

The Greenhorn and the Ambassador

By Edward Lucas White

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THE greenhorn looked very green indeed. He was long and lean and lanky. He had very big, flat feet in very loose, old shoes, not at all tidy. His socks were red; an ugly, insistent red. His trousers were too short, as were his coat sleeves. The suit he wore was a marvel. It was of a loose-woven darkish green cloth, marked off into big squares by narrow stripes of a darkish yellow. At the intersections of the stripes were tufts of a more greenish yellow, like sun-dried grass, which gave a shaggy effect to the whole surface. It looked like the product of a weaver's nightmare, made up into clothes by the indiscreet whim of a freakish employee of some wholesale clothier, sold after repeated reductions at the last gasp of a clean-sweep sale. The greenhorn wore no cuffs, his shirt-sleeve bands were frayed, his low collar, two sizes too large for him, was even more frayed. His necktie was a stringy device of a bright and unpromising blue, which made his red-rimmed, watery blue eyes look entirely colorless.

His long face, boyishly smooth except for an incipient corn-silk moustache, had a vacuous expression. His wide mouth he kept not entirely shut. His skin was of a peculiar raw, scaly texture, as if universally and permanently chapped. He had a way of putting one or the other hand up to his towish yellow hair, a bewildered way, as if trying to remember something. And those hands were the most striking thing about him. Every part of him was long, but his hands were uncannily long, and had a clawlike, centipedish, daddy-longlegs-like motion to every joint of them. As one timidly waved an envelope and the other mechanically sought the side of his head they were very ugly indeed. And they moved in that way over and over again, as he sat in the waiting room of the legation.

A more hopelessly countrified specimen of a backwoods American the secretary thought he had never seen. He was an expert at protecting his chief from the intrusion of those countrymen of his who in a never-ending stream, without any shadow of a claim upon official or personal attention, sought to thrust themselves upon official time. The secretary was always suave and always seemed sympathetic. He now appeared especially regretful that the ambassador was not in. Mr. Medick would, perhaps, leave his letter to be transmitted by the secretary. The greenhorn used few words, but he conveyed unmistakably that he meant to deliver that letter in person. The secretary had no idea how long it might be before the ambassador would reach the legation. The greenhorn sat immovable; the secretary decided to let him sit a while.

"He'll soon get tired," he thought.
The greenhorn soon got very tired. But he kept his place, meditating on the way in which he proposed to win the ambassador's notice. He had been told that he would find him an old-fashioned man with old-fashioned ideas, a courteous and kind-hearted gentleman, most considerate of every one, but capable of overmastering wrath if crossed in his pet notions, and prone to take an unalterable dislike to those who shocked his sense of the proprieties by beliefs or actions contrary to his views.

The greenhorn reflected as to what those views probably were. He had been told that the ambassador revered sweet, serene, domestic, home-keeping women, and abominated loud, self-assertive children; that he abhorred what he called the sordid scramble for mere lucre; that he anathematized the modern tendency to specialization and lauded the antique ideal of a well-rounded general education as the only fit training for all men; that he prided himself on his ability to read character at a glance.

Beyond these points the greenhorn had to resort to inference or conjecture. He tried to imagine himself a man born when the ambassador was born, in the same place and of the same kind of family, brought up similarly and influenced by similarities of education; to think of every conceivable subject and to conjure up a picture of how it would strike him. This mental exertion helped to while away the tedium of waiting, but he was weary in heart and

soul before the secretary again addressed him.

The secretary tried every device in his arsenal. The greenhorn would wait or would come back at any hour, to-day, to-morrow, or the next day or the day after that. He had a letter of introduction to the ambassador from an old friend. He would do nothing else but try to present it until he had presented it. After a while the secretary realized that he was beaten. Entering the ambassador's private room, he said:

"I fancy, sir, you would best have it over at once. He is worse than a horse leech."

"Show him in," said the ambassador wearily.

The secretary returned to the waiting room. The ambassador had reached the legation and was now at leisure. Would Mr. Medick walk in?

Where he was led the greenhorn followed, his heart thumping. The ambassador saw in the young man's face something the sleek, glib secretary had wholly missed. He rose, offered a warm, dry hand, and indicated a chair by his desk.

"Sit down, Mr. Medick," he said. "To what do I owe the pleasure of seeing you?"

"I have a letter of introduction, sir," said the greenhorn, "from the Honorable James Hollis, who was at the University of Virginia with you, sir."

"Jim Hollis!" exclaimed the ambassador. "Haven't heard of him for years. How is Jim?"

"He is the richest and most important man in our section, sir," said the greenhorn.

"Good for Jim!" said the ambassador. "He always had plenty of push."

"He has yet, sir," said the greenhorn. "Many alumni of the University of Virginia in your section?" the ambassador inquired.

"As far as I know, sir," said the greenhorn, "Judge Hollis is the only one, sir."

While the ambassador was reading the letter the greenhorn studied him, noted the silvery sheen of his iron-gray hair, the fresh pink of his wrinkled face, the clearness of his brown eyes, the decision of his mouth and chin. And particularly its points projecting beside the jaw, and he dwelt upon the high standing collar, upon the voluminous black cravat that swathed the throat.

"Hollis," the ambassador began, looking up from the letter, "tells me that you have come to Vienna to study. What are you studying?"

"Music, sir," replied the greenhorn.

The ambassador swept a glance over his visitor, conning the lack-lustre eyes, expressionless face, outlandish attire, and baboonish awkwardness of posture.

"Is your family musical?" he asked.

"Not at all, sir," answered the greenhorn. "I am the only one who ever cared for music, as far as I know, sir."

"Why do you care for it, then?"

"I have never cared for anything else, since I was born, sir," said the greenhorn simply.

"Do you take it up as an amusement or as a profession?" the ambassador queried.

"As a profession," the young man told him. "I mean to make my living by it, sir."

"Not a very remunerative profession, is it?" the ambassador inquired.

The greenhorn thought he saw his chance, and he was glad that he could reply with perfect sincerity, for he felt the penetrating power of those keen brown eyes.

"I think, sir," he said, "that it will be more profitable for me to spend my life doing what I love best, even if I have to stay poor, than to waste it doing something I care nothing for or even hate. That's the way it looks to me, sir."

"Not bad, not at all bad," said the ambassador.

"I think, sir," the greenhorn went on impetuously, "that to earn a little money pleasantly and at the same time cultivate my ability to enjoy it will be better than to aim at making much money, ruin my capacity to take pleasure in it, and perhaps fail to make it after all; that's my idea, sir."

The ambassador regarded the greenhorn. From his awkward appearance no one could have expected him to talk so

well. Perhaps here was, in spite of his exterior, a young man worth advising.

"Very good," said the ambassador, "very good indeed. But you must remember that to attain that ideal you must make yourself an all-round musician. You must not put too much time or energy upon any one phase of your art. You must study the history of music, the development of its methods. You must attain some measure of skill upon every known instrument. You must master theory and orchestration and composition. You must not make yourself one-sided."

"I should delight in all that, sir," said the greenhorn argumentatively. "But I am not independently well off. I have no property, no income at all. I have my living to make, sir."

"All the more reason for laying a broad foundation of solid knowledge," the ambassador maintained.

"But, sir," the greenhorn reasoned, "I must begin to make my living soon."

"Don't make it too soon," the ambassador warned him. "Superficiality and shallowness are the curse of our age; shallowness and superficiality and haste."

"All my natural bent, sir," the greenhorn asserted, with the air of one proving a proposition, "has been toward piano playing. All my best prospects seem to lie in the cultivation of those capacities. They tell me I have unusual hands, sir."

The ambassador eyed those certainly remarkable hands. He perceived their mobility, but was most struck by their hideousness. He flared up.

"That is the way with all of you young men," he broke out. "You want to cultivate one faculty to the exclusion of everything that makes the faculty worth having. You came here to study. Europe offers you the widest opportunities for acquiring variety of culture and breadth of character. Instead of making good physicians of yourselves you specialize on children's diseases, or eye and ear, gain a specious reputation, make a living easily and quickly, and never really amount to anything. Instead of learning Greek and Latin you mool over Doric dialectic case-endings, Samnite inscriptions, or hidden quantities; when you might become scholars you turn into moles, delving underground at the damp roots of literature. Even you artists specialize." He blinked and puffed, rolling himself in his chair.

"Leschetitzky, sir, is not only the best piano instructor in the world," said the greenhorn, "but an all-round cultured musician, sir."

"A mere specialist," the ambassador said, dismissing the discussion with a wave of his hand. "You are one more sacrifice to Moloch, one more infant cast into the furnace of Baal."

"Perhaps you are right, sir," the greenhorn admitted deprecatingly.

"Certainly I am right," said the ambassador, with his I dare you to contradict me—air. "But you will pay no more attention than the others."

"I shall reflect upon what you say," said the greenhorn, with an attempt at a conciliatory tone.

The ambassador eyed him for a moment in silence, and then said:

"You have not yet told me why you came here. What can I do for you?"

"I have been told, sir, that if I can obtain a letter of recommendation from you to the director of music studies I can then procure free tickets to the performances of the opera at the Imperial Theatre, sir."

The ambassador puckered up his face, and replied testily:

"Oh, they clamor for such letters. I am eternally pestered for them. I give too many. I cannot give one to you. If you were a student of orchestration or composition I might stretch a point for you. But, being a pianist, I fail to see how you have a valid claim."

The greenhorn fixed upon the ambassador's face a gaze devoid of any glint of intelligence.

"It's queer, sir," he said softly, "how it works out. Against my will I am compelled to specialize. You, sir, tell me I am all wrong, and advise me to train myself musically in all possible ways. I grasp eagerly at an opportunity to broaden and strengthen my general knowledge of music. And you tell me I must forego it because I am a specialist, sir."

The greenhorn's look had in it just the