



CHRISTOPHER AND THE PRINCESS.—[SEE PAGE 236.]

THE PRINCESS XENIA.*

A ROMANCE.

BY H. B. MARRIOTT WATSON.

CHAPTER X.

TAKING the journey easily, to spare his horse, Christopher reached Dreiburg somewhat late in the evening, and dined comfortably at his hotel. He thought out his plans carefully, and resolved to come to some understanding with von Straben. He began to see clearly that that astute person had no intention of letting him into his secrets. He had been used to get rid of Prince Albrecht, in which adventure he had evidently been entirely successful; and now he was employed as nothing more than a common messenger, vouchsafed no further information than his own eyes and ears might pick up. Consequently it was with his mind already determined that, after his dinner, he repaired to the apartments of the Count in the Schloss Geisenthurm. He was admitted by a man-servant, who informed him that his master was out, but, upon hearing that the business was urgent, added that he would not be long away. Christopher therefore dismissed him, and sat down to wait. The rooms which had been allotted to the Count lay, as has been said, in the northern wing of the Palace, and consisted of a suite of several chambers. The servant had led Christopher not into the fine wainscoted room in which he had previously been, but into a smaller room, sparsely furnished and fitted as a waiting-room. A farther door connected this antechamber with the interior parts of the Schloss beyond.

The time passed slowly, and after exhausting his patience, Christopher got up and examined the pictures on the walls. As he did so, the door, which had been on the latch, creaked and opened, and he started round under the impression that von Straben had returned. Then, discovering what had happened, he went forward to close the door again. Suddenly the restlessness he was feeling drove him forth from the room, and he stood outside the open door for a moment looking down the passage. A staircase ran upward, rising a few feet from him,

and on an impulse he closed the door and ascended this.

At the top a narrow gallery conducted him out into a broad corridor, very lofty and exceedingly handsome in its proportions and decorations. Hardly considering what trespass he was making, he walked along it for some distance, until he heard the sound of voices. They arrested him, and then, cautiously approaching a branch in the corridor, he peered round the corner. Three men stood conversing together very ardently, and one—whom he recognized by his back to be the Count—seemed to be pleading with great animation. Of the others, one was a stout elderly man, who had been pointed out to him as the Chancellor of Weser-Dreiburg; and the second, from the descriptions he had received, could be no less than his Highness the Grand-Duke himself. He was a very tall and very lean old man, and as he stood, his withered face in profile, he was stooped upon a stick, and held one trembling hand upon his Chancellor's shoulder. He wore a skull-cap, from under which the sparse hair shone white and venerable. Christopher gazed, uncertain as to his actions for the moment. Obviously some point of great public interest was in discussion, but he shrank from spying upon them. The Grand-Duke was plainly agitated; he shook his head in a weary way; and von Straben, bowing down, resumed his statement in a low quick voice. Suddenly the three, as if upon a common understanding, turned about and moved towards Christopher. He hastily glanced about him. It was impossible that he could escape in time to descend the gallery by which he had entered, and a minute more and he must meet them face to face and be confessed for what he had no thought of being—an interloping spy. The thought of von Straben and of his own designs now growing so wonderfully under his hands flashed through his mind. The emergency was desperate. The footsteps had almost reached the turn

in the corridor when Christopher, wrenching quickly at the handle, opened a door behind him, and stepping into the room, shut it softly. This done, he turned about, and his eyes fell at once upon the Princess.

The Princess, who had been seated upon a couch at the farther end of the room, started and stared at him in amazement. In that instant of overwhelming confusion Christopher realized that the chamber was furnished after the manner of a living-room, and that the Princess was alone. He was frankly overpowered by the awkward turn to his foolish adventure, and stood for a while incapable of speech and glowing with color to his forehead. The Princess herself, on the contrary, was white, and though she seemed to present an appearance of agitation, she sat very still, and it was borne in upon Christopher that his intrusion was, not the cause of her emotion.

Presently she steadied herself and spoke.

"Pray, sir, what is your business here?" she asked in a low voice, but with an air of authority.

Christopher bowed, and began an apology. "Madam," he said, being now in better possession of himself, "I must ask you to accept a thousand apologies. But in the Palace, being ignorant, I missed my way, and one door is so like another—"

"True," said she, breaking in upon his stammering utterance. "I will have you directed safely. The galleries are somewhat bewildering. No doubt you wanted the Chancellor's room." And then suddenly she stared at him with a look of suspicion and bit her lip.

Christopher bowed again, being able to offer no contradiction to the lady's guess.

"You will find it a little farther in the corridor," she went on, in her pleasantly remote voice. "I will send a servant with you," and she set her hand upon a bell, but as quickly paused. "I fear," she said, as if recalling painfully a recollection, "that you will not find his Excellency at present," and in a fit of melancholy abstraction she gazed through the window on the fountains playing in the court-yard below. Christopher's only thought up to this point had been to withdraw at the earliest opportunity, and indeed he was in the act of another bow and was backing towards the door when

the visage of the Princess was turned once more slowly upon him. He met her eyes, and it was as if he felt suddenly that melancholy gaze pierce through him. For an appreciable space of time she dwelt upon him, but with no signs of recognition—merely in a sad neglect of her surroundings. Christopher Lambert was a man, as we have observed, given to the rule of impulse under all his deliberate calculations. The chasing current of his blood running with such vital fulness refined him to active thoughts and cool designs, but no less excited him at times to instantaneous action. He had the habit of restraint, but no habit is continuous. And now he paused on the eve of his retirement, and as suddenly held the Princess with his eyes. She grew aware of his presence and this act of boldness, and her long form straightened insensibly.

"I thought you were gone, sir," she said. She looked at him with a frosty coldness, but Christopher's keen vision detected about her pale cheeks the stains and marks of tears.

"Madam," said he, boldly, "I could not leave you in this way. You need help."

The words came impetuously, but they were framed with deliberation.

"You are right, sir," cried she, flashing. "I will call help at once," and again she stretched her hand to the bell.

Christopher put up his arm. "I pray your Highness," he besought, "not to make an end too suddenly. It is no impertinence that moves me."

His voice rang very grave and earnest, and he stood erect, bearing himself brightly and with a fine glow of warmth in his eyes. The Princess hesitated. "You can have nothing to say to me, Mr. Lambert. You presume upon your previous service," she said, with the same coldness.

"Nay, nay, your Highness," cried Christopher, quickly; "my acquaintance gives me the right to say nothing. I have the right to presume on nothing. Indeed, my position, in contrast with yours, enjoins upon me silence. But my opportunity, the chance, this occasion, so accidentally befallen, bids me cry out from every nerve of my body."

"I do not understand you, sir," she replied, still with the same calmness, and fixing her dispassionate and liquid eyes upon him.

"You do not understand me, madam," said Christopher, quietly, and now con-

firmed in the complete mastery of himself. "No; indeed I think not. But, your Highness, it is because the usages that surround you are so unnatural, the conventions that constrain you and all women, highness or lowness, are so severe and unwarrantable, that you must needs make a feint of innocence, and bundle your true feelings out of sight. And if peradventure you should be surprised with the signs and marks of your true selves upon your faces, why you must lie and prevaricate, and ape a high pride you do not feel, for the preservation of your honor. Your honor, indeed, were safer in the keeping of your own truth and honesty."

The Princess stared upon him with parted lips through which a shadow of white teeth was visible, her cheeks gathering a pinch of color, her eyes dilating in astonishment. Once she put out her hand as though to touch the bell, but drew it back, and stood wavering under the influence of an unusual emotion.

"I have heard your nation was healthy and brave, Mr. Lambert," she said, presently. "It is news to learn that you are a race of philosophers."

An unpleasant little musical laugh issued from her throat, and it was manifest to Christopher that she was near the brink of weeping, for all her austere looks. He judged that she had but newly come through some ordeal, and he thought he could make a guess at it. He had not had that long ride from Salzhausen for nothing.

"Pardon me, your Highness," he said. "It is no philosophy that inspires these rough sentences of mine, but merely a knowledge of fact, and the common-sense of my kind. I am endowed with sharp eyes, if with no very sharp wits, and your Highness's tale is written upon your Highness's face."

The Princess started, and the hot color charged her pale face again. Christopher put up his hand. "Nay, I beseech you to hear me out. What I say may very well appear to you to be an impertinence. I suppose I have no business to notice the traces upon your cheeks. Royal eyes brew no tears; royal hearts beat to no other tune than that of a proud sovereignty. Well, your Highness, rest assured that when I go forth from this room I shall be obediently blind and subserviently dumb. I shall watch only the

faces of my equals, find pity for their troubles only, offer them alone some help or consolation. But here I have other eyes and the tongue of my own individual freedom, and though I shall have blundered into this speech as I have blundered into this chamber, it may be that you can bring yourself to pardon the one mistake with the other."

The Princess stood at the window now, her gaze trembling upon the spurting waters.

"You need no pardon from me," she said, quietly. "An amiable mistake requires no relief. Pray leave me, sir."

"Before God, madam," cried Christopher, with sudden passion, "I will not leave you thus. I pray your Highness to throw off these unworthy tremors. Act by your princely nature, divest yourself of false modesty, and remember that what concerns you in life concerns you in two ways, as a woman no less than as a princess."

He had drawn himself to his full height as he spoke, and his eyes burned with their pleading. Something in his poise, the arrogance of that great confidence, mingling with the zeal with which he plied his argument, startled and moved the Princess. The words which had risen to her lips remained unuttered, and when she spoke it was quite gently.

"It is because I remember that, sir, I am and can be in no need of help," she said.

Though her voice fell soft and clear and sad, there was yet in it a ring of pride, which might have deterred a less obstinate man. But Christopher was in his most stubborn mood, and with a glow of satisfaction he welcomed this answer for a signal of surrender. He threw himself into the breach with most desperate energy.

"Is your Highness sure of that?" he asked. "Pardon me, but it is a point upon which I would take other judgment. A mistake is so easy. I should prefer a decision reached in the green fields and under the eye of Heaven, to one that the pressure of courts and the provisions of intrigue have settled. And can your Highness, think you, fitly determine for yourself between such great and private causes?"

The Princess looked at him inquiringly, parted her lips, but said nothing. Christopher, following her thoughts, rec-

ognized what she would have asked him. Her patience under his eloquence renewed in him his satisfaction. He felt that he had gained his point. The Princess sank upon the seat; she was wound in a tangle of feelings, captured in her emotional condition by this strong and iron stranger, who stood a little way apart, respectful, giving tongue to counsel with eloquence and sincerity, pleading with her for herself, and careless of any mischief to himself. Christopher, at this moment of triumph the master of so vast a hoard of imprisoned power, felt his blood run with exultation, and his soul touched the stars. He caught a vivid sight of the glories to which this unconquerable servant might lead him.

"Madam," he answered, "I speak with deference, and out of a regard for the destinies of this ancient state. How are you convinced that what lies before you in your duty as Princess will conserve the privileges and liberties of Weser-Dreiburg?"

"'Tis the only way," said the Princess, with a sigh. "There is no choice. But," she cried, suddenly breaking into agitation, "you—why should you—I am mad to talk with you, a stranger and a foreigner."

"Nay, your Highness," said Christopher, "but yet it may be to your Highness's advantage," and his gray eyes dwelt upon her with calm conviction. Enhanced as his own natural confidence was by the huge fortune of which he was conscious, he could not doubt, nor would he allow any one to doubt, himself. He carried persuasion with him, even to the trembling hysterical Princess, as she sat there forlorn and desolate in her room, the victim of a selfish diplomacy.

"See," he went on. "I have a guess how your Highness may be placed. It is no matter if I am wrong. Your Highness will pardon me if I am blunt and speak in plain terms. It is the thing, not the word, that offends. To be offered for a sacrifice to save the state is a noble career truly, and worthy of any woman's life, but surely it were wise to calculate if the sacrifice is to be effectual."

"What mean you, sir?" cried the Princess.

"Your Highness is aware that Germany wants this little state, and has been on the watch for years. And how, I ask your Highness, shall the chance be

brought off? Why, by a sacrifice, a futile, ineffectual sacrifice."

The Princess flushed warm, and then grew pale and cold again.

"What means this consultation of his Highness and the German legate together?" he continued. "The very palace stones would exclaim passionately upon a course of so much folly. Why should the German Emperor take such paternal care to find a husband for his Highness's daughter? Indeed the ties that would thus connect Salzhausen and Weser-Dreiburg would prove to his benefit, and to the benefit of that rapacious empire. The Margrave of Salzhausen is known to be his creature; and in the end it would not be a strip of border-land, but the whole virgin territory of Weser-Dreiburg that would fill the imperial gullet."

But now Xenia had resumed a safe control of herself. The stress under which she had been suffering, and which had betrayed her, had passed during these cold arguments. She looked up more brightly, and a feint of a smile restored her previous dignity.

"My dear Mr. Lambert," she said, speaking even lightly, "I told you when we first met that we Continentals are never allowed to be simple. You have spoken a good deal, and I dare say your sermon contains some elements of truth. I am no hand at politics; I leave that to the Council of his Highness, and the two Houses. I have no doubt our little petty quarrels interest you; they are operative, and command the ridicule of Europe. I do not grudge your laughter, but I must remember that I am part and portion of the farce myself, and therefore I cannot smile with you."

"Madam," said Christopher, gravely, "I am in no humor to laugh. Your petty quarrels draw me because they may threaten greater catastrophes; and I am not so dull but I see that the welfare of your country jumps with your own desires."

"And yet," said the Princess, resuming, "you came with Count von Straben."

"Ah, madam!" cried Christopher, quickly, "and thereby the whole fruit of my performance. It is in that direction you need help, you and Weser-Dreiburg."

A light glowed in Xenia's face, and she made an impulsive movement forward, but ceased, and her eyes faded and dropped.

"Weser-Dreiburg can offer no resistance to a first-class power," she said, disconsolately.

"True, but she can deploy diplomacy against physical power," exclaimed Christopher.

"You speak very confidently, Mr. Lambert," replied the Princess. "I wish I could enjoy your expectations. But I have lived in courts, and you—you are an Englishman. If what you say is true, nothing can save Weser-Dreiburg." She hesitated. "But perhaps her fate may be postponed."

Christopher nodded. "I thought it would put itself to you in that way," he answered. "But believe me, the sacrifice you would make would be vain. It is not so you will save the Grand-Duchy."

"How, then?" she broke forth, suddenly. "You hint at a plan. What would you have us do?" As suddenly she came to a pause, and uttered a brief laugh. "I think, sir, that after all it is not here, in this room, that the fate of Weser-Dreiburg will be settled."

"And your Highness's own fate?" added Christopher, meaningly. She winced, as though menaced by a blow. Christopher saw her waver again from the princess into the woman. "We may not settle either," he said in a low voice, "but we may help. I beg your Highness to remember that we can help."

"You are very good," replied Xenia, with a touch of feeling in her voice. "I do not understand you, but I believe you have intended well, and that without selfish reasons."

"Believe me," returned Christopher, "that I am thinking only of what would be for the best."

"Ah, well," exclaimed the Princess, airily, "it is not you and I that will settle it," and she held out her hand frankly.

Christopher bowed and kissed the tips of her fingers; then he withdrew.

Christopher found his way out of the Palace in a condition of musing satisfaction. Passing by the sentinels on duty before the doors, he fixed them with an unregarding eye, and, still wreathed in complacency, he came out again before the apartments of the Count. This time he was informed that von Straben was at home, and entered without more ceremony. The German welcomed his young friend with his usual debonair grace, put

no questions about the missives, but behaved as he invariably behaved, quite as if he had no stronger or more important tie of connection with Christopher than that of common friendliness and polite good-will. It was Christopher who took the conversation to the subject. Indeed, he had discovered that this was generally his task. He pulled the Jew's letter from his pocket, and spoke bluntly.

"Your Jew gave me that," said he. "I presume it is from Herr Gasten."

"No doubt, no doubt," returned the Count. "I am much in your debt. I thank you, Mr. Lambert," and he brushed the letter aside, as though its news might very well keep until after Mr. Lambert's amiable visit.

"You had better read it," suggested Christopher. "We mustn't stand on ceremony. There may be something important. And, besides, I am in the game, you see."

Von Straben raised his eyebrows almost imperceptibly, but bowed and broke the seal. He read the letter and laid it down.

"A thousand apologies," he said. "And now, Mr. Lambert, can I offer you—"

But Christopher sharply interrupted him. "And now, Count," said he, gravely, "let us come to an understanding."

Von Straben glanced at him in silence, shrugged his shoulders very slightly, and showed a sparkle of teeth under his mustache. He had the air of waiting, hiding, as it were, in covert against a surprise, and he regarded Christopher with interrogating eyes.

"I have met your Herr Gasten," went on Christopher, "and he made a very definite impression on me."

"Ah, I am glad you met," said the Count, cheerfully. "He is a very amiable young fellow—quite an excellent man. I have a great regard for him."

"Of that I have not the least doubt in the world," replied Christopher, "and I may add that he appears to reciprocate your esteem. He inquired diligently after your health."

"Very kind of him; but that is like him," murmured von Straben.

"He also put several questions to me," went on Christopher, without heeding this interposition, "but I was able to assure him that I was not in your confidence."

"Ah!" exclaimed von Straben. "I see."

"I do not think much of the bottle-nosed man," went on Christopher, coolly. "If I were you I should discard him. But of course I am not in your confidence. He strikes me as shifty as well as mercenary, and he has no manners."

"Manners," assented the Count, gravely considering his companion—"manners are not always indispensable. I agree that they are laudable."

"Indeed," said Christopher, promptly, "if it comes to that, I am of opinion that you might even have dispensed with some ceremonious superfluities yourself."

"In relation, Mr. Lambert, to yourself?" inquired von Straben, suavely, and not at all put about.

"You see," said Christopher, with some grimness, "you *can* see a point without walking round it."

"That is kindly put," returned the Count; "a neat compliment. And yet, sir, I think it may be rather you that are ceremonious. I have a doubt whether you needed any introduction to my friend Herr Gasten."

"I had a flash of illumination," answered Christopher. "But I cannot always rely upon it. You see, he is not a very discreet gentleman. He wags his tongue."

"That is precisely my difficulty," observed von Straben. He appeared to be sunk in thought, and let his glance fall reflectively upon the letter which Christopher had given him.

"You will see, Count," urged the young man, "that I am not used with too much consideration. I am modest, but I have certain claims upon your esteem. You are no longer enjoying the society of the pleasant Prince Albrecht, and one who commands the movements of princes may justly feel wounded to be employed as a common bootboy."

"I pray you, don't, Mr. Lambert," cried the Count, putting up his hand as though in pain. "You distress me. I assure you that you are the only person in this state that I would have asked to favor me so."

"Why, then," exclaimed Christopher, "I stand upon another footing; but I am a blunt and clumsy Englishman, and I do nothing by innuendoes. I have a fancy for frank specifications."

"I have no hesitation in saying that I

believe we can work together, Mr. Lambert," said the Count.

Christopher stared him full in the eyes, and then put out his hand abruptly. Von Straben accepted it.

"Until that was done," said Christopher, as if a load was off his mind, "I have been waiting to make a proposition." Von Straben stood, the picture of polite interrogation. "The Princess may be averse to this match. Bah! let us speak plainly. I mean his Highness—'Herr Gasten'—may not commend himself."

"Her Highness the Princess," said von Straben, softly, "is a woman."

"Quite so. Well, is she in want of a maid of honor, a lady-in-waiting—whatever they may be? If so, I recommend to your kindly offices on her behalf a very amiable lady, Fräulein Reinart."

It was now von Straben's turn to stare at his companion; but Christopher bore the scrutiny without wavering.

"You think she would be suitable?" inquired the Count, after a long pause.

"I understand that she is of good birth, but I cannot follow your German distinctions. She seems to have plenty of money. It is possible that she would not entertain such an offer. I may say that she is German by nationality."

Von Straben took a turn of the floor, and paused in front of Christopher. "I dare say she would prove a comfort to her Highness," he remarked.

"I have no doubt of it," returned Christopher, confidently.

"Mr. Lambert," said the Count, lightly, "it is possible that you are not unprejudiced."

"I do not claim to be so," said Christopher, promptly. "I admire Fräulein Reinart thoroughly. She is a fine woman and an agreeable companion."

Von Straben's eyes fell away. "I have not heard of any vacancy," he remarked, "but it's always possible that there may be one."

"Everything is possible," said Christopher, sententiously.

Von Straben laughed. "Not quite everything, my friend. For example, it seems impossible to keep a secret from Mr. Lambert."

CHAPTER XI.

CHRISTOPHER refrained with a struggle from paying Fräulein Reinart a visit

even at that late hour of the night. But his sense of decorum prevailed upon him, and he postponed his interview till the morning. Even so, he arrived at the hotel so early that Katarina was not yet in a state to receive him. He had an agreeable conversation when it took place, and both the lady and himself parted upon excellent terms with one another and in great spirits. To Katarina it was a large new step in her social progress; to Christopher, a skilful move in the perilous game he was playing.

Count von Straben had not been wrongly interpreted by Christopher; he was seriously considering the suggestion that this young German woman should be installed in some position at the Court. The proposal, as it chanced, fell in with his own mood quite naturally. The opposition of the Princess to the alliance which Germany was good enough to favor had been so far uncompromising—at least in public. The Grand-Duke wavered—now argued the impossibility of such a match, and then seemed to accept it with a melancholy resignation. The faithful Chancellor, who was a man of caution, and a timid soul to boot, watched his master carefully, was silent before the pleadings of the enemy, and was understood to dwell in private upon the dangers that threatened the state, and the absurdity of hazarding a war with Germany. But the key to the position lay with the Princess herself, and of that von Straben was well aware. His Highness was grown old, and the hand that held the sceptre was very weary, but he nourished a deep affection for his daughter. He would not press upon her a course that was distasteful, and so between the salvation of his duchy and the happiness of his child he drifted irresolutely, wholly unable in his enfeebled state to come to any decision. It was for use in this deadlock that the ingenious and implacable diplomat required a tool; and it appeared to him that the lively and unscrupulous Fräulein Reinart might serve his ends. For this reason he determined to gratify Christopher by employing a person for whom he conceived that young man had an attachment, thus accomplishing two results at a blow. He read (or thought he read) Katarina at a glance, and had determined how far she was trustworthy. He saw that she had a very poor conscience to worry her, noted her

vices of vanity and greed, and relied in some degree also upon her patriotism as a German. He considered, at any rate, that Count von Straben would be able to attach her to the proper cause temporarily, and after that—he cared not a rap what she might think or say or do.

It is no part of this history to inquire by what circuitous ways, or with what arts of pressure or persuasion, von Straben contrived this petty intrigue, but it is quite certain that after the receipt of certain information from Dresden, the position of lady-in-waiting was offered to Fräulein Katarina Wilhelmina von Reinart, daughter of Johann von Reinart of Schesinger, in the kingdom of Saxony, and that it was eagerly accepted by her. The young lady's excitement ran high at this time, and she made no secret of her rapture to Christopher. She bore herself with great dignity, but with a certain little air of appeal which was very charming.

"You have done this for me," she said, impulsively, laying a hand on Christopher's arm, and as quickly withdrawing it. "I do not forget that."

"Madam," said Christopher, impassively polite, "I have my promise to fulfil—a small return for a great service which you once rendered to me."

Katarina made a gesture of impatience, twirling about with a whirl of her skirts. "You talk foolishly," she said. "What I did was nothing; I never pretended it was anything. You rescued me from dirt and poverty, and from the maudlin attentions—" She shrugged her shoulders and looked at him closely. "I will have no more of your promise. I can do what I want myself now. Remember that. I release you, if you will. You are not to bother with me. You have put me in a position to carry on for myself."

Christopher grinned. "You forget," he said, dryly, "that I have my personal pride to consider. I said I would do something, and that I must do."

Katarina's cheeks burned. "You shall do nothing more," she insisted. "I have changed my mind."

"Then you break faith," returned Christopher.

She left him petulantly. But to the Count she was quite another woman, showing in her most worldly and most independent spirit. She gave herself libertine airs, and mocked him; even

while she thanked him for the advancement, she paid him no deference. It might have been that she thought her obligations were due to Christopher alone, and that she had put her faith in him as the controller and assessor of her fortunes. Von Straben considered her, amused, philosophic, and entirely satisfied. According to his aphorism, "frisky steeds kick their heels before cooling them," and he asked no better than these fire-works of triumphant vanity.

It will be manifest that both the Count and Christopher looked to put Katarina to the same use. And yet the latter, at any rate, was somewhat disappointed by the immediate results. For the Princess would make no confidences, and was merely gracious and kindly. Perhaps she was aware that she owed this new lady-in-waiting to Count von Straben and the abominable German party. Katarina, nevertheless, had sharp sight, and was as nimble in her instincts as a cat.

"Her Highness," she declared, "is unhappy. I am sorry to see her so. I would help her, Mr. Lambert, if I knew how. Yet I feel she does not like me. How atrocious these impotent royal airs are!"

"Her Highness," said Christopher, "is pressed to marry a man she detests."

Katarina glanced at him with an odd expression on her face. "And you would help her to resist?" she asked. He nodded simply. "How you will interfere in people's lives, Mr. Lambert!" she said. "I should not have said you had so much sentiment."

"You see how you have misjudged me, Fräulein," he observed.

Katarina laughed. "I think I know you very well," she remarked, "at least as well as the Count, who prides himself upon knowing so much. Well, I'll tell you what—I must use my eyes and ears more sharply, that's all. If I cannot persuade secrets, I must surprise them."

Christopher moved awkwardly, and he felt that his color was growing. This was putting in plain terms what she was employed to be.

"There will be no necessity for that," he said presently.

"Why, mon Dieu! I must bring you some news!" said Katarina.

"I can wait," said he; "meanwhile you may take some to Count von Straben."

"Am I to blow hot or cold?" she inquired, roguishly.

"I must have no hand in this," explained Christopher. "You must barely be understood to see me. It is important that we meet seldom. But we can find means."

"Leave that to me," said Katarina, boldly. "But how am I to meet the Count?"

Christopher reflected. "He must understand that you are creeping into the Princess's secrets," he said at last. "Do not commit yourself, but bear that in mind. You must not see me for a week, and all that time the Princess is wavering, first inclining slowly to submission, then flying out in anger, according as her temper would exhibit such reversals. On such news the Count will be held in suspense."

Katarina was very faithful to her orders. She led the Count a dance between hopes and fears; or at least he professed to fluctuate in spirits. It may not be that he believed all the reports he heard; he may even have distrusted the veracity of his spy. But it is certain that these continuous disappointments wore upon his cheerfulness. He had now taken Christopher frankly into his confidence upon this one point, the marriage of the Princess—at least he had all the appearance of having done so. He discussed the project with his friend, airily, to be sure, and not as if the destinies of nations hung upon it.

"His Highness the Margrave Sigismund of Salzhausen returns from Paris very shortly. You see it would be an admirable match, Mr. Lambert, and would wake up this poor-spirited Dreiburgh. The Margrave is a fine fellow, with artistic tastes. He has built a wonderful opera-house, and clothed it in mirrors—a popular and philanthropic creature. Her Highness would adore him."

"Her Highness seems to be of a different opinion," remarked Christopher, dryly.

"Yes; I am sorry," assented the patient Count. "It would have been so advantageous all round. It would have settled so many difficulties. His Majesty is anxious to bury the hatchet. It is a pity. But a foolish prejudice—some silly tale, perhaps—her Highness is so fastidious."

The Princess was not only fastidious; she was also very reticent. No whisper

of her private thoughts reached Christopher at this time. She wore a grave or smiling face, very sober to look on, and broaching in her eyes a dozen emotions; but she held her tongue, and covered her real feelings in a dignified sweetness. This was Katarina's tale; and as von Straben grew more impatient, Christopher became more anxious. He had as yet no weapon with which to resist the insidious advances of the enemy. He knew that there were daily conferences in the Council House, and the Chancellor went about hanging his head and rubbing his double chin. The Princess made no sign. Perhaps she was trying, in despair, to set back the hour of her surrender; or it may be that she had not yet made up her mind. The Grand-Duke himself, as Christopher gathered, remained impassive, trembling, expectant, waiting for his daughter. The decision of the momentous question hung upon the lips of a girl filled with none too stout a heart, and beleaguered by sentiment. Such was the gossip that crept into the foreign press and found an echo in the imposing commonplaces of a great London paper. The Count exerted himself to the utmost; he even named a day, and offered an ultimatum in the most civil and diplomatic language. There was no mention of the proposed marriage in this document, which merely pressed in the most formal manner for a settlement of the indemnity question; but the interior significance was quite understood. The exchanges in the matter of the marriage had been private between the Grand-Duke and the German envoy, and so the former was aware of the only course which would save his country from a heavy financial impost. So too was Xenia, the poor Princess, and she kept her counsel and her nerve. It was given out that she was indisposed. Von Straben shrugged his shoulders.

"They will never get any further, my friend," he declared, "these women. It is because they feel. But how absurd to feel! It is only necessary to live."

But Christopher was full of unrest himself. It appeared to him important that he should in some way get at the Princess. He wondered if she had thought of his arguments before her in that private boudoir. Although he was not vain enough to suppose that she had recalled his pleading with any interest, he

had been content with his impression at the time. But she was in a stew of emotion, and his words had had an undue advantage. That he admitted, and upon the top of the admission came the reflection that she was not likely to have mended her condition since. Nay, she might have gone from bad to worse. He saw clearly that the pressure upon her would prove too great for her resistance, and that she must in the end capitulate, unless her wavering resolution were fortified by some exterior aid. The trouble was to supply that aid. He trimmed his mind to this, and in the mean time set Katarina once more to work.

Fräulein Reinart, taking her cue, breathed prejudice against the Margrave of Salzhausen. In the most convincing way she crowned him with ridicule, and having stumbled upon the tender spot in her mistress's character, insinuated against the unfortunate young man a very disagreeable career.

"I am told he plays a fiddle," she exclaimed. "What an employment for a man, your Highness! And he owns a troupe of ballet-girls in Paris, it is said. It is when I think of that effeminate and unprofitable Prince that my heart rejoices in the reverend dignity and majesty of his Highness."

And such speeches as these, turning upon nothing but a topic of idle conversation and conveying such a eulogy upon Weser-Dreiburg, seemed to the Princess to merit no rebuke. No doubt she was insensibly influenced by them, seeing that her own conviction in regard to the Margrave was confirmed by the common knowledge.

"Her Highness is more melancholy to-day," Katarina would remark to von Straben. "I fear she is less inclined to the Margrave. She spoke slightly of singers this morning. It was not the words; there was bitterness in the voice."

And to Christopher she broke out gaily: "I can find no more anathemas, my friend. I have poured a broadside into that young man, whom I have never seen. Ach, heaven, but it is so dull! There is no gayety in the Schloss. I would give the world that you should ask me to dinner."

Christopher smiled. "Wait till it is over," he said, "and you shall have fifty dinners."

"I shall be dead of ennui," she said, and retired, laughing and languishing.

She assumed a part admirably, but Christopher was satisfied that he saw through her.

But meanwhile Katarina was preparing the soil on which he was to sow. His object in submitting the Princess to this diligent husbandry was twofold—not only to make ready for himself, but to confirm her in her fears, and so put off the decision as long as possible. Yet upon this side his plans suddenly broke down in the following manner:

Christopher saw the Count periodically, although he had not been set to any new job since his expedition to Salzhause. But von Straben kept him in good temper by appearing to confide in him openly the deepest secrets. There is no doubt that he did now and then communicate information which was by no means public property, but it may safely be assumed that the German was not as ingenuous as he seemed. He had a pleasant knack of buttonholing Christopher for his confidences, and wore the habitual air of one who was glad to get the advice of a shrewd head. If you could credit his manner, it was Christopher who was conferring upon him the favor of opening his ears and giving advice. Now Christopher was too suspicious to be taken in altogether by this piece of conduct; yet he certainly felt an agreeable satisfaction at times; and now and then he was tempted to believe that von Straben had absolutely taken him for a coadjutor in the difficult game he was playing. One evening Christopher visited von Straben's rooms and found him poring thoughtfully over a despatch. He was unusually affected from his impassive *sang-froid*.

"It is useless," he exclaimed, after he had greeted his guest. "I will parley no longer. I cannot afford to lose a point. See, my friend, I am blamed, even I, who have been so industrious, so kindly." His eyes rested on the document with a frown, and then he folded it abruptly, and looked up, smiling. "You cannot understand my annoyance? Well, look you, Mr. Lambert, I will stand it no more." He rose, put on his coat, and excused himself; he was bound for the Grand-Duke in a great hurry. Obviously there was news of importance in his despatch, and possibly he spoke the truth to Christopher out of indifference for a piece of gossip that must sooner or later be current. Indeed, the fatal news fell upon

Christopher with something like a blow next day when he encountered Katarina by appointment. The Princess had consented; that was the rumor of the Court. She had had an audience of his Highness early in the morning; it had endured for close on two hours; a maid had surprised her weeping, and she had dried her eyes and drawn herself haughtily to her full stature. The palace was buzzing with the news like a summer garden with bees. Whence the information filtered none could tell, but even the dates were appointed, by report, for the signing of the contract and for the ceremony itself. And so once again the affairs of state had triumphed over the insignificant interests of the individual.

Christopher Lambert was by no means abashed by the tale which Fräulein Reinart poured into his ears. So far he had moved among the transactions of these intrigues like any common mortal with sharp wits, a cool head, and excellent address. He had made use of his personal qualifications as a man; he had never appeared in the character of a millionaire. It was time that his money was brought into use, and he had already designed a plot in which it should figure. As Katarina and he talked on the lower terrace of the Schloss gardens under the late spring moon, embowered in the darkness of the encircling trees, he laid her instructions before her shortly and sharply. It was urgent that he should see the Princess; yet certainly he had no excuse to ask the favor of an audience. If he had conceived the girl at all properly, she would surely deny him, in the resignation of her despair or in her singular pride. Perhaps even she would fail to recall him, and would remember nothing of his former sermon.

"There must be no failure," he enjoined upon Katarina, severely. "I trust you. The action passes now into my hands."

Katarina vowed obedience; she was quick-witted, as he knew, and he left her with confidence. As he stole up the borders of the formal garden between the aucubas, the light of heaven flowed softly upon a tall figure on the upper terrace. He recognized it at a glance for the Princess. His way led him close beside her where she stood, her face turned towards the twinkling lights, her chin thrust a little forward on the palm of her hand as

she leaned upon the marble coping. The lustre of the moon enveloped her. The direction of her gaze lay across the roofs of the city, the circumambient Weser, and the leagues of forest that stretched towards Erwald. Christopher paused in the pathway and regarded her. No particular of her dress was visible, but all was swallowed in the shadows of the terrace. Out into the twilight bent a tall and gracious figure, and the face glowed with luminous sadness. Not otherwise, he reflected, might some beleaguered princess of fantasia stand and watch from her solitariness and accustomed haunt, praying for help with mute eyes, offering dumb signals appealingly across a distance, and desperate of succor. She had sacrificed her birthright as a woman, and there was none to prevent or refuse that great surrender. Christopher's heart moved with a feeling of compassion. The picture showed him its tragic side. Suddenly and under the gleam of his imagination the image of the martyr was projected upon his fancy. Her country betrayed her; it had selfish need of her. As he stood, considering her in this altered mood, his thoughts took the field with hers. His mind travelled with his eyes across the houses of the sleeping town, over the murmuring river, and beyond those silent woods to the confines of Erwald. It might almost have been, he thought, as if she were keeping a watch upon that territory, expecting some help to issue from the gates of Arnholz. But no horseman was visible to the lonely sentinel, speeding for Dreiburg. The night returned her no answer or encouragement, merely shook itself, breathed its inanimate vows, and settled into circumspect darkness.

Christopher turned and proceeded on his way, and looking back, beheld the shadows of the night seize and engross the stooping girl. But that vision of vigil did not leave his mind; it captured his fancy. "She has appealed towards Erwald," he said to himself. "It is from Erwald that her prayer shall be answered."

Our adventurer made his dispositions during the following day with the decision and resource of a general.

But late in the afternoon the main hinge of his plan was still to set. He had gathered some ideas as to the places frequented by Fritz, Katarina's old lover,

but so far he had been unable to lay his hands upon that melancholy swash-buckler. His industry was, however, destined to meet its reward, for he at last encountered Fritz, a good deal dishevelled and not a little intoxicated, at the mouth of a small inn in the lower portion of the city. The man would have passed him with a stiff and somewhat surly salute, but Christopher stopped him.

"Ah, Herr Polnitz," he broke out, pleasantly, "I have not seen you for some time. I was wondering where to find you. You should have left your address. I have news for you. It is well we are met."

Fritz stared and uttered a jovial laugh. "Then if the news be good, we will have a bottle on it—my faith, yes," said he.

"That is for you to judge," remarked Christopher, and followed his companion, without further ceremony, into the tavern.

"You think," began Fritz, loudly, "that I am breaking my heart about that devil of a woman. Well, you're wrong, then. I let no wenches interfere with my life, not I. She was a handsome, strapping girl, too; but, my God! she wheedled one! If you will believe me, when I first met her I had no more notion of picking up with her than you yourself. I looked upon it as a jest: that is how I considered it. But she was a wheedler, to be sure. She enticed you. You could never be facing the one way for five minutes. It is a good service to be rid of her;" and Fritz drained his pot of lager-beer and laughed.

"I am glad to see you have learned wisdom," said Christopher. "A woman is never worth the pains we waste upon her, and this girl—I do not suppose she was worthy of you."

"That she was not," exclaimed Fritz, complacently.

"And yet," observed the other, scrutinizing him critically, "I'll wager your tongue is braver than your heart. If you ask me, you protest too strongly. I think you have a weakness for the girl."

Fritz swaggered. "Not I," he cried, "and you've no right to say so. I cannot afford to throw away my time upon a heartless hussy."

"Ah, well," said Christopher, with a nod, "I am glad to see you recovered. I congratulate you. So my news is of no importance now."

But Fritz was sober enough to take alarm at this.

"What is this?" he asked. "You had some news for me. Is it about Katarina? Heavens, man, I wish her well. I should like to hear of her. What do you know?"

"Why," said Christopher, "I scarcely know whether you should be pleased or disappointed by my information. In one way, I think you should be prepared to rejoice, for Fräulein Reinart has got on, and I believe you are generous."

"No one has ever accused me of meanness," boasted Fritz. "I am glad if she is getting up in the world. But where is she?"

"In Dreiburg itself," said Christopher. "She holds a position in the Grand-Duke's household."

Fritz started. "What!" he cried. "Katarina in the Schloss! Why, how comes this?"

"I have seen her," said Christopher. "I cannot solve your riddles. You must ask her. She inherited some money, did she not? Well, she may have some influence also now. But I have seen her. She is quite a great lady."

Fritz was silent, and now very sober. He knit his heavy brows and considered. This hot-tempered, roistering, sentimental braggart nourished in his heart what was a sincere and even a fanatical affection for his mistress. His sluggard wits were slowly conceiving the situation. Christopher watched him; he had not come here and spent all these hours in hunting up Fritz to talk about Katarina.

"If I thought there was any one—" began the fellow, slowly.

"Pooh! there is no one. She is as honest as yourself," said Christopher.

Fritz colored. "Oh, a man is very different," he said. "But I wish Katarina well. I do not grudge her good fortune. She has used me ill, but," he shrugged his shoulders, "a man's back is broad enough."

"True," remarked Christopher. "He can amuse himself somehow."

"Oh, there's not much amusement," pretended Fritz. "He can drown care; that's all. He can get rid of the pangs if he makes an effort." He sighed. "Well, we will drink to Katarina," and raised his mug.

Christopher studied him intently; he wondered if he might venture upon his proposal without exciting the other's ani-

mosity and suspicions. But he was certain that he knew his man, and he relied upon the swaggering vanity. Fritz caught the gray eyes fastened attentively upon him and appearing to measure him up.

"I was thinking that you were a likely man for an emergency, Herr Polnitz," explained the Englishman. "You are strong and active. You would be a valuable fellow at a pinch."

"I am very well," murmured Fritz, bashfully.

"Come, then, what do you say if I give you a chance to renew your acquaintance with Fräulein Reinart?" said Christopher.

Fritz turned red, took a pull at his beer, and endeavored to assume an indifferent behavior. "It would be very kind of you," he returned. "But I would hesitate to put you about."

"A long conversation?" suggested Christopher.

Fritz evidently wavered. Christopher resolved to throw all his weights into the scale.

"And something else to boot," he went on, lowering his voice. "Herr Polnitz, I let you into a secret. I have a favor to ask from you."

He whispered into Fritz's ear. The German started, half rose from his seat, opened his mouth, while upon his face grew an expression of alarm.

"It is impossible," he cried. "You are mad."

Christopher glanced about the room, fearing that they would attract the notice of strangers. "There is no harm," he explained. "I have told you that I mean well."

"I would not have a hair of her head injured," cried Fritz, storming. "I am a loyal man myself."

"Pooh!" said Christopher. "You make a grave fuss. After all, if I wish to figure heroically it is a harmless weakness, for which I am willing to pay. Besides, I will promise you a long talk with Fräulein Katarina."

Fritz looked the picture of stupid embarrassment. It was plain he was torn both ways.

"I am sure," added Christopher, suavely, "that it is not fear holds you back. If it were fear, why of course that is another matter."

"I am not afraid," said Fritz, sullenly. "But I am no bully to frighten women."

"We are going to frighten none," Christopher assured him. "Trust me for that. I am willing to pay for my freaks. This one is harmless; remember that I am an Englishman."

"That is true," replied Fritz. "Well, if I do as you say, it will be to see Katarina. And if you play me false—"

"My dear sir," said Christopher, laughing. "I give you leave to split me."

CHAPTER XII.

THE year had moved slowly into May, and the sun shone with the zeal of summer. Far away under the horizon of the southeast the still high mountains between Salzhausen and the outlying skirts of the great German Empire showed, wrapped in a faint dazzle of blue mist. The air blew clear and fresh across the lowlands of Weser-Dreiburg, bringing strength into the green corn upon the farms, and flooding the streets of the little capital with the checkers of the wavering lindens. Upon this bright morning her Highness the Princess Xenia rose after a night of broken sleep, and looked forth with melancholy eyes through a window upon the sun-swept country below. That shining prospect presently struck new hope into her; new feelings animated her heart; and the current of her blood ran strongly. She was young, and she had a wholesome mind; above all, she owned a temper of some imagination, and it was impossible to resist the influences of this early summer scene. For the time she had forgotten the Palace and her surroundings, her mind ceased to brood upon her abominable fate, and sheer delight of the beautiful air and the glorious color filled her soul. She basked in the content of it; she stood like a young animal, of a piece with these natural environs of her spirit.

Later in the day the Princess and her retinue rode forth by the eastern gate towards Bleiden-upon-the-Hill, where Leopold X. had built himself a pretty summer house in the close of the eighteenth century. This dainty little country house was small and unceremonious in aspect. It was the custom of the Grand-Duke to spend a week or two together in its privacy, and until recently he had been wont to sleep in Bleiden, and drive the six miles into Dreiburg in the morning. But he was grown now too old and infirm to take these spirited pleasures, and pre-

ferred to sleep where he dined and conducted his affairs. The Princess, however, was in the habit of using the house at Bleiden, finding it a convenient refuge from the insincerities and vanities of the Court. The house itself lies in the heart of a large park thickly scattered with trees, and is set hard by a pretty village and upon the edge of a bountiful champagne. Hither Xenia was driven on this fine day, partly by the smiling allurements of the weather, and in part because she had developed a distaste for the huckstering transactions of the Court, and desired to be at peace and to meditate on her tragic case.

Abandoned to the charm of the rural scenes, and to the seductions of that magic day, she betook herself late in the afternoon, in the company of Katarina, for a walk in the park. The timber was very noble, and in the great open spaces of green grass the bracken had thrust up its hands and opened its fingers, gently. Towards the borders of the park the trees grew closer, and, huddled in a little populous assembly, formed a small wood or copse. In this the Princess and her maid wandered.

Some time after the departure of her Highness from Dreiburg, two men issued, riding, from the eastern gate of the town, and sticking the spurs into their horses, took the road for Bleiden. They parted within half a mile of the village, after an earnest consultation, and the taller rode on alone, and entering the tiny street, ordered a breakfast at the inn. Here, shortly after the meal was over, arrived a messenger with a note, inscribed in a feminine hand and smelling of some rich scent. When this had been read, the guest dismissed the messenger with a present, and, his face marked with lively satisfaction, ordered his horse and rode off, remarking to the innkeeper that he was gone to survey the neighboring country, and would return. An hour later, sure enough, he got back, and afterwards did not again venture from the village, but chatted and talked affably with the visitors in the hostelry, ate and drank comfortably, until it was five o'clock, when, leisurely calling for his horse, he announced his intention of returning to Dreiburg.

At half past five, Christopher—for the identity of this traveller has no doubt been guessed—had reach a piece of the

park of Bleiden which lay farthest from the village and on the margin of a wooded country. Here he reined in, and concealing himself and his horse in a thicket, waited.

Meanwhile the Princess, who had been walking, plunged in thought, had reached with her companion a small arbor built in the thick of the patch of wood. The sun was fast westering and the sky was aflame with gold. Some magic in that declining orb touched her insensibly, and of a sudden the spectre of her misery returned. So surely as the light was sailing out of heaven and would soon leave the earth struck dark and cold, so certainly there crept upon her the forebodings she had lately entertained. Had she been either stronger or less sensitive, she would not have suffered under this grievous disappointment. But Xenia was at once too imaginative and too tender not to shrink from a fortune which might have pleased or at least contented a baser spirit, and yet strong enough to hide her real emotions and suffer.

In the midst of these unpleasant thoughts she was aware of a noise, of the bracken about her that was rudely shaken, and then of a loud guffaw, and the red, dissolute face of a grinning man emerged through the parted bushes close by. The Princess started, and glanced round her for Katarina, but that young lady, seeing her mistress so deeply involved in thought, had strolled down the pathway, and had vanished into the wood. A thrill of fear assailed the Princess. She rose from her seat, and gazing steadily at the intruder, would have scared him by her haughty demeanor. But he had the air of a man in drink, and the only result of her boldness was to encourage his advance. The fellow pushed through the bushes, and striding forward with a swaggering gait, confronted the Princess. She opened her mouth, moistening her lips.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded, bravely; and as the fellow kept silence, continuing to gain upon her, she asked again, with less firmness, "What do you want?"

"I want you," gurgled the man, and sprang forward as though greedily to clutch his victim to him.

The Princess uttered a scream and started backward, and upon the instant, even simultaneously, if she had been able

to realize it, a voice was heard shouting at hand.

"You scoundrel!" it cried, and the noise of a precipitate rush sounded upon the scene. The next moment, and behold this presumptuous and impudent assailant scrambling at a fine speed through the bracken, and disappearing among the bushes, with Christopher Lambert on his heels, shouting angrily.

The Princess waited, trembling in her limbs, but holding herself upright, until the return of her rescuer. He came back flushed and scratched by his advance among the thorns, but, to one who observed narrowly, wearing a very contented appearance.

"I trust your Highness is none the worse," he said, with a display of anxiety.

The Princess shook her head. "I thank you, no," she answered. "I am very grateful to you. You came in time to—" A light of recognition sparkled in her eyes. "It is Mr. Lambert?"

Christopher bowed. "Who is willingly at your service whenever he can be of help," he said, gravely.

The Princess turned her face from him: she was still agitated, but she managed to control her emotions. The surprise of this foreigner's appearance startled her even from her previous terrors.

"You have helped me very much," she observed, with an uncomfortable laugh. "It seems I am to be always in your debt. These drunken creatures—"

"The man has escaped," said he. "I hope he will be caught. I am sorry that I was not quick enough; but the wood is very close."

"Oh, I am not vengeful," returned Xenia, calmly. "I would not it happened otherwise. No doubt he was drunk."

"A tipsy traveller," assented Christopher, "mistaking your Highness, no doubt, for some maid of the house. They have no eyes, in liquor, and the gloom of the shade would encourage the mistake."

The Princess laughed. "Oh, pray do not explain away your apology for the fellow," she said. "I assure you it is very likely. Why should I not be taken for a maid?" She looked at him with smiling tranquillity. "I think, Mr. Lambert," she added, "that you must be given to explanations, for, if I remember aright, I have had to listen to them before."

"If I have bored your Highness," said Christopher, quickly, "I ask a thousand pardons. But your Highness will do me the justice to admit that on neither occasion have I trespassed with intention. The chance has twice exposed you to the tedium of my prosing."

"Come, sir," said she, lightly, "you take a little jest too gravely; and I must remind you that I am deeply in your debt."

"I would that I might persuade your Highness to plunge deeper," said Christopher, earnestly.

"My faith," said Xenia, smiling, "but I have no desire to sweat under so onerous a burden."

"Ah! then you do me wrong," said he. "That is to suppose that I would exact some interest from you."

"The world lends nothing for nothing," remarked Xenia, carelessly.

Christopher, though he was warming to the encounter, was unduly chafed by these devious and polite approaches. He was positively irritated to consider that this woman held him back from his plans, and that her will must be suborned with care and patience ere he could move a step. This was the feeling in the background of his mind that pricked him boldly forward now.

"My interest," he said, gently, "is the interest of an afflicted nation and a suffering woman."

The Princess looked up at him, dropped her eyes, and then stirred visibly, as if to move away. But she spoke, instead, somewhat scornfully:

"You are fortunate to have your feelings so accessible. I find my own country quite sufficient for my pity."

"My country has no need of my sympathies," responded Christopher, coldly, "nor of my aid. But I think you look at me ungenerously. If I lay my heart at the feet of Weser-Dreiburg, it is not your Highness that should tread upon it."

"No; you are right," said the Princess, quickly. "I own I am at fault. I ask your pardon. Mr. Lambert, I wish you good-day."

Christopher took a step towards her. "Stay!" he commanded, in his most formidable voice. "I will not have your Highness so refuse the only offer of assistance which may avail her."

"It seems," said she, with a tiny angry laugh, "that I am rescued from the

tramp but to be intimidated by my rescuer. I but exchange one fate for another."

"You shall exchange a fate which is distasteful to you for one that leaves you free and self-respecting," said Christopher, bending his brows upon her and fixing her with his zealous eyes.

Xenia's breath came faster, and her fingers twisted the one ring upon her hand.

"Mr. Lambert, these are heroics," she exclaimed. The descending sun gleamed through the avenues of oak and struck upon the sword between them. It dazzled Xenia's eyes, flooding her face with gold. Christopher stood watching her, passing her features under rigorous scrutiny, and striving to peer into the workings of her mind. The Princess herself, flushed and irritated as she was, experienced a sudden return of melancholy. She was more moved than she seemed by the remarkable effrontery of the stranger, by his self-confidence, by his frank blunt statements. After all, she was merely a girl, and whatever princely cloak she might assume to defend her feminine weakness, that frailty must still remain in the knowledge of the philosopher. The face of pride she showed, the presentment of haughty anger, her glittering eyes, and the scornful posture of her lips—all these appeared to Christopher to be exhibitions of the sex, charming artifices, beyond doubt, but childish phenomena, to be borne with, to be smiled at, to be coaxed and cozened away by various devices. So he was not at all alarmed or cast down by her continuous fencing with him. Even her chill politeness did not disappoint him. He kept an earnest face, watched his opportunity, and like a bulldog held his ground.

"You think," said he, "that I am making an empty boast. I ask your Highness to look in my face. Do you see there any sign of levity or any signal of weakness? I am no demi-god to undertake the impossible. I am not even a strong man, it may be. But this I am, and this I lay claim to being—a man who never offers unless it is in his power to give, and one who would think shame to dally with the hopes of the desperate."

The Princess opened her mouth, but no words came. She stood there, on that little patch of greensward, between the great boles of the oak-trees—a slim, tall girl with tremulous lips and a beating

heart. The sincerity of the man who had dared to stay her departure arrested her, but she was looking not at him, but through the fresh green leaves towards the setting sun.

"I beseech your Highness," went on Christopher in his low quick voice, "to make your decision with care, to realize that you are at the parting of the ways. This is no time to build up the conventional barriers between yourself and one that offers you help. On the contrary, those that remain should surely be overleaped. It may be that you stand facing the ruin of all your hopes, of all your dreams. You yourself know best. At least I know that you contemplate a course which carries with it the destruction of the country that you love. This, then, should give you pause, if there are no other arguments; and in the name of Heaven I assure you that it is that motive rather than any pleadings that touch your Highness's person that makes me now, as once before, a trespasser upon your patience, that incites me to such boldness; and that inspires me with indifference as to your just anger."

Xenia moved, and caught her breath ever so gently. "You speak very certainly, sir," she answered, in a broken voice. "I cannot share your confidence. The die is cast."

In an instant the great volume of Christopher's flowing energies rolled in a tide through the breach.

"Madam," he said, "I will remind you of what I have professed. I do not trifle with you. I have a plan."

"A plan!" she echoed.

"Yes," he said, briskly, "and one that only needs your assent to bring down this impudent intrigue of the white heads at Berlin in a dusty ruin."

"You speak in riddles," said Xenia, gazing on him intently.

"That I shall not long," exclaimed he. "Your Highness knows how the Grand-Duke is placed, how a game of seesaw is played by the imperial bully with indemnities and cessions of territory, threats and cajoleries."

"I should know that well enough," said Xenia, with a sigh.

"What, then, is the object of this remarkable design, by which the reigning houses of Weser-Dreiburg and Salzhausen are to be united? Why, it is to make both into a comfortable sandwich for the

Kaiser's maw, no less. Germany and Austria have long cast their greedy eyes on this prosperous and peaceful state. Prince Sigismund is Germany's puppet, and Austria's is Prince Albrecht."

He paused. Xenia's countenance showed no change, only a wondering and eager attention. "It would be a dangerous move for the Grand-Duchy to throw in her lot with either of these princes. I ask you what remains but to escape the abominable designs of these treacherous emperors by anticipating them?"

"You mean—" asked the Princess, breathing hard.

"I mean that if your Highness yield to pressure, Weser-Dreiburg is lost; but if you will resist, you will save her soul alive."

"It is too late; it is too late!" exclaimed the Princess, bitterly. "The die is cast. What hope could I have of resistance?"

"It is no light matter to cross the purposes of princes," said Christopher, gently. "And the task falls all the harder if you are so weakly supported."

"Supported!" she said, mournfully. "I have had no support. I have had their forces united against me."

"You cannot stand alone," he observed.

"I can do nothing," said Xenia, with sudden resignation.

"On the contrary, madam," interrupted Christopher, "the solution is wholly in your hands, and may be achieved with the poor external aid of such a one as myself."

"What would you have me do?" she inquired, quickly.

"I would have you put yourself beyond the reach of their intrigues, to step off the chess-board," he replied. "Grasp your fate in your own hands. It is worth the effort."

"You would ask me to run?" she asked, wondering.

"I would plead with you that you should marry," he corrected.

A spring of color rose in her face. "It is a desperate remedy you urge," she said, with some hesitation. "I have hardly the desire to contemplate the hazard."

"Pardon me," said Christopher, with a bow, "I was not thinking of your Highness, but of Weser-Dreiburg."

The blush died in her cheeks, and she

faced the distance with a troubled aspect. Christopher watched her in silence. It seemed to him that he was a spectator of that intestine struggle; but he looked on without emotion, merely with a hope that he had said enough. Presently she turned, and her voice, breaking very slightly, spoke with a little mockery in her tones.

"I dare say, Mr. Lambert, you have found the happy bridegroom."

"Policy points one way," he observed, sententiously. "If I am wrong, correct me. There is no Protestant house outside Germany available, and Germany is impossible. The most heroic resistance to the encroachments of the foreigner has been made by his Highness the Prince of Erwald."

Xenia moved her head as if with a gesture of impatience.

"If your Highness will consider," went on Christopher, "this project may seem not a thing to be lightly blown aside by a personal whim, but a solid piece of policy, which alone can redeem the Grand-Duchy. For my part, I am not considering your Highness in the question, and I doubt not that your Highness would desire to be neglected. I am no citizen of Dreiburg, not even a domiciled stranger in your country, but I confess that my heart warms to this little patch of garden on the back parts of Europe, predestined as the spoil and tit-bit of two rapacious and unfriendly powers. Madam, it would be a master-stroke to thwart them. They press upon you, they coerce you, they whisper their ultimatums in your private councils; but think you what a revenge your Highness might take for these browbeatings of your country, with what a chagrin they would learn of your courage and your resolution, and in what a ruin their fine plots would topple and fall! This little state has a history of which it may well be proud; its chronicles are inscribed on the rolls of fame, unassailed. Weser-Dreiburg has kept its integrity through the better part of a thousand years. And what has enabled it to do so? I need not remind your Highness of the motto of the great Duke Leopold, that text upon which the house of Geisenthurm has framed its conduct and its ambitions these many hundred years—

Per arma per virtutem.

That, madam, is a proud and stately boast

on the part of your royal house. And, indeed, I believe it to be well justified. Who has not thrilled at the tale of Rudolph, the fourth Duke, before the Saracen city? Or, what member of that illustrious house could fail to keep in mind the great traditions of the first Leopold, who saved his beloved country at the sacrifice of his own life? It is the voices of these ascendants I seem to hear now crying about the ancient city; it is their lamentations, their despair, that I and other friends of the Grand-Duchy find it in our hearts to pity; it is their spirit and their unselfishness that should at this moment actuate your Highness."

His low, deep voice, which rang very eloquently in that tender twilight, ceased suddenly, and Xenia was conscious of a profound silence. His pleading had moved her, and her impulsive nature excited her to answer, yet she answered sadly enough:

"You mistake me, sir; it is not of myself that I am thinking. I am a daughter of those Geisenthurms of whom you spoke, and I pray to Heaven that I am not unworthy of my lineage. But how would this plan you propose accomplish its purpose? Weser-Dreiburg would still be in the squeeze of Germany. To pay the indemnity would be ruin."

"That, madam," said Christopher, quickly, "is part of my plan. Rest assured that I am not playing the coquette with words. I shall undertake that no trouble comes through that. Come, your Highness, we want a *coup d'état*. Assent to the betrothal I have suggested, and leave the rest to me. I will forfeit my head if we are not clear of the German envoy forty-eight hours later."

The Princess stared at him with wonder, a light of admiration growing in her eyes. He looked so stark, so confident, that her weak and overstrained nature took rest in him.

"But the Grand-Duke, my father—" she began.

"Ah, madam," said he, sadly, "his Highness is old, and is in the hands of feeble counsellors. But they too shall give us leave. Nay, the whole plan is no good unless it be countersigned by them. But wait; we must make haste slowly. No whisper must reach the Court until we are prepared. I know these doctors of wisdom; they prevaricate, they temporize, they vacillate. The only way to use

them is to act first and confess afterwards."

"What will you do?" she said, with animation.

"I shall ride at once to Prince Karl of Erwald," returned Christopher, promptly. "Within three days I shall be back, and all I ask is that, if it be necessary, you will sign your name to a letter. Come, your Highness must not look so frightened. You shall be cognizant of all the moves. I shall take none without you."

"But the Margrave—" broke in Xenia, suddenly, her face falling. "He is to come— He—"

"Ah!" said Christopher, reflecting. "Yes, we must not forget him. Well, I should like to know when he is to arrive."

"It is within a fortnight," answered Xenia, breathlessly.

"Come, that will be plenty of time," said he, cheerfully; "we shall be ready for him. Your Highness need have no fears. But I must have the exact date. And now I see your Highness's lady-in-waiting. I will leave you in her hands. Perhaps you might send me word by her. I make no doubt that she is faithful to you, since she must know you."

Christopher bowed low over this tiny compliment as he spoke, and ceremoniously took his leave, but as rapidly as possible, and ere the Princess could change her mind if she had desired to do so. He leaped over a fallen bough, and passed by Katarina, who was emerging from the undergrowth. He raised his hat.

"Thank you, Fräulein," said he. "You will have a message from the Princess for me."

Katarina raised her eyebrows. "Ah, Heaven!" she said, impatiently, "what a time you have been! You have exposed me to the mercies of that boor. He said you promised him. I can never forgive you. Faugh! I detest him! A thousand thanks, monsieur." And with this impertinence and a mocking curtsy she was gone.

Christopher looked after her, meditating. He had a strong hold upon this frivolous young woman, but he came to the conclusion that it was none too strong. He resolved that immediately this business was accomplished he would give her her discharge, honorably and politely, but with due firmness.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

THE WRATH OF THE ZUYDER ZEE.

BY THOMAS A. JANVIER.

I.

OLD JAAP VISSER was mad. Out there on the island of Marken, in the Zuyder Zee, he was the one madman, and a curiosity. The little boys—all born web-footed, and eager as soon as they could walk to toddle off on their stout little Dutch legs and take to the water—used to run after him and jeer at him. An underlying fear gave zest to this amusement. The older of them knew that he could lay a strange binding curse upon people. The younger of them, resolving this concept into simpler terms, knew that he could say something that would hurt more than a spanking; and that would keep on hurting, in some unexplained but dreadful way, beyond the sting of the worst spanking that ever they had known. Therefore, while they jeered, they jeered circumspectly. Out in the open—on the brick-paved pathways which

traverse the low marsh-land and unite the little knolls on which are the villages: the Hafenbeurt (where the harbor is), the Kerkehof, and the Kesbeurt—butter would not melt in their small Dutch mouths when they met him. But when they had him at their mercy among the houses of one or another of the villages things went differently. Then they would yell "Old Jaap!" "Mad old Jaap!" after him—and as he turned upon them would whip off their sabots, that they might run the more lightly, and would dash around corners into safety: with delightful thrills of dread running through their small scampish bodies at the thought of the curse that certainly was flying after them, and that certainly would make them no better than dead jelly-fish if they did not get around the corner in time to ward it off! And old Jaap would be left free for a moment from his tormentors, bran-