

A PRINCESS AND A WOMAN.

By Robert McDonald.

I.

WITH an exclusiveness that could scarcely have been born of having ridden on American sleeping cars most of his life, Howlett had taken a whole compartment on the train for the Russian frontier.

It was cold, as the train went steadily through the snowy plains of eastern Prussia. One rug was thrown carelessly over Howlett's knees, and another was mixed up with half a dozen yellow covered French novels, which his friends in Berlin had given him to enliven a colorless journey. His heavy military overcoat was frogged closely up to his throat, but the hood, whose warmth he had tested on many a blizzardish night on the Western plains, was thrown back upon his shoulders.

There was a suggestion of the West in the way Howlett had pushed his soft hat brim up against the crown, leaving his good white forehead to say frankly all it could for his face. It gave him a boyish look which the firm lines about his rather high nose and straight mouth belied. He was only twenty six, but he had seen service enough, and had so distinguished himself in the performance of it that he was traveling toward a reward. After the battle of Wounded Knee they carried him off the field for dead. He had kept the men together as long as he had any, and then had taken his Hotchkiss gun and worked it himself, shelling the plain until the Indians were defeated. Then his wounds pulled him down. They kept him in the hospital for four or five months, and then somebody remembered that he had been educated abroad, and that it might be advantageous to have now and then, at some foreign court, a military attaché who really knew the language. So they were sending him to St. Petersburg.

The American newspapers were making some little fuss about it, because Howlett was not a West Point man, but had risen to his lieutenancy from an enlistment; but

there were a number of people, both in the army and out of it, who were as much delighted at a success in real life as if they had read the story in a book.

In Berlin he found old friends in the young American officers attached to the legation, and met some of his own old chums of his school and university days in Germany. They had made the days pass merrily, and this last night they had given him a dinner. He had slipped away from them before the festivities were over, and had taken the twelve o'clock train with only one or two of the dearest of the old fellows to say good by.

He was trying to still his nerves, and was wondering if he had had too many farewell glasses of champagne. Whenever the train stopped Howlett would get out and pace up and down before the line of carriages. Curtains were drawn almost everywhere, but now and then a nodding, sleepy head could be seen, or a lighted compartment where two or three officers or merchants sat with cards and silver pieces before them.

There was another passenger who seemed to have the same singular liking for frosty night air. Up and down the two men would pace, always keeping an eye on one compartment, whose curtains were closely shut. As Howlett dashed into the Berlin station that night, there had been a carriage immediately behind him. He had noticed it because he thought, as it first forced itself upon his attention, that it contained some of his friends. It had the insistence of a pursuer. But as he stepped upon the pavement he saw alighting with haste—and upon the part of one, at least, with some flurry—two ladies.

The agitated elderly one required no special attention. She was classified, from the beginning, as belonging to the order of backgrounds. She was short of stature, with bead-like eyes and an aquiline nose. She reminded Howlett of a brown hen clucking and fussing over a chick; but in his case the chick was evidently of no

brood of her own, but a stately swan whom she had been set to guard.

The other woman was a beautiful young girl. She reminded Howlett of America, although he saw that she was not an American. Her gown was too simple, and the round hat lacked a touch of style, although the way it was set upon her hair was decidedly distinguished. The little band of fur about her white neck was sable, but Howlett did not appreciate the fact. He only saw that her cheek was clear and white, that her mouth parted over white teeth to let the breath of agitation hurry through, and that she was trying to quell a storm in her blue eyes.

Involuntarily he moved aside to let the two women get their tickets before him. The journey appeared to be something for which they had hastily prepared. It was late, and as Howlett put down his pile of bills a rude elbow pushed him on.

He turned to see a man who would have been too large even without the ostentatious pile of rich furs that covered his shoulders. His boots, reaching half way to his knees, were topped with fur, and his cap, tilted far on the side of his wide head, had a glistening stone sunken in the blue fox skin of which it was made. There was a barbaric suggestion in the dress, and in the face, of which Howlett had only a half glimpse in his hurry. He saw Tartar cheek bones and a wide mouth, and carried away an unpleasant impression.

As the man in fur touched him, it seemed to Howlett that he heard an exclamation that carried a note of dismay; but when he looked for the girl whose throat might have uttered it, she was gone. He had only time to see the man who had followed him dart by and throw himself into a carriage, and to enter his own, before the train began to move. At every station both men had spent the moments of waiting in passing and repassing along the platform.

It was the last station before Königsberg, and almost morning. Howlett, in turning, saw that the man with the furs had stopped, and was lighting a cigar, making a cup of his hands to hold the flame of a match from the wind. It was the first time he had had a full view of his fellow passenger's face; and as the flickering light played over the wide nostrils and the high cheek bones, it seemed to Howlett that there was something familiar in the countenance, something he had seen before. Perhaps it was the audacious tilt of the blue fox cap, with its conspicuous jewel, that led Howlett's eyes to the forehead; but as they traveled down a

ragged scar that ran to the edge of the thick eyebrow, the American gave a low whistle which made the man look up.

How well he remembered him then! Von König—cad and bully! The gymnasium in the old school at Dresden! How it all came back.

It was Howlett's first duel—and his last. As he looked at the ugly face, he could feel again the tense strain when the sword was put into his hands, and his second—who was sixteen, two years his senior—gave him a word or two of advice. He remembered the general satisfaction, and the general alarm, when Von König went over with that ugly cut on his temple. It had made a great row at the time, and his mother had taken him away from the school at once, her lips set tight over his iniquity. His own tightness of lip allowed him to think, even at fourteen, that worse things might have happened than that Von König shouldn't get up. The school thought so too.

As he looked at him now, Howlett took in the richness of his old enemy's attire. In the old days Von König had been one of the most poverty stricken boys, notwithstanding the fact that in some distant way he had belonged to one of the great families. Tonight, it seemed as if he might be in favor with some of them. "The Czar may have appointed him cutthroat in ordinary," Howlett thought. But if the recognition was mutual, Von König made no sign.

Suddenly the curtain of the window beside which the two men were standing was lifted, and behind it appeared the face of the young girl Howlett had seen at the Berlin station. Von König turned, and his hand went up to his cap. With an expression of utter disdain on her face, Howlett saw her pull the curtain across the window, leaving it blank as before.

At that instant the guard came running toward the train. Von König stopped him and pressed something into his hand, saying a few words.

"At Königsberg," the guard answered, and the bell rang for the start.

It was daylight when the fortifications of Königsberg came into sight. For some reason Howlett's door was locked, and it was two minutes before he could get it opened. He stood there pounding and raging; and when he was at last released, he went striding by the guard without the usual coin.

It was exactly as he had expected. Von König had gathered his belongings together on the platform, giving the appearance that

he was a new passenger about to embark. The guard walked up to the carriage where the face had been seen at the window.

"There is a seat here, sir," he said respectfully to Von König.

"You are not putting any one in here?" the brown little woman asked fiercely. "I cannot allow it. I will not allow it! You do not know——"

"Hush," the young girl said, putting her hand on her companion's arm. "We will take another carriage."

"I am extremely sorry to discommode you," Von König said, cap in hand, "but there is no other seat."

Howlett's hat was in his own hand, showing all his fine blond head.

"I beg your pardon," he said coolly, addressing himself entirely to the elderly woman, and quite ignoring the beautiful, indignant face near by. "I have a carriage entirely to myself, which I will very gladly give up to you."

"We cannot allow——" the elder lady began, but the young lady stopped her.

"Thank you very much," she said in excellent English. "We will accept your offer as far as the frontier. Come," she added, to her companion.

Howlett walked back, took up his rugs and all of the novels save one, "*La Neu-vaine de Colette*," and walking back down the platform pushed them in over Von König's legs and followed them. If there was a grain of triumph in his heart his face denied it. If Von König recognized him, he held his eyes as well as his tongue in excellent control. They sat and smoked through the hours that bore them on to the frontier. For some reason neither cared to leave the carriage now. It was as if each waited to see the other's next move.

The train drew slowly into the station of the frontier town, gay with the sentries of two countries jealously guarding their respective territories and colors. A tall iron grille divided the railroad tracks of Russia from those of Germany, and each man must show his passport to go through in either direction. Howlett gathered up his rugs and walked leisurely along. He wanted to be sure that the two ladies were properly taken care of, and he kept an eye on Von König.

A young officer in uniform, attended by two servants, passed through the grille and came down toward the Berlin train. Even on the German side people bowed to him with extreme deference. Howlett noticed him with pleasure in his gaze. He was a Russian, but there was none of the gloom

of the snowy wastes in his velvety black eyes or in any line of the boyish face. He could hardly have passed twenty one, and the light of adventure was evidently his beacon. He must have made inquiries from the train officials, for the guard was ahead of him.

"She is in here, sir," he said, indicating the carriage Howlett had given up a few hours before.

There seemed to be no necessity for announcing the newcomer. The elderly woman almost fell into his arms, with voluble exclamations in German, running rapidly to French. He kissed her on both cheeks, stooping almost half his height. Then he put out his hand to meet the close English handshake of the girl, and when he spoke to her it was in that language.

"Marie is ready to put you on bread and water," he said, laughing.

"I did not expect Marie to understand. She never cares for an hour's freedom."

"It was most unfortunate—I knew how it would be," the elderly lady began; but the girl stopped her companion by a look. They were passing Von König now, but she did not glance in his direction, and the young officer's eyes were all for the girl, at whom he gazed with the affectionate look of a brother.

As they reached the grille, both Howlett and Von König stood aside. Baggage must be examined, and Howlett's was heavy. Von König appeared to have none. The young Russian officer gave a nod as the ladies' trunks were trundled up, and handed out three pieces of paper. The inspector bowed low, passed the baggage, and they walked through the gates.

There seemed to be some trouble about Von König's passport. He fumbled through his pockets, and at last produced a bank note, which he slipped into the official's hand.

"Who were the party passing through?" he asked in Russian.

"The young nephew of the Grand Duke Serge, and the duchess' sister, Princess Wasia of Hesse-Arnheim, with her companion, Mme. Berg. They have been traveling from Scotland incognito."

Howlett could have laughed at the look that swept over Von König's face. Extreme chagrin predominated for an instant, and then by a sudden change the German looked at Howlett with triumphant eyes.

"He is thinking that I am no better off," Howlett mused, as he took his stamped passport and walked through the grille.

Von König hesitated a moment, and then,

without showing a passport, walked back toward the Berlin train.

II.

HOWLETT found that he had been well provided for by his friends of the St. Petersburg legation. The minister had been an old acquaintance of his father's, and the young soldier had made a guess that he owed his appointment as much to political influence as to his bravery in an Indian fight.

A young attaché has not too much money generally, but Howlett was an exception. The tight lipped mother who had put sufficient spirit into him to make him enlist in the army for promotion, when there was no other way of getting a commission, had belonged to a family to whom all the goods of this world fell as a matter of course. His apartments were large, and near the house of the minister; and when he had draped them with the spoils of the years he had spent in the atmosphere of the West they were probably the most unique apartments in all the city on the Neva. They were gay with Mexican serapes, Indian trappings, and skin rugs.

Howlett was even able to keep his own modest turnout. Indeed, he could have kept as fine a set of equipages as a grand duke, but he had enough American sense of humor to see the ridiculousness of such ostentation.

The morning after his arrival he went to call upon the minister, and to learn something of his new duties. He found Mrs. Folsom, the minister's wife, a gay, happy woman, immensely interested in her surroundings, and full of the gossip of the court, just as she had been full of Washington diplomatic squabbles when her husband was United States Senator from Kentucky. She had Americanized the palace where they lived, almost as thoroughly as Howlett had brought the breath of the army post into his own apartments.

"Everybody comes here in a very free and easy way," she told the new attaché. "Stay here with me until the people begin to come in the afternoon. I am going to have ever such a pretty girl here presently to pour tea for me. She is English, but she is almost as nice as if she came from—Kentucky;" and she gave a cheery laugh. "She is the friend of the Princess Wasia."

"Ah," Howlett said with interest. "And who is the Princess Wasia?"

"The Princess Wasia, let me tell you,

my young friend, is the most beautiful girl in Europe, and one of the most remarkable. She is the younger sister of the Grand Duchess Serge, and a princess of one of those little kingdoms over there in Germany that we Americans never hear about. Her mother was half English, and her father was half English, and she has that peculiar mixture of blood which I suppose we have in America, for she is more like a Kentucky girl than anything else. But everybody is like everybody else, nowadays. That is the secret of American girls being so successful as foreign wives," Mrs. Folsom chattered on. "They are just as well bred and a great deal brighter than most princesses.

"Wasia's mother died when she was a baby, and then her father died, and her brother is a jolly sort of a fellow, they say, who doesn't much care what she does. They say she has ridden and driven and shot all over England and Scotland and Norway, without anybody having the least idea who she was. The Empress of Austria is her distant relative, and it was she who taught the girl to ride and to travel about as she does. They have no money, and if she required a suite I fear she'd have to stay at home. Her sister is very conservative, it is said, but the two are devoted friends. It is a charming house, if you ever make your way there. I have never thought the Grand Duchess Marie too conservative to be human, for her husband'smorganatic nephew, Curt, is a member of their household. But Wasia is a great scandal to the royal family, and I think the empress and her sister are anxious to see her married off."

"And to whom will they marry her?" Howlett asked.

He was impatient at the little line of flush that he felt creeping along the tops of his cheeks, and at the quiver about his throat.

"To some prince—whoever wants a wife," the minister's wife said carelessly.

Of course the marriage of a royal princess could mean nothing to Howlett; but he remembered the face of the girl who had so gravely and graciously accepted his offer of the railway carriage. He felt that he had in some measure protected her from the insolence of a brute, and it gave him a sense of ownership. He had pretended, in his own mind, that he had only been anxious to keep Von König from insulting a lady, any lady; but in his heart he knew that his interest went deeper than that. When the blue eyes of the Princess Wasia had looked

into his, they had spoken squarely and frankly. They had been almost on a level with his own, for she was a divinely tall creature, who held her head well up.

Howlett was only twenty six, and his hot blood of youth and romance had not had any chills of worldliness. There was a romance in the thought of caring for a princess, hopeless as such a passion must be. He wondered if he would meet her.

"The young count, Curt, the grand duke's nephew, will be here this afternoon. I think he is a little in love with Lady Jane, the English girl I told you about. You must stay."

It was a merry party that gathered at the minister's as the twilight of three o'clock approached. The snow was falling outside, so frozen that its tinkle could be heard through the double glass and the heavy red silk curtains which draped the windows of the drawing room.

Howlett was not greatly experienced, but he felt the force of Mrs. Folsom's remark about everybody being like everybody else. It might have been a party in London or Washington. The uniforms of the officers made a brilliant coloring, and perhaps there were a few more jewels on the gowns, but that was all. The young American planted himself beside Lady Jane, who was a girl of a type he knew well. She was one of the people who enjoy almost everything, and who can always find companions in their excursions, physical or mental; the people who always appear to be having a good time themselves, and who attract the rest of the world to make an effort to see what it is all about.

"You have a great many friends here?" Howlett asked her. He thought he was very diplomatic.

"Oh, I have friends everywhere," Lady Jane said, stretching her bare white arm across the tea table for a cup. Anybody would have given it to her, but then she wouldn't have seen her arms, which would have been a distinct loss. "If the world doesn't like me, it is a case of unrequited affection. I have lots of friends."

"Do you—ah—find court society—a little difficult?"

"No, indeed. My dearest friend—ah!—" Lady Jane looked at him for a moment, turning her head from side to side as if she were taking the measure of his face for a sketch. "When did you reach Petersburg?" she asked abruptly.

"Yesterday."

"And are you in the habit of hunting up ladies to give them seats in trains?"

She did not look at him for an answer, but smiled brilliantly at some one coming across the room, her white teeth showing. Howlett looked up, to see the young officer who had met the Princess Wasia at the frontier approaching through the crowded room as if he were magnetically drawn toward that corner. He bent over Lady Jane's fingers, which held a great many more rings than Howlett had been led to suppose a well brought up English girl was in the habit of wearing. Then, pointing to the American, she said in a stage whisper,

"That is he! Allow me," she added aloud a moment later, and with extreme politeness, as if she supposed no one had overheard her former remark, "to present Count Petrovsky to Lieutenant Howlett."

The young count grasped Howlett's fingers with energy.

"I have been wanting to meet you," he said, "to thank you for saving my cousin from annoyance. You see it is a secret that she was annoyed. It is impossible to say anything about it, for if the family found it out she wouldn't be allowed to go about in that fashion any more, which would be a great pity all around."

"I rather enjoyed it, I think," Howlett said, "because I knew the man."

The rest had drawn away from the tea table and left the two young men and Lady Jane to talk alone.

"You did?" Curt asked eagerly. "Who was he? My cousin would not allow Mme. Berg to tell me anything about it until yesterday, and then, under a solemn promise of secrecy, she told Lady Jane and me."

"He was a boy I went to school with long ago, in Dresden. He is of no sort of consequence. You have probably seen the last of him. He was standing by the grille, and heard or saw your names on your passports. He will hardly annoy you again. Von König was his name."

"Von König?" Curt said, half closing his eyes as if in an effort to remember the name. "Ah—well," and he dismissed it. "There is to be a ball at the Princess Lobanov's next week. Will you be there?"

"I shall be wherever the minister leads me."

"Then you will come, and my cousin can thank you. She considered the service a great one. The man had followed them for three days. She did not want to ask protection, as her name would have appeared, and it might have reached the newspapers. That could not be. She considered the service a great one," he repeated.

The room was not brilliantly lighted.

Candles burned here and there, and great logs flickered on the hearth. A moment before there had been a stir about the door, and in the hallway, where the elder guests had settled themselves about the hostess. Somebody had entered, but the three young people had not noticed who it was. Here in this cozy corner the light was carefully shaded. Most of it fell from under pink shades upon the shoulders of Lady Jane and along the part in her curly brown hair. They were all startled when a hand was put on Curt's shoulder, and the Princess Wasia herself stood beside them.

"Ah, Wasia!" Lady Jane cried, half rising. "How did they let you come?"

"I came," she replied calmly. "I was staying with your mother for the afternoon, and she brought me." She looked at Howlett expectantly, recognition in her eyes.

"I present Lieutenant Howlett of the American legation to your highness," Curt said stiffly, and then, the little ceremony over, he added in his usual jovial tone, "I've thanked him for giving you his place in the train. He says he knows the man—a nobody from Dresden."

"I thank you very much," the princess said, and gave him her hand. "Will you give me some tea, Jane? I will sit down for a moment; I am very tired."

The tea was handed over, Howlett made a nest in the cushions, and the princess sat down. Mrs. Folsom had put up a piece of Chinese fretwork and draped curtains from it, and set seats behind it, until she had one of those little retreats with which most American houses are furnished nowadays, known as "flirtation nooks." The princess had probably never heard the name, for she sat back in the dimmest corner, with Howlett on a divan before her, without a trace of self consciousness. Lady Jane and Count Curt hid themselves behind the great steaming silver samovar.

"I suppose my cousin has told you of my adventure," Wasia said. "The man had finally driven us to Russia. I knew he would fear to follow us here, after he knew who we were. It was inexpedient to let him know before. I should be sorry to give up my journeys *sans ceremonie*."

"I always imagined that a princess delighted in going about with a jeweled crown upon her head," Howlett ventured. "I remember that one in the fairy tale who lost hers in the fountain——"

"She has been a warning to us ever since," Wasia laughed. "You remember a toad brought it back to her, and she was obliged to marry him."

"But he turned into a prince."

"Sometimes a prince is as disagreeable as a toad," and a little shudder ran over her.

Howlett thought of what the minister's wife had told him, and a hot indignation filled him at that shudder. What mattered the peace of Europe in comparison to the peace of mind of this beautiful, gentle girl?

"My acquaintance with princes has been limited to the very handsome photographs of them I have seen in magazines and in shop windows. None of those looked like toads," he said amiably.

"There are good retouchers in photographers' places. We need a Holbein to come back and tell the truth. But why should we talk of them? Tell me something of America. Could I travel about over there?"

"Well," Howlett said judiciously, "I cannot tell. There is a tradition that Burke's Peerage and the Almanac de Gotha are constantly open on our American tables, and that the whereabouts of the people mentioned are followed on a map. And then there are the newspaper reporters. If any one even looks distinguished, they never rest until they discover why."

"Do I look distinguished?"

Howlett looked to see if the remark was put as Lady Jane would surely have spoken it. The blue eyes met his frankly.

"You are very beautiful," he said under his breath, "and you look like a princess."

"Do I look different from American girls?"

"No," Howlett replied honestly. "You look very much like one. And you talk like one."

"I have been told that before," she said delightedly. "I love America. That is the place where I should like to live. I read American books. I look at the pictures of American girls in your papers. I hear about them. I have seen some of them in England, after they have married over there; and they are lovely. It is a beautiful thing to do as you please. They seem to be the only people in the world who do that."

"But they think a princess does as she pleases."

"She *never* does—or almost never. In all real things she cannot. She must make her friends within a circumscribed circle; she must——" She gave a little gasp, and fished for the piece of lemon in her cup.

"She must, I suppose, marry whoever is chosen for her?"

"Do you—you are an American, you cannot have any of our prejudices—do you

think that it is a woman's duty to marry that two countries should be better friends? Do you think it is fair that men should not think out some other solution to their political difficulties? Is it a woman's duty?"

"If she does not love the man—no!" Howlett said.

"We are not allowed to have any religion. We are taught only the simple story of the Bible, so that the priests of our husbands' countries may interpret it for us after it is decided what that country is to be. That was all very well in the old days when a woman honestly believed that her husband was responsible for her soul's salvation, but today we women have souls of our own. Would an American girl marry a man she did not care for?"

"I am afraid she often does," Howlett said. "But nobody could make her if she didn't want to."

"That is it—they want to. We are brought up to think it a crime against the state to want anything. We are moved about like pieces on a chess board." She looked at him in a naïve fashion and laughed. "This is the first time I ever had the opportunity to talk in that way in my life. I have enjoyed it." She half arose as if to go, but Howlett solidly blocked the way, and she sat down again.

"But you—you princesses—you would not give up your rank. You would rather marry a man you hated—marry the toad who brought you the crown, than the man you loved without it."

"I do not know," the Princess Wasia said dreamily. "I never loved—a man."

III.

THE next few weeks passed by like a dream to Howlett. He went to all the clubs, behind the scenes at the theaters, to late suppers with the gay young men of the most brilliant city in the world, to the balls at the great houses—and everywhere that a young man with an unlimited purse and the "open sesame" to society could enter. He seemed to live only upon the days when he saw the Princess Wasia. All the rest were wasted hours. Still, he remembered that he had a career, and sometimes he broke away for a few hours and devoted himself to his studies. If he could not see her, however, he could seek out Curt and hear of her, or he could go to Lady Jane.

Howlett had been received by the Czar and the empress, and by the Grand Duchess Serge, the sister of the beautiful girl he had grown to call "my princess"; but he

had found the latter very different from her young sister. Looking at the droop of the grand duchess' mouth, and the little line between her brows, Howlett wondered if Wasia had not taken her life as a text for that little sermon against marriages of state.

One day there came a letter from Lady Jane's mother, asking for the pleasure of Mr. Howlett's attendance upon them at a skating party. They were to drive in troikas for several miles to a house in the country. A pond had been cleared of snow, and a hut built of frozen blocks. During the drive he found himself seated beside Mme. de St. Pierre, of the French legation, and the Countess Wallevsky, two of the most inveterate gossips of St. Petersburg. After they had discovered the young American to be a most stupid and uninteresting companion, with no thrilling information to give them, the two ladies began talking of affairs concerning which they were wise.

"The great ball at the Winter Palace, next week, is to have an additional attraction, I hear," the countess said. She was evidently aware already that her friend had heard the news.

"Yes, the Prince of Carpathia is coming on a visit. What does your husband think of it? Has the Czar invited him? There was a whisper that he would never accept Johann as ruler of Carpathia, that he intended it for a new corner of the Russias, with one of the family on the throne."

They could talk at ease with only an American in hearing.

"Johann is an upstart," Mme. Wallevsky said with scorn. "It was only the other day that he was a nobody. All those deaths in the family have made him head of the house, and there was nobody else in Europe who would take the risks of the Carpathian throne. He had nothing to lose."

"Not even reputation, it is said."

"His is of the worst, personally. There is a dancer"—and then the conversation mumbled away. What was a lieutenant in the far off American army?

When the skating ground was reached, it was found that the lake had been turned into a bit out of fairyland. Hollow cones had been made of snow balls, and candles placed inside, the light coming through the interstices in bars of colored rays. These bordered the pond and cast a mysterious light over the black fir shaded ice. Skates were buckled on, and couples, free almost as they would have been in America, swung out into the center, sometimes in the light, and then lost again in the shadow. Chaperons stood or sat on the banks, some in

chairs packed with furs, and with foot stoves, some about the crackling fire. Howlett was taken by Lady Jane, and they went merrily round and round until they were mere indistinct figures in the crowd upon the ice.

"Come down this way," she said, drawing him around a tiny peninsula, thick with bushes. "I want to talk to you. I am in trouble."

"Command me," Howlett answered.

"They have forbidden me to see Curt. It appears that the Czar is about to take him up. He has a use for him somewhere—in Siberia, perhaps. My father has ordered me not to see him. He is not here tonight."

"I missed him."

"At least, he is not here officially. Really, he is just around this corner, and with him is Wasia." Lady Jane drew a trifle closer to him, so that her cheek took some of the hot breath that came from under Howlett's mustache. "I want to beg you, as a favor to me, to take Wasia out on the ice, while I skate here with Curt. She will enjoy the spin, poor girl. We are almost the same size. If any one speaks to you, you can fly away from them. Will you do it?"

"I will do anything to oblige you," Howlett said.

"You will greatly oblige me."

Three minutes later, the Princess Wasia's hands were in his, and Howlett, his head singing with happiness and pride, was flying over the ice by her side. Their feet moved together as if they had never taken a step apart from each other. The forces that moved their bodies acted in unison, their pulses bounded to the same time. A band at the upper end of the pond played fitful Russian airs, wild like the wind that went singing and sighing through the fir branches overhead.

Howlett waited for her to speak. It was the only time he had been alone with her since that first afternoon. Always since then she had been the princess of the royal house, unapproachable; but they had looked at each other over the walls of etiquette, and had been friends.

Now he trembled and hoped. He wanted her to begin where they had left off, where they had been interrupted. He was not analyst enough to realize that when two young people speak of love, they are making love to each other; but he knew that he wanted her to go on, or to give him an opening that he might go on. He had thought of so many things in these weeks

that he wanted to say to her. He had read books and articles bearing upon the subject of which she had spoken. He had been all ready with brilliant things to say, and now he could remember none of them.

"You have been very gay lately," she said finally.

"Yes," he said, "and I hear the ball at the Winter Palace will be the grandest of the season. Shall you be there?"

"My sister attends the empress."

"I hear that the Czar will receive the Prince of Carpathia." An instant later he added, "Are you cold? Will you go to the fire?" She had shivered.

"No."

They flew along the bank and made a swing through the skaters in the center of the pond. Many of the guests had tired of the sport already, and had gone inside to dance. The sounds came out on the wind.

"What did you hear of the new Prince of Carpathia?"

"Nothing, except that he was one of those toads of which you once spoke, and that it was a surprise that the Czar should receive him. I know very little of European politics. I am new to this country. They are teaching me."

"You do not need to know—over in your large, fresh, new country. Carpathia is one of the bones of contention over here. They have had trouble in securing a prince to rule it, and the one who has taken the throne is very young, and new even to a title, I understand. I have never met him. I hope I never shall."

"I think I should like to see a man who is new to a throne, who never expected to have one. It must be a curious sensation. I suppose now"—Howlett felt reckless—"you have always looked forward to a throne, or at least to a seat near one."

The Princess Wasia half drew her hands from his close clasp on her fingers. "I have that without looking forward," she said.

"I beg your pardon. I forget—I—"

"Do you forget? I wish I could." Her voice was sad.

"Do you want to forget that you are a princess?" Howlett asked. "Why?"

"Because I would rather be—just a woman."

"Why not, then?"

"I wonder if you Americans can understand how hard that would be. I should be like something let down from another planet. I should have no friends, no family. I should have passed from my known place. What do I know of the world except in theories?"

"There might be—there would be—those who would gladly teach you. But it might be a lesson you would not care to learn. Remember that every woman in the world envies you. We have a saying, 'Happy as a queen.'"

"I have not known happy queens."

Almost everybody had left the ice except one man beside themselves. He had kept near them, passing and repassing. He was a large man, whose short, close fitting coat of sealskin covered heavy shoulders. A hood was over his head, shading his face, so that they had not seen his features. Once or twice Howlett had begun a sentence, but the proximity of this skater had stopped it on his lips. There appeared to be an insistence in his nearness, and presently the young American saw that he was trying to come near them when the princess was in the light, as if he wished to see her face.

Howlett remembered tales he had heard of Russian spies. He wondered if this could be one following the princess to report her doings. When the man passed out of hearing for a moment, he whispered in the princess' ear,

"When I let your hands go, turn rapidly and skate toward the peninsula. I will follow you. Leave me as if it were an accident, and my impetus had thrown you forward."

Skating along, making a curve as if about to turn in the bright light, just as their follower came toward them again, Howlett released his companion, and skated outside as she gave a rapid whirl and darted off like a bird. Then he turned suddenly, and as the other man came on behind, too close to avoid the meeting, Howlett stood facing him. A ray from one of the lights set upon the snowy bank of the pond fell upon the mysterious skater as he passed the American, almost brushing against him. Howlett had only a glance at the man's features, but it was enough. He recognized the long scar on the forehead. It was Von König.

Howlett swung around and flew after the princess. She had joined Curt and Lady Jane.

"Come quickly," Howlett said, taking Lady Jane's hand. "Go," he added to the others.

When they came out from behind the peninsula Von König had disappeared.

IV.

HOWLETT, buttoned tightly in his full dress uniform, stood with his countrymen

in line, waiting for their majesties to enter the ball room of the Winter Palace. He looked plain and simple enough in his blue and white, beside the gorgeous uniforms of the other nationalities. Here were men in scarlet and in white and gold, some in velvet and sable from the half civilized eastern states; there were men with scarred faces, men with handsome and dreamy faces, but more than one eye passed them by in all their gorgeous plumage to look into the countenance of the American.

"What a *man* he looks," an old princess from the Balkans said. "There used to be men like that when I was young. I thought they were all dead, but perhaps they have only emigrated."

There was trouble in Howlett's heart, and it had pushed through into his face, giving it a gravity which took away from its boyishness. A rumor was floating in the air, passing from lip to lip. The mystery of the Czar's cordiality to the Prince of Carpathia was explained. The diplomats had decided that the way to make the new régime peaceful and popular was to marry the ruler to a princess who was well connected, who had ties in many of the reigning families; and the Princess Wasia of Hesse-Arnheim had been chosen. It had been deemed expedient that the prince should come to the Russian court and meet her under the protection of the Czar himself; and Howlett was there to see that meeting.

The talk buzzing about him was of nothing else.

"They say she is strong minded, that she is one of those who would copy the ways of that new school in the English middle classes; that she wants a latch key," a Frenchwoman near by was laughingly telling.

"I wonder what she will do with a latch key in Carpathia."

"I have heard that he is half a brute. Dozens of pictures of Wasia were sent to Carpathia this morning, to put in the windows of the shops; and as many of little Stefanie, the dancer, were sent from Berlin to put beside them, I will wager. The Carpathians will think their juxtaposition a delicate piece of humor. Doubtless they will put Johann between."

"They will not dare," Howlett was saying to himself.

Every moment seemed like an hour. At last the royalties arrived. The emperor, the grand dukes, a brilliant throng in which the Prince of Carpathia must be; the empress and the other royal ladies are there, too. It is a dazzling pageant, one in which

for an instant Howlett cannot distinguish the two for whom, to him and to almost every one else, all the rest are but a setting. Then he sees her, pale, beautiful, in a white satin gown, with a little string of pearls about her beautiful neck. She must have heard, for her lips are white and her eyes far away.

Through the crowd of men about the emperor Howlett looks with intense curiosity, and his eyes fasten upon one figure. What is Von König's hideous face doing there? Does he come with the new prince?

"He is ugly enough," the Frenchwoman is saying. "If anything could make a man look handsome, it would be that slashed uniform; but it all heightens his general disagreeableness. I wonder what she thinks of it? It is one of the few sensations left, to see how they take these marriages of state."

And then Howlett realized. He understood the look of triumph that came over Von König's face at the entrance into Russia. His former schoolmate was the man whom some strange shift of fortune had raised to the throne of a principality; and he had fallen in love with the woman the powers had decided that he was to marry. What was the meddlesomeness of a young American compared to this?

How he passed through the next hour Howlett never knew. At last the formality was over, and he was allowed to wander away where he chose. He found a little room apart from the crowd. He had seen Curt now and then, but he had not answered his recognitions and invitations. He wanted to be alone. The horror and misery of the situation overcame him.

"We had a bloody war in America once," he found himself saying to himself, "to free slaves, to give the lowest black woman the right to be herself; and here is a creature as lovely as an angel— It is ridiculous, in this nineteenth century! The thing is impossible. I will go and tell her so. I don't care if I tell her at the

very elbow of the emperor. They have no right!"

It was a brilliant ball, full of light, high spirited with the excitement of what all felt to be the turning point of a great international event. The prince's family history was told over and over again—how he had become the last of the old family, and from being its lowest member had come to be its highest. Howlett even heard the story of the scar. Gossip made it worse than the truth, which he had thought bad enough at the time.

He threaded his way to the great banqueting halls. It was almost time for them to be there. Would they put her beside him—the princess and the toad—at the table of the empress?

Suddenly the hopelessness of it all came over the young American. What could he do? There was a gulf like that of a space in the universe between them. He might as well be on one planet and she on another. He put his hand to his head, and covered his dry eyeballs with his fingers. He loved her. He dared to love her—and she was a princess!

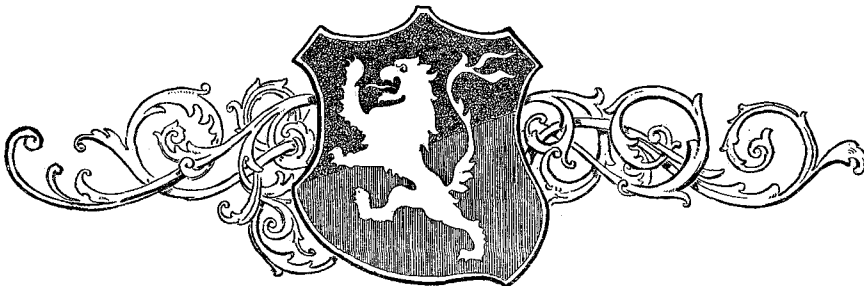
He had stepped aside into a recess behind a group of palms. The place was made of glass, and he could see the snow and the starlight outside. On a bench under the window there was something white. The outline of a head was against the glass. Howlett knew who it was. He did not ask how she came to be there. It was one of the miracles. The attraction that draws two human souls together as surely as steel and magnet, had found them.

Howlett had dropped beside her and put out his hands to hers.

"I love you," he said simply. "You shall not do this awful thing. My life, my fortune, all I have, is yours to use as you will. You have said that you would rather be just a woman than a princess."

"Hush!" she said. "I must go. I cannot think. Think for me!"

(To be continued).



HAVE WE A LANDED ARISTOCRACY?

The remarkable growth of great landed estates in America—The cause of the movement, and its possible meaning for good or for ill—The parks and country seats of the Vanderbilts, the Webbs, Austin Corbin, the Goulds, the Rockefellers, and other millionaire families.

THERE is no word in the English language so distasteful to a true American as "aristocracy." In every sense it is opposed to all that the American holds as his first and best national inheritance. It grates on his ear, turns his mind against any subject with which it may be connected, and arouses in him the remembrance of a dreaded possibility from which, happily, he and his country have escaped. Still, aristocracy, as a word, is coming into painfully frequent use in the United States. Used first in connection with money, and applied to the class whose only claim to distinction was the power conferred by money, the term has been broadened to apply to the blood as well as to the material possessions of the rich; and in such sense it has found only a significant silence to oppose its claim.

It is only among the possessors of great wealth that a landed aristocracy on this side of the water may be found to be possible. In land the millions of the rich find a natural investment, and such possessions are inherited by their families only as other accumulated property is inherited. No title or rank, of course, goes with the land. It is simply a material inheritance.

The tendency among the rich to possess vast tracts of real estate increases year by year as the century draws to a close. The extent of these holdings is wholly a matter of money; the architectural magnificence of the buildings with which they are equipped, the artistic beauties of the artificial landscapes, the drives and lakes and forests, as well as the game with which such holdings of land are usually stocked—all these are but a matter of money also. It is the art and the skill of the professional landscape gardener and the civil engineer that have produced all this, and the cost of such work is such as only the rich can afford. The same tendency is in evidence all over the Union. The rough mountain lands of North Carolina, the sterile sand hills of Long Island, the worn out farms of New England, and the vineyards and

ranches of the West, are being bought up and consolidated into private parks for the wealthiest men of our great cities.

Social reformers see in these facts cause for alarm. Henry George recently expressed his conviction that a class analogous to the landed gentry of England was forming in this country. He said that during the last ten years the new aristocracy had done more toward monopolizing the land of honest farmers than in any similar period of our history. This opinion is directly against the statement of Professor Francis A. Walker, who, in the census of 1880, set forth that the ownership of land was being diffused in the United States. But the figures by which Professor Walker arrived at his conclusion, Henry George declares, proved the reverse of the statement made, if they proved anything at all. In his "Social Problems" Mr. George points out that not merely is it the manifest tendency of agricultural machinery and the concentration of population in large cities to reduce the proportion of land owners, but that the same great cause which has concentrated the ownership of land in England is operating here. The American farmer of the old type, the cultivator who tilled his own soil, must soon, he asserts, become extinct.

The figures given by the last census, it must be admitted, support this forecast. In 1880, of the farms in the United States, three quarters were tilled by their proprietors; in 1890, not quite two thirds. The proportion of hired farms had in ten years risen from 25 to nearly 34 per cent. At this rate, though it will be long before the homestead owner becomes extinct, the tenants will outnumber him within twelve or fifteen years. The farmer who owns free of incumbrance is already in a minority.

As the cause of this concentration Mr. George holds primarily the rise in the value of land. Small estates have become parts of large estates through purchase, having gravitated, he says, to the possession of the rich, as other possessions that have a money