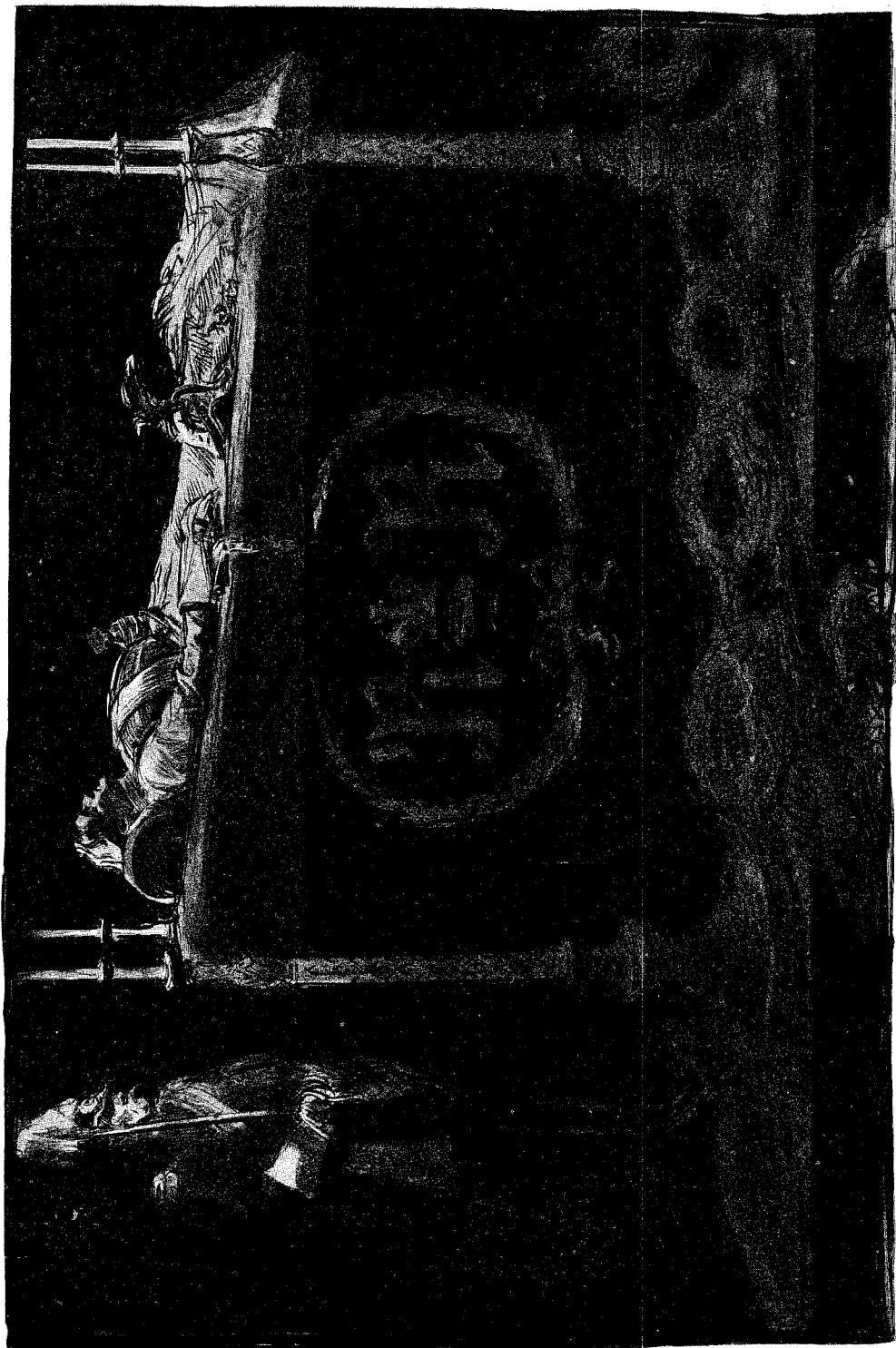
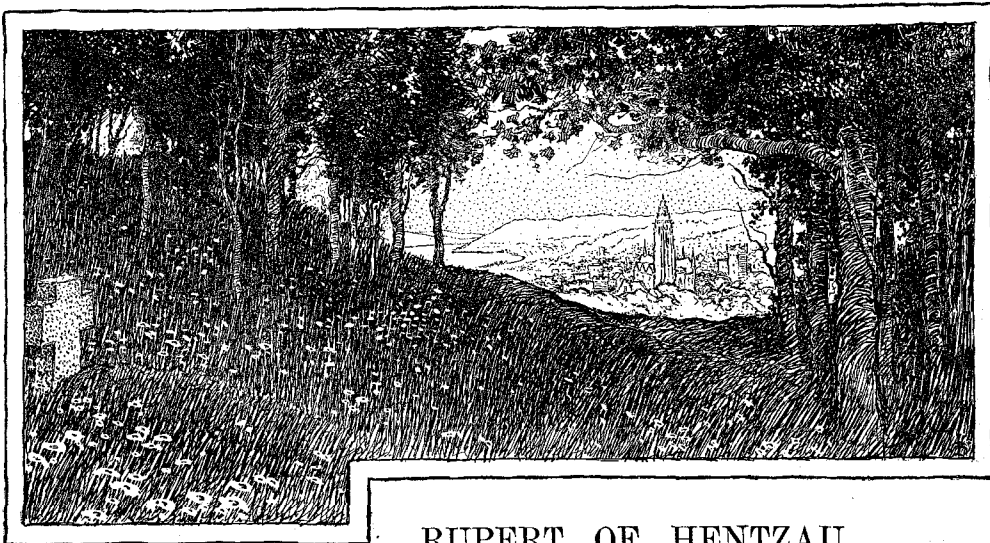


DRAWN BY CHARLES DANA GIBSON.



See page 279.

“THE DECISION OF HEAVEN.”



RUPERT OF HENTZAU.

FROM THE MEMOIRS OF FRITZ VON TARLENHEIM.

BY ANTHONY HOPE.

WITH FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHARLES DANA GIBSON.

(Concluded.)

CHAPTER XIX.—*Continued.*

FOR OUR LOVE AND HER HONOR.

SAPT finished his lesson or his story. A sob burst from the queen, and she hid her face in her hands. Bernenstein and I, amazed at this strange tale, scarcely understanding whether it were jest or earnest, stood staring stupidly at Sapt. Then I, overcome by the strange thing, turned half-foolish by the bizarre mingling of comedy and impressiveness in Sapt's rendering of it, plucked him by the sleeve, and asked, with something between a laugh and a gasp:

"Who had that other corpse been, Constable?"

He turned his small, keen eyes on me in persistent gravity and unflinching effrontery.

"A Mr. Rassendyll, a friend of the king's, who with his servant James was awaiting his Majesty's return from Strelsau. His servant here is ready to start for England, to tell Mr. Rassendyll's relatives the news."

The queen had begun to listen before

now; her eyes were fixed on Sapt, and she had stretched out one arm to him, as if imploring him to read her his riddle. But a few words had in truth declared his device plainly enough in all its simplicity. Rudolf Rassendyll was dead, his body burnt to a cinder, and the king was alive, whole, and on his throne in Strelsau. Thus had Sapt caught from James, the servant, the infection of his madness, and had fulfilled in action the strange imagination which the little man had unfolded to him in order to pass their idle hours at the lodge.

Suddenly Mr. Rassendyll spoke in clear, short tones.

"This is all a lie, Sapt," said he, and his lips curled in contemptuous amusement.

"It's no lie that the lodge is burnt, and the bodies in it, and that half a hundred of the peasants know it, and that no man could tell the body for the king's. As for the rest, it is a lie. But I think the truth in it is enough to serve."

The two men stood facing one another with defiant eyes. Rudolf had caught the meaning of the great and audacious trick which Sapt and his companion had played. It was impossible now to bring the king's body to

Strelsau; it seemed no less impossible to declare that the man burnt in the lodge was the king. Thus Sapt had forced Rudolf's hand; he had been inspired by the same vision as we, and endowed with more unshrinking boldness. But when I saw how Rudolf looked at him, I did not know but that they would go from the queen's presence set on a deadly quarrel. Mr. Rassendyll, however, mastered his temper.

"You're all bent on having me a rascal," he said coldly. "Fritz and Bernenstein here urge me; you, Sapt, try to force me. James, there, is in the plot, for all I know."

"I suggested it, sir," said James, not defiantly or with disrespect, but as if in simple dutiful obedience to his master's implied question.

"As I thought—all of you! Well, I won't be forced. I see now that there's no way out of this affair, save one. That one I'll follow."

We none of us spoke, but waited till he should be pleased to continue.

"Of the queen's letter I need say nothing and will say nothing," he pursued. "But I will tell them that I'm not the king, but Rudolf Rassendyll, and that I played the king only in order to serve the queen and punish Rupert of Hentzau. That will serve, and it will cut this net of Sapt's from about my limbs."

He spoke firmly and coldly; so that when I looked at him I was amazed to see how his lips twitched and that his forehead was moist with sweat. Then I understood what a sudden, swift, and fearful struggle he had suffered, and how the great temptation had wrung and tortured him: before he, victorious, had set the thing behind him. I went to him and clasped his hand: this action of mine seemed to soften him.

"Sapt, Sapt," he said, "you almost made a rogue of me!"

Sapt did not respond to his gentler mood. He had been pacing angrily up and down the room. Now he stopped abruptly before Rudolf, and pointed with his finger at the queen.

"I make a rogue of you?" he exclaimed. "And what do you make of our queen, whom we all serve? What does this truth that you'll tell make of her? Haven't I heard how she greeted you before all Strelsau as her husband and her love? Will they believe that she didn't know her husband? Ay, you may show yourself, you may say they didn't know you. Will they believe she

didn't? Was the king's ring on your finger? Where is it? And how comes Mr. Rassendyll to be at Fritz von Tarlenheim's for hours with the queen, when the king is at his hunting-lodge? A king has died already, and two men besides, to save a word against her. And you—you'll be the man to set every tongue in Strelsau talking, and every finger pointing in suspicion at her!"

Rudolf made no answer. When Sapt had first uttered the queen's name, he had drawn near and let his hand fall over the back of her chair. She put hers up to meet it, and so they remained. But I saw that Rudolf's face had gone very pale.

"And we, your friends?" pursued Sapt. "For we've stood by you as we've stood by the queen, by God we have—Fritz, and young Bernenstein here, and I. If this truth's told, who'll believe that we were loyal to the king, that we didn't know, that we weren't accomplices in the tricking of the king—maybe, in his murder? Ah, Rudolf Rassendyll, God preserve me from a conscience that won't let me be true to the woman I love, or to the friends who love me!"

I had never seen the old fellow so moved; he carried me with him, as he carried Bernenstein. I know now that we were too ready to be convinced; rather that, borne along by our passionate desire, we needed no convincing at all. His excited appeal seemed to us an argument. At least the danger to the queen, on which he dwelt, was real and true and great.

Then a sudden change came over him. He caught Rudolf's hand and spoke to him again in a low, broken voice, an unwonted softness transforming his harsh tones.

"Lad," he said, "don't say no. Here's the finest lady alive sick for her lover, and the finest country in the world sick for its true king, and the best friends—ay, by heaven, the best friends—man ever had, sick to call you master. I know nothing about your conscience; but this I know: the king's dead, and the place is empty; and I don't see what Almighty God sent you here for unless it was to fill it. Come, lad—for our love and her honor! While he was alive I'd have killed you sooner than let you take it. He's dead. Now—for our love and her honor, lad!"

I do not know what thoughts passed in Mr. Rassendyll's mind. His face was set and rigid. He made no sign when Sapt finished, but stood as he was, motionless, for a long while. Then he slowly bent his head and

looked down into the queen's eyes. For a while she sat looking back into his. Then, carried away by the wild hope of immediate joy, and by her love for him and her pride in the place he was offered, she sprang up and threw herself at his feet, crying:

"Yes, yes! For my sake, Rudolf—for my sake!"

"Are you, too, against me, my queen?" he murmured, caressing her ruddy hair.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DECISION OF HEAVEN.

WE were half mad that night, Sapt and Bernenstein and I. The thing seemed to have got into our blood and to have become part of ourselves. For us it was inevitable—nay, it was done. Sapt busied himself in preparing the account of the fire at the hunting-lodge; it was to be communicated to the journals, and it told with much circumstantiality how Rudolf Rassendyll had come to visit the king, with James his servant, and, the king being summoned unexpectedly to the capital, had been awaiting his Majesty's return when he met his fate. There was a short history of Rudolf, a glancing reference to his family, a dignified expression of condolence with his relatives, to whom the king was sending messages of deepest regret by the hands of Mr. Rassendyll's servant. At another table young Bernenstein was drawing up, under the constable's direction, a narrative of Rupert of Hentzau's attempt on the king's life and the king's courage in defending himself. The count, eager to return (so it ran), had persuaded the king to meet him by declaring that he held a state document of great importance and of a most secret nature; the king, with his habitual fearlessness, had gone alone, but only to refuse with scorn Count Rupert's terms. Enraged at this unfavorable reception, the audacious criminal had made a sudden attack on the king, with what issue all knew. He had met his own death, while the king, perceiving from a glance at the document that it compromised well-known persons, had, with the nobility which marked him, destroyed it unread before the eyes of those who were rushing in to his rescue. I supplied suggestions and improvements; and, engrossed in contriving how to blind curious eyes, we forgot the real and permanent difficulties of the thing we had resolved upon. For us they did not exist;

Sapt met every objection by declaring that the thing had been done once and could be done again. Bernenstein and I were not behind him in confidence. We would guard the secret with brain and hand and life, even as we had guarded and kept the secret of the queen's letter, which would now go with Rupert of Hentzau to his grave. Bauer we could catch and silence: nay, who would listen to such a tale from such a man? Rischenheim was ours; the old woman would keep her doubts between her teeth for her own sake. To his own land and his own people Rudolf must be dead, while the King of Ruritania would stand before all Europe, recognized, unquestioned, unassailed. True, he must marry the queen again; Sapt was ready with the means, and would hear nothing of the difficulty and risk in finding a hand to perform the necessary ceremony. If we quailed in our courage, we had but to look at the alternative, and find comfort from the perils of what we meant to undertake by a consideration of the desperate risk involved in abandoning it. Persuaded that the substitution of Rudolf for the king was the only thing which would serve our turn, we asked no longer whether it were possible, but sought only the means to make it safe and yet more safe.

But Rudolf himself had not spoken. Sapt's appeal and the queen's imploring cry had shaken but not overcome him; he had wavered, but he was not won. Yet there was no talk of impossibility or peril in his mouth, any more than in ours: those were not what gave him pause. The score on which he hesitated was whether the thing should be done, not whether it could; our appeals were not to brace a failing courage, but to cajole a sturdy sense of honor which found the imposture distasteful so soon as it seemed to serve a personal end. To save the king he had played the king in old days, but he did not love to play the king when the profit of it was to be his own. Hence he was unmoved till his care for the fair fame of the queen and the love of his friends joined to buffet his resolution. Then he faltered; but he had not fallen. Yet Colonel Sapt did all as though he had given his assent, and watched the last hours in which his flight from Strelsau was possible go quickly by with more than equanimity. Why hurry Rudolf's resolve? Every moment shut him closer in the trap of an inevitable choice. With every hour that he was called the king, it became more impossible for him to bear any other name all his days. Therefore

Sapt let Mr. Rassendyll doubt and struggle, while he himself wrote his story and laid his long-headed plans. And now and then James, the little servant, came in and went out, sedate and smug, but with a quiet satisfaction gleaming in his eyes. He had made a story for a pastime, and it was being translated into history. He at least would bear his part in it unflinchingly.

Before now the queen had left us, persuaded to lie down and try to rest till the matter should be settled. Stilled by Rudolf's gentle rebuke, she had urged him no more in words, but there was an entreaty in her eyes stronger than any spoken prayer, and a piteousness in the lingering of her hand in his harder to resist than ten thousand sad petitions. At last he had led her from the room and commended her to Helga's care. Then, returning to us, he stood silent a little while. We also were silent, Sapt sitting and looking up at him with his brows knit and his teeth restlessly chewing the mustache on his lip.

"Well, lad?" he said at last, briefly putting the great question.

Rudolf walked to the window and seemed to lose himself for a moment in the contemplation of the quiet night. There were no more than a few stragglers in the street now; the moon shone white and clear on the empty square.

"I should like to walk up and down outside and think it over," he said, turning to us; and, as Bernenstein sprang up to accompany him, he added, "No. Alone."

"Yes, do," said old Sapt, with a glance at the clock, whose hands were now hard on two o'clock. "Take your time, lad, take your time."

Rudolf looked at him and broke into a smile.

"I'm not your dupe, old Sapt," said he, shaking his head. "Trust me, if I decide to get away, I'll get away, be it what o'clock it will."

"Yes, confound you!" grinned Colonel Sapt.

So he left us, and then came that long time of scheming and planning, and most persistent eye-shutting, in which occupations an hour wore its life away. Rudolf had now passed out of the porch, and we supposed that he had betaken himself to the gardens, there to fight his battle. Old Sapt, having done his work, suddenly turned talkative.

"That moon there," he said, pointing his square, thick forefinger at the window, "is a mighty untrustworthy lady. I've known her wake a villain's conscience before now."

"I've known her send a lover's to sleep," laughed young Bernenstein, rising from his table, stretching himself, and lighting a cigar.

"Aye, she's apt to take a man out of what he is," pursued old Sapt. "Set a quiet man near her, and he dreams of battle; an ambitious fellow, after ten minutes of her, will ask nothing better than to muse all his life away. I don't trust her, Fritz; I wish the night were dark."

"What will she do to Rudolf Rassendyll?" I asked, falling in with the old fellow's whimsical mood.

"He will see the queen's face in hers," cried Bernenstein.

"He may see God's," said Sapt; and he shook himself as though an unwelcome thought had found its way to his mind and lips.

A pause fell on us, borne of the colonel's last remark. We looked one another in the face. At last Sapt brought his hand down on the table with a bang.

"I'll not go back," he said sullenly, almost fiercely.

"Nor I," said Bernenstein, drawing himself up. "Nor you, Tarlenheim?"

"No, I also go on," I answered. Then again there was a moment's silence.

"She may make a man soft as a sponge," reflected Sapt, starting again, "or hard as a bar of steel. I should feel safer if the night were dark. I've looked at her often from my tent and from bare ground, and I know her. She got me a decoration, and once she came near to making me turn tail. Have nothing to do with her, young Bernenstein."

"I'll keep my eyes for beauties nearer at hand," said Bernenstein, whose volatile temper soon threw off a serious mood.

"There's a chance for you, now Rupert of Hentzau's gone," said Sapt grimly.

As he spoke there was a knock at the door. When it opened James entered.

"The Count of Luzau-Rischenheim begs to be allowed to speak with the king," said James.

"We expect his Majesty every moment. Beg the count to enter," Sapt answered; and, when Rischenheim came in, he went on, motioning the count to a chair: "We are talking, my lord, of the influence of the moon on the careers of men."

"What are you going to do? What have you decided?" burst out Rischenheim impatiently.

"We decide nothing," answered Sapt.

"Then what has Mr.—what has the king decided?"

"The king decides nothing, my lord. She decides," and the old fellow pointed again through the window towards the moon. "At this moment she makes or unmakes a king; but I can't tell you which. What of your cousin?"

"You know that my cousin's dead."

"Yes, I know that. What of him, though?"

"Sir," said Rischenheim with some dignity, "since he is dead, let him rest in peace. It is not for us to judge him."

"He may well wish it were. For, by heaven, I believe I should let the rogue off," said Colonel Sapt, "and I don't think his Judge will."

"God forgive him, I loved him," said Rischenheim. "Yes, and many have loved him. His servants loved him, sir."

"Friend Bauer, for example?"

"Yes, Bauer loved him. Where is Bauer?"

"I hope he's gone to hell with his loved master," grunted Sapt, but he had the grace to lower his voice and shield his mouth with his hand, so that Rischenheim did not hear.

"We don't know where he is," I answered.

"I am come," said Rischenheim, "to put my services in all respects at the queen's disposal."

"And at the king's?" asked Sapt.

"At the king's? But the king is dead."

"Therefore 'Long live the king!'" struck in young Bernenstein.

"If there should be a king—" began Sapt.

"You'll do that?" interrupted Rischenheim in breathless agitation.

"She is deciding," said Colonel Sapt, and again he pointed to the moon.

"But she's a plaguy long time about it," remarked Lieutenant von Bernenstein.

Rischenheim sat silent for a moment. His face was pale, and when he spoke his voice trembled. But his words were resolute enough.

"I gave my honor to the queen, and even in that I will serve her if she commands me."

Bernenstein sprang forward and caught him by the hand.

"That's what I like," said he, "and damn the moon, Colonel!"

His sentence was hardly out of his mouth when the door opened, and to our astonishment the queen entered. Helga was just behind her; her clasped hands and frightened

eyes seemed to protest that their coming was against her will. The queen was clad in a long white robe, and her hair hung on her shoulders, being but loosely bound with a ribbon. Her air showed great agitation, and without any greeting or notice of the rest she walked quickly across the room to me.

"The dream, Fritz," she said. "It has come again. Helga persuaded me to lie down, and I was very tired, so at last I fell asleep. Then it came. I saw him, Fritz—I saw him as plainly as I see you. They all called him king, as they did to-day; but they did not cheer. They were quiet, and looked at him with sad faces. I could not hear what they said; they spoke in hushed voices. I heard nothing more than 'the king, the king,' and he seemed to hear not even that. He lay still; he was lying on something, something covered with hanging stuff, I couldn't see what it was; yes, quite still. His face was so pale, and he didn't hear them say 'the king.' Fritz, Fritz, he looked as if he were dead! Where is he? Where have you let him go?"

She turned from me and her eyes flashed over the rest.

"Where is he? Why aren't you with him?" she demanded, with a sudden change of tone. "Why aren't you round him? You should be between him and danger, ready to give your lives for his. Indeed, gentlemen, you take your duty lightly."

It might be that there was little reason in her words. There appeared to be no danger threatening him, and after all he was not our king, much as we desired to make him such. Yet we did not think of any such matter. We were abashed before her reproof and took her indignation as deserved. We hung our heads, and Sapt's shame betrayed itself in the dogged sullenness of his answer.

"He has chosen to go walking, madame, and to go alone. He ordered us—I say, he ordered us not to come. Surely we are right to obey him?" The sarcastic inflection of his voice conveyed his opinion of the queen's extravagance.

"Obey him? Yes. You couldn't go with him if he forbade you. But you should follow him; you should keep him in sight."

This much she spoke in proud tones and with a disdainful manner, but then came a sudden return to her former bearing. She held out her hands towards me, wailing:

"Fritz, where is he? Is he safe? Find him for me, Fritz; find him."

"I'll find him for you if he's above ground,

madame," I cried, for her appeal touched me to the heart.

"He's no farther off than the gardens," grumbled old Sapt, still resentful of the queen's reproof and scornful of the woman's agitation. He was also out of temper with Rudolf himself, because the moon took so long in deciding whether she would make or unmake a king.

"The gardens!" she cried. "Then let us look for him. Oh, you've let him walk in the gardens alone?"

"What should harm the fellow?" muttered Sapt.

She did not hear him, for she had swept out of the room. Helga went with her, and we all followed, Sapt behind the rest of us, still very surly. I heard him grumbling away as we ran downstairs, and, having passed along the great corridor, came to the small saloon that opened on the gardens. There were no servants about, but we encountered a night-watchman, and Bernenstein snatched the lantern from the astonished man's hand.

Save for the dim light thus furnished, the room was dark. But outside the windows the moon streamed brightly down on the broad gravel walk, on the formal flower-beds, and the great trees in the gardens. The queen made straight for the window. I followed her, and, having flung the window open, stood by her. The air was sweet, and the breeze struck with grateful coolness on my face. I saw that Sapt had come near and stood on the other side of the queen. My wife and the others were behind, looking out where our shoulders left space.

There, in the bright moonlight, on the far side of the broad terrace, close by the line of tall trees that fringed its edge, we saw Rudolf Rassendyll pacing slowly up and down, with his hands behind his back and his eyes fixed on the arbiter of his fate, on her who was to make him a king or send him a fugitive from Strelsau.

"There he is, madame," said Sapt. "Safe enough!"

The queen did not answer. Sapt said no more, and of the rest of us none spoke. We stood watching him as he struggled with his great issue; a greater surely has seldom fallen to the lot of any man born in a private station. Yet I could read little of it on the face that the rays of white light displayed so clearly, although they turned his healthy tints to a dull gray, and gave unnatural sharpness to his features against the deep background of black foliage.

I heard the queen's quick breathing, but

there was scarcely another sound. I saw her clutch her gown and pull it away a little from her throat; save for that, none in the group moved. The lantern's light was too dim to force notice from Mr. Rassendyll. Unconscious of our presence, he wrestled with fate that night in the gardens.

Suddenly the faintest exclamation came from Sapt. He put his hand back and beckoned to Bernenstein. The young man handed his lantern to the constable, who set it close to the side of the window-frame. The queen, absolutely engrossed in her lover, saw nothing, but I perceived what had caught Sapt's attention. There were scores on the paint and indentations in the wood, just at the edge of the panel and near the lock. I glanced at Sapt, who nodded his head. It looked very much as though somebody had tried to force the door that night, employing a knife which had dented the woodwork and scratched the paint. The least thing was enough to alarm us, standing where we stood, and the constable's face was full of suspicion. Who had sought an entrance? It could be no trained and practised house-breaker; he would have had better tools.

But now our attention was again diverted. Rudolf stopped short. He still looked for a moment at the sky, then his glance dropped to the ground at his feet. A second later he jerked his head—it was bare, and I saw the dark red hair stir with the movement—like a man who has settled something which caused him a puzzle. In an instant we knew, by the quick intuition of contagious emotion, that the question had found its answer. He was by now king or a fugitive. The Lady of the Skies had given her decision. The thrill ran through us; I felt the queen draw herself together at my side; I felt the muscles of Rischenheim's arm which rested against my shoulder grow rigid and taut. Sapt's face was full of eagerness, and he gnawed his mustache savagely. We gathered closer to one another. At last we could bear the suspense no longer. With one look at the queen and another at me, Sapt stepped on to the gravel. He would go and learn the answer; thus the unendurable strain that had stretched us like tortured men on a rack would be relieved. The queen did not answer his glance, nor even seem to see that he had moved. Her eyes were still all for Mr. Rassendyll, her thoughts buried in his; for her happiness was in his hands and lay poised on the issue of that decision whose momentousness held him for a moment mo-

tionless on the path. Often I seem to see him as he stood there, tall, straight, and stately, the king a man's fancy paints when he reads of great monarchs who flourished long ago in the springtime of the world.

Sapt's step crunched on the gravel. Rudolf heard it and turned his head. He saw Sapt, and he saw me also behind Sapt. He smiled composedly and brightly, but he did not move from where he was. He held out both hands towards the constable and caught him in their double grasp, still smiling down in his face. I was no nearer to reading his decision, though I saw that he had reached a resolution that was immovable and gave peace to his soul. If he meant to go on he would go on now, on to the end, without a backward look or a falter of his foot; if he had chosen the other way, he would depart without a murmur or a hesitation. The queen's quick breathing had ceased, she seemed like a statue; but Rischenheim moved impatiently, as though he could no longer endure the waiting.

Sapt's voice came harsh and grating.

"Well?" he cried. "Which is it to be—backwards or forward?"

Rudolf pressed his hands and looked into his eyes. The answer asked but a word from him. The queen caught my arm; her rigid limbs seemed to give way, and she would have fallen if I had not supported her. At the same instant a man sprang out of the dark line of tall trees, directly behind Mr. Rassendyll. Bernenstein uttered a loud startled cry and rushed forward, pushing the queen herself violently out of his path. His hand flew to his side, and he ripped the heavy cavalry sword that belonged to his uniform of the Cuirassiers of the Guard from its sheath. I saw it flash in the moonlight, but its flash was quenched in a brighter short blaze. A shot rang out through the quiet gardens. Mr. Rassendyll did not loose his hold of Sapt's hands, but he sank slowly on to his knees. Sapt seemed paralyzed. Again Bernenstein cried out. It was a name this time.

"Bauer! By God, Bauer!" he cried.

In an instant he was across the path and by the trees. The assassin fired again, but now he missed. We saw the great sword flash high above Bernenstein's head and heard it whistle though the air. It crashed on the crown of Bauer's head, and he fell like a log to the ground with his skull split. The queen's hold on me relaxed; she sank into Rischenheim's arms. I ran forward and knelt by Mr. Rassendyll. He still held Sapt's

hands, and by their help buoyed himself up. But when he saw me he let go of them and sank back against me, his head resting on my chest. He moved his lips, but seemed unable to speak. He was shot through the back. Bauer had avenged the master whom he loved, and was gone to meet him.

There was a sudden stir from inside the palace. Shutters were flung back and windows thrown open. The group we made stood clean-cut, plainly visible, in the moonlight. A moment later there was a rush of eager feet, and we were surrounded by officers and servants. Bernenstein stood by me now, leaning on his sword; Sapt had not uttered a word; his face was distorted with horror and bitterness. Rudolf's eyes were closed and his head lay back against me.

"A man has shot the king," said I, in bald, stupid explanation.

All at once I found James, Mr. Rassendyll's servant, by me.

"I have sent for doctors, my lord," he said. "Come, let us carry him in."

He, Sapt, and I lifted Rudolf and bore him across the gravel terrace and into the little saloon. We passed the queen. She was leaning on Rischenheim's arm, and held my wife's hand. We laid Rudolf down on a couch. Outside I heard Bernenstein say, "Pick up that fellow and carry him somewhere out of sight." Then he also came in, followed by a crowd. He sent them all to the door, and we were left alone, waiting for the surgeon. The queen came up, Rischenheim still supporting her.

"Rudolf! Rudolf!" she whispered, very softly.

He opened his eyes, and his lips bent in a smile. She flung herself on her knees and kissed his hand passionately.

"The surgeon will be here directly," said I.

Rudolf's eyes had been on the queen. As I spoke he looked up at me, smiled again, and shook his head. I turned away.

When the surgeon came, Sapt and I assisted him in his examination. The queen had been led away, and we were alone. The examination was very short. Then we carried Rudolf to a bed; the nearest chanced to be in Bernenstein's room; there we laid him, and there all that could be done for him was done. All this time we had asked no questions of the surgeon, and he had given no information. We knew too well to ask: we had all seen men die before now, and the look on the face was familiar to us. Two or three more doctors, the most eminent in Strelsau, came now, having been hastily sum-

moned. It was their right to be called; but, for all the good they were, they might have been left to sleep the night out in their beds. They drew together in a little group at the end of the room and talked for a few minutes in low tones. James lifted his master's head and gave him a drink of water. Rudolf swallowed it with difficulty. Then I saw him feebly press James's hand, for the little man's face was full of sorrow. As his master smiled the servant mustered a smile in answer.

I crossed over to the doctors.

"Well, gentlemen?" I asked.

They looked at one another, then the greatest of them said gravely:

"The king may live an hour, Count Fritz. Should you not send for a priest?"

I went straight back to Rudolf Rassendyll. His eyes greeted me and questioned me. He was a man, and I played no silly tricks with him. I bent down and said:

"An hour, they think, Rudolf."

He made one restless movement, whether of pain or protest I do not know. Then he spoke, very low, slowly, and with difficulty.

"Then they can go," he said; and when I spoke of a priest he shook his head.

I went back to them and asked if anything more could be done. The answer was nothing; but I could not prevail further than to get all save one sent into an adjoining room; he who remained seated himself at a table some way off. Rudolf's eyes had closed again; old Sapt, who had not once spoken since the shot was fired, raised a haggard face to mine.

"We'd better fetch her to him," he said hoarsely. I nodded my head.

Sapt went while I stayed by him. Bernenstein came to him, bent down, and kissed his hand. The young fellow, who had borne himself with such reckless courage and dash throughout the affair, was quite unmanned now, and the tears were rolling down his face. I could have been much in the same plight, but I would not before Mr. Rassendyll. He smiled at Bernenstein. Then he said to me:

"Is she coming, Fritz?"

"Yes, she's coming, sire," I answered.

He noticed the style of my address; a faint amused gleam shot into his languid eyes.

"Well, for an hour, then," he murmured, and lay back on his pillows.

She came, dry-eyed, calm, and queenly. We all drew back, and she knelt down by his bed, holding his hand in her two hands. Presently the hand stirred; she let it go;

then, knowing well what he wanted, she raised it herself and placed it on her head, while she bowed her face to the bed. His hand wandered for the last time over the gleaming hair that he had loved so well. She rose, passed her arm about his shoulders, and kissed his lips. Her face rested close to his, and he seemed to speak to her, but we could not have heard the words even if we would. So they remained for a long while.

The doctor came and felt his pulse, retreating afterwards with close-shut lips. We drew a little nearer, for we knew that he would not be long with us now. Suddenly strength seemed to come upon him. He raised himself in his bed, and spoke in distinct tones.

"God has decided," he said. "I've tried to do the right thing through it all. Sapt, and Bernenstein, and you, old Fritz, shake my hand. No, don't kiss it. We've done with pretense now."

We shook his hand as he bade us. Then he took the queen's hand. Again she knew his mind, and moved it to his lips.

"In life and in death, my sweet queen," he murmured.

And thus he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COMING OF THE DREAM.

THERE is little need, and I have little heart, to dwell on what followed the death of Mr. Rassendyll. The plans we had laid to secure his tenure of the throne, in case he had accepted it, served well in the event of his death. Bauer's lips were forever sealed; the old woman was too scared and appalled to hint even to her gossips at the suspicions she entertained. Rischenheim was loyal to the pledge he had given to the queen. The ashes of the hunting-lodge held their secret fast, and none suspected when the charred body which was called Rudolf Rassendyll's was laid to quiet rest in the graveyard of the town of Zenda, hard by the tomb of Herbert the forester. For we had from the first rejected any idea of bringing the king's body to Strelsau and setting it in the place of Mr. Rassendyll's. The difficulties of such an undertaking were almost insuperable; in our hearts we did not desire to conquer them. As a king Rudolf Rassendyll had died, as a king let him lie. As a king he lay in his palace at Strelsau, while the news of his murder at the hands of a confederate of Ru-

pert of Hentzau went forth to startle and appall the world. At a mighty price our task had been made easy; many might have doubted the living, none questioned the dead; suspicions which might have gathered round a throne died away at the gate of a vault. The king was dead. Who would ask if it were in truth the king who lay in state in the great hall of the palace, or whether the humble grave at Zenda held the bones of the last male Elphberg? In the silence of the grave all murmurs and questionings were hushed.

Throughout the day people had been passing and repassing through the great hall. There, on a stately bier surmounted by a crown and the drooping folds of the royal banner, lay Rudolf Rassendyll. The highest officer guarded him; in the cathedral the archbishop said a mass for his soul. He had lain there three days; the evening of the third had come, and early on the morrow he was to be buried. There is a little gallery in the hall, that looks down on the spot where the bier stood; here was I on this evening, and with me Queen Flavia. We were alone together, and together we saw beneath us the calm face of the dead man. He was clad in the white uniform in which he had been crowned; the ribbon of the Red Rose was across his breast. His hand held a true red rose, fresh and fragrant; Flavia herself had set it there, that even in death he might not miss the chosen token of her love. I had not spoken to her, nor she to me, since we came there. We watched the pomp round him, and the circles of people that came to bring a wreath for him or to look upon his face. I saw a girl come and kneel long at the bier's foot. She rose and went away sobbing, leaving a little circlet of flowers. It was Rosa Holf. I saw women come and go weeping, and men bite their lips as they passed by. Rischenheim came, pale-faced and troubled; and while all came and went, there, immovable, with drawn sword, in military stiffness, old Sapt stood at the head of the bier, his eyes set steadily in front of him, and his body never stirring from hour to hour through the long day.

A distant faint hum of voices reached us. The queen laid her hand on my arm.

"It is the dream, Fritz," she said. "Hark! They speak of the king; they speak in low voices and with grief, but they call him king. It's what I saw in the dream. But he does not hear nor heed. No, he can't hear nor heed even when I call him my king."

A sudden impulse came on me, and I turned to her, asking: "What had he decided, madame? Would he have been king?"

She started a little.

"He didn't tell me," she answered, "and I didn't think of it while he spoke to me."

"Of what then did he speak, madame?"

"Only of his love—of nothing but his love, Fritz," she answered.

Well, I take it that when a man comes to die, love is more to him than a kingdom: it may be, if we could see truly, that it is more to him even while he lives.

"Of nothing but his great love for me, Fritz," she said again. "And my love brought him to his death."

"He wouldn't have had it otherwise," said I.

"No," she whispered; and she leant over the parapet of the gallery, stretching out her arms to him. But he lay still and quiet, not hearing and not heeding when she murmured, "My king! my king!" It was even as it had been in the dream.

That night James, the servant, took leave of his dead master and of us. He carried to England by word of mouth—for we dared write nothing down—the truth concerning the King of Ruritania and Mr. Rassendyll. It was to be told to the Earl of Burlesdon, Rudolf's brother, under a pledge of secrecy; and to this day the earl is the only man besides ourselves who knows the story. His errand done, James returned in order to enter the queen's service, in which he still is; and he told us that when Lord Burlesdon had heard the story he sat silent for a great while, and then said:

"He did well. Some day I will visit his grave. Tell her Majesty that there is still a Rassendyll, if she has need of one."

The offer was such as should come from a man of Rudolf's name, yet I trust that the queen needs no further service than such as it is our humble duty and dear delight to render her. It is our part to strive to lighten the burden that she bears, and by our love to assuage her undying grief. For she reigns now in Ruritania alone, the last of all the Elphbergs; and her only joy is to talk of Mr. Rassendyll with those few who knew him, her only hope that she may some day be with him again.

In great pomp we laid him to his rest in the vault of the kings of Ruritania in the Cathedral of Strelsau. There he lies among the princes of the House of Elphberg. I think that if there be indeed any conscious-

ness among the dead, or any knowledge of what passes in the world they have left, they should be proud to call him brother. There rises in memory of him a stately monument, and people point it out to one another as the memorial of King Rudolf. I go often to the spot, and recall in thought all that passed when he came the first time to Zenda, and again on his second coming. For I mourn him as a man mourns a trusted leader and a loved comrade, and I should have asked no better than to be allowed to serve him all my days. Yet I serve the queen, and in that I do most truly serve her lover.

Times change for all of us. The roaring flood of youth goes by, and the stream of life sinks to a quiet flow. Sapt is an old man now; soon my sons will be grown up, men enough themselves to serve Queen Flavia. Yet the memory of Rudolf Rassendyll is fresh to me as on the day he died, and the vision of the death of Rupert of Hentzau dances often before my eyes. It may be that some day the whole story shall be told, and men shall judge of it for themselves. To me it seems now as though all had ended well. I must not be misunderstood: my heart is still sore for the loss of him. But we saved the queen's fair fame, and to Rudolf himself the fatal stroke came as a relief from a choice too difficult: on the one side lay what impaired his own honor, on the other what threatened hers. As I think on this my anger at his death is less, though my grief cannot be. To this day I know not how he chose; no, and I don't know how he should have chosen. Yet he had chosen, for his face was calm and clear.

Come, I have thought so much of him that I will go now and stand before his monument, taking with me my last-born son, a little lad of ten. He is not too young to desire to serve the queen, and not too young to learn to love and reverence him who sleeps there in the vault and was in his life the noblest gentleman I have known.

I will take the boy with me and tell him what I may of brave King Rudolf, how he fought and how he loved, and how he held the queen's honor and his own above all things in this world. The boy is not too young to learn such lessons from the life of Mr. Rassendyll. And while we stand there I will turn again into his native tongue—for, alas, the young rogue loves his toy soldiers better than his Latin!—the inscription that the queen wrote with her own hand, directing that it should be inscribed in that stately tongue over the tomb in which her life lies buried. "To Rudolf, who reigned lately in this city, and reigns for ever in her heart. —QUEEN FLAVIA."

I told him the meaning, and he spelt the big words over in his childish voice; at first he stumbled, but the second time he had it right, and recited with a little touch of awe in his fresh young tones:

RUDOLFO

Qui in hac civitate nuper regnavit
In corde ipsius in æternum regnat
FLAVIA REGINA.

I felt his hand tremble in mine, and he looked up in my face.

"God save the Queen, father," said he.

THE END.

THE FIGHTING STRENGTH OF THE UNITED STATES.

BY F. W. HEWES.

IN view of the war with Spain and the possibility presented by it of difficulties with other European nations, it becomes interesting to consider how the United States compare with the various nations of Europe in general power to prosecute and sustain war. Of course, in the matter of standing armies and permanent equipment—in everyday readiness for war—several European nations are better off than the United States; and in the earlier stages of a war, readiness is undoubtedly an advantage. But

it is not the only item, and in a long and general war it would not be the most important item, in what may be called a nation's war potential: that is, the assemblage and sum of all the resources upon which a nation must draw in the conduct and support of a war. Only by comparing them in the whole of their several war potentials, in the sum of their resources for war, can we come at any just determination of the relative capacities of the United States and the nations of Europe to cope with each other.