



DIGEST.

Weidenbruck is the capital city of Grimland and the residence of Karl XXII., who is ill unto death. Fritz, Baron of Friedrichsheim, the finest monarchist in the realm, is wasting his time with "women and wine." When the young king comes to the throne, Fritz joins with Max Stein, General Meyer, and Herr Saunders to maintain the succession. About this time Mrs. Perowne and her daughter, Phoebe, arrive in Weidenbruck and meet Fritz, who describes himself as Herr Lugner. Saunders intercepts a letter to the Ex-Queen of Grimland which reveals a plot.

The plot is the conception of Cyril of Wolfsnaden, who aspires to the Regency, and by probably violent methods. Stein, Meyer and Saunders plan to circumvent this by working to have Fritz, Baron of Friedrichsheim, promoted to the Regency. Fritz consents to the plot. Under the leadership of the Freiherr of Kragg, the "blue blood" declare in favour of Cyril as Regent, despite deputations from the people urging them to proclaim Fritz. Saunders buys the support of the mayor. Fritz secretes himself in a barrel in the Council Chamber and hears the choice of the Council fall on the Regent. He also was secreted in another barrel. Fritz escapes from the council chamber and ultimately comes face to face with Phoebe Perowne, with whom he is in love, who thinks he is drunk. Cyril and the Ex-Queen shake hands on a bargain to keep the young son of the late King in the care of Cyril himself, whose desire is to see that his enemies get no chance to run the little heir as a rival candidate for the throne. Cyril pretends to be in love with the Ex-Queen.

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

"As loyal as you were to Fritz of Friedrichsheim, whose death you now demand?" he asked. "He was never anything to me. No man has ever been anything to me but Cyril of Wolfsnaden."

She was acting admirably and he knew she was acting; but he was well enough pleased. For one thing, she was a beautiful woman; for another her assistance was essential. He knew that she clung so feverishly to him because his strength and ambition might set her on a high rung of the ladder of power, but also he knew that her passionate femininity grappled him with soft violence because he was a man and an admirer. She felt some tenderness for him, and if she professed more than she really felt, he was content. He was a man of lost illusions, and such fantasies as "love for love's sake" had no place in his scheme of existence. Nevertheless he was human and he desired to test the strength of her devotion.

"How am I to know that you care for me—more than those?" and he waved a hand towards her photograph album.

She gently disengaged herself from him.

"Do I not carry your letter here?" she asked, placing a hand on her bosom.

"Indeed?" he demanded, not without incredulity.

For answer she drew forth a letter addressed to Frau Weber, 19 Hahn-gasse, Weidenbruck.

He took it from her, and scrutinized it closely. And as he looked his brow clouded and his jaw fell. He tore the letter from its covering and glanced at the contents.

"The letter is mine," he said, "but the envelope is someone else's."

"It is in your writing."

"Pardon me, it is in a writing exceedingly like mine. There is treachery here. Someone has tampered with this, and the forgery is a clever one. Ah! I have not stupid foes to deal with, but the cleverest men in the country. I smell Meyer's handiwork here."

"Now you are sad again," she complained. "Surely there is nothing here that can be used against you."

"Meyer can read between the lines. The fact that the thing has passed through his fingers proves that every movement of ours is watched, every action shadowed."

"We must be prudent."

"No," he cried with sudden energy. "Prudence is of no avail against a Jew. He can play that game a thou-

sand times better than we can. We must be bold. They know the relations that subsist between you and me. They know my ambitions. They know, thanks to Fritz's spying, that I have been elected to the Regency. In the week that intervenes before my appointment is officially announced they will move heaven and earth to overthrow me. But by the blood of all the devils it will be I who strike the first blow!"

"How?"

"The condition of affairs demands the instant proclamation of my Regency. There are plots afoot which demand a strong man in authority to quell them. There is a conspiracy against the young Karl; he must be removed for safety to Wolfsnaden."

"Will the Rathsherren consent?" she asked.

"Circumstances will compel them to consent. We must have a riot in Weidenbruck. Lacherberg must stir up the scum first against Fritz, and then against me. There will be no difficulty, for the people hate me already. Then will come the tug-of-war. The Rathsherren will feel that my cause is their own. It will be aristocrats and grapeshot against scum and paving-stones. Providence, as usual, will be on the side of arms of precision. Blood will flow in the Morast and the slums of the Goose Market. There will be a few anarchists the less, a few socialists with holes in their hot skulls, a few dirty blackguards of republicans stiffening in the snow. Then the people will have learned their lesson: the dogs will know their master; they will lick the hand that has beaten them. Cyril of Wolfsnaden will rule in Weidenbruck; Grimland will pay him homage!"

"And my boy, Karl?"

"Will occupy the position of ease, indolence, and insignificance at Wolfsnaden which I have enjoyed for the last fifteen years."

CHAPTER XIII.

Saunders at Home.

A WOMAN'S tears are sacred things. The most brutal of husbands ceases to bully his wife from the moment that sobs supplant argument, and a flow of briny dewdrops supersedes the outpouring of petulant words. The moment she weeps a woman puts herself beyond the pale of combat, even in the most trivial matters. But if her weeping is in secrecy and solitude, if its cause is unselfish and deep, if it takes place from no tactical motive, but out of pure womanliness, how much more sacred is it, how much more worthy of reticent treatment from the pen of the most cold-blooded chronicler!

When she reached the Hotel Concordia after her visit to the public galleries of the Strafeburg, Phoebe Perowne retired to her bedroom and had what women call "a good cry." She was disappointed in herself, in the comely Herr Lugner, in life itself. Here was a youth, handsome, charming, fascinating, despite his admitted defects, the victim to the great curse of alcoholism. That was what she believed, and what she wept for. With her, life was all black and white, and no half-tones. Occasional lapses from rectitude, from sobriety, from chastity, were things that she had no cognizance of in her theories of existence. Men were "respectable"—to use the characteristic English phrase that had so amused Mrs. Saunders—or they were sinners. A man who was intoxicated early in the afternoon was essentially "not respectable," essentially a sinner. She neither doubted the hard fact of his intoxication, nor did she give him the benefit of imagining his lapse to be a rare one. And at the thought of a young life doomed to the

slow, heart-breaking humiliation of a drunkard's fate she wept bitter tears. She could forgive him being a coward—he was young and delicately fashioned. She could forgive him being an idler—he had extraordinary personal charm and skated divinely. But this horror—the slurred speech, the flushed cheek, the partially controlled limbs—what an abyss of degeneration and misery it opened to the prophetic vision of the mind! And yet, even in this hateful episode he had shown for a moment a strange natural dignity that had broken through the ice of her contempt and released the warm waters of pity from her lachrymal glands. She had not wept in the Strafeburg—not more than a tear or two, for pride was as religion with her—but in her bedroom at the Concordia she wept nearly all the tears in her body. By dinner-time, perhaps because there were no more tears to flow, she had composed herself. Soap and water, and the pride that was entrenched in her nature, obliterated the stains of sorrow, and it was a pale but tranquil Phoebe who faced her mother at the table d'hote that evening.

"You look tired, Phoebe," said Mrs. Perowne. "I hope you did not find the Strafeburg too fatiguing."

"I am glad I went," replied Phoebe; "not because I saw some beautiful pictures, which bored me, or some ugly instruments of torture, which horrified me, but because I met Mrs. Saunders, whom I found most fascinating."

"She is certainly an attractive person," consented the elder woman, "and I believe, like most people who stay long enough in Grimland, has had some stirring experiences."

"I admire her," said Phoebe. "There is a calm strength in her face which suggests a fine mind behind the cool grey eyes. She is a "superior person"—not in the odious and conventional meaning of the phrase, but because she possesses, I feel sure, a superior intellect and superior moral qualities."

"I am glad you like her," said Mrs. Perowne, "because she has invited us round to her rooms in the Neptunburg to-night. She suggested a visit to the slums of Weidenbruck."

"I should love it above all things," said Phoebe, with enthusiasm. "I adore slumming. Also I have to thank her—"

"For what?"

"For portraying a hero to me. I have never met a hero off the stage. I have never heard one described except in books. But Fritz of Friedrichsheim, young, handsome, patriotic and fearless—there is a man to captivate the imagination and restore one's faith in the present degenerate days!"

"He seems a little—a little wild," suggested the mother.

"He has been a little wild," corrected Phoebe. "All saints and heroes are wild till their call comes. You know my motto: 'Du zummat; du gude if you can; anyway du zummat.' Fritz is evidently a person of fierce activities. Till the need of his country called him his activities were commonplace. He spent his youth and money, as Mrs. Saunders put it, royally. He was more of a man, even in his revelling, than his fellows. Now he is a hero; he has put aside the follies of youth. The hour has made him a man."

MRS. PEROWNE smiled at her daughter's enthusiasm.

"Perhaps the real Fritz, if we chance to meet him, will prove less inspiring than the ideal," she suggested.

"Perhaps. I am used to disillusion. But, anyway, whatever his faults, he



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