

# The Interpreter.

CHAPTER I.

(CONTINUED.)

... a woman, Hal! magnificent! Such things: deep brown tones, and masses of the richest grey hair, with superb, solemn, sunken eyes, and a throat and forehead tanned and wrinkled into the very ideal of a *Madama*, or a *Witch of Endor*, or any fine old sorceress, "all of the olden time." I have done her in chalks, and in sepia, and in oils. I adore her in the former. She is, I fancy, a good, careful woman, and much attached to Vere, who promises to be an excellent linguist; but of this I cannot see the advantage. There is but one pursuit, in my opinion, for an intellectual being who is not obliged to labor in the fields for his daily bread, and that is Art. I have wooed the heavenly maid all my life. To me she has been sparing of her favors; and yet a single smile from her has gilded my path for many a long and weary day. She has beckoned me on and on till I feel I could follow her to the end of the world; she shielded me in the dark hour; she has brightened my lot ever since; she led me to nature, her grand reflection for you know my theory, that art is reality, and nature but the embodiment of art; she has made me independent of the frowns of that other jade, Fortune, and taught me the most difficult lesson of all—to be content. What is wealth? You and I have seen it lavished with both hands, and its possessor, weary, satiate, languid, and disgusted. What is rank? a mark for envy, an idol but for fools. Fame? a few orders on a tight uniform; a craving for more and more; even when we know the tastelessness of the food, to be still hungry for applause. Love? a sting of joy and heartache for ever. Are they not all vanity of vanities? But your artist is your true creator. He can embody the noblest aspirations of his mind, and give them a reality and a name. You, Hal, who are the most practical, unimaginative, business-like fellow that ever hedged a bet or drove a bargain, have had such dreams betwixt sleeping and waking as have given you a taste of heaven, and taught you the existence of a fairy-land of which, to such as you, is only granted a far away and occasional glimpse. What would you give to be able to embody such blissful visions and call them up at will? Let me have a camel's hair brush, a few dabs of clay, and, behold! I am the magician before whose wand these dreams shall reappear tangibly, substantially, enduringly: alas! for mortal shortcomings, sometimes a little out of drawing, sometimes a little hard and cold; but still, Hal, I can make my own world, such as it is, and people it for myself; nor do I envy any man on earth, except, perhaps, a sculptor. To have perfected and wrought out in the imperishable marble the ideal of one's whole life, to walk round it, and smoke one's cigar and say, "This will last as long as St. Paul's Cathedral or the National Debt, and this is mine, I made it"—must be a sensation of delight that even we poor painters, with our works comparatively of a day, can hardly imagine; but then, what we lose in durability we gain in reproduction: and so once more I repeat, let who will be statesman, warrior, stock-jobber, or voluptuary, let give me the pallot and the case, the *l'air de d'un peintre*, the line of beauty and the brush!

"Can you wonder that I should wish my life to tread the same path? Had I but begun at his age, and worked as I should have worked, what might I have been now? Could I but make amends to him by leading him up the path to real fame, and see Vere the regenerator of modern art, I should die happy."

"And now, Hal, I must ask you of your own pursuits and your own success. I do often see an English paper; but these are a fine sporting people, with a dash of the high tastes and love of horseflesh; and in each posthouse where we put up last week, the very heart of the Banat, I found a lot of flying children, and a Bell's Life of the month before last. In this I read that the Margold colt was first favorite for the day, and I can only say that I hope he will be as fervently as I should have done

as any place out of England can be, and my old friend but little altered during the last twenty years. You remember De Rohan at Melton and Newmarket, at Rome and at Paris. Wherever he lived he was quite the Englishman, and always rode a thoroughbred horse. It would indeed be ungrateful on your part to forget him. Need I remind you of the dinner at the old Club, and the procession afterwards, with some fourteen wax candles, to inspect "The Switcher" in your stables, at the risk of burning down the greater part of the town, and converting some of the best horses in England into an exceedingly tough grill. I can see the Count's face of drunken gravity now, as he felt carefully down the horse's forelegs, unlettered by the respectful stare of your groom, or the undiagnosed astonishment of the animal itself. 'What is his name?' was the only question he asked of the polite Mr. Tophorn. 'The Switcher, my lord,' was the reply. 'Ver' nice name,' said the Count, and bought him forthwith at a price that you yourself can best appreciate; but from that day to this he never could pronounce the animal's appellation; and although he rode the 'Switcher' both in England and here, and has got prints and pictures of him all the house, 'The Switcher' he will continue to be till the end of time.

'All this Anglo-mania, however, is not much appreciated in high places; and I can see enough without looking much below the surface to satisfy me that the Count is eyed jealously by the authorities, and if ever they catch him tripping they will not spare his fortunes or his person. I fear there will be a row before long, and I would not trust the wild blood of my friends here if they once get the upper hand. Only yesterday an incident occurred that gave me a pretty correct idea of the state of feeling in this country and the disaffection the peasant has to his imperial rulers. Vere and I were travelling along in our usual manner, occupying the front seat of a most dilapidated carriage, which I purchased at Bucharest for twenty ducats, with the nurse and the baggage behind. We had stopped for me to sketch an animated group, in the shape of a drove of wild horses being drafted and chosen by their respective owners, and Vere was clapping his hands and shouting with delight at the hurry-scurry of the scene (by the way, there was a white horse that I caught in a beautiful attitude, who comes out admirably and lights up the whole sketch), when an officer and a couple of Austrian dragoons rode into the midst of the busy horse tamers, and very rudely proceeded to subject them to certain inquiries, which seemed to meet with sulky and evasive answers enough. After a time the Austrian officer, a handsome boy of twenty, stroking an incipient moustache, ordered the oldest man of the party to be summoned; and placing him between his two soldiers, began to interrogate him in a most offensive and supercilious manner. The old man, who was what we should term in England a better sort of yeoman farmer, of course immediately affected utter ignorance of German; and as the young Austrian was no great proficient in Hungarian, I was compelled most unwillingly to interpret between them, Vere looking on meanwhile with his mouth wide open, in a state of intense bewilderment. The following is a specimen of the conversation:—

Austrian Sub-Lieutenant, in German.—'Thou hast been hiding deserters; and so shalt thou be imprisoned, and fined, and suffer punishment.' I have to modify these threats into Hungarian.—'Brother, this noble officer seeks a deserter. Knowest thou of such an one?'

'Old man—'My father, I know nothing.'

'Austrian Officer, with many epithets, modified as before by your humble servant.—'You shall be punished with the utmost rigour if you do not give him up.'

'Old man, again, my father, I know nothing.'

'Officer, losing all patience, and gestulating wildly with his sword—'Slave, brute, dog, tell me this instant which way he took, or I will have you hanged to that nearest tree, your family shall be imprisoned, and your village burnt to the ground.'

'Old Man, as before—'My father, I know nothing.'

'The case was getting hopeless; but the young officer had now thoroughly lost his temper, and ordered his men to tie the peasant up, and flog him soundly with a stirring-rod. Here I thought it high time to

carriage, he addressed me in German, and with a gentlemanlike voice and manner begged to know in what direction I was travelling. 'I hope to get to Edeldorf to-night,' was my answer. He started at the name. 'Edeldorf!' said he; 'I too, am bound for Edeldorf; can you favor me with a seat in your carriage?' Of course I immediately complied, and Vere and I soon had the stranger between us, journeying amicably on towards my old friend's chateau. You know my failing, Hal, so I need not tell you how it was that I immediately began to study my new acquaintance's physiognomy, somewhat, I thought, to his discomfort, for at first he turned his head away, but after a while seemed to think better of it, and entered into conversation with much more frankness and vivacity. The sun was getting low, and I think I could have sketched him very satisfactorily in that warm, soft light. His head was essentially that of a soldier; the brow deficient in idealism, but with the bold outlines which betoken penetration and forethought. Constructiveness fully developed, combativeness moderate, but firmness very strongly marked; the eye deep set, and, though small, remarkably brilliant; the jaw that of a strong, bold man, while the lines about the mouth showed great energy of character and decision. From the general conformation of his head I should have placed forethought as the distinguishing quality of his character, and I should have painted the rich brown tones of his complexion on a system of my own, which such a portrait would be admirably calculated to bring out.

However, I could not well ask him to sit upon so short an acquaintance; so, while he and Vere chatted on—for they soon became great friends, and my acquaintance seemed charmed to find a child speaking German so fluently—I began to speculate on the trade and character of mysterious addition to our party. 'Hair cut short, moustache close clipped,' thought I, 'perfect German accent, and the broad Viennese dialect of the aristocracy, all this looks like a soldier; but the rough frieze coat, and huge shapeless riding boots could never belong to an officer of that nearest of armies—the Imperial and Kingly.' Then his muscular figure, and light active gait, which I remarked as he sprang into the carriage, would argue him one who was in the habit of practising feats of strength and agility. There is no mistaking the effects of the gymnasium. Stay, I have it, he is a fencing-master; that accounts for the military appearance, the quick glance, the somewhat worn look of the countenance, and he is going to Edeldorf, to teach De Rohan's boy the polite art of self-defence. So much the better. I too, love dearly a turn with the foils, so I can have a glorious 'set-to' with him to-morrow or the next day; and then, when we are more intimate, I can paint him. I think I shall do him in oils. I wish he would turn his head the least thing further this way.' I had got as far as this when my new friend did indeed turn his head round, and looking me full in the face, thus addressed me: 'Sir, you are an Englishman, and an honorable man. I have no right to deceive you; set me down, and let me walk.' Vere looked more astonished than ever. I begged him to explain himself. 'I tell you,' said he, 'that I am a thief and a deserter. My name is posted at every barrack-gate in the empire. I am liable to be hanged, if taken. Are you not afraid of me now?' 'No,' exclaimed Vere, his color heightening and his eyes glistening (oh! so like her). 'Papa and I will take care of you; don't be afraid.' My boy had anticipated what I was going to say; but I assured him that as I had taken him into my carriage I considered him as my guest, and come what would I never could think of abandoning him till we reached our destination. 'Of course,' I added, 'you are then free to come and go as you please. If you have done anything disgraceful, we need never know each other again. I do not wish to hear of it. You are to me only a belated traveller; permit me to add, a gentleman, to whom I am delighted to be of service. Will you smoke? Let me offer you a cigar.' The blood rushed to his face as he declined the proffered courtesy; for an instant he looked half offended, and then, seizing my hand, he exclaimed, 'If you know all, you would pity me—nay, more, you would approve of what I have done.' He turned suddenly to Vere, and rather startled him by abruptly exclaiming, 'Boy, do you love your father? is he all the world to you?' 'Yes,' said Vere

pected events, foreign manners and home ideas, to say nothing of a general confusion of tongues; for I could prattle French, German, and Hungarian, with a smattering of Turkish, not to mention my own native language; and I used them all indiscriminately. But my father's letters bring back much that I had otherwise forgotten, and whilst I read the story of the renegade, I can almost fancy I am leaning against his upright soldierlike form, and listening to the clear decided tones in which he told his tale.

## LETTER III.

'I am a soldier, sir,' said my new acquaintance whilst I leant back in my carriage smoking my cigar, and, *more meo*, Hal, and made most of my 'study.' 'I am an Austrian soldier—at least I was a week ago—I would not give much for my chance if ever I come into the clutches of the 'Double Eagle' again. Shall I tell you why I entered the Imperial army? All my life I have thought it best to be on the winning side. If I had been born an Englishman, oh, what happiness! I would have asked no better lot than to wander about with my dog and gun, and be free. But a Croat, no, there is no liberty in Croatia. We must have masters, foorsooth! territorial dues and seignorial rights; and we must bow and cringe and be trampled on by our own nobility. But these, too, have their masters, and I have seen the lord of many thousand acres tremble before a captain of dragoons. So I determined that if a military despotism was to be the order of the day, why I, too, would make a part of the great engine, perhaps sometime I might come to wield it all. My father was appointed steward to a great lord in Hungary—perhaps, had he remained, I might never have left home, for I am his only child, and we two are alone in the world; besides, is not a son's first duty, to obey his father?—but I could not bear to exchange the free open air, and my horse, and my gun, and my dogs (I had the best greyhounds in Croatia), for a leathern stool and an inkstand, and I said, 'Father, I too will become an Austrian, and so some day shall I be a great man, perhaps a colonel, and then will I return once a year to see you, and comfort you in your old age.' So I was sworn to obey the Emperor, and soon I learned my exercise, and saw that to rise even in the Austrian Army was not difficult for one who could see clearly before him, and could count that two and two make four, and never five.

'Very few men are soldiers at heart, and those who love the profession and would fain shine, can only see only one way to success, and that must be the old-established track that has always been followed. If I wanted to move across that stream and had no boats what should I do? I would try if it be too deep to wade. But the regulation says, soldiers shall not wade if the water be beyond a certain depth. So for six inches of water I must be defeated. That should not be my way; if it came no higher than their chins my men should cross; and if we could keep our muskets dry, where would be the harm? Well, I soon rose to be a corporal and a sergeant; and whilst I practised fencing and riding and gymnastics, I learnt something of gunnery and fortification, and the art of supplying an army with food. At last I was made a lieutenant and paymaster of the regiment, for I could always calculate readily, and never shrank from trouble or feared responsibility. So I had good pay and good comrades, and was getting on. Meanwhile my poor father was distressing himself about my profession, and imagining all sorts of misfortunes that would happen to me if I remained a soldier. In his letters to me he always hinted at the possibility of some great success—at his hopes of, before long, placing me in an independent position; that I should leave the army to come and live with him, and we would farm an estate of our own, and never be parted any more. Poor old man; what do you think he built on? why, these foolish lotteries. Ticket after ticket did he purchase, and ticket after ticket came up a blank. At last, in his infatuation, he raised a sum of money—enough to obtain him all the numbers he had set his heart upon—for he mixed calculation with his gambling, which is certain ruin—and for this purpose he embezzled two thousand florins of his employer's property, and wasted it as he had done the rest. In his despair he wrote to me. What could I do? two thousand florins were in the pay-

ber so dark and glossy, now as white as snow; yet he is a very handsome fellow still. In mail or plate, leaning his arm on his helmet, with his beard flowing over a steel cuirass inlaid with gold, he would make a capital seneschal, or marshal of a tournament, or other elderly dignitary of the middle ages; but I should like best to paint him in dark velvet, with a skull cap, as Lord Soulis, or some other noble votary of the magic art; and to bring him out in a dusky room, with one ray of vivid light from a lamp just over his temples, and gleaming off that fine, bold, shining forehead, from which the hair is now completely worn away.'

There is no more of the old dusty letters. Why these should have been tied up and preserved for so many years is more than I can tell. They have, however, reminded me of much in my youth that I had well-nigh forgotten. I must try back on my vague memories for the commencement of my narrative.

CHAPTER III.

'PAR NOBIS.'

'You shall play with my toys, and break them if you like, for my papa loves the English, and you are my English friend,' said a handsome blue-eyed child to his little companion, as they sauntered hand-in-hand through the spacious entrance-hall at Edeldorf. The boy was evidently bent on patronizing his friend. The friend was somewhat abashed and bewildered, and grateful to be taken notice of.

'What is your name?—may I call you by your Christian name?' said the lesser child, timidly, and rather nestling to his protector, for such had the bigger boy constituted himself.

'My name is Victor,' was the proud reply; 'and you may call me Victor, because I love you; but the servants must call me Count, because my papa is a count; and I am not an Austrian count, but a Hungarian. Come and see my sword.' So the two children were soon busy in an examination of that very beautiful, but not very destructive plaything.

They were indeed a strange contrast. Victor de Rohan, son and heir to one of the noblest and wealthiest of Hungary's aristocracy, looked all over the high-bred child he was. Free and bold, his large, frank blue eyes, and wide brow, shaded with clustering curls of golden brown, betokened a gallant, thoughtless spirit, and a kind, warm heart; whilst the delicate nostril and handsomely-curved mouth of the well-born child betrayed, perhaps, a little too much pride for one so young, and argued a disposition not too patient of contradiction or restraint. His little companion was as unlike him as possible, and indeed most people would have taken Victor for the English boy, and Vere for the foreign one. The latter was heavy, awkward, and ungainly in his movements, timid and hesitating in his manner, with a shallow complexion, and dark, deep-set eyes, that seemed always looking into a world beyond. He was a strange child, totally without the light-heartedness of his age, timid, shy, and awkward, but capable of strong attachments, and willing to endure anything for the sake of those he loved. Then he had quaint fancies, and curious modes of expressing them, which made other children laugh at him, when the boy would retire into himself, deeply wounded and unhappy, but too proud to show it. As he looks now at Victor's sword, with which the latter is vaporing about the hall, destroying imaginary enemies, Vere adds—

'What becomes of the people that are killed, Victor?'

'We ride over their bodies,' says Victor, who has just delivered a finishing thrust at his phantom foe.

'Yes, but what becomes of them?' pursues the child, now answering himself. 'I think they come to me in my dreams; for sometimes, do you know, I dream of men in armor charging on white horses, and they come by with a wind that wakes me; and when I ask 'Nettich' who they are, she says they are the fairies; but I don't think they are fairies, because you know fairies are quite small, and have wings. No, I think they must be the people that are killed.'

'Very likely,' replies Victor, who has not considered the subject in this light, and