Better a Peasant Than a Peer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HIS EXCELLENCY, COUNT MIKOFF

"Bell's right. Princesses, and that kind of thing, grow like blackberries in this country," thinks Hal. "A princess and a count in one day is not bad."

From the soup to the dusty apples and pears which figure in the carte as "dessert," the table d'hote drags its slow coprse to a conclusion, and, the ladies having retired, the gentlemen, one and all, excepting the gentle Bell, begin to smoke. Hal feels in all his pockets for a cigar or a pipe, and is about to request Bell to order a cigar, when the count, with a courteous little bow, addressing Bell, says:

"Permit me to offer your young friend a cigar," and passes his case.

"Thanks," says Hal, in his direct fashion; and Bell, getting up to cough and mope at a little distance from the clouds of smoke, Hal moves into his chair.

"This is a capital cigar," he says, in his outspoken fashion, "the first decent tobacco I've had since I left England. Most fellows bring their tobacco with them, but I wasn't up to it. Some of the stuff they smoke here is simply abominable; they grow it here in the fields, and you see it lying about like heaps of hay gone wrong. It nearly kills my friend."

And he looked at Bell sympathically; which adds another thousand or so wrinkles to his face—shrugs his shoulders.

"Yes?"

After a time:

"But one must put up with some drawback in travel—is it not so?" he says, in that admirable English which Russians alone among foreigners acquire.

He nods.

"And if you can't get tobacco, one can get English beer—the only thing drinkable to be obtained."

The count smiles, amused by this display of British insularity.

"Perhaps," he says, with a little deprecatory gesture of the white hands, "you have not tried the best of the German wines—Johannisberg, now."

"No," says Hal, who had never heard of the king of Rhine wines.

"Suppose," says the count. "We see if our good landlord has a bottle."

"I'll order one," says Hal.

The count serenely declares that he will not allow him; Hal as emphatically claims the honor of ordering it, and eventually Bell is called from the window to convey their joint wishes. In comes the landlord, a little fat man, with dark hair plastered to his head, and with huge ears, also flat, and adorned with rings, and Bell in piping German, makes known the requirements. The little man waddles off, returning with a bottle of Johannisberg, which, with a profound bow to the count, he uncorks, and, with sundry flourishes, pours out.

Bell takes a modest sip, and, with trembling eyelids, mildly declares that it is good; Hal more vigorously pronounces it "something worth drinking," and the count, with innumerable wrinkles, smiles, bows, strokes his mustache with his white hand, and pronounces the words "Very good"—which it ought to be, considering mine host will charge over a guinea for it.

Hal is never loath to talk, to one of his own sort, at any time, and his tongue loosened by the wine, chats away in the best of humors, and is about to propose another bottle, when a man—evidently a servant—enters the room, and, with a respectful inclination of the head, hands the count a letter.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," says his excellency, rising and opening it.

As he does so he drops the envelope, and Hal, who is nearest, stoops and picks it up. In handing it to him he sees that it is stamped with an elaborate crest and armorial bearings, and that the address is in the thin, angular characters which ladies—Heaven only knows why—particularly affect.

The count reads his letter.

"Good, Fritz," he says, "you shall bear the answer. Gentlemen, good-evening," and, with a courtly bow, leaves the room.

"Really," says Bell, with bland enjoyment, "a most polished old gentleman. Quite one of the old school. Depend upon it, my dear Hal, that travel is the finest, indeed, the only way in which one can gain experience and a knowledge of the world. I've heard that a Russian gentleman is the most highbred product of modern civilization——"

"Yes," says Hal, cutting in ruthlessly, "he's a fine old fellow. I wonder what he is—armyman, I should think. Here's the landlord; ask him, Bell!"

"My dear Hal, do you think—well, well," he says, being as curious as Hal himself. "We were admiring his excellency——"

"Ah, the count!" ejaculates the landlord, shrugging his shoulders to the ears, and blowing a vast cloud from his long meerschaum. "Ah, yes, he is a great general—one of the old noblesse; but—" and extends his hand—"but, alas!—poor! Poor as St. Christopher. It is a pity, is it not? But ah, well," and he wags his head philosophically, "he will mend that, you will see! Oh, yes, that is for certain! He will mend that."—

Bell would like to ask how, but another fit of coughing, produced by the long meerschaum, drives him from the room, and Hal, laughing, follows.

Being thoroughly tired, Hal does not lie awake that night thinking, neither does he dream of the Princess Verona; the only thing Hal dreams of being great "takes" of trust; but it is certain that, as he scrubs away at his hair with two brushes, hard and stiff enough to groom a dray-horse, he sees, mentally, the beautiful face, with the large, dark eyes that looked up at him so frankly that afternoon, and once more feels that peculiar dripping of cold water down the back which he experienced as he cut into the white arm with his penknife.

If anything, it is hotter than ever the next morning; every window of the hotel is open, and the stall-keepers are busy, very busy, leaning against the posts and smoking wooden pipes calculated to hold an ounce at a load.

Marvelously bright and fresh does Hal look, in his light-brown jacket and knickerbockers; he has had a swim and thrown a fly or two; he has had his breakfast, which was composed of something more substantial than the usual roll and butter which in Germany constitutes that meal, and he has brushed his closely-cut hair until it shines in the morning sunlight as brightly as Jeanne's.

The old fruit woman shades her eyes, and looks after him admiringly as he goes down the white street; possibly he reminds her of her own boy, who lies buried at Gravelotte in his Uhlan uniform, with many of his comrades around him!

At the corner of the street there stands a little florist's shop. Hal, with a little, half-ashamed glance to the right and the left, went in and purchased a white azalea, which the little damsel behind the counter was kind enough to arrange in his buttonhole, and then went on his way.

Past the church, down into the vale, up a long avenue of apple and plum trees, and at last he stood on the grounds of the Villa Verona.

It was a long, low-lying pile of masonry, gleaming white in the bright sunlight, and bearing about it the signs of wealth and careful attention.

A huge St. Bernard, that was lying on a terrace under the veranda, arose and bounded toward him, evidently with the intention of devouring him, but Hal put out his hand and patted him, and the dog was so surprised that he stopped growling and wagged his tail, keeping, however, very close to Hal as he ascended the steps and rang the bell.

A tall manservant, dressed in black, opened the broad glass door.

"Is the Princess Verona within?" asked Hal.

The man inclined his head.

"Si, Senor," he rplied.

(I wonder whether he means "yes" or "no," thought Hal.)

But the man evidently meant yes, for he ushered Hal into the hall, which was of white marble, with fluted columns, and very large.

Hal gave the man his card, and while it was carried in, amused himself looking at the tall lamps standing in pots of majolica, and by conversing with the dog, who still mounted guard beside him.

Presently the servant returned, and, with a low bow and a gesture of the hand, ushered him into a room at the end of the hall. Hal had barely time to take in its handsome proportions and tasteful decorations, when a door opened and the princess came toward him.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN LOVE WITH A PRINCESS.

If the Princess Verona had looked beautiful down by the valley yesterday, she appeared still more lovely to Hal's eyes in her morning dress of white pique, which was without ornament excepting one crimson blossom on its bosom, and was simplicity itself. Hal noticed, in the half minute during which he held her hand, that her hair was coiled tightly up to the shapely head in the English fashion, and that it was like silk itself.

She met him without a shade of embarrassment, but with a gentle smile of pleasure, such as a young girl might wear when welcoming an old friend.

"You have come," she said; "it is kind."

Hal, looking particularly tall, and feeling hugely big and awkward—though he didn't really look it—murmured something inaudible.

"I hope your arm is all right," he said, glancing at that member.

"Oh, yes, quite," she replied, with a little rippling laugh. "It was nothing not more than a pin-prick. And have you made friends with Carlo?" she went on, playing with the dog's soft ear.

"Yes," said Hal; "he is very friendly."

The princess arched her eyebrows.

"He is not always; sometimes he is very disagreeable to strangers, aren't you, Carlo? You like dogs?"

"Yes," said Hal, and patted Carlo again.

"So do I," she said; "English dogs, especially. You have such nice dogs in England—better than anywhere else."

Hal colored with pleasure.

"You know England?" he said.

She shook her head. "No, I have never been there."

"No?" said Hal; "I should have thought you had."

"Why?" she asked, with a smile.

"Because you speak English so well."

She laughed and shook her head gently.

"That is a compliment. But indeed I do not. My sentences are all wrong, papa says; he speaks English, oh, very well!"

Hal nodded.

"I think Englishmen are the stupidest fellows in the matter of languages," he said; "scarcely any Englishman one meets knows anything but his own tongue."

"Ah, and why?" she said, quickly.

"Because it is spoken all over the world!"

"What a lovely morning it is? Have you been fishing?" and she glances at his basket, which he carries in his hand.

"Yes," says Hal; "I had capital sport this morning, and ventured to bring a few trout if—if you will be so good as to accept them."

"Thank you," she says, opening the lid and looking in. "Yes, there they are—how pretty they look! Are you quite sure you can spare them? Papa will be so pleased—he is fond of fish. I don't know why some of the people don't catch them—perhaps they don't know how."

"It is not very difficult," says Hal.

At this moment an elderly lady, dressed in black, enters, carrying a basket of flowers.

"The princess says something in Italian to her, then turns to Hal.

"My friend, Senora Titella."

Hal at once concludes that it is her companion, and bows; and the lady goes across the room with her flowers.

The princess walks to the window, and draws aside the curtain.

"It is lovely," she says—"almost Italian weather. Have you been to Italy yet?"

"No," says Hal.

She looks at him with rather a sad smile.

"Oh," she says, "you must see Italy. I am an Italian, and yet I am English!"

"Your father——" says Hal.

"Is Italian; my mother was English. She—she died in England, and therefore papa does not go to England."

"I understand," says Hal, softly.

The next moment the girl chases the melancholy from her face.

"You are fond of flowers?"

"Yes," she says, looking at the azalea, which makes Hal blush. 'Come and see the gardens!"

And she steps out on the terrace catching up a light straw hat as she does so.

As Hal follows into the garden, he notices that the companion has crossed the room and stands at the window, with a book in her hand.

It is a magnificent garden, worthy of the villa. Velvety lawns, set with glittering beds of flowers, whose colors, are contrasted with the pure white of marble statues and fountains. It is, in fact, essentially an Italian garden, though Hal doesn't know it.

The princess leads him through a mass of garden paths to a nook, made cool and shady by a grotto of ferns, over which falls the spray of a hidden fountain.

"This is a beautiful garden," he says, in his abrupt fashion. 'Your highness ought to be happy.'

She had been plucking the ferns growing near her, and looks up, with a little smile parting her lips.

"Happy?" she says, as if his words had called up a question in her mind. "Yes, I suppose I am happy. But I am very dull sometimes."

"Dull?" says Hal, looking at her sympathetically out of his honest eyes.

"Yes, very dull," and she smothers a little sigh. "There is only papa and Titella—the lady you saw, you know. Papa is always with his books and papers, and Titella—Titella is busy about the house. Are you never dull?"

"Often," he says.

"Tell me," she says, in her little inquisitive manner, which seems so frank and confiding to English Hal, "tell me, what do you do then?"

"Oh," says Hal, "I—I—well, I generally go and shoot something, or take my rod, or smoke a pipe."

She laughs.

"There's nothing to shoot here," she says, looking around, "excepting me; but you can smoke your pipe, if you like."

"But I'm not dull now, and I don't want to smoke; shouldn't think of it," says Hal, "and—and I'm very sorry you are ever dull!"

She smiles.

"I must learn to shoot and smoke, must I not?"

(To be continued.)

CHILDLESS WOMEN

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Among the virtues of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound is its ability to correct sterility in many cases. This fact is well established as evidenced by the above letter and hundreds of others we have published in these columns.

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MINARD'S LINIMENT RELIEVES DISTEMPER.

"Prince of Pilsen."

Again Greeted by Capacity House.

The popularity of the "Prince of Pilsen" seems to know no bounds, for last night, the fifth performance was greeted by a capacity audience who took no pains to show their appreciation of the excellent music and singing and the clever acting which was provided for their entertainment. A much needed rest had been granted to the singers by the postponement caused by the storm and a decided improvement was noted as a consequence. Amongst the audience the faces of many people who had attended previous performances, were to be seen, and no greater tribute than this could be paid to the production. But, as if this were not sufficient proof of the public's appreciation of the opera, last night the stage represented a flower garden in full bloom, made up of bouquets presented by admirers to the various lady principals. Nor was Hans Wagner forgotten, for the genial Doctor was presented—with great impressiveness and ceremony—with a tub of flowers, at the conclusion of that catchy song of his, "He Didn't Know Exactly What to Do." Mr. Percy Jardine was again in excellent form as "Artie," whilst Mr. Cabot Fitzgerald as the "Prince", Mr. Karl Trapnell as Wagner's son, and Mr. W. Wallace as "Francois" were again in their element. Mr. Trapnell's voice was heard to great advantage as was also Mr. Fitzgerald's. "Artie" and "Francois" were again responsible for keeping the audience convulsed with laughter. Mrs. Ring was again very good, her singing and acting being highly appreciated, and the singing of Miss Else Herder left nothing to be desired. Miss Mary Eagan was encored several times and the singing of Miss Mary Ryan also won great applause. It will afford satisfaction to the public to know that the performance will be repeated to-night and that on Saturday afternoon and night extra presentations will be given.

B.I.S. Officers Nominated

The preliminary annual meeting of the Benevolent Irish Society which took place last night was largely attended. President W. J. Higgins, K.C., occupied the chair, and the usual reports being received and adopted the nomination of officers for the ensuing year took place with the following results:

President—W. J. Higgins, K.C.
Vice President—J. J. Pippy.
1st Asst. Vice President—W. B. Comerford.
2nd Asst. Vice President—J. A. Barron and John Moore.
Treasurer—J. Campbell.
Secretary—A. Doyle.
Chairman of Schools—J. P. Crotty.
Chairman of Charities—J. J. Mullaly.
Chairman of Review and Correspondence—M. J. Kean and W. T. Hearn.
Secretary of Schools—M. J. Savage.

The annual meeting takes place next Thursday night, February 17th, when the election of officers takes place, and it is expected that the meeting will be the largest in the history of he Society.

Concert and Sketch at St. Joseph's.

A large audience filled St. Joseph's Hall last night to witness the performance of the sketch "A Bit O' Blarney" and concert, given by the talented young people of St. Joseph's Parish. The sketch was enjoyed to the utmost by the audience and the skilful playing of Kitty the Maid to the Misanthrope Phibbs, by Mrs. P. J. Kinsella, was encored by all. Miss Pauline Vaughan was true to life as the wife of the spend-thrift Tipps, whilst the male characters were splendidly carried out by Messrs. (Capt.) O'Grady, Spearns, Prowse, Galgay and Barnes. The concert was made up of the following items:

Song—Mrs. C. Garland.
Song—Miss Gladys Redstone.
Song—Mr. J. M. Irvine.
Recitation—Miss Mildred Taylor.
Song—Miss Kathleen Hayes.
Recitation—Mr. J. P. Crotty.
Song—Miss Angela McGrath.
Song—Mr. P. Dobbin.
Recitation—Miss Madeline Gearin.
Song—Mr. Jack Canning.
Step Dance—Mr. Frank Walsh.
Song—Miss Ida Howlett.

Whilst Misses Mollie Farrell and Nance Howlett presided at the piano. The several numbers were well received and the encores were many. An old favorite, Mr. Jas. Crotty, made his debut after a lengthy interval. The promoters of last nights event, Mrs. P. J. Kinsella and Capt. O'Grady, may well feel proud of the success which crowned their efforts.

Coban Reaches Louisburg.

A message was received yesterday afternoon stating that S.S. Coban, which left here on Sunday last taking several Newfoundlanders, had arrived at Louisburg, the crew and passengers being well. Some anxiety had been felt by relatives of those on the boat, and this message was sent to assuage their fears.

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