

and fall into the hands of their enemies.

For several seconds the sleigh remained almost stationary. The surface was soft, and the runners sank deep into the snow. For the moment it seemed that this last venture of theirs was to prove abortive, that the ridiculous and futile fate of sticking fast in the treacherous crystals would be their portion. But their slow progress never quite came to an actual standstill. Gradually, very gradually, they shuffled downwards, and after a sticky, dubious mile-an-hour speed the pace began to quicken to a steady, definite descent. Then, pushing the snow away from its curved runners in feathery spray, the lumbering conveyance commenced to move with no uncertain course down the hill-side. Skidding, jolting, but ever seeking lower levels the sleigh lurched at considerable speed over the fleckless surface of the unscarred snow-field.

It was impossible to steer, but no crop of boulders or pine stump threatened the safety of their descent. Cyril's eyes streamed with water forced out by the rushings air; but his heart was afire with excitement and prospective success, and his keen gaze swept round on all sides to take in every factor of the situation. Above them now the wooden shelter was plainly visible, and as the Arch-duke had shrewdly surmised, it was full of soldiers. They were watching his descent with eager eyes, but fortunately for the fugitives they were dismounted cavalry, not ski-shod infantry, or a hot pursuit would have been the order of the day. Nor did they dare open fire, for the presence of Karl was as a bomb-proof entrenchment to the abducting Cyril. He shook his fist mockingly at his impotent antagonists, and then bent his gaze down the valley to the right. Coming round the curving line of railway was the tiny train from Nussheim en route for Weidenbruck.

"My luck's not altogether out," he muttered, and hardly had he spoken when the sleigh skidded violently sideways and then overturned, inconspicuously hurling its freight into the snow. The valley was reached, and the journey's abrupt termination was due partly to the changed angle of inclination, and partly to a collision with a pile of unused sleepers stacked hard-by the permanent way. No one was damaged, but the ex-Queen was shaken more than a woman of luxurious habits and a deficient sense of humour cares about. Cyril pulled himself together with a laugh, crying, "Come, friends, we've half won the battle and the other half's comparatively easy."

And at that moment, contemplating his rude energy and infectious spirit, Karl found it in his heart almost to admire the man whom he knew for his deadliest enemy.

And now Cyril was standing between the rails, holding up his hand. It was a strictly illegal position of course, but Cyril cared about as much for the by-laws of a railway company as he did for the cardinal virtues or the prospects of purgatory. The engine-driver saw him a considerable way off, and after whistling loud, long, and frequently, finally decided to bring his train to a standstill a few yards short of the Arch-duke's person.

Cyril pushed Karl and the ex-Queen on to the cab of the engine and then mounted himself.

The engine-driver's amazed protest was checked before it was made. When a man holds up a train and mounts it, revolver in hand, it is better not to protest too vigorously.

"Start the confounded train," said Cyril to the driver, "and go full speed ahead."

The train was started with a jerk that suggested that the driver was not considering the comfort of his passengers so much as his own safety. Onwards they rushed towards Weidenbruck as fast as the little engine could carry them.

"I had better slacken pace round this curve, Excellency," protested the driver presently.

"D—the curve," was all the reply he got.

The Arch-duke had seen that the troop of cavalry, which had been sent

to intercept him, was returning rapidly in the same direction as himself. It was a race, a glorious race between the iron-horse and the light cavalry, and his spirit revelled in the excitement of the contest.

"We are approaching the station of Rothdorf, and the signal is against us," protested the driver a little later. "D— Rothdorf and d—the signal," said Cyril. "Full steam ahead!"

On they rushed, clanging over the metals, rushing round dangerous curves, rattling over bridges and roaring through brief tunnels, with a side-to-side swinging that was eloquent of danger and terrifying to all but the strongest nerves. Karl, despite his precarious position, was almost enjoying the wild and unusual experience. His mother, terrified at the whole business, and particularly at the way the driver's warnings were disregarded, feeling physically sick from the nauseating motion, covered her eyes with her hands and moaned feebly. They were in the outskirts of the capital now, and as they drew near another small station Cyril gave the command to stop. The cavalry, he reflected, would probably make straight for the terminus, and it was wiser not to complete their journey to that point.

The driver jammed on the brake, and with skidding wheels and red-hot axles the train came to an abrupt end of its delirious progress.

Cyril found time to compensate the driver with a couple of gold pieces and then dragged his companions out of the station.

"Tickets!" demanded a pompous official with gold-rimmed spectacles and a handsome peaked cap.

"We have no tickets," said Cyril. "Out of the way, man, if you value your life."

Apparently the official did value his life. Possibly he recognized the Arch-duke; anyway he was sufficiently a man of sense not to make any further banal requests for tickets.

In the station yard was an omnibus, carried like all other vehicles at this time of the year in Weidenbruck, on steel runners. There was a driver in a low-crowned, shiny, billycock hat on the box, and an angular yellow horse between the shafts. On the outside of the bus was painted the inscription, "Pension Schmitt."

Cyril hustled his companions inside. "To the Pension Schmitt, Excellency?" demanded the driver.

"No, to Number 86 Januariusstrasse," said the Arch-duke, "and if you can get there in ten minutes I will give you ten pounds."

"Where are you taking us now?" demanded the ex-Queen as Cyril joined them inside the vehicle.

"To Major von Lacherberg's diggings," replied the Arch-duke. "He knows the slums of Weidenbruck like his own pocket. Without doubt he will find us some sort of den in the Morast where we can hide for a day or two."

"Hide in a den in the Morast!" echoed the ex-Queen miserably, and then relapsed again into sobs, which were scarcely audible by reason of the rattling window-panes. The coachman meant earning his ten pounds.

"Don't cry, my dear," said Cyril cheerily. "Personally, I am enjoying myself famously. I mean getting even with Fritz, Mever, Saunders and Co. before the day's over—and it's only half done yet. And what about my lawful Sovereign?" he asked banteringly. "Is he feeling tearful like his poor mamma, or full of fight like his loving cousin? What are you thinking of, Your Majesty?"

"I was thinking," said Karl, after a pause, "that if I were ten years older, and you ten years younger, I would use your undoubted capacities for the good of Grimland."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Noblesse Oblige."

THE Freiherr of Kragg, seated on a Cinquecento chair at a wax-polished mahogany table, sipping '62 kurdeshheim from a monogrammed and coroneted glass, occasionally cracking a walnut with silver-gilt crackers on a Sevres dessert plate, presented the not uncommon spectacle of wealth divorced from happi-



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