

"Only patriots and lovers venture forth on such nights as this," he said, in a guttural voice that rendered his French almost laughable.

"With an occasional thief or varlet," supplemented the Marchioness.

"Ach, Dieu," murmured the Count.

Fresh arrivals were announced by Cricklewick. For the next ten or fifteen minutes they came thick and fast, men and women of all ages, nationality and condition, and not one of them without a high-sounding title. They disposed themselves about the vast room, and a subdued vocal hubbub ensued. If here and there elderly guests, with gnarled and painfully scrubbed hands, preferred isolation and the pictorial contents of a magazine from the land of their nativity, it was not with snobbish intentions. They were absorbing the news from "home," in the regular weekly doses.

The regal, resplendent Countess du Bara, of the Opera, held court in one corner of the room. Another was glorified by a petite baroness from the Artists' Colony far down-town, while a rather dowdy lady with a coronet monopolized the attention of a small group in the centre of the room.

Lady Jane Thorne and Lord Temple sat together in a dim recess beyond the great chair of state, and conversed in low and far from impersonal tones.

Cricklewick appeared in the doorway and in his most impressive manner announced Her Royal Highness, the Princess Mariana Theresa Sebastano Michelini Celestine di Pavesi.

And with the entrance of royalty, kind reader, you