

A big, swarthy, unhealthy-looking Italian was Pallacio, sleek haired and fallow, and looked as if his skin was a size too loose for him. He might have been called stupid-looking if it were not for the restless light that gleamed from his deep-set black eyes.

Mrs. Darley seemed nervous at the ordeal through which her dearly-prized picture was to pass, as though it were in some sense a personal trial. Hugh and Sybil, confident of the result with the serene confidence of youth, were full of anticipated triumph. They, at least, had no doubt of the expert's opinion.

Pallacio lifted the portrait in its heavy frame from its chain over the mantelpiece to the floor, where the light from the large French window fell full upon it. For five minutes he examined it carefully, now standing back a few paces, now coming close up to the canvas, he spoke no word, his face gave no index of his judgment. At length it seemed his mind was made up. "It is a copy," he said deliberately, "very well done, excellent, most men it would deceive, but me not at all. It is undoubtedly a copy."

(To be continued.)

The Red Virgin

By G. FREDERICK TURNER

(Concluded)

CHAPTER XXXI.

Concord.

SOME three weeks after the events related in the last chapter, the February sun was shining with more than winter radiance on the surface of the frozen Rundsee; and for this and other reasons the artificial lake in the Thiergarten was wearing an aspect of more than its wonted gaiety.

A public announcement of considerable interest had been made in the previous evening's edition of the *Abendpost*.

Let us transcribe literally the elegant language of that admirable and semi-official organ.

"We are authorized to announce, and have much pleasure in announcing, that our beloved Regent Fritz, twenty-third Baron of Friedrichsheim, is about to contract an alliance with the Fraulein Phoebe Perowne, daughter of the late Colonel Perowne, C.B., D.S.O., J.P., and Mrs. Perowne, of Tiddicomb Hall, Somersetshire, England. Miss Perowne is a high-born (hoch-geborn) and beautiful young lady, connected with some of the oldest families in the English aristocracy, and is the possessor of remarkably pure features, a domestic temperament, and some of the richest arable land in the west of England—"

Grimland was very anglophil at the moment, a fact entirely without importance as far as international politics were concerned, but a matter of considerable gratification to the happy couple who glided with locked hands and smiling faces round the crowded surface of the Rundsee.

And all smart Grimland was there to see them, to note the pure features, assess the domestic temperament, and speculate on the rich arable lands that dowered the affianced bride of Grimland's beloved Regent. The von Bilderbaums were there, and the Grunheims, and the Kordrik-Radletz, the Paprikofs, and the Schwartzdorf-Nirderthals.

And far more important things than mere human dignitaries were enriching the snowy beauties of the park, so that it would have been a dull heart indeed that failed to sing responsively to the rhythm of youth and beauty moving triumphantly and graciously in the gemmed setting made by nature's choicest artificers. For the magic goldsmith Sun, and the magic jeweller Frost had between them wrought a picture of dazzling brilliance that uplifted the soul, and turned the driest hearts into liquid springs of purest exultation. Blue sky, white earth, and the glory of crisp air, and perfect ice! No wonder Phoebe's cheeks glowed with the pulsing blood of joyous youth, no wonder her great eyes shone with the mystic fire of kindled purity.

Nor was Fritz less obviously radiant, only there was a serious, almost a solemn, touch in his joy, that told of boyhood grown to manhood, and reckless joie de vivre turned to the strong triumph of assured happiness. His right arm was no longer in a sling, but his healed scar drew an inerasible line on his handsome cheek, marring his comeliness, thought some, but giving him just the needed stamp of robust virility in Phoebe's loving eyes.

"Tell me your philosophy," Fritz

was saying, "and I will believe in it."

"But I no longer believe in it myself," replied Phoebe, smiling.

"Nevertheless tell it me," he persisted, "and we will both try and believe in it. I am sure it is very beautiful."

"I doubt even that. You know my motto—let that suffice. 'Du zummst. Du gude if you can—anyway, du zummst.' I still hold to that."

"So do I," agreed Fritz rapturously, "and I hold to mine, which I used to despise. 'Affaire de coeur, affaire d'honneur.' I used to think I knew all about coeurs and honneur. Now I know that I knew very little about either, just as I now know a great deal about both."

"Conceited man!"

"Not conceited—merely conscious of a true revelation. And now I want you to tell me about your philosophy, which I pretended to take an interest in when I first met you."

"Oh, philosophy is only for old people and old-maids," rejoined Phoebe. "It is the vague something that the unsatisfied soul hugs to itself, when the real things—the better things—are not there to hug. I have done with philosophy."

"Because you have something better to hug?"

Phoebe blushed deliciously. "Be careful," she laughed, "or I will expound my philosophy."

"That is what I am asking."

"Very well then," said Phoebe. "I believed that the highest types of men and women combined the finest qualities of both sexes—bravery and gentleness, honour and tenderness, strength and mercy. Possibly I was right. But I thought that from this the next step was to the higher sexlessness: that there should be love without passion, union without possession, husbands who were not masters, wives who were co-equal in authority with their husbands."

"I AM not a philosopher," said Fritz, "but I do not quarrel with your views."

"Because you know that they are too ridiculous to matter. One does not quarrel with a child who thinks the moon is made of green cheese."

"I would believe the moon was made of spiders' webs if you said so."

"But I do not tell you so. Neither do I tell you that a wife's authority should be equal to her husband's, because I do not wish it to be so."

"Then you no longer believe in 'Votes for Women'?" he asked.

Phoebe laughed gaily. "That is another matter," she said. "I think that married women should have votes, so that they could vote as their husbands told them."

The band came to the end of the ing, and Fritz and Phoebe skated to particular selection they were play-wards the little pavilion, and sat down on chairs by the edge of the ice.

Then just as they were seated, they had to rise again, for no less a person than Karl XXIII. was skating towards them. He looked well and happy, and had that half-humorous, half-wistful smile that was so attractive a possession of his late father. He pressed Phoebe's hand and then clapped Fritz warmly on the shoulders.

"Dear old Fritz," he said, "well done indeed! You have my congratulations,



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