

The Interpreter.

CHAPTER XVI.

PRINCESS VOCQBAL.

(CONTINUED.)

'Who—I, Monsieur le Comte? I cannot possibly give you any command, except to ring that bell. The Prince would like to see you before you go. Let the Princess know Monsieur de Rohan is here,' she added, to the servant who answered her summons. 'You were always a great favorite of his—of ours, I may say; and she bade him adieu, and gave him her soft white hand with all her former sweetness of manner; and told her servant, loud enough for her victim to hear, 'to order the carriage, for she meant to drive in the Bois de Boulogne; and finally shot a Partisan glance at him over her shoulder as she left the room by one door, whilst he proceeded by another towards the Prince's apartments.

No wonder Victor de Rohan quitted the house not so wise a man as he entered it; no wonder he was seen that same afternoon caracolling his bay horse in the Bois de Boulogne; no wonder he went to dress moody and out of humor, because, ride where he would, he had failed to catch a single glimpse of the known carriage and liveries of Princess Vocqbal.

They met, however, the following evening at a concert at the Tuileries. The day after—oh, what good luck!—he sat next her at dinner at the English ambassador's, and put her into her carriage at night when she went home. Poor Victor! he dreamed of her white dress and floating hair, and the pressure of her gloved hand. Breakfast next morning was not half so important a meal as it used to be, and he thought the fencing-school would be a bore. She was rapidly getting the upper-hand of young Count de Rohan.

Six weeks afterwards he was still in Paris. The gardens at the Tuileries were literally sparkling in the morning sun of a bright Parisian day. The Zouaves on guard at the gate lounged over their firelocks with their usual reckless brigand air, and leered under every bonnet that passed them, as though the latter accomplishment were part and parcel of a Zouave's duty. The Rue de Rivoli was alive with carriages; the sky, the houses, the gilt-topped railings—everything looked in full dress, as it does nowhere but in Paris; the very flowers in the gardens were two shades brighter than in any other part of France. All the children looked clean, all the women well dressed; even the very trees had on their most becoming coat of green, and the long close alleys smelt fresh and delicious as the gardens of Paradise. Why should Victor de Rohan alone look gloomy and morose when all else is so bright and fair? Why does he puff so savagely at his cigar, and glance so restlessly under the stems of those thick-growing chestnuts? Why does he mutter between his teeth, 'Fais, unfeeling! the third time she has played me this trick? No, it is not she. Oh! I should know her a mile off. She will not come. She has no heart, no pity. She will not come. *Sapramento!* there she is!

In the most becoming of morning toilettes, with the most killing little bonnet at the back of her glossy head, the best fitting of gloves, and the tiniest of *chaussures*, without a lock out of its place or fold rumpled, cool, composed, and beautiful, leaving her maid to amuse herself with a pelny chair and a *seuil* *deca*, Princess Vocqbal walks up to the agitated Hungarian, and placing her hand in his, says, in her most bewitching accents, 'Forgive me, my friend; I have risked so much to come here, I could not get away a moment sooner. I have passed the last hour in such agony of suspense.' The time to which the lady alludes has been spent, and well spent, in preparing the brilliant and effective appearance which she is now making.

'But you have come at last,' exclaims Victor, breathlessly. 'I may now speak to you for the first time alone. Oh, what happiness to see you again! All this week I have been so wretched without you; and why were you never at home when I called?'

'*Les convenances*, my dear Count,' answers the lady. 'Everything I do is watched and known. Only last night I was taxed

the interior of the adjoining one; a most unfair and reprehensible practice, by-the-by, and one calculated to lead to an immensity of discord. What he saw he never proclaimed, but as the Princess Vocqbal occupied the box adjoining his own, it is fair to suppose that he watched the movements of his mistress.

She bit her lip, and drew her features together as if she had been stung, when on the following afternoon, in the Bois de Boulogne, Vicomte Lascar informed her, with his insipid smile, that he had that morning met De Rohan at the railway station, evidently *en route* for Hungary, adding, for the Princess was an excellent linguist, and Lascar prided himself much on his English, 'Ome, sweet ome, no place like ome.'

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COMMON LOT.

'And so, you see, my dear Egerton, it is out of the question. I own to a great liking for your character. I think you behaved yesterday like a trump. I am too old for romance, and all that, but I can understand your feeling, my boy, and I am sorry for you. The objection I have named would alone be sufficient. Let it never be mentioned again. Your father was my oldest friend, and I hope you will not think it necessary to break with us; but marriage is a serious affair, and indeed is not to be thought of.'

'No hope, Sir Harry?' I gasped out; 'years hence, if I could win fame, distinction, throw a cloak of honor over this accursed brand, give her a name to be proud of, is there no hope?'

'None,' replied Sir Harry; 'these things are better settled at once. It is far wiser not to delude yourself into the notion that, because you are a disappointed man now, you are destined to become a great one hereafter. Greatness grows, Vere, just like a cabbage or a cauliflower, and must be tended and cultivated with years of labor and perseverance; you cannot pluck it down with one spring, like an apple from a bough. No, no, my lad; you will get over this disappointment, and be all the better for it. I am sorry to refuse you, but I must, Vere, distinctly, and for the last time. Besides, I tell you in confidence, I have other views for Constance, so you see it is totally out of the question. You may see her this afternoon, if you like. She is a good child, and will do nothing in disobedience to her father. Farewell, Vere, I am sorry for you, but the thing's done.'

So I walked out of the Baronet's room in the unenviable character of a disappointed suitor, and he went back to his farm book and his trainer's accounts, as coolly as if he had just been dismissing a domestic; whilst I—my misery was greater than I could bear—his last words seemed to scorch me. 'I should get over it—I should be the better for it.' And I felt all the time that my heart was breaking; and then, 'he had other views for Constance; not only must she never be mine, but I must suffer the additional pang of feeling that she belongs to another. 'Would to God,' I thought, 'that we had sunk together yesterday, never to rise again!'

I went to look for her in the shrubbery; I knew where I should find her; there was an old summer-house that we two had sat in many a time before, and I felt sure Constance would be there. She rose as I approached it: she must have seen by my face that it was all over. She put her hand in mine, and, totally unmanned, I bent my head over it, and burst into a flood of tears, like a child. I remember to this day the very pattern of the gown she wore; even now I seem to hear the soft, gentle accents in which she reasoned and pleaded with me, and strove to mitigate my despair.

'I have long thought it must come to this, Vere,' she said, with her dark, melancholy eyes looking into my very soul; 'I have long thought we have both been much to blame, you to speak, and I to listen, as we have done; now we have our punishment. Vere, I will not conceal from you I suffer much. More for your sake than my own. I cannot bear to see you so miserable. You to whom I owe so much, so many happy hours, and yesterday my very life. Oh, Vere, try to bear it like a man.'

'I cannot, I cannot,' I sobbed out; 'no hope, nothing to look forward to, but a cheerless, weary life, and then to be forgotten—'

she turned away with more than her usual majesty, and walked towards the house. I remarked that she dropped a white rose—fit emblem of her own dear self—on the gravel path, as she paced slowly along, without once turning her head. I was too proud to follow her and pick it up, but sprang away in an opposite direction, and was soon out of her sight.

That night, when the wild clouds were flying across the moon, and the wind howled through the gloomy yews and the ghostly fir-trees, and all was sad and dreary and desolate, I picked up the white rose from that gravel path, and placed it next my heart. Faded, shrunk, and withered, I have got it still. My home was now no place for me. I arranged my few affairs with small difficulty, pensioned the two old servants my poor father had committed to my charge; set my house in order, packed up my things, and in less than a week I was many hundred miles from Alton Grange and Constance Beverley.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OMAR PASHA.

It is high noon, and not a sound, save the occasional snort of an impatient steed, is to be heard throughout the lines. Picketed in rows, the gallant little chargers of the Turkish cavalry are dozing away the hours between morning and evening feed. The troopers themselves are smoking and sleeping in their tents; here and there may be seen a devout Mussulman prostrate on his prayer-carpet, his face turned towards Mecca, and his thoughts wholly abstracted from all worldly considerations. Ill-fed and worse paid they are nevertheless a brawny, powerful race, their broad rounded shoulders, bull-necks; and bowed legs denoting strength rather than activity; whilst their high features and marked swarthy countenances betray at once their origin, sprung from generations of warriors who once threatened to overwhelm the whole Western world in a tide that has now been long since at the ebb. Patient are they of hardship, and devoted to the Sultan and their duty, made for soldiers and nothing else, with their fierce, dogged resolution, and their childish obedience and simplicity. Hand-in-hand, two of them are strolling leisurely through the lines to release a restive little horse who has got inexplicably entangled in his own and his neighbor's picket-ropes, and is fighting his own way out of his difficulty with teeth and hoofs. They do not hurry themselves, but converse peacefully as they pass along.

'Is it true, Mastapha; that *Giaours* are still coming to join our Bey? The *Padisha* is indeed gracious to these sons of perdition.'

'It is true, Janum; may Allah confound them!' replies Mustapha, spitting in parenthesis between his teeth; 'but they have brave hearts, these *Giaours*, and cunning heads, moreover, for their own devices. What good Moslem would have thought of sending his commands by wire, faster than they could be borne by the horses of the Prophet?'

'Mag!' argues the other trooper: 'black, unholy magic! There is but one Allah.'

'What fish are you eating?' answers Mustapha, who is of a practical turn of mind. 'Have not I myself seen the wire and the post, and do I not know that the *Padisha* sends his commands to the *Ferik-Pasha* by the letters he writes with his own hand?'

'But you have never seen the letter,' urges his comrade, 'though you have ridden a hundred times under the lines.'

'Oh, mulehead, and son of a jackass!' retorts Mustapha, 'do you not know that the letter flies so fast along the wire, that the eye of man cannot perceive it? They are dogs and accursed, these *Giaours*; but, by my head, they are very foxes in wit.'

'I will defend their graves,' observes his comrade; and forthwith they proceeded to release the entangled charger, who has by this time nearly eaten his ill-starred neighbor; and I over-hear this philosophical disquisition, as I proceed for orders to the Green Tent of Iskender Bey, commandant of the small force of cavalry attached to Omer Pasha's army in Bulgaria.

As I enter the tent, I perceive two men seated in grave discussion, whilst a third

health. His small head is set on his shoulders in the peculiar manner that always denotes physical strength; and his well-cut features would be handsome, were it not for a severe and somewhat caustic expression which mars the beauty of his countenance. His deep-set eye is very bright and keen; its glance seems accustomed to command, and also to detect falsehood under a threefold mask. He has not dealt half a lifetime with Asiatics to fail in acquiring that useful knack. He wears his beard and moustache short and close; they are

Grizzled here and there
But more with toll than age,

and add to his soldierlike exterior. His dress is simple enough; it consists of a close-fitting, dark-green frock, adorned only with the order of the *Medjidie*, high riding-boots, and a crimson fez. A carved Turkish sabre hangs from his belt, and a double-barrelled gun of English workmanship is thrown across his knees. As he looks up from his map, his eyes rest on me, and he asks Victor in German, 'Who is that?'

'An Englishman, who has joined your Excellency's force as an Interpreter,' answered my friend, 'and who is now attached to Iskender Bey. I believe the Bey can give a good account of his gallantry on more than one occasion.'

'The Bey,' thus appealed to, musters up a drunken smile, and observes, 'A good swordsman, your Excellency, and a man of many languages. Sober too,' he adds, shaking his head, 'sober as a Mussulman, the first quality in a soldier.'

His Excellency smiles again at Victor, who presents me in due form, not forgetting to mention my name.

The great man almost starts. He fixes on me that glittering eye which seems to look through me. 'Where did you acquire your knowledge of language?' he asks. 'My side-de-camp informs me you speak Hungarian even better than you do Turkish.'

'I travelled much in Hungary as a boy, Excellency,' was my reply. 'Victor de Rohan is my earliest friend: I was a child scarcely out of the nursery when I first made his acquaintance at Edeldorf.'

A gleam of satisfaction passed over his Excellency's face. 'Strange, strange,' he muttered, 'how the wheel turns; and then pulling out a small steel purse, but slenderly garnished, he selected from a few other coins an old silver piece, worn quite smooth and bent double. 'Do you remember that?' said he, placing it in my hand.

The gipsy-troop and the deserter flashed across my mind at once. I was so confused at my own stupidity in not having recognized him sooner, that I could only stammer out, 'Pardon, your Excellency—so long ago—a mere child.'

He grasped my hand warmly. 'Egerton,' said he, 'boy as you were, there was heart and honor in your deed. Subordinate as I then was, I swore never to forget it. I never have forgotten it. You have made a friend for life in Omar Pasha.'

I could only bow my thanks, and the General added, 'Come to me at head-quarters this afternoon. I will see what can be done for you.'

'But, Excellency, I cannot spare him,' interposed Iskender Bey. 'I have here an English officer, the bravest of the brave, but so stupid that I cannot understand a word he says. I had rather be without sword and lance than lose my Interpreter. And then, your Excellency, the attack to-morrow—the attack.'

Omar Pasha rose to depart. 'I will send him back this evening with dispatches,' said he, saluting his host in a Turkish manner, touching first the heart, then the mouth, then the forehead—a courtesy which the old fire-eater returned with a ludicrous attempt at solemnity.

'De Rohan,' he added, 'stay here to carry out the orders I have given you. As soon as your friend can be spared, from the Bey, bring him over with you, to remain at head-quarters. *Salaam!* And the general was on his horse and away long before the Turkish guard could get under arms to pay him the proper compliments, leaving Iskender Bey to return to his brandy-bottle, and my old friend Victor to make himself comfortable in my tent, and smoke a quiet chibouque with me whilst we related all that had passed since we met.

Victor was frank and merry as usual, spoke unreservedly of his *liaison* with Princess Vocqbal, and the reasons which had decided him on seeing a campaign with the

life, so I thought I might see a little soldiering. When they found I could speak Turkish, or rather when I told them so, they gave me every facility at the War-office. I got a pair of jackboots and a revolver, here I am.'

'But Omar will make you something better than an Interpreter,' urged Victor. 'I must get you over to head-quarters. *Ve Men* rise rapidly in these days; next campaign you might have a brigade, and following one a division. This war will last for years; you are fit for something better than a *Torgyman*.'

'I think so too,' I replied; 'though, to tell, when I came out here I was quite satisfied with my present position, and contented for the excitement of action. Is this soldiering grows upon one, Victor, do it not? Yet I am loth to leave Iskender too; the old Lion stretched me his paw when I had no friends in Turkey, and I believe as useful to him. At least I must stay with him now, for we shall be engaged before long, I can tell you that.'

'*Tant mieux*,' retorted Victor, with flashing eyes; 'old Brandy-face will ram his cavalry into it if he gets a chance. Don't let him ride too far forward himself, Vere, if you can help it, as he did when he cut his way through that troop of hussars, and got them another example of the stuff the *Polaks* are made of. The Moscov nearly had you that time, though. It was then he lost the use of half his fingers, and got that crack over the head which had been an excuse for drunkenness ever since.'

'Drunk or sober,' I replied, 'he is the best cavalry officer we have; but make yourself comfortable, Victor, as well as you can. I recommend you to sleep on my divan for an hour or two; something tells me we shall advance to-night. To-morrow, old friend, you and I may sleep on a harder bed.'

'*Vive la guerre!*' replied Victor, gaily before; but ere I had buckled on my sabre to leave the tent, the chibouque had fallen from his lips, and he was fast asleep.

My grey Arab, 'Injour,' was saddled and fastened to a lance; my faithful *Bok* who had accompanied me through all my wanderings, and who had taken an extraordinary like for his equine companion, was ready to be my escort; a revolver was in my holster-pipe, a bunch of black bread in my wallet, and with my sabre by my side, and pretty accurate idea of my route, I experienced a feeling of light-heartedness and independence to which I had long been a stranger. Poor Bold enjoyed his master's society all the more that, in deference to Moslem prejudices, I had now banished him from my tent, and consigned him to the company of my horses. He gambolled about me, whilst my snorting horse, shaking his delicate head, struck playfully at him with his forefeet, as the dog bounded in front of him. Bad horseman as I always was, yet in a deep demi-pique Turkish saddle, with broad shovel stirrups and a severe Turkish bit, I felt thoroughly master of the animal, and I keenly enjoyed the sensation. 'Injour' was indeed a pearl of his race. Beautiful as a star, wiry and graceful as a deer, he looked all over the priceless child of the desert whose blood had come down to him from the very horses of the prophet, unstained through a hundred generations. Mettle, courage, and endurance were apparent in the smooth satin skin, the flat sinewy legs, the full muscular neck, broad forehead, shapely muzzle, wide nostril, quivering ears, and game wild eye. He could gallop on mile after mile hour after hour, with a stride unvarying and apparently untiring as clockwork; though he had a heavy man on his back, his pulses seem to beat higher, or his breath come quicker, when he arrived at the head-quarters of the Turkish army than when he had left my own tent an hour and a half earlier, the intervening time, much to poor Bold's distress, having been spent at a gallop. There was, evidently, a stir in Omar Pasha's quarters. Turkish officers were going and coming with an eagerness and alacrity by no means natural to those functionaries. An English horse, looking very thin and uncomfortable, was being led away from the tent smoking from the speed at which he had been ridden. The sentry alone was totally unmoved and apathetic; a devout Mussulman, to him destiny was destiny, and there he stood. Had the enemy appeared forty thousand strong, sweeping over his very camp, he would have fired his musket leisurely—in all probability it would not have done one of the first things.