

gentleman," she said, "and I hope you will come to our wedding."

"The Regent of Grimland will have only personages of distinction as his guests," said the Freiherr. "I am an old man, shorn of his dignities—"

"You never possessed greater dignity than you do this day," broke in Fritz. "You will come to my wedding and take a seat next the altar rails or—I don't know what I shall do. The Rathsherrn have only ceased to exist as a corporate body. Individually they live and the State has need of them. Courage, loyalty, stubbornness, pride even, these are great things if—"

"If wedded to the spirit of Progress?" added the Freiherr with a wry grimace. "I am not a great believer in the spirit of Progress, but I am an old man, and the times change."

"The times change indeed," said Fritz; "and, to complete the quotation, we change with them. I am changed from a young fool into a young man who cannot be altogether a fool, because he has chosen his mate so wisely. Miss Perowne is changed, for she no longer believes in the theories, but in the facts of life. And you are changed, for you were once our enemy and are now our friend."

"I FEAR my friendship will be as unimportant as my enmity proved," said the Freiherr.

"It will not be unimportant to me," said Phoebe in a low tone.

The Freiherr glanced to Fritz as if asking permission for something. The latter nodded almost imperceptibly. Then the old nobleman took the young English girl gently in his arms and kissed her on both cheeks. He said nothing, but there were tears in his eyes. The splendid old iceberg had melted. Perhaps he was thinking of his long-dead wife, perhaps— But pride was not to be permanently defeated, and with an effort he pulled himself together, doffed his hat, and skated stiffly and correctly away.

A moment later the band struck up a waltz. It was the same waltz that Fritz and Phoebe had skated to that January morning on the Rundsee. Their eyes met. In a twinkling their hands joined and they struck out for the rhythmic glories of the ice-waltz. For a while neither spoke, both abandoning themselves silently to the gliding ecstasy of the dance.

Then Fritz broke silence. "Is this better than waltzing with Herr Lugner?" he asked.

"Better, a thousand times better," she breathed, then added with a little laugh: "But that was very good."

Another couple were waltzing near them, and nearly as well, to wit: Saunders and his wife.

"It makes me feel very young again, Robert," the latter was saying, "to see those young people so happy."

"You and I will always be young," said Saunders, "because love like ours is not for a day or a year, but for ever. May their experience be ours. I can wish them no greater blessing from the Giver of all good things."

Mrs. Saunders' hand tightened on her husband's arm. She seemed to find a difficulty in finding her next words. Then with a brave effort she said:

"And may Phoebe ten years hence be as proud of her husband as I am of mine."

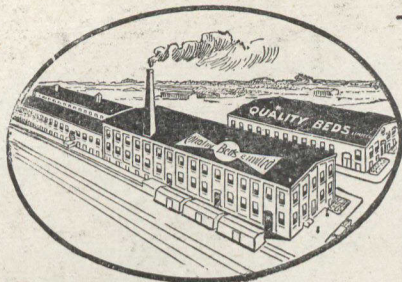
The distant clock of the Domkirche struck the mid-day hour. A strange solemnity seemed to obsess them both, and it did not seem inconsequent to Saunders when his wife said:

"I am thinking of the poor Red Virgin. In her way that strange woman loved you, Robert."

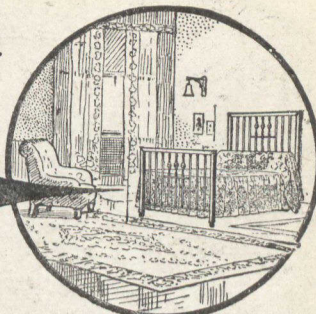
Saunders smiled a little sadly.

"The Red Virgin loved the poor and the sick and little children," he said. "She gave her life to save mine. Love like that cannot hurt one, or come between me and you. It is rather a link to bind us closer. When I come to write my memoirs, I shall set down everything, extenuating nothing, and the world shall hold, as I hold, that in this fierce drama of the interregnum, in that savage clash of forces, the Red Virgin alone fought from unselfish motives, and in her death proved how near humanity can come to the Divine."

THE END.



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