.”

These singular views of history, strictly *ad usum Seraphinæ*, did not weave their usual soothing spell over the Princess. It was plain that she had taken a momentary distaste to her own resolutions; for she continued to oppose her counsellor, looking upon him out of half-closed eyes and with the shadow of a sneer upon her lips. “What boys men are!” she said; “what lovers of big words! Courage, indeed! If you had to scour pans, Herr von Gondremark, you would call it, I suppose, Domestic Courage?”

“I would, madam,” said the Baron stoutly, “if I scoured them well. I would put a good name upon a virtue; you will not overdo it; they are not so enchanting in themselves.”

“Well, but let me see,” she said. “I wish to understand your courage. Why we asked leave, like children! Our grannie in Berlin, our uncle in Vienna, the whole family, have patted us on the head and sent us forward. Courage? I wonder when I hear you!”

“My Princess is unlike herself,” returned the Baron. “She has forgotten where the peril lies. True, we have received encouragement on every hand; but my Princess knows too well on what untenable conditions; and she knows besides how, in the publicity of the diet, these whispered conferences are forgotten and disowned. The danger is very real” – he raged inwardly at having to blow the very coal he had been quenching – “none the less real in that it is not precisely military, but for that reason the easier to be faced. Had we to count upon your troops, although I share your Highness’s expectations of the conduct of Alvenau, we cannot forget that he has not been proved in chief command. But where negotiation is concerned, the conduct lies with us; and with your help, I laugh at danger.”

“It may be so,” said Seraphina, sighing. “It is elsewhere that I see danger. The people, these abominable people – suppose they should instantly rebel? What a figure we should make in the eyes of Europe to have undertaken an invasion while my own throne was tottering to its fall!”

“Nay, madam,” said Gondremark, smiling, “here you are beneath yourself. What is it that feeds their discontent? What but the taxes? Once we have seized Gerolstein, the taxes are remitted, the sons return covered with renown, the houses are adorned with pillage, each tastes his little share of military glory, and behold us once again a happy family! ‘Ay,’ they will say in each other’s long ears, ‘the Princess knew what she was about; she was in the right of it; she has a head upon her shoulders; and here we are, you see, better off than before.’ But why should I say all this? It is what my Princess pointed out to me herself; it was by these reasons that she converted me to this adventure.”

“I think, Herr von Gondremark,” said Seraphina, somewhat tartly, “you often attribute your own sagacity to your Princess.”

For a second Gondremark staggered under the shrewdness of the attack; the next, he had perfectly recovered. “Do I?” he said. “It is very possible. I have observed a similar tendency in your Highness.”

It was so openly spoken, and appeared so just, that Seraphina breathed again. Her vanity had been alarmed, and the greatness of the relief improved her spirits. “Well,” she said, “all this is little to the purpose. We are keeping Frédéric without, and I am still ignorant of our line of battle. Come, co-admiral, let us consult... How am I to receive him now? And what are we to do if he should appear at the council?”

“Now,” he answered. “I shall leave him to my Princess for just now! I have seen her at work. Send him off to his theatricals! But in all gentleness,” he added. “Would it, for instance, would it displease my sovereign to affect a headache?”

“Never!” said she. “The woman who can manage, like the man who can fight, must never shrink from an encounter. The knight must not disgrace his weapons.”

“Then let me pray my *belle dame sans merci*,” he returned, “to affect the only virtue that she lacks. Be pitiful to the poor young man; affect an interest in his hunting; be weary of politics; find in his society, as it were, a grateful repose from dry considerations. Does my Princess authorise the line of battle?”

“Well, that is a trifle,” answered Seraphina. “The council – there is the point.”

“The council?” cried Gondremark. “Permit me, madam.” And he rose and proceeded to flutter about the room, counterfeiting Otto both in voice and gesture not unhappily. “What is there to-day, Herr von Gondremark? Ah, Herr Cancellarius, a new wig! You cannot deceive me; I know every wig in Grünewald; I have the sovereign’s eye. What are these papers about? O, I see. O, certainly. Surely, surely. I wager none of you remarked that wig. By all means. I know nothing about that. Dear me, are there as many as all that? Well, you can sign them; you have the procuration. You see, Herr Cancellarius, I knew your wig. And so,” concluded Gondremark, resuming his own voice, “our sovereign, by the particular grace of God, enlightens and supports his privy councillors.”

But when the Baron turned to Seraphina for approval he found her frozen. “You are pleased to be witty, Herr von Gondremark,” she said, “and have perhaps forgotten where you are. But these rehearsals are apt to be misleading. Your master, the Prince of Grünewald, is sometimes more exacting.”

Gondremark cursed her in his soul. Of all injured vanities, that of the reprovèd buffoon is the most savage; and when grave issues are involved, these petty stabs become unbearable. But Gondremark was a man of iron; he showed nothing; he did not even, like the common trickster, retreat because he had presumed, but held to his point bravely. “Madam,” he said, “if, as you say, he prove exacting, we must take the bull by the horns.”

“We shall see,” she said, and she arranged her skirt like one about to rise. Temper, scorn, disgust, all the more acrid feelings, became her like jewels; and she now looked her best.

“Pray God they quarrel,” thought Gondremark. “The damned minx may fail me yet, unless they quarrel. It is time to let him in. Zz – fight, dogs!” Consequent on these reflections, he bent a stiff knee, and chivalrously kissed the Princess’s hand. “My Princess,” he said, “must now dismiss her servant. I have much to arrange against the hour of council.”

“Go,” she said, and rose.

And as Gondremark tripped out of a private door, she touched a bell, and gave the order to admit the Prince.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRINCE DELIVERS A LECTURE ON MARRIAGE, WITH PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATIONS OF DIVORCE

With what a world of excellent intentions Otto entered his wife’s cabinet! how fatherly, how tender! how morally affecting were the words he had prepared! Nor was Seraphina unamiably inclined. Her usual fear of Otto as a marplot in her great designs was now swallowed up in a passing distrust of the designs themselves. For Gondremark, besides, she had conceived an angry horror. In her heart she did not like the Baron. Behind his impudent servility, behind the devotion which, with indelicate delicacy, he still forced on her attention, she divined the grossness of his nature. So a man may be proud of having tamed a bear, and yet sicken at his captive’s odour. And above all, she had certain jealous intimations that the man was false and the deception double. True, she falsely trifled

with his love; but he, perhaps, was only trifling with her vanity. The insolence of his late mimicry, and the odium of her own position as she sat and watched it, lay besides like a load upon her conscience. She met Otto almost with a sense of guilt, and yet she welcomed him as a deliverer from ugly things.

But the wheels of an interview are at the mercy of a thousand ruts; and even at Otto's entrance, the first jolt occurred. Gondremark, he saw, was gone; but there was the chair drawn close for consultation; and it pained him not only that this man had been received, but that he should depart with such an air of secrecy. Struggling with this twinge, it was somewhat sharply that he dismissed the attendant who had brought him in.

"You make yourself at home, *chez moi*," she said, a little ruffled both by his tone of command and by the glance he had thrown upon the chair.

"Madam," replied Otto, "I am here so seldom that I have almost the rights of a stranger."

"You choose your own associates, Frédéric," she said.

"I am here to speak of it," he returned. "It is now four years since we were married; and these four years, Seraphina, have not perhaps been happy either for you or for me. I am well aware I was unsuitable to be your husband. I was not young, I had no ambition, I was a trifler; and you despised me, I dare not say unjustly. But to do justice on both sides, you must bear in mind how I have acted. When I found it amused you to play the part of Princess on this little stage, did I not immediately resign to you my box of toys, this Grünewald? And when I found I was distasteful as a husband, could any husband have been less intrusive? You will tell me that I have no feelings, no preference, and thus no credit; that I go before the wind; that all this was in my character. And indeed, one thing is true, – that it is easy, too easy, to leave things undone. But, Seraphina, I begin to learn it is not always wise. If I were too old and too uncongenial for your husband, I should still have remembered that I was the Prince of that country to which you came, a visitor and a child. In that relation also there were duties, and these duties I have not performed."

To claim the advantage of superior age is to give sure offence. "Duty!" laughed Seraphina, "and on your lips, Frédéric! You make me laugh. What fancy is this? Go, flirt with the maids and be a prince in Dresden china, as you look. Enjoy yourself, *mon enfant*, and leave duty and the state to us."

The plural grated on the Prince. "I have enjoyed myself too much," he said, "since enjoyment is the word. And yet there were much to say upon the other side. You must suppose me desperately fond of hunting. But indeed there were days when I found a great deal of interest in what it was courtesy to call my government. And I have always had some claim to taste; I could tell live happiness from dull routine; and between hunting, and the throne of Austria, and your society, my choice had never wavered, had the choice been mine. You were a girl, a bud, when you were given me –"

"Heavens!" she cried, "is this to be a love-scene?"

"I am never ridiculous," he said; "it is my only merit; and you may be certain this shall be a scene of marriage *à la mode*. But when I remember the beginning, it is bare courtesy to speak in sorrow. Be just, madam: you would think me strangely uncivil to recall these days without the decency of a regret. Be yet a little juster, and own, if only in complaisance, that you yourself regret that past."

"I have nothing to regret," said the Princess. "You surprise me. I thought you were so happy."

"Happy and happy, there are so many hundred ways," said Otto. "A man may be happy in revolt; he may be happy in sleep; wine, change, and travel make him happy; virtue, they say, will do the like – I have not tried; and they say also that in old, quiet, and habitual marriages there is yet another happiness. Happy, yes; I am happy if you like; but I will tell you frankly, I was happier when I brought you home."

"Well," said the Princess, not without constraint, "it seems you changed your mind."

"Not I," returned Otto, "I never changed. Do you remember, Seraphina, on our way home, when you saw the roses in the lane, and I got out and plucked them? It was a narrow lane between great trees; the sunset at the end was all gold, and the rooks were flying overhead. There were nine, nine red roses; you gave me a kiss for each, and I told myself that every rose and every kiss should

stand for a year of love. Well, in eighteen months there was an end. But do you fancy, Seraphina, that my heart has altered?”

“I am sure I cannot tell,” she said, like an automaton.

“It has not,” the Prince continued. “There is nothing ridiculous, even from a husband, in a love that owns itself unhappy and that asks no more. I built on sand; pardon me, I do not breathe a reproach – I built, I suppose, upon my own infirmities; but I put my heart in the building, and it still lies among the ruins.”

“How very poetical!” she said, with a little choking laugh, unknown relentings, unfamiliar softnesses, moving within her. “What would you be at?” she added, hardening her voice.

“I would be at this,” he answered; “and hard it is to say. I would be at this: – Seraphina, I am your husband, after all, and a poor fool that loves you. Understand,” he cried almost fiercely, “I am no suppliant husband; what your love refuses I would scorn to receive from your pity. I do not ask, I would not take it. And for jealousy, what ground have I? A dog-in-the-manger jealousy is a thing the dogs may laugh at. But at least, in the world’s eye, I am still your husband; and I ask you if you treat me fairly? I keep to myself, I leave you free, I have given you in everything your will. What do you in return? I find, Seraphina, that you have been too thoughtless. But between persons such as we are, in our conspicuous station, particular care and a particular courtesy are owing. Scandal is perhaps not easy to avoid; but it is hard to bear.”

“Scandal!” she cried, with a deep breath. “Scandal! It is for this you have been driving!”

“I have tried to tell you how I feel,” he replied. “I have told you that I love you – love you in vain – a bitter thing for a husband; I have laid myself open that I might speak without offence. And now that I have begun, I will go on and finish.”

“I demand it,” she said. “What is this about?”

Otto flushed crimson. “I have to say what I would fain not,” he answered. “I counsel you to see less of Gondremark.”

“Of Gondremark? And why?” she asked.

“Your intimacy is the ground of scandal, madam,” said Otto, firmly enough – “of a scandal that is agony to me, and would be crushing to your parents if they knew it.”

“You are the first to bring me word of it,” said she. “I thank you.”

“You have perhaps cause,” he replied. “Perhaps I am the only one among your friends – “O, leave my friends alone,” she interrupted. “My friends are of a different stamp. You have come to me here and made a parade of sentiment. When have I last seen you? I have governed your kingdom for you in the meantime, and there I got no help. At last, when I am weary with a man’s work, and you are weary of your playthings, you return to make me a scene of conjugal reproaches – the grocer and his wife! The positions are too much reversed; and you should understand, at least, that I cannot at the same time do your work of government and behave myself like a little girl. Scandal is the atmosphere in which we live, we princes; it is what a prince should know. You play an odious part. Do you believe this rumour?”

“Madam, should I be here?” said Otto.

“It is what I want to know!” she cried, the tempest of her scorn increasing. “Suppose you did – I say, suppose you did believe it?”

“I should make it my business to suppose the contrary,” he answered.

“I thought so. O, you are made of baseness!” said she.

“Madam,” he cried, roused at last, “enough of this. You wilfully misunderstand my attitude; you outwear my patience. In the name of your parents, in my own name, I summon you to be more circumspect.”

“Is this a request, *monsieur mon mari*?” she demanded.

“Madam, if I chose, I might command,” said Otto.

“You might, sir, as the law stands, make me prisoner,” returned Seraphina. “Short of that you will gain nothing.”

“You will continue as before?” he asked.

“Precisely as before,” said she. “As soon as this comedy is over, I shall request the Freiherr von Gondremark to visit me. Do you understand?” she added, rising. “For my part, I have done.”

“I will then ask the favour of your hand, madam,” said Otto, palpitating in every pulse with anger. “I have to request that you will visit in my society another part of my poor house. And reassure yourself – it will not take long – and it is the last obligation that you shall have the chance to lay me under.”

“The last?” she cried. “Most joyfully!”

She offered her hand, and he took it; on each side with an elaborate affectation, each inwardly incandescent. He led her out by the private door, following where Gondremark had passed; they threaded a corridor or two, little frequented, looking on a court, until they came at last into the Prince’s suite. The first room was an armoury, hung all about with the weapons of various countries, and looking forth on the front terrace.

“Have you brought me here to slay me?” she inquired.

“I have brought you, madam, only to pass on,” replied Otto.

Next they came to a library, where an old chamberlain sat half asleep. He rose and bowed before the princely couple, asking for orders.

“You will attend us here,” said Otto.

The next stage was a gallery of pictures, where Seraphina’s portrait hung conspicuous, dressed for the chase, red roses in her hair, as Otto, in the first months of marriage, had directed. He pointed to it without a word; she raised her eyebrows in silence; and they passed still forward into a matted corridor where four doors opened. One led to Otto’s bedroom; one was the private door to Seraphina’s. And here, for the first time, Otto left her hand, and, stepping forward, shot the bolt.

“It is long, madam,” said he, “since it was bolted on the other side.”

“One was effectual,” returned the Princess. “Is this all?”

“Shall I reconduct you?” he asked, bowing.

“I should prefer,” she asked, in ringing tones, “the conduct of the Freiherr von Gondremark.”

Otto summoned the chamberlain. “If the Freiherr von Gondremark is in the palace,” he said, “bid him attend the Princess here.” And when the official had departed, “Can I do more to serve you, madam?” the Prince asked.

“Thank you, no. I have been much amused,” she answered.

“I have now,” continued Otto, “given you your liberty complete. This has been for you a miserable marriage.”

“Miserable!” said she.

“It has been made light to you; it shall be lighter still,” continued the Prince. “But one thing, madam, you must still continue to bear – my father’s name, which is now yours. I leave it in your hands. Let me see you, since you will have no advice of mine, apply the more attention of your own to bear it worthily.”

“Herr von Gondremark is long in coming,” she remarked.

“O Seraphina, Seraphina!” he cried. And that was the end of their interview.

She tripped to a window and looked out; and a little after, the chamberlain announced the Freiherr von Gondremark, who entered with something of a wild eye and changed complexion, confounded, as he was, at this unusual summons. The Princess faced round from the window with a pearly smile; nothing but her heightened colour spoke of discomposure. Otto was pale, but he was otherwise master of himself.

“Herr von Gondremark,” said he, “oblige me so far: reconduct the Princess to her own apartment.”

The Baron, still all at sea, offered his hand, which was smilingly accepted, and the pair sailed forth through the picture-gallery.

As soon as they were gone, and Otto knew the length and breadth of his miscarriage, and how he had done the contrary of all that he intended, he stood stupefied. A fiasco so complete and sweeping was laughable, even to himself; and he laughed aloud in his wrath. Upon this mood there followed the sharpest violence of remorse; and to that again, as he recalled his provocation, anger succeeded afresh. So he was tossed in spirit; now bewailing his inconsequence and lack of temper, now flaming up in white-hot indignation and a noble pity for himself.

He paced his apartment like a leopard. There was danger in Otto, for a flash. Like a pistol, he could kill at one moment, and the next he might be kicked aside. But just then, as he walked the long floors in his alternate humours, tearing his handkerchief between his hands, he was strung to his top note, every nerve attent. The pistol, you might say, was charged. And when jealousy from time to time fetched him a lash across the tenderest of his feeling, and sent a string of her fire-pictures glancing before his mind's eye, the contraction of his face was even dangerous. He disregarded jealousy's inventions, yet they stung. In this height of anger, he still preserved his faith in Seraphina's innocence; but the thought of her possible misconduct was the bitterest ingredient in his pot of sorrow.

There came a knock at the door, and the chamberlain brought him a note. He took it and ground it in his hand, continuing his march, continuing his bewildered thoughts; and some minutes had gone by before the circumstance came clearly to his mind. Then he paused and opened it. It was a pencil scratch from Gotthold, thus conceived:

“The council is privately summoned at once.

“*G. v. H.*”

If the council was thus called before the hour, and that privately, it was plain they feared his interference. Feared: here was a sweet thought. Gotthold, too – Gotthold, who had always used and regarded him as a mere peasant lad, had now been at the pains to warn him; Gotthold looked for something at his hands. Well, none should be disappointed; the Prince, too long beshadowed by the uxorious lover, should now return and shine. He summoned his valet, repaired the disorder of his appearance with elaborate care; and then, curled and scented and adorned, Prince Charming in every line, but with a twitching nostril, he set forth unattended for the council.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRINCE DISSOLVES THE COUNCIL

It was as Gotthold wrote. The liberation of Sir John, Greisengesang's uneasy narrative, last of all, the scene between Seraphina and the Prince, had decided the conspirators to take a step of bold timidity. There had been a period of bustle, liveried messengers speeding here and there with notes; and at half-past ten in the morning, about an hour before its usual hour, the council of Grünwald sat around the board.

It was not a large body. At the instance of Gondremark, it had undergone a strict purgation, and was now composed exclusively of tools. Three secretaries sat at a side-table. Seraphina took the head; on her right was the Baron, on her left Greisengesang; below these Grafinski the treasurer, Count Eisenthal, a couple of non-combatants, and, to the surprise of all, Gotthold. He had been named a privy councillor by Otto, merely that he might profit by the salary; and as he was never known to attend a meeting, it had occurred to nobody to cancel his appointment. His present appearance was the more ominous, coming when it did. Gondremark scowled upon him; and the non-combatant on his right, intercepting this black look, edged away from one who was so clearly out of favour.

“The hour presses, your Highness,” said the Baron; “may we proceed to business?”

“At once,” replied Seraphina.

“Your Highness will pardon me,” said Gotthold; “but you are still, perhaps, unacquainted with the fact that Prince Otto has returned.”

“The Prince will not attend the council,” replied Seraphina, with a momentary blush. – “The despatches, Herr Cancellarius? There is one for Gerolstein?”

A secretary brought a paper.

“Here, madam,” said Greisengesang. “Shall I read it?”

“We are all familiar with its terms,” replied Gondremark. “Your Highness approves?”

“Unhesitatingly,” said Seraphina.

“It may then be held as read,” concluded the Baron. “Will your Highness sign?”

The Princess did so; Gondremark, Eisenthal, and one of the non-combatants followed suit; and the paper was then passed across the table to the librarian. He proceeded leisurely to read.

“We have no time to spare, Herr Doctor,” cried the Baron brutally. “If you do not choose to sign on the authority of your sovereign, pass it on. Or you may leave the table,” he added, his temper ripping out.

“I decline your invitation, Herr von Gondremark; and my sovereign, as I continue to observe with regret, is still absent from the board,” replied the Doctor calmly; and he resumed the perusal of the paper, the rest chafing and exchanging glances. “Madam and gentlemen,” he said at last, “what I hold in my hand is simply a declaration of war.”

“Simply,” said Seraphina, flashing defiance.

“The sovereign of this country is under the same roof with us,” continued Gotthold, “and I insist he shall be summoned. It is needless to adduce my reasons; you are all ashamed at heart of this projected treachery.”

The council waved like a sea. There were various outcries.

“You insult the Princess,” thundered Gondremark.

“I maintain my protest,” replied Gotthold.

At the height of this confusion the door was thrown open; an usher announced, “Gentlemen, the Prince!” and Otto, with his most excellent bearing, entered the apartment. It was like oil upon the troubled waters; every one settled instantly into his place, and Greisengesang, to give himself a countenance, became absorbed in the arrangement of his papers; but in their eagerness to dissemble one and all neglected to rise.

“Gentlemen,” said the Prince, pausing.

They all got to their feet in a moment; and this reproof still further demoralised the weaker brethren.

The Prince moved slowly towards the lower end of the table; then he paused again, and, fixing his eye on Greisengesang, “How comes it, Herr Cancellarius,” he said, “that I have received no notice of the change of hour?”

“Your Highness,” replied the Chancellor, “her Highness the Princess ...” and there paused.

“I understood,” said Seraphina, taking him up, “that you did not purpose to be present.”

Their eyes met for a second, and Seraphina’s fell; but her anger only burned the brighter for that private shame.

“And now, gentlemen,” said Otto, taking his chair, “I pray you to be seated. I have been absent; there are doubtless some arrears; but ere we proceed to business, Herr Grafinski, you will direct four thousand crowns to be sent to me at once. Make a note, if you please,” he added, as the treasurer still stared in wonder.

“Four thousand crowns?” asked Seraphina. “Pray for what?”

“Madam,” returned Otto, smiling, “for my own purposes.”

Gondremark spurred up Grafinski underneath the table.

“If your Highness will indicate the destination ...” began the puppet.

“You are not here, sir, to interrogate your Prince,” said Otto.

Grafinski looked for help to his commander; and Gondrermark came to his aid, in suave and measured tones.

“Your Highness may reasonably be surprised,” he said; “and Herr Grafinski, although I am convinced he is clear of the intention of offending, would have perhaps done better to begin with an explanation. The resources of the state are at the present moment entirely swallowed up, or, as we hope to prove, wisely invested. In a month from now, I do not question we shall be able to meet any command your Highness may lay upon us; but at this hour I fear that, even in so small a matter, he must prepare himself for disappointment. Our zeal is no less, although our power may be inadequate.”

“How much, Herr Grafinski, have we in the treasury?” asked Otto.

“Your Highness,” protested the treasurer, “we have immediate need of every crown.”

“I think, sir, you evade me,” flashed the Prince; and then, turning to the side-table, “Mr. Secretary,” he added, “bring me, if you please, the treasury docket.”

Herr Grafinski became deadly pale; the Chancellor, expecting his own turn, was probably engaged in prayer; Gondrermark was watching like a ponderous cat. Gotthold, on his part, looked on with wonder at his cousin; he was certainly showing spirit, but what, in such a time of gravity, was all this talk of money? and why should he waste his strength upon a personal issue?

“I find,” said Otto, with his finger on the docket, “that we have 20,000 crowns in case.”

“That is exact, your Highness,” replied the Baron. “But our liabilities, all of which are happily not liquid, amount to a far larger sum; and at the present point of time it would be morally impossible to divert a single florin. Essentially, the case is empty. We have, already presented, a large note for material of war.”

“Material of war?” exclaimed Otto, with an excellent assumption of surprise. “But if my memory serves me right, we settled these accounts in January.”

“There have been further orders,” the Baron explained. “A new park of artillery has been completed; five hundred stand of arms, seven hundred baggage mules – the details are in a special memorandum. – Mr. Secretary Holtz, the memorandum, if you please.”

“One would think, gentlemen, that we were going to war,” said Otto.

“We are,” said Seraphina.

“War!” cried the Prince. “And, gentlemen, with whom? The peace of Grünwald has endured for centuries. What aggression, what insult, have we suffered?”

“Here, your Highness,” said Gotthold, “is the ultimatum. It was in the very article of signature, when your Highness so opportunely entered.”

Otto laid the paper before him; as he read, his fingers played tattoo upon the table. “Was it proposed,” he inquired, “to send this paper forth without a knowledge of my pleasure?”

One of the non-combatants, eager to trim, volunteered an answer. “The Herr Doctor von Hohenstockwitz had just entered his dissent,” he added.

“Give me the rest of this correspondence,” said the Prince. It was handed to him, and he read it patiently from end to end, while the councillors sat foolishly enough looking before them on the table. The secretaries, in the background, were exchanging glances of delight; a row at the council was for them a rare and welcome feature.

“Gentlemen,” said Otto, when he had finished, “I have read with pain. This claim upon Obermünsterol is palpably unjust; it has not a tincture, not a show, of justice. There is not in all this ground enough for after-dinner talk, and you propose to force it as a *casus belli*.”

“Certainly, your Highness,” returned Gondrermark, too wise to defend the indefensible, “the claim on Obermünsterol is simply a pretext.”

“It is well,” said the Prince. “Herr Cancellarius, take your pen. ‘The council,’” he began to dictate – “I withhold all notice of my intervention,” he said, in parenthesis, and addressing himself more directly to his wife; “and I say nothing of the strange suppression by which this business has been smuggled past my knowledge. I am content to be in time – ‘The council,’” he resumed, “on a

further examination of the facts, and enlightened by the note in the last despatch from Gerolstein, have the pleasure to announce that they are entirely at one, both as to fact and sentiment, with the Grand-Ducal Court of Gerolstein.’ You have it? Upon these lines, sir, you will draw up the despatch.”

“If your Highness will allow me,” said the Baron, “your Highness is so imperfectly acquainted with the internal history of this correspondence, that any interference will be merely hurtful. Such a paper as your Highness proposes would be to stultify the whole previous policy of Grünewald.”

“The policy of Grünewald!” cried the Prince. “One would suppose you had no sense of humour! Would you fish in a coffee cup?”

“With deference, your Highness,” returned the Baron, “even in a coffee cup there may be poison. The purpose of this war is not simply territorial enlargement; still less is it a war of glory; for, as your Highness indicates, the state of Grünewald is too small to be ambitious. But the body politic is seriously diseased; republicanism, socialism, many disintegrating ideas are abroad; circle within circle, a really formidable organisation has grown up about your Highness’s throne.”

“I have heard of it, Herr von Gondremark,” put in the Prince; “but I have reason to be aware that yours is the more authoritative information.”

“I am honoured by this expression of my Prince’s confidence,” returned Gondremark, unabashed. “It is, therefore, with a single eye to these disorders that our present external policy has been shaped. Something was required to divert public attention, to employ the idle, to popularise your Highness’s rule, and, if it were possible, to enable him to reduce the taxes at a blow, and to a notable amount. The proposed expedition – for it cannot without hyperbole be called a war – seemed to the council to combine the various characters required; a marked improvement in the public sentiment has followed even upon our preparations; and I cannot doubt that when success shall follow, the effect will surpass even our boldest hopes.”

“You are very adroit, Herr von Gondremark,” said Otto. “You fill me with admiration. I had not heretofore done justice to your qualities.”

Seraphina looked up with joy, supposing Otto conquered; but Gondremark still waited, armed at every point; he knew how very stubborn is the revolt of a weak character.

“And the territorial army scheme, to which I was persuaded to consent – was it secretly directed to the same end?” the Prince asked.

“I still believe the effect to have been good,” replied the Baron; “discipline and mounting guard are excellent sedatives. But I will avow to your Highness, I was unaware, at the date of that decree, of the magnitude of the revolutionary movement; nor did any of us, I think, imagine that such a territorial army was a part of the republican proposals.”

“It was?” asked Otto. “Strange! Upon what fancied grounds?”

“The grounds were indeed fanciful,” returned the Baron. “It was conceived among the leaders that a territorial army, drawn from and returning to the people, would, in the event of any popular uprising, prove lukewarm or unfaithful to the throne.”

“I see,” said the Prince. “I begin to understand.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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