

SOPHY OF KRAVONIA.

A Novel, by Anthony Hope
Author of "Prisoner of Zenda," "The Intrusions of Peggy," Etc.

(Continued.)

"I speak truth sir, as I believe it. But I can't expect you to take my word against the Countess's. I have too much respect for Madame la Comtesse to ask that."

Again he bent down towards the King; the King looked up at him. Madame la Comtesse was not, after all, a very resourceful fellow. An oath! Great Heavens! Oaths were in the day's work when you put your hand to affairs like this. But here Stenovic was wise—and Lepage was shrewd. Stenovic generalized from an experience rather one-sided; the other two knew the special case. When oaths were mentioned—solemn oaths—Stenovic's face glowed.

The King knew his wife too, and he was profoundly affected, convulsed to the depths of his mind. The thing sounded true—it had a horrible sound of truth. He craved the Countess's denial, solemn as it could be—framed. That would restore the confidence which was crumbling from beneath his tortured, bewildered mind.

"Can anybody object to that," he asked slowly, "if I say it will relieve my mind?" he smiled apologetically. "I'm a sick man, you know. If it will relieve a sick man's mind, banish a sick man's fancies? If I shall sleep a little better—and old Lepage here be ashamed of himself?"

None of them dared to object. None could plausibly, unless the Countess herself—and she dared not. In his present mood the King would not accept the plea of her dignity; against her dignity would set the indulgence due to a sick man's rebellious fancies; could she, for her dignity's sake, deny him what would make him sleep?

He looked at her; something in her face appeared to strike him as strange. A sort of quiver ran through his body; he seemed to pull himself together with an effort; as he spoke to her, his voice sounded faint, and ever so slightly blurred.

"You've heard Lepage, and I know that you'll speak the truth to me on your oath—the truth about the thing nearest to the heart of a dying husband. You wouldn't lie on oath to a dying man, your husband and your King. For I am dying. You have years still; but they'll end. You believe that, some day you and I shall stand together before the Throne. As you shall answer to Heaven in that day, is it true? Was it in your heart and in the hearts of these men, to keep my son the heir of my House from his throne? Is it true? And you shall answer to God for your soul, is there any truth in it?"

The woman went gray in the face—a sheet of gray paper seemed drawn over her cheeks; her narrow lips showed a pale red streak across it. Her prayers—those laborious, ingenious, plausible prayers—helped her nothing here.

"I protest! At this time, sir, the Countess will be upset!" Stenovic had been driven to this; he feared greatly. Not a soul heeded him; every eye was now on the woman. She struggled—she struggled to lie; she struggled to do what she believed would bring pardon to her soul. Her voice was forced and harsh when at last she broke silence.

"As I shall answer in that day—" "As you shall answer to God for your soul in that day—" the King repeated. She gave a wild glance at Stenovic, seeking succor, finding no refuge. Her eyes came back by the King's face, and she saw the word "yes" in his eyes.

"As I shall answer to God for my separate birth-pang—" "As I shall answer to God for my soul—" She stopped. That fatal silence while a man might count ten. She threw her hands above her head, and broke into a violent torrent of sobbing. "Yes," they heard her say through her tumultuous weeping.

The King suddenly started back in his chair, as though somebody had offered to strike him. "You—you, my wife! You Stenovic! You, whom I trusted—trusted—trusted like—Ah, is that you, Lepage? Did I hear rightly—wouldn't she swear?"

"With the utmost respect to Madame la Comtesse, she could not swear, sir, tomorrow. But what will she say to me—anything?"

"She'll be all right," he said to Markart with a passing smile. "I think she was fond of the King," said Markart.

Stenovic turned. "Now," he said, seating himself again and resuming his chair. "You suggest that we still use that old story of the arrest of Baroness Dobrava?"

"It's signed 'Alexis,' and King Alexis lives till five tomorrow. Moreover, if all goes well, King Alexis lives again for many years after that."

Stenovic nodded slightly. "The Baroness comes winging—or you bring her? At any rate, one way or the other, she's in our hands by this time tomorrow."

"Exactly, General. I fall to perceive that this lamentable event—he waved his hand towards the King's empty chair—"is the case as regards the Baroness one yet."

"Not the least—unless you consider that kicking our heads on the throw has any such effect," replied Stenovic; and for the first time he smiled.

"Once you wanted to play the big state on a bad hand, General. What you put it on the table now, when you've a good one?"

"I'm thinking of a certain strong card in the other hand which you haven't mentioned yet, Baroness Dobrava is to be in our power by this time tomorrow."

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Natcheff threw out his hands, shrugging his shoulders over so slightly. "I regret to say that the effect is the worst possible. His Majesty is dead."

Silence again—a silence strangely broken. Stenovic sprang across the room with a bound like a cat's, and caught the physician by the shoulder. "No!" he said. "Not for twenty-four yet! His Majesty dies—tomorrow!"

XV.

A JOB FOR CAPTAIN HERCULES.

Stenovic's words seemed to freeze them all stiff where they stood, even Countess Ellenburg's sons, which had threatened to break forth again, were arrested in their flow.

"Markart, lock the door leading to the King's apartments. Natcheff and Lepage, carry the King into his bedroom; lay him on the bed; stay there till I call you, Countess, General, I invite your earnest attention."

Stenovic's mind excelled in the waiting game, the slow, tortuous approach, the inch-by-inch advance of leisurely diplomacy. For him this crisis was at first too sudden. The swift and daring intellect of Stenovic naturally and inevitably took the lead; his strong will fascinated his confederates.

"Is this to be the beginning of the end?" he asked. "For us and our friends—what if we send a courier to Praskok to call King Sergius to his capital—what then? For you, Countess, and your son, oblivion and obscurity at Dobrava—for all the rest of your kind, we mustn't hesitate."

Life, just that! For you, General, and for me, and our friends—yes, you too, Markart—our cone, more or less civilly given. There won't be enough legitimate men in all Slavia on the day King Sergius enters. But there's no King Sergius now."

Stenovic was regarding the use of his brain; his eyes grew distant in deep meditation. Countess Ellenburg looked eager and grim; her lips could not aver a false oath—well, she was not asked to swear any oath now. Markart could not think, he stood staring at Stenovic.

"In half an hour that courier must start for Praskok, if he starts at all. Of all things, we mustn't hesitate."

He had palmed the result to them of the coming of King Sergius; it meant the defeat of years of effort, the entailed end of hopes, of place, of power or influence. There was no future for those three in Kravonia if King Sergius came. And Markart, of course, seemed no more than one of Stenovic's train.

"And if the courier doesn't start?" asked Stenovic. He took out and lit a cigar, asking no leave of the Countess; probably he hardly knew that he was smoking it.

Stenovic looked at his watch. "Five o'clock. We have twenty-four hours—it would be risky to keep the courier longer. There's not much time; we must be prompt. But we mustn't sacrifice anything to hurry. For this crisis it would lead to the King's orders to Baroness Dobrava in the middle of the night! She'd smile a rat, if she's as clever as they say. And as would the Prince, I think. I would have a hundred men at Praskok by midnight, but I shouldn't."

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PROVINCE GETS £300,000 ON FAVORABLE TERMS

Rate of Interest Payable Yearly and Figures Out Less Than 5 Per Cent.

New Loan is for One Year and Was Secured by Premier Robinson from Bank of Montreal—First Half Year's Installment of Increased Subsidy Amounting to \$65,000 Expected in Few Days and Will Be Available for Extra Allowances to Teachers and University.

Premier Robinson, who is in the city, last evening made an important announcement concerning the financial affairs of the province. Briefly, the government has been able to arrange a loan from the Bank of Montreal for £300,000, at a rate of interest which figures out a little less than five per cent.

"This," said the Premier, "is especially gratifying, as it shows the excellent credit of the Province of New Brunswick."

"While some of the best securities in America today are going begging, and cities like Halifax, Montreal, Winnipeg and New York, are finding it almost impossible to sell bonds at a reasonable price, the Province of New Brunswick has been able to sell its treasury bills at a rate which is a slight improvement on what they have been paying for the past year or two."

"This will enable them to meet their obligations falling due during the year and provide for all necessary expenditures upon capital account at a rate of interest which is almost as low as many issues of long time bonds."

"The best financial experts are of the opinion that the present credit of the province of the money market cannot continue and the Province of New Brunswick will be in a position to take advantage of the improvement which is expected in the near future."

"Notwithstanding the statements to the contrary, the province has not been offering any of its long-term bonds on the market, although several financial institutions have made overtures for their purchase."

Speaking of the increased provincial subsidy, the Premier said that it was expected that the first half-year's installment of \$65,000 would be available in the course of a few days.

"The bill was introduced into the Imperial parliament provided that the increase should take effect from the first day of July, 1907. This bill has since been assented to by the King."

"The Premier thought it quite likely that the teachers would receive their increased allowance for the next school term. The extra grant for the University of New Brunswick would also be paid as soon as the increased subsidy was in the treasury."

The balance will be devoted to taking up the 8 per cent. debentures which were issued by the province in 1904, and to provide for the expenditures on capital account, which have already been authorized by the legislature. These include the appropriations for several large permanent bridges such as the Suspension bridge over the St. John river; the new steel spans for the Fredericton bridge, the Dalhousie bridge and the bridge over the Washademoak at the Narrows and the Hawkshaw bridge.

The government has submitted some capital expenditures for rolling stock for the Central Railway, so called, and for the completion of the road.

The present loan is for one year from the 15th of August and the interest is payable yearly instead of quarterly as has been customary in the case of short term loans in the past, and which made the cost of interest for the whole year considerably over five per cent.

Then again, when this loan was effected, the rate of exchange was so favorable that the province was able to have the money placed to its credit at Fredericton at a premium above par. Usually a commission is charged for the transfer of the money, which would make the net proceeds of the loan slightly less than par, which is \$18.2-3, of course.

Asked for some details as to how the money would be applied, the Premier said that part of it had already been used to retire the liability to about \$40,000 from his employer, Franklin Cunliffe, of Plymouth. It seems that the man had been hired by Cunliffe to assist in buying, and by some means got across to the family pocketbook and disappeared last night with the contents of the police car on his trunk.

Neal McKinnon, proprietor of the well-known McKinnon Hotel, is plain in a suit that is to come up tomorrow. On Saturday he says an old man named James Bryson, who hails from Fredericton, asked him to change a \$20 bill.

McKinnon counted out four fives and handed them over. There being three or four in the party and something coming up to divert his attention from the matter, McKinnon forgot to ask Bryson for the bill. Sunday morning he recalled the transaction, and immediately started out in pursuit of Bryson. The latter stoutly declared that he had given McKinnon the money. The case is to be decided before Magistrate Dibblee and a jury.

WOODSTOCK, N. B., Aug. 19.—A few days ago at Amherst an Indian named Mitchell Moulton stole a canoe from a half-breed named James Deveau and made for Woodstock. Deveau followed him here and had information laid before Magistrate McCormack. Moulton is being held to await trial, but a counter stroke seems to have put the prosecution at bay. Deveau, it seems, spent last Friday night with some Indians at the reservation near town, and then went on to Houlton, intending to return today. When the train pulled into the Queen street station he met an unexpected reception, Officer McKinnon taking him into custody to answer the complaint of Elizabeth Paul, a dusky child of the forest, who early this morning sought out the police magistrate and laid information against Deveau, charging him with indecent assault upon the occasion of his visit to the reservation. Deveau was lodged in jail to await examination.

Information has been laid against a young chap named Jim McCann, aged about 25, charging him with the theft of a sum of money amounting to about \$40, from his employer, Franklin Cunliffe, of Plymouth. It seems that the man had been hired by Cunliffe to assist in buying, and by some means got across to the family pocketbook and disappeared last night with the contents of the police car on his trunk.

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"The Premier thought it quite likely that the teachers would receive their increased allowance for the next school term. The extra grant for the University of New Brunswick would also be paid as soon as the increased subsidy was in the treasury."

The balance will be devoted to taking up the 8 per cent. debentures which were issued by the province in 1904, and to provide for the expenditures on capital account, which have already been authorized by the legislature. These include the appropriations for several large permanent bridges such as the Suspension bridge over the St. John river; the new steel spans for the Fredericton bridge, the Dalhousie bridge and the bridge over the Washademoak at the Narrows and the Hawkshaw bridge.

The government has submitted some capital expenditures for rolling stock for the Central Railway, so called, and for the completion of the road.

The present loan is for one year from the 1