

The Queen's Pleasure

By Henry Harland

I AM writing to you from a lost corner of the far south-east of Europe. The author of my guide-book, in his preface, observes that a traveller in this part of the world, "unless he has some acquaintance with the local idioms, is liable to find himself a good deal bewildered about the names of places." On Thursday of last week I booked from Charing Cross, by way of Dover, Paris, and the Oriental Express, for Vescova, the capital of Monterosso; and yesterday afternoon—having changed on Sunday, at Belgrade, from land to water, and steamed for close upon forty-eight hours down the Danube—I was put ashore at the town of ВСКОВ, in the Principality of Tchernogoria.

I certainly might well have found myself a good deal bewildered; and if I did not—for I'm afraid I can't boast of much acquaintance with the local idioms—it was no doubt because this isn't my first visit to the country. I was here some years ago, and then I learned that ВСКОВ is pronounced as nearly as may be Vscov, and that Tchernogoria is Monterosso literally translated—*tchernnoe* (the dictionaries certify) meaning red, and *gora*, or *goria*, a hill, a mountain.

It is our fashion in England to speak of Monterosso, if we speak

speak of it at all, as I have just done : we say the Principality of Monserosso. But if we were to enquire at the Foreign Office, I think they would tell us that our fashion of speaking is not strictly correct. In its own Constitution Monserosso describes itself as a *Basilestvo*, and its Sovereign as the *Basile*; and in all treaties and diplomatic correspondence, *Basile* and *Basilestvo* are recognised by those most authoritative lexicographers, the Powers, as equivalent respectively to King and Kingdom. Anyhow, call it what you will, Monserosso is geographically the smallest, though politically the eldest, of the lower Danubian States. (It is sometimes, by the bye, mentioned in the newspapers of Western Europe as one of the Balkan States, which can scarcely be accurate, since, as a glance at the map will show, the nearest spurs of the Balkan Mountains are a good hundred miles distant from its southern frontier.) Its area is under ten thousand square miles, but its reigning family, the Pavelovitches, have contrived to hold their throne, from generation to generation, through thick and thin, ever since Peter the Great set them on it, at the conclusion of his war with the Turks, in 1713.

Vescova is rarely visited by English folk, lying, as it does, something like a two days' journey off the beaten track, which leads through Belgrade and Sofia, to Constantinople. But, should you ever chance to come here, you would be surprised to see what a fine town it is, with its population of upwards of a hundred thousand souls, its broad, well-paved streets, its substantial yellow-stone houses, its three theatres, its innumerable churches, its shops and cafés, its gardens, quays, monuments, its government offices, and its Royal Palace. I am speaking, of course, of the new town, the modern town, which has virtually sprung into existence since 1850, and which, the author of my guide-book says, "disputes with Bukharest the title of the Paris of the South-East."

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The old town—the Turkish town, as they call it—is another matter: a nightmare-region of filthy alleys, open sewers, crumbling clay hovels, mud, stench, dogs, and dirty humanity, into which a well-advised foreigner will penetrate as seldom as convenient. Yet it is in the centre of the old town that the Cathedral stands, the Cathedral of Sankt Iakov, an interesting specimen of Fifteenth Century Saracenic, having been erected by the Sultan Mohammed II, as a mosque.

Of the Royal Palace I obtain a capital view from the window of my room in the Hôtel de Russie.

“A vast irregular pile,” in the language of my guide-book, “it is built on the summit of an eminence which dominates the town from the West.” The “eminence” rises gradually from this side to a height of perhaps a hundred feet, but breaks off abruptly on the other in a sheer cliff overhanging the Danube. The older portions of the Palace spring from the very brink of the precipice, so that, leaning from their ramparts, you could drop a pebble straight into the current, an appalling depth below. And, still to speak by the book, these older portions “vie with the Cathedral in architectural interest.” What I see from my bedroom is a formidable, murderous-looking Saracenic castle: huge perpendicular quadrangles of blank, windowless, iron-grey stone wall (*curtains*, are they technically called?), connecting massive square towers; and the towers are surmounted by battlements and pierced by meurtrières. It stands out very bold and black, gloomy and impressive, when the sun sets behind it, in the late afternoon. I could suppose the place quite impregnable, if not inaccessible; and it’s a mystery to me how Peter the Great ever succeeded in taking it, as History will have it that he did, by assault.

The modern portions of the Palace are entirely commonplace and cheerful. The east wing, visible from where I am seated writing, might have been designed by Baron Haussmann: a long stretch of yellow façade—dazzling to the sight just now, in the morning sunshine—with a French roof, of slate, and a box of gay-tinted flowers in each of its countless windows.

Behind the Palace there is a large and very lovely garden, reserved to the uses of the Royal Household; and beyond that, the Dunayskiy Prospekt, a park that covers about sixty acres, and is open to the public.

The first floor, the *piano nobile*, of that east wing is occupied by the private apartments of the King and Queen.

I look across the quarter-mile of red-tiled housetops that separate me from their Majesties' habitation, and I fancy the life that is going on within. It is too early in the day for either of them to be abroad, so they are certainly there, somewhere behind those gleaming windows: Theodore *Basile*, and Anéli *Basilitsa*.

She, I would lay a wager, is in her music-room, at her piano, practising a song with Florimond. She is dressed in white (I always think of her as dressed in white—doubtless because she wore a white frock the first time I saw her), and her brown hair is curling loose about her forehead, her maids not having yet imprisoned it. I declare, I can almost hear her voice: *tra-la-lira-la-la*: mastering a trill; while Florimond, pink, and plump, and smiling, walks up and down the room, nodding his head to mark the time, and every now and then interrupting her with a suggestion.

The King, at this hour, will be in his study, in dressing-gown and slippers—a tattered old dingy brown dressing-gown, out at elbows

elbows — at his big, wildly-littered writing-table, producing “copy,” . . . to the accompaniment of endless cigarettes and endless glasses of tea. (Monterossan cigarettes are excellent, and Monterossan tea is always served in glasses.) The King has literary aspirations, and—like Frederick the Great—coaxes his muse in French. You will occasionally see a *conte* of his in the *Nouvelle Revue*, signed by the artful pseudonym, Théodore Montrouge.

At one o'clock to-day I am to present myself at the Palace, and to be received by their Majesties in informal audience; and then I am to have the honour of lunching with them. If I were on the point of lunching with any other royal family in Europe. . . . But, thank goodness, I'm not; and I needn't pursue the distressing speculation. Queen Aneli and King Theodore are—for a multitude of reasons—a Queen and King apart.

You see, when he began life, Theodore IV was simply Prince Theodore Pavelovitch, the younger son of a nephew of the reigning Basile, Paul III; and nobody dimly dreamed that he would ever ascend the throne. So he went to Paris, and “made his studies” in the Latin Quarter, like any commoner.

In those days—as, I dare say, it still is in these—the Latin Quarter was crowded with students from the far south-east. Servians, Roumanians, Monterossans, grew, as it were, on every bush; we even had a sprinkling of Bulgarians and Montenegrins; and those of them who were not (more or less vaguely) princes, you could have numbered on your fingers. And, anyhow, in that democratic and self-sufficient seat of learning, titles count for little, and foreign countries are a matter of consummate ignorance and jaunty unconcern. The Duke of Plaza-Toro, should he venture in the classical Boul' Miche, would have to cede the

pas to the latest hero of the Beaux-Arts, or bully from the School of Medicine, even though the hero were the son of a village apothecary, and the bully reeked to heaven of absinthe and tobacco ; while the Prime Minister of England would find his name, it is more than to be feared, unknown, and himself regarded as a person of quite extraordinary unimportance.

So we accepted Prince Theodore Pavelovitch, and tried him by his individual merits, for all the world as if he were made of the same flesh and blood as Tom, Dick, and Harry ; and thee-and-thou'd him, and hailed him as *mon vieux*, as merrily as we did everybody else. Indeed, I shouldn't wonder if the majority of those who knew him were serenely unaware that his origin was royal (he would have been the last to apprise them of it), and roughly classed him with our other *princes valaques*. For convenience sake, we lumped them all—the divers natives of the lands between the Black Sea and the Adriatic—under the generic name, Valaques ; we couldn't be bothered with nicer ethnological distinctions.

We tried Prince Theodore by his individual merits ; but, as his individual merits happened to be signal, we liked him very much. He hadn't a trace of "side ;" his pockets were full of money ; he was exceedingly free-handed. No man was readier for a lark, none more inventive or untiring in the prosecution of one. He was a brilliant scholar, besides, and almost the best fencer in the Quarter. And he was pleasantly good-looking—fair-haired, blue-eyed, with a friendly humorous face, a pointed beard, and a slight, agile, graceful figure. Everybody liked him, and everybody was sorry when he had to leave us, and return to his ultramundane birthplace. "It can't be helped," he said. "I must go home and do three years of military service. But then I shall come back. I mean always to live in Paris."

That

That was in '82. But he never came back. For, before his three years of military service were completed, the half-dozen cousins and the brother who stood between him and the throne, had one by one died off, and Theodore himself had succeeded to the dignity of *Basilitch*,—as they call their Heir Presumptive. In 1886 he married. And, finally, in '88, his great-uncle Paul also died—at the age of ninety-seven, if you please—and Theodore was duly proclaimed Basile.

He didn't forget his ancient cronies, though; and I was only one of those whom he invited to come and stay with him in his Palace. I came, and staid . . . eleven months! That seems egregious; but what will you say of another of us, Arthur Fleet (or Florimond, as their Majesties have nicknamed him), who came at the same time, and has staid ever since? The fact is, the King is a tenacious as well as a delightful host; if he once gets you within his portals, he won't let you go without a struggle. "We do bore ourselves so improbably out here, you know," he explains. "The society of a Christian is a thing we'd commit a crime for."

Theodore's consort, Anéli Isabella, *Basilitsa Tchernogory*—*vide the Almanach de Gotha*—is the third daughter of the late Prince Maximilian of Wittenburg; sister, therefore, to that young Prince Waldemar who comes almost every year to England, and with whose name and exploits as a yachtsman all conscientious students of the daily press will be familiar; and cousin to the reigning Grand Duke Ernest.

Theoretically German, she is, however, to all intents and purposes, French; for her mother, the Princess Célestine (of Bourbon-Morbihan), was a Frenchwoman, and, until her marriage, I fancy that more than half of Anéli's life was passed between
Nice

Nice and Paris. She openly avows, moreover, that she "detests Germany, the German language, the German people, and all things German, and adores France and the French." And her political sympathies are entirely with the Franco-Russ alliance.

She is a deliciously pretty little lady, with curling soft-brown hair, a round, very young-looking face, a delicate rose-and-ivory complexion, and big, bright, innocent brown eyes—innocent, yet with plenty of potential archness, even potential mischief, lurking in them. She has beautiful full red lips, besides, and exquisite little white teeth. Florimond wrote a triolet about her once, in which he described her as "une fleur en porcelaine." Her Majesty repudiated the phrase indignantly. "Why not say a wax-doll, and be done with it?" she demanded. All the same, "fleur en porcelaine" does, in a manner, suggest the general effect of her appearance, its daintiness, its finish, its crisp chiselling, its clear, pure colour. Whereas, nothing could be more misleading than "wax-doll," for there is character, character, in every molecule of her person.

The Queen's character, indeed, is what I wish I could give some idea of. It is peculiar, it is distinctive; to me, at any rate, it is infinitely interesting and diverting; but, by the same token—if I may hazard so to qualify it—it is a trifle . . . a trifle . . . difficult.

"You're such an arbitrary gent!" I heard Florimond complain to her, one day. (I heard and trembled, but the Queen only laughed.) And that will give you an inkling of what I mean.

If she likes you, if you amuse her, and if you never remotely oppose or question her desire of the moment, she can be all that is most gracious, most reasonable, most captivating: an inspiring listener, an entertaining talker: mingling the naïveté, the inex-
perience

perience of evil, the half comical, half appealing unsophistication, of a girl, of a child almost—of one who has always lived far aloof from the struggle and uncleanness of the workaday world—with the wit, the humour, the swift appreciation and responsiveness of an exceedingly impressionable, clear-sighted, and accomplished woman.

But but

Well, I suppose, the right way of putting it would be to say, in the consecrated formula, that she has the defects of her qualities. Having preserved something of a child's simplicity, she has not entirely lost a child's wilfulness, a child's instability of mood, a child's trick of wearing its heart upon its sleeve. She has never perfectly acquired a grown person's power of controlling or concealing her emotions.

If you *don't* happen to amuse her—if, by any chance, it is your misfortune to *bore* her, no matter how slightly; and, oh, she is so easily bored!—the atmosphere changes in a twinkling: the sun disappears, clouds gather, the temperature falls, and (unless you speedily “brisken up,” or fly her presence) you may prepare for most uncomfortable weather. If you manifest the faintest hesitation in complying with her momentary wishes, if you raise the mildest objection to them—*gare à vous!* Her face darkens, ominous lightning flashes in her eyes, her under-lip swells dangerously; she very likely stamps her foot imperiously; and you are to be accounted lucky if you don't get a smart dab from the barbed end of her royal tongue. And if she doesn't like you, though she may think she is trying with might and main to disguise the fact and to treat you courteously, you know it directly, and you go away with the persuasion that she has been, not merely cold and abstracted, but downright uncivil.

In a word, Queen Anéli is hasty, she is impatient. And, in addition to that, she is uncertain. You can never tell beforehand, by any theory of probabilities based on past experience, what will or will not, on any given occasion, cause her to smile or frown. The thing she expressed a desire for yesterday, may offend her to-day. The suggestion that put her in a temper yesterday, to-day she may welcome with joyous enthusiasm. You must approach her gingerly, tentatively; you must feel your ground.

"Oh, most dread Sovereign," said Florimond, "if you won't fly out at me, I would submit, humbly, that you'd better not drive this afternoon in your open carriage, in your sweet new frock, for, unless all signs fail, it's going to rain like everything."

She didn't fly out at him exactly; but she retorted, succinctly, with a peremptory gesture, "No, it's *not* going to rain," as who should say, "It daren't." And she drove in her open carriage, and spoiled her sweet new frock. "Not to speak of my sweet new top-hat," sighs Florimond, who attended her; "the only Lincoln and Bennett top-hat in the whole length and breadth of Montersso."

She is hasty, she is uncertain; and then . . . she is *intense*. She talks in italics, she feels in superlatives; she admits no comparative degree, no emotional half-tones. When she is not *ecstatically* happy, she is *desperately* miserable; wonders why she was ever born into this worst of all possible worlds; wishes she were dead; and even sometimes drops dark hints of meditated suicide. When she is not in the brightest of affable humours, she is in the blackest of cross ones. She either *loves* a thing, or she *simply can't endure it*;—the thing may be a town, a musical composition, a perfume, or a person. She either loves you, or she simply can't endure you; and she's very apt to love you and to cease to love you

you alternately—or, at least, to give you to understand as much—three or four times a day. It is winter midnight or summer noon, a climate of extremes.

“Do you like the smell of tangerine-skin?”

Every evening for a week, when, at the end of dinner, the fruit was handed round, the King asked her that question; and she, never suspecting his malice, answered invariably, as she crushed a bit between her fingers, and fervidly inhaled its odour, “Oh, do I *like* it? I *adore* it. It’s perfect *rapture*.”

She is hasty, she is uncertain, she is intense. Will you be surprised when I go on to insist that, down deep, she is altogether well-meaning and excessively tender-hearted, and when I own that among all the women I know I can think of none other who seems to me so attractive, so fascinating, so sweetly feminine and loveable? (Oh, no, I am not *in love* with her, not in the least—though I don’t say that I mightn’t be, if I were a king, or she were not a queen.) If she realises that she has been unreasonable, she is the first to confess it; she repents honestly, and makes the devoutest resolutions to amend. If she discovers that she has hurt anybody’s feelings, her conscience will not give her a single second of peace, until she has sought her victim out and heaped him with benefits. If she believes that this or that distasteful task forms in very truth a part of her duty, she will go to any length of persevering self-sacrifice to accomplish it. She has a hundred generous and kindly impulses, where she has one that is perverse or inconsiderate. Bring any case of distress or sorrow to her notice, and see how instantly her eyes soften, how eager she is to be of help. And in her affections, however mercurial she may appear on the surface, she is really constant, passionate, and, in great things, forbearing. She and her husband, for example, though

though they have been married for perilously near ten years, are little better than a pair of sweethearts (and jealous sweethearts, at that; you should have been present on a certain evening when we had been having a long talk and laugh over old days in the Latin Quarter, and an evil spirit prompted one of us to regale her Majesty with a highly-coloured account of Theodore's youthful infatuation for Nina Childe! . . . Oh, their faces! Oh, the silence!); and then, witness her devotion to her brother, to her sisters; her fondness for Florimond, for Madame Donarowska, who was her governess when she was a girl, and now lives with her in the Palace.

"I am writing a fairy-tale," Florimond said to her, "about Princess Gugglegoo and Princess Ragglesnag."

"Oh?" questioned the Queen. "And who were *they*?"

"Princess Gugglegoo was all sweetness and pinkness, softness and guilelessness, a rose full of honey, and without a thorn; a perfect little cherub; oh, such a duck! Princess Ragglesnag was all corners and sharp edges, fire and fret, dark moods and quick angers; oh, such an intolerant, dictatorial, explosive, tempestuous princess! You could no more touch her than you could touch a nettle, or a porcupine, or a live coal, or a Leyden jar, or any other prickly, snaggy, knaggy, incandescent, electric thing. You *did* have to mind your p's and q's with her! But no matter how carefully you minded them, she was sure to let you have it, sooner or later; you were sure to *rile* her, one way or another: she was that cantankerous and tetchy, and changeable and unexpected.—And then. . . . Well, what do you suppose?"

"I'm waiting to hear," the Queen replied, a little drily.

"Oh, there! If you're going to be grumpy, I won't play," cried Florimond.

"I'm

"I'm not grumpy—as you call it. Only, your characters are rather conventionally drawn. However, go on, go on."

"There was a distinct suggestion of menace in your tone. But never mind. If you didn't really mean it, we'll pretend there wasn't.—Well, my dears," he went on, turning, so as to include the King in his audience, "you never *will* believe me, but it's a solemn, sober fact that these two princesses were twin sisters, and that they looked so much alike that nobody, not even their own born mother, could tell them apart. Now, wasn't *that* surprising? Only, Ragglesnag looked like Gugglegoo suddenly curdled and gone sour, you know; and Gugglegoo looked like Ragglesnag suddenly wreathed out in smiles and graces. So that the courtiers used to say, 'Hello! What *can* have happened? Here comes dear Princess Gugglegoo looking as black as thunder.' Or else—'Bless us and save us! What's *this* miracle? Here comes old Ragglesnag looking as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth.'—Well, and then. . . ."

"Oh, you needn't continue," the Queen interrupted, bridling. "You're tedious and obvious, and utterly unfair and unjust. I hope I'm not an insipid little fool, like Gugglegoo; but I don't think I'm quite a termagant, either, like your horrid exaggerated Ragglesnag."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" wailed Florimond. "Why *will* people go and make a personal application of everything a fellow says? If I had been even remotely thinking of your Majesty, I should never have dreamed of calling her by either of those ridiculous outlandish names. Gugglegoo and Ragglesnag, indeed!"

"What *would* you have called her?" the King asked, who was chuckling inscrutably, in his arm-chair.

"Well, I *might* have called her Ragglegoo, and I *might* have called

called her Gugglesnag. But I hope I'm much too discerning ever to have applied such a sweeping generalisation to her as Ragglesnag, or such a silly, sugary sort of barbarism as Gugglegoo."

"It's perfectly useless," the Queen broke out, bitterly, "to expect a *man*—even a comparatively intelligent and highly-developed man, like Florimond—to understand the subtleties of a woman's nature, or to sympathise with the difficulties of her life. When she isn't as crude, and as blunt, and as phlegmatic, and as insensitive, and as transparent and commonplace and all-of-one-piece, as themselves, men always think a woman's unreasonable and capricious and infantile. It's a little *too* discouraging. Here I wear myself to a shadow, and bore and worry myself to extermination, with all the petty contemptible cares and bothers and pomps and ceremonies of this tiresome little Court; and that's all the thanks I get—to be laughed at by my husband, and lectured and ridiculed in stupid allegories by Florimond! It's a little *too* hard. Oh, if you'd only let me go away, and leave it all behind me! I'd go to Paris, and change my name, and become a concert-singer. It's the only thing I really care for—to sing and sing and sing. Oh, if I could only go and make a career, as a concert-singer in Paris! Will you let me? Will you? *Will* you?" she demanded vehemently of her husband.

"That's rather a radical measure to bring up for discussion at this hour of the night, isn't it?" the King suggested, laughing.

"But it's quite serious enough for you to afford to consider it. And I don't see why one hour isn't as good as another. *Will* you let me go to Paris and become a concert-singer?"

"What! And leave poor me alone and forlorn here in Ves-cova? Oh, my dear, you wouldn't desert your own lawful spouse in that regardless manner!"

"I don't

"I don't see what 'lawful' has to do with it. You don't half appreciate me. You think I'm childish, and capricious, and bad-tempered, and everything that's absurd and idiotic. I don't see why I should waste my life and my youth, stagnating in this out-of-the-way corner of Nowhere, with a man who doesn't appreciate me, and who thinks I'm childish and idiotic, when I could go to Paris, and have a life of my own, and a career, and do the only thing in the world I really care for. Will you let me? Answer. Will you?"

But the King only laughed.

"And besides," the Queen went on, in a minute, "if you really missed me, you could come too. You could abdicate. Why shouldn't you? Instead of staying here, and boring and worrying ourselves to death as King and Queen of this ungrateful, insufferable, little unimportant ninth-rate country, why shouldn't we abdicate, and go to Paris, and be a Man and a Woman, and have a little Life, instead of this dreary, artificial, cardboard sort of puppet-show existence? You could devote yourself to literature, and I'd go on the concert-stage, and we'd have a delightful little house in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and be perfectly happy. Of course Florimond would come with us. Why shouldn't we? Oh, if you only would! Will you? Will you, Theo?" she pleaded earnestly.

The King looked at his watch. "It's nearly midnight, my dear," he said. "High time, I should think, to adjourn the debate. But if, when you wake up to-morrow morning, you wish to resume it, Florimond and I will be at your disposal. Meanwhile we're losing our beauty-sleep; and I, for one, am going to bed."

"Oh, it's always like that!" the Queen complained. "You never do me the honour of taking seriously anything I say. It's intolerable. I don't think any woman was ever so badly treated."

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She didn't recur to the subject next day, however, but passed the entire morning with Florimond, planning the details of a garden-party, and editing the list of guests ; and she threw her whole soul into it, too : so that, when the King looked in upon them, a little before luncheon, Florimond smiled at him significantly (indeed, I'm not sure he didn't *wink* at him) and called out, "Oh, we *are* enjoying of ourselves. Please don't interrupt. Go back to your counting-house and count out your money, and leave us in the parlour to eat our bread and honey."

It is in the nature of things, doubtless, that a temperament such as I have endeavoured to suggest, should find the intensity of its own feelings reflected by those that it excites in others. One would expect to hear that the people who like Queen Aneli like her tremendously, and that the people who don't like her tremendously don't like her at all. And, in effect, that is precisely the lady's case. She is tremendously liked by those who are near to her, and who are therefore in a position to understand her and to make allowances. They love the woman in her ; they laugh at and love the high-spirited, whimsical, impetuous, ingenuous child. But those who are at a distance from her, or who meet her only rarely and formally, necessarily fail to understand her, and are apt, accordingly, neither to admire her greatly, nor to bear her much good will. And, of course, while the people who are near to her can be named by twos and threes, those who view her from a distance must be reckoned with by thousands. And this brings me to a painful circumstance, which I may as well mention without more ado. At Vescova—as you could scarcely spend a day in the town, and not become aware—Queen Aneli is anything you please but popular.

"The inhabitants of Monterosso," says M. Boridov, in his
interesting

interesting history of that country, “fall into three rigidly separated castes : the nobility, a bare handful of tall, fair-haired, pure-blooded Slavs ; the merchants and manufacturers, almost exclusively Jews and Germans ; and the peasantry, the populace—a short, thick-set, swarthy race, of Slavic origin, no doubt, and speaking a Slavic tongue, but with most of the Slavic characteristics obliterated by admixture with the Turk. . . . Your true Slav peasant, with his mild blue eyes, and his trustful spirit, is as meek and as long-suffering as a dumb beast of burden. But your black-browed Monterossan, your Tchernogorets, is fierce, lawless, resentful, and vindictive, a Turk’s grandson, the Turk’s first cousin : though no one detests the Turk more cordially than he.”

Well, at Vescova, and, with diminishing force, throughout all Monterosso, Queen Anéli is entirely misunderstood and sullenly disliked. Her husband cannot be called precisely the idol of his people, either ; but he is regarded with indulgence, even with hopefulness ; he is a Monterossan, a Pavelovitch : he may turn out well yet. Anéli, on the contrary, is an alien, a German, a *Niemkashka*. The feeling against her begins with the nobility. Save the half-dozen who are about her person, almost every mother’s son or daughter of them fancies that he or she has been rudely treated by her, and quite frankly hates her. I am afraid, indeed, they have some real cause of grievance ; for they are most of them rather tedious, and provincial, and narrow-minded ; and they bore her terribly when they come to Court ; and when she is bored, as we have seen, she is likely to show it pretty plainly. So they say she gives herself airs. They pretend that when she isn’t absent-minded and monosyllabic, she is positively snappish. They denounce her as vain, shallow-pated, and extravagant. They twist and torture every word she speaks, and everything she does, into subject-matter for unfriendly criticism ; and they quote

as from her lips a good many words that she has never spoken, and they blame her savagely for innumerable things that she has never thought of doing. But that's the trouble with the fierce light that beats upon a throne—it shows the gaping multitude so much more than is really there. Why, I have been assured by at least a score of Monterossan ladies that the Queen's lovely brown hair is a wig; that her exquisite little teeth are the creation of Dr. Evans, of Paris; that whenever anything happens to annoy her, she bursts out with torrents of the most awful French oaths; that she quite frequently slaps and pinches her maids-of-honour; and that, as for her poor husband, he gets his hair pulled and his face scratched as often as he and she have the slightest difference of opinion. Monterossan ladies have gravely asseverated these charges to me (these, and others more outrageous, that I won't repeat), whilst their Monterossan lords nodded confirmation. It matters little that the charges are preposterous. Give a Queen a bad name, and nine people in ten will believe she merits it.

Anyhow, the nobility of Monterosso, quite frankly hating Queen Anéli, give her every bad name they can discover in their vocabularies; and the populace, the mob, without stopping to make original investigations, have convicted her on faith, and watch her with sullen captiousness and dislike. When she drives abroad, scarcely a hat is doffed, never a cheer is raised. On the contrary, one sometimes hears mutterings and muffled groans; and the glances the passers-by direct at her are, in the main, the very reverse of affectionate glances. Members of the shop-keeping class alone show a certain tendency to speak up for her, because she spends her money pretty freely; but the shop-keeping class are aliens too, and don't count—or, rather, they count against her, “the dogs of Jews,” the *zhudovskwy sobakwy!*

But do you imagine Queen Anéli minds? Do you imagine she
is

is hurt, depressed, disappointed? Not she. She accepts her unpopularity with the most superb indifference. "What do you suppose I care for the opinion of such riff-raff?" I recollect her once crying out, with curling lip. "Anyone who has the least individuality, the least character, the least fineness, the least originality—any one who is in the least degree natural, unconventional, spontaneous—is bound to be misconceived and calumniated by the vulgar rank and file. It's the meanness and stupidity of average human nature; it's the proverbial injustice of men. To be popular, you must either be utterly insignificant, a complete nonentity, or else a time-server and a hypocrite. So long as I have a clear conscience of my own, I don't care a button what strangers think and say about me. I don't intend to allow my conduct to be influenced in the tiniest particular by the prejudices of outsiders. Meddlers, busybodies! I will live my own life, and those who don't like it may do their worst. I will be myself."

"Yes, my dear; but after all," the King reminded her, "one has, in this imperfect world, to make certain compromises with one's environment, for comfort's sake. One puts on extra clothing in winter, for example, however much, on abstract principles, one may despise such a gross, material, unintelligent thing as the weather. Just so, don't you think, one is by way of having a smoother time of it, in the long run, if one takes a few simple measures to conciliate the people amongst whom one is compelled to live? Now, for instance, if you would give an hour or two every day to learning Monterossan. . . ."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't begin *that* rengaine," cried her Majesty. "I've told you a hundred million times that I won't be bothered learning Monterossan."

It is one of her subjects' sorest points, by the bye, that she has
never

never condescended to learn their language. When she was first married, indeed, she announced her intention of studying it. Grammars and dictionaries were bought ; a Professor was nominated ; and for almost a week the Crown Princess (Basilevna), as she then was, did little else than grind at Monterossan. Her Professor was delighted ; he had never known such a zealous pupil. Her husband was a little anxious. " You musn't work too hard, my dear. An hour or two a day should be quite enough." But she answered, " Let me alone. It interests me." And for almost a week she was at it early and late, with hammer and tongs ; poring over the endless declensions of Monterossan nouns, the endless conjugations of Monterossan verbs ; wrestling, *sotto voce*, with the tongue-tangling difficulties of Monterossan pronunciation ; or, with dishevelled hair and inky fingers, copying long Monterossan sentences into her exercise book. She is not the sort of person who does things by halves.—And then, suddenly, she turned volte-face ; abandoned the enterprise forever. " It's idiotic," she exclaimed. " A language with thirty-seven letters in its alphabet, and no literature ! Why should I addle my brains trying to learn it ? Ah, bien, merci ! I'll content myself with French and English. It's bad enough, in one short life, to have had to learn German, when I was a child."

And neither argument nor entreaty could induce her to recommence it. The King, who has never altogether resigned himself to her determination, seizes from time to time an opportunity to hark back to it ; but then he is silenced, as we have seen, with a " don't begin *that* rengaine." The disadvantages that result from her ignorance, it must be noticed, are chiefly moral ; it offends Monterossan amour-propre. Practically, she does perfectly well with French, that being the Court language of the realm.

No, Queen Anéli doesn't care a button. She tosses her head,
and

and accepts "the proverbial injustice of men" with magnificent unconcern. Only, sometimes, when the public sentiment against her takes the form of aggressive disrespect, or when it interferes in any way with her immediate convenience, it puts her a little out of patience—when, for instance, the traffic in the street retards the progress of her carriage, and a passage isn't cleared for her as rapidly as it might be for a Queen whom the rabble loved; or when, crossing the pavement on foot, to enter a church, or a shop, or what not, the idlers that collect to look, glare at her sulkily, without doing her the common courtesy of lifting their hats. In such circumstances, I dare say, she is more or less angered. At all events, a sudden fire will kindle in her eyes, a sudden colour in her cheeks; she will very likely tap nervously with her foot, and murmur something about "canaille." Perhaps anger, though, is the wrong word for her emotion; perhaps it should be more correctly called a kind of angry contempt.

When I first came to Vescova, some years ago, the Prime Minister and virtual dictator of the country was still M. Tsargradev, the terrible M. Tsargradev,—or Sargradeff, as most English newspapers write his name,—and it was during my visit here that his downfall occurred, his downfall and irretrievable disgrace.

The character and career of M. Tsargradev would furnish the subject for an extremely interesting study. The illegitimate son of a Monterossan nobleman, by a peasant mother, he inherited the unprepossessing physical peculiarities of his mother's stock: the sallow skin, the broad face, the flat features, the prominent cheek-bones, the narrow, oblique-set, truculent black eyes, the squat, heavy figure. But to these he united a cleverness, an energy, an ambition, which are as foreign to simple as to gentle Monterossan blood,

blood, and which he doubtless owed to the fusion of the two ; and an unscrupulousness, a perfidy, a cruelty, and yet a superficial urbanity, that are perhaps not surprising in an ambitious politician, half an Oriental, who has got to carry the double handicap of a repulsive personal appearance and a bastard birth. Now, the Government of Monterosso, as the King has sometimes been heard to stigmatise it, is deplorably constitutional. By the Constitution of 1869, practically the whole legislative power is vested in the *Soviete*, a parliament elected by the votes of all male subjects who have completed three years of military service. And, in the early days of the reign of Theodore IV, M. Tsargradev was leader of the *Soviete*, with a majority of three to one at his back.

This redoubtable personage stood foremost in the ranks of those whom our fiery little Queen Aneli "could not endure."

"His horrible soapy smile ! His servile, insinuating manner ! It makes you feel as if he were plotting your assassination," she declared. "His voice—ugh ! It's exactly like lukewarm oil. He makes my flesh creep, like some frightful, bloated reptile."

"There was a Queen in Thule," hummed Florimond, "who had a marvellous command of invective. 'Eaving help your reputation, if you fell under her illustrious displeasure."

"I don't see why you make fun of me. I'm sure you think as I do—that he's a monster of low cunning, and cynicism, and craft, and treachery, and everything that's vile and revolting. Don't you ?" the Queen demanded.

"To be sure I do. I think he's a bold, bad, dreadful person. I lie awake half the night, counting up his iniquities in my mind. And if just now I laughed, it was only to keep from crying."

"This sort of talk is all very well," put in the King ; "but the fact remains that Tsargradev is the master of Monterosso. He
could

could do any one of us an evil turn at any moment. He could cut down our Civil List to-morrow, or even send us packing, and establish a republic. We're dependent for everything upon his pleasure. I think, really, my dear, you ought to try to be decent to him—if only for prudence' sake."

"Decent to him!" echoed her Majesty. "I like that! As if I didn't treat him a hundred million times better than he deserves! I hope he can't complain that I'm not decent to him."

"You're not exactly effusive, do you think? I don't mean that you stick your tongue out at him, or throw things at his head. But trust him for understanding. It's what you leave unsaid and undone, rather than what you say or do. He's fully conscious of the sort of place he occupies in your heart, and he resents it. He thinks you distrust him, suspect him, look down upon him. . . ."

"Well, and so I do," interrupted the Queen. "And so do you. And so does everybody who has any right feeling."

"Yes; but those of us who are wise in our generation keep our private sentiments regarding him under lock and key. We remember his power, and treat him respectfully to his face, however much we may despise him in secret. What's the use of quarrelling with our bread and butter? We should seek to propitiate him, to rub him the right way."

"Then you would actually like me to *grovel*, to *toady*, to a disgusting little low-born, black-hearted cad like Tsargradev!" cried the Queen, with scorn.

"Oh, dear me, no," protested her husband. "But there's a vast difference between toadying, and being a little tactful, a little diplomatic. I should like you to treat him with something more than bare civility."

"Well,

"Well, what can I do that I don't do?"

"You never ask him to any but your general public functions, your state receptions, and that sort of thing. Why don't you admit him to your private circle sometimes? Why don't you invite him to your private parties, your dinners?"

"Ah, merci, non! My private parties are my private parties. I ask my friends, I ask the people I like. Nothing could induce me to ask that horrid little underbred mongrel creature. He'd be—he'd be like—like something unclean—something murky and contaminating—in the room. He'd be like an animal, an ape, a satyr."

"Well, my dear," the King submitted meekly, "I only hope we'll never have cause to repent your exclusion of him. I know he bears us a grudge for it, and he's not a person whose grudges are to be made light of."

"Bah! I'm not afraid of him," Anéli retorted. "I know he hates me. I see it every time he looks at me, with his snaky little eyes, his forced little smile—that awful, complacent, ingratiating smirk of his, that shows his teeth, and isn't even skin deep; a mere film spread over his face, like pomatum! Oh, I know he hates me. But it's the nature of mean, false little beasts like him to hate their betters; so it can't be helped. For the rest, he may do his worst. I'm not afraid," she concluded airily.

Not only would she take no steps to propitiate M. Tsargradev, but she was constantly urging her husband to dismiss him.

"I'm perfectly certain he has all sorts of dreadful secret vices. I haven't the least doubt he's murdered people. I'm sure he steals. I'm sure he has a secret understanding with Berlin, and accepts bribes to manage the affairs of Monterosso as Prince Bismarck wishes. That's why we're more or less in disgrace with our
natural

natural allies, Russia and France. Because Tsargradev is paid to pursue an anti-Russian, a German, policy. If you would take my advice, you'd dismiss him, and have him put in prison. Then you could explain to the Soviets that he is a murderer, a thief, a traitor, and a monster of secret immorality, and appoint a decent person in his place."

Her husband laughed with great amusement.

"You don't appear quite yet to have mastered the principles of constitutional government, my dear. I could no more dismiss Tsargradev than you could dismiss the Pope of Rome."

"Are you or are you not the King of Monterosso?"

"I'm Vice-King, perhaps. You're the King, you know. But that has nothing to do with it. Tsargradev is leader of the Soviets. The Soviets pay the bills, and its leader governs. The King's a mere fifth-wheel. Some day they'll abolish him. Meanwhile they tolerate him, on the understanding that he's not to interfere."

"You ought to be ashamed to say so. You ought to take the law and the Constitution and everything into your own hands. If you asserted yourself, they'd never dare to resist you. But you always submit—submit—submit. Of course, everybody takes advantage of a man who always submits. Show that you have some spirit, some sense of your own dignity. Order Tsargradev's dismissal and arrest. You can do it now, at once, this evening. Then to-morrow you can go down to the Soviets, and tell them what a scoundrel he is—a thief, a murderer, a traitor, an impostor, a libertine, everything that's foul and bad. And tell them that henceforward you're going to be really King, and not merely nominally King; and that you're going to govern exactly as you think best; and that, if they don't like that, they will have to make the best of it. If they resist, you can dissolve them, and

order a general election. Or you can suspend the Constitution, and govern without any Soviete at all."

The King laughed again.

"I'm afraid the Soviete might ask for a little evidence, a few proofs, in support of my sweeping charges. I could hardly satisfy them by declaring that I had my wife's word for it. But, seriously, you exaggerate. Tsargradev is anything you like from the point of view of abstract ethics, but he's not a criminal. He hasn't the faintest motive for doing anything that isn't in accordance with the law. He's simply a vulgar, self-seeking politician, with a touch of the Tartar. But he's not a thief, and I imagine his private life is no worse than most men's."

"Wait, wait, only wait!" cried the Queen. "Time will show. Some day he'll come to grief, and then you'll see that he's even worse than I have said. I *feel*, I *know*, he's everything that's bad. Trust a woman's intuitions. They're much better than what you call *evidence*."

And she had a nickname for him, which, as well as her general criticisms of his character, had pretty certainly reached the Premier's ear; for, as subsequent events demonstrated, very nearly every servant in the Palace was a spy in his pay. She called him the *nain jaune*.

Subsequent events have also demonstrated that her woman's intuitions were indeed trustworthy. Perhaps you will remember the revelations that were made at the time of M. Tsargradev's downfall; fairly full reports of them appeared in the London papers. Murder, peculation, and revolting secret debaucheries were all, surely enough, proved against him. It was proved that he was the paid agent of Berlin; it was proved that he had had recourse to *torture* in dealing with certain refractory witnesses in his famous prosecution of Count Osaréki. And then, there was
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the case of Colonel Alexandrevitch. He and Tsargradev, at sunset, were strolling arm-in-arm in the Dunayskiy Prospekt, when the Colonel was shot by some person concealed in the shrubberies, who was never captured. Tsargradev and his friends broached the theory, which gained pretty general acceptance, that the shot had been intended for the Prime Minister himself, and that the death of Colonel Alexandrevitch was an accident due to bad aiming. It is now perfectly well established that the death of the Colonel was due to very good aiming indeed ; that the assassin was M. Tsargradev's own hireling ; and that perhaps the best reason why the police could never lay hands on him had some connection with the circumstance that the poor wretch, that very night, was strangled and cast into the Danube.

Oh, they manage these things in a highly unlikely and theatrical manner, in the far south-east of Europe !

But the particular circumstances of M. Tsargradev's downfall were amusingly illustrative of the character of the Queen. *Ce que femme veult, Dieu le veult*. And though her husband talked of the Constitution, and pleaded the necessity of evidence, Anéli was unconvinced. To get rid of Tsargradev, by one method or another, was her fixed idea, her determined purpose ; she bided her time, and in the end she accomplished it.

It befell, during the seventh month of my stay in the Palace, that a certain great royal wedding was appointed to be celebrated at Dresden : a festivity to which were bidden all the crowned heads and most of the royal and semi-royal personages of Christendom, and amongst them the Basile and Basilitza of Monterosso.

“It will cost us a pretty sum of money,” Theodore grumbled,
when

when the summons first reached him. "We'll have to travel in state, with a full suite ; and the whole shot must be paid from our private purse. There's no expecting a penny for such a purpose from the Soviets."

"I hope," exclaimed the Queen, looking up from a letter she was writing, "I hope you don't for a moment intend to go?"

"We *must* go," answered the King. "There's no getting out of it."

"Nonsense!" said she. "We'll send a representative."

"I only wish we could," sighed the King. "But unfortunately this is an occasion when etiquette requires that we should attend in person."

"Oh, bother etiquette," said she. "Etiquette was made for slaves. We'll send your Cousin Peter. One must find some use for one's Cousin Peters."

"Yes ; but this is a business, alas, in which one's Cousin Peter won't go down. I'm very sorry to say we'll have to attend in person."

"Nonsense!" she repeated. "Attend in person! How can you think of such a thing? We'd be bored and fatigued to death. It will be unspeakable. Nothing but dull, stodgy, suffocating German pomposity and bad taste. Oh, je m'y connais! Red cloth, and military bands, and interminable banquets, and noise, and confusion, and speeches (oh, the speeches!), until you're ready to drop. And besides, we'd be herded with a crowd of ninth-rate princelings and petty dukes, who smell of beer and cabbage and brilliantine. We'd be relegated to the fifth or sixth rank, behind people who are all of them really our inferiors. Do you suppose I mean to let myself be patronised by a lot of stupid Hohenzollerns and Grätzhoffens? No, indeed! You can send your cousin Peter."

"Ah,

"Ah, my dear, if I were the Tsar of Russia!" laughed her husband. "Then I could send a present and a poor relation, and all would be well. But—you speak of ninth-rate princelings. A ninth-rate princeling like the Basile of Tchernogoria must make act of presence in his proper skin. It's *de rigueur*. There's no getting out of it. We must go."

"Well, *you* may go, if you like," her Majesty declared. "As for me, I *won't*. If *you* choose to go and be patronised and bored, and half killed by the fatigue, and half ruined by the expense, I suppose I can't prevent you. But, if you want my opinion, I think it's utter insane folly."

And she re-absorbed herself in her letter, with the air of one who had been distracted for a moment by a frivolous and tiresome interruption.

The King did not press the matter that evening, but the next morning he mustered his courage, and returned to it.

"My dear," he began, "I beg you to listen to me patiently for a moment, and not get angry. What I wish to say is really very important."

"Well, what is it? What is it?" she inquired, with anticipatory weariness.

"It's about going to Dresden. I—I want to assure you that I dislike the notion of going quite as much as you can. But it's no question of choice. There are certain things one has to do, whether one will or not. I'm exceedingly sorry to have to insist, but we positively must reconcile ourselves to the sacrifice, and attend the wedding—both of us. It's a necessity of our position. If we should stay away, it would be a breach of international good manners that people would never forgive us. We should be the scandal, the by-word, of the Courts of Europe. We'd give the direst offence in twenty different quarters. We really can't
afford

afford to make enemies of half the royal families of the civilised world. You can't imagine the unpleasantnesses, the complications, our absence would store up for us; the bad blood it would cause. We'd be put in the black list of our order, and snubbed, and embarrassed, and practically ostracised, for years to come. And you know whether we need friends. But the case is so obvious, it seems a waste of breath to argue it. You surely won't let a mere little matter of temporary personal inconvenience get us into such an ocean of hot water. Come now—be reasonable, and say you will go."

The Queen's eyes were burning; her under-lip had swollen portentously; but she did not speak.

The King waited a moment. Then, "Come, Anéli—don't be angry. Answer me. Say that you will go," he urged, taking her hand.

She snatched her hand away. I'm afraid she stamped her foot. "No!" she cried. "Let me alone. I tell you I *won't*."

"But, my dear . . ." the King was re-commencing . . .

"No, no, no! And you needn't call me your dear. If you had the least love for me, the least common kindness, or consideration for my health or comfort or happiness, you'd never dream of proposing such a thing. To drag me half-way across the Continent of Europe, to be all but killed at the end of the journey by a pack of horrid, coarse, beer-drinking Germans! And tired out, and irritated, and patronised, and humiliated by people like — and —! It's perfectly heartless of you. And I—when I suggest such a simple natural pleasure as a trip to Paris, or to the Italian lakes in autumn—you go and tell me we can't afford it! You're ready to spend thousands on a stupid, utterly unnecessary and futile absurdity, like this wedding, but you can't afford to take me to the Italian lakes! And yet you pretend to love me! Oh, it's

it's awful, awful, awful!" And her voice failed her in a sob; and she hid her face in her hands, and wept. So the King had to drop the subject again, and to devote his talents to the task of drying her tears.

I don't know how many times they renewed the discussion, but I do know that the Queen stood firm in her original refusal, and that at last it was decided that the King should go without her, and excuse her absence as best he might on the plea of her precarious state of health. It was only after this resolution was made and registered, and her husband had brought himself to accept it with some degree of resignation—it was only then that her Majesty began to waver and vacillate, and reconsider, and change her mind. As the date approached for his departure, her alternations became an affair of hours. It was, "Oh, after all, I can't let you go alone, poor Theo. And besides, I should die of heart-break, here without you. So—there—I'll make the best of a bad business, and go with you"—it was either that, or else, "No, after all, I *can't*. I really can't. I'm awfully sorry. I shall miss you horribly. But, when I think of what it *means*, I haven't the strength or courage. I simply can't"—it was one thing or the other, on and off, all day.

"When you finally know your own mind, I shall be glad if you'll send for me," said Theodore. "Because I've got to name a Regent. And if you're coming with me, I shall name my uncle Stephen. But if you're stopping here, of course I shall name you."

There is a bothersome little provision in the Constitution of Monterosso to the effect that the Sovereign may not cross the frontiers of his dominions, no matter for how brief a sojourn, without leaving a Regent in command. Under the good old régime, before the revolution of 1868, the kings of Tchernogoria

nogoria were a good deal inclined to spend the bulk of their time—and money—in foreign parts. They found Paris, Monte Carlo, St. Petersburg, Vienna, and even, if you can believe me, sometimes London, on the whole more agreeable as places of residence than their hereditary capital. (There was the particularly flagrant case of Paul II, our Theodore's great-grandfather, who lived for twenty years on end in Rome. He fancied himself a statuary, poor gentleman, and produced—oh, such amazing Groups! Tons of them repose in the Royal Museum at Vescova; a few brave the sky here and there in lost corners of the Campagna—he used to present them to the Pope! Perhaps you have seen his Fountain at Acqu'amarra?) It was to discourage this sort of royal absenteeism that the patriotic framers of the Constitution slyly slipped Sub-Clause 18 into Clause ii, of Title 3, of Article XXXVI: *Concerning the Appointment of a Regent.*

"So," said Theodore, "when you have finally made up your mind, I shall be glad if you will let me know; for I've got to name a Regent."

But the Queen continued to hesitate; in the morning it was Yes, in the evening No; and the eleventh hour was drawing near and nearer. The King was to leave on Monday. On the previous Tuesday, in a melting mood, Aneli had declared, "There! Once for all, to make an end of it, I'll go." On Wednesday a Commission of Regency, appointing Prince Stephen, was drawn up. On Thursday it was brought to the Palace for the royal signature. The King had actually got as far as the *d* in his name, when the Queen, faltering at sight of the irrevocable document, laid her hand on his arm. She was very pale, and her voice was weak. "No, Theo, don't sign it. It's like my death-warrant. I—I haven't got the courage. You'll have to let me stay. You'll have to go alone." On Friday a new commission

was

was prepared, in which Anéli's name had been substituted for Stephen's. On Saturday morning it was presented to the King. "Shall I sign?" he asked. "Yes, sign," said she. And he signed.

"Ouf!" she cried. "*That's* settled."

And she hardly once changed her mind again until Sunday night; and even then she only half changed it.

"If it weren't too late," she announced, "do you know, I believe I'd decide to go with you, in spite of everything? But of course I never could get ready to start by to-morrow morning. You couldn't wait till Tuesday?"

The King said he couldn't.

"And now, my dears" (as Florimond, who loves to tell the story, is wont to begin it), "no sooner was her poor confiding husband's back a-turned, than what do you suppose this deep, designing, unprincipled, high-handed young woman up and did?"

Almost the last words Theodore spoke to her were, "Do, for heaven's sake, try to get on pleasantly with Tsargradev. Don't treat him too much as if he were the dust under your feet. All you'll have to do is to sign your name at the end of the bills he'll bring you. Sign and ask no questions, and all will be well."

And the very first act of Anéli's Regency was to degrade M. Tsargardev from office and to place him under arrest.

We bade the King good-bye on the deck of the royal yacht *Nemisa*, which was to bear him to Belgrade, the first stage of his journey. Cannon bellowed from the citadel; the bells of all the churches in the town were clanging in jubilant discord; the river was gay with fluttering bunting, and the King resplendent in a gold-laced uniform, with the stars and crosses of I don't know how many

many Orders glittering on his breast. We lingered at the landing-stage, waving our pocket-handkerchiefs, till the *Nemisa* turned a promontory and disappeared ; Aneli silent, with a white face, and set, wistful eyes. And then we got into a great gilt-and-scarlet state-coach, she and Madame Donarowska, Florimond and I, and were driven back to the Palace ; and during the drive she never once spoke, but leaned her cheek on Madame Donarowska's shoulder, and cried as if her heart would break.

The Palace reached, however—as who should say, “We're not here to amuse ourselves”—she promptly dried her tears.

“Do you know what I'm going to do ?” she asked. And, on our admitting that we didn't, she continued, blithely, “It's an ill wind that blows no good. Theo's absence will be very hard to bear, but I must turn it to some profitable account. I must improve the occasion to straighten out his affairs ; I must put his house in order. I'm going to give Monsieur Tsargradev a taste of retributive justice. I'm going to do what Theo himself ought to have done long ago. It's intolerable that a miscreant like Tsargradev should remain at large in a civilised country ; it's a disgrace to humanity that such a man should hold honourable office. I'm going to dismiss him and put him in prison. And I shall keep him there till a thorough investigation has been made of his official acts, and the crimes I'm perfectly certain he's committed have been proved against him. I'm not going to be Regent for nothing. I'm going to *rule*.”

We, her auditors, looked at each other in consternation. It was a good minute before either of us could collect himself sufficiently to speak.

At last, “Oh, lady, lady, august and gracious lady,” groaned Florimond, “please be nice, and relieve our minds by confessing that you're only saying it to tease us. Tell us you're only joking.”

“I never

"I never was more serious in my life," she answered.

"I defy you to look me in the eye and say so without laughing," he persisted. "What *is* the fun of trying to frighten us?"

"You needn't be frightened. I know what I'm about," said she.

"What you're about!" he echoed. "Oh me, oh my! You're about to bring your house crashing round your ears. You're about to precipitate a revolution. You'll lose your poor unfortunate husband's kingdom for him. You'll—goodness only can tell what you *won't* do. Your own bodily safety—your very life—will be in danger. There'll be mobs, there'll be rioting. Oh, lady, sweet lady, gentle lady, you mustn't, you really mustn't. You'd much better come and sing a song, along o' me. Don't meddle with politics. They're nothing but sea, sand, and folly. Music's the only serious thing in the world. Come—let's too-tootle."

"It's all very well to try to turn what I say to jest," the Queen replied loftily, "but I assure you I mean every word of it. I've studied the Constitution. I know my rights. The appointment and revocation of Ministers rest absolutely with the Sovereign. It's not a matter of law, it's merely a matter of custom, a matter of convenience, that the Ministers should be chosen from the party that has a majority in the Soviete. Well, when it comes to the case of a ruffian like Tsargradev, custom and convenience must go by the board, in favour of right and justice. I'm going to revoke him."

"And within an hour of your doing so the whole town of Vescova will be in revolt. We'll all have to leave the Palace, and fly for our precious skins. We'll be lucky if we get away with them intact. A pretty piece of business! Tsargradev, from being Grand Vizier, will become Grand Mogul; and farewell to
the

the illustrious dynasty of Pavelovitch ! Oh, lady, lady ! I call it downright unfriendly, downright inhospitable of you. Where shall my grey hairs find shelter ? I'm *so* comfortable here under your royal roof-tree. You wouldn't deprive the gentlest of God's creatures of a happy home ? Better that a thousand Tsargradevs should flourish like a green bay tree, than that one upright man should be turned out of comfortable quarters. There, now, be kind. As a personal favour to me, won't you please just leave things as they are ? ”

The Queen laughed a little—not very heartily, though, and not at all acquiescently. “Monsieur Tsargradev must go to prison,” was her inexorable word.

We pleaded, we argued, we exhausted ourselves in warnings and protestations, but to no purpose. And in the end she lost her patience, and shut us up categorically.

“No ! Let me be ! ” she cried. “I've heard enough. I know my own mind. I won't be bothered.”

It was with heavy spirits and the dimmest forebodings that we assisted at her subsequent proceedings. We had an anxious time of it for many days ; and it has never ceased to be a source of astonishment to me that it all turned out as well as it did. But—*ce que femme veut, le diable ne sçaurait pas l'empêcher.*

She began operations by despatching an aide-de-camp to M. Tsargradev's house, with a note in which she commanded him to wait upon her forthwith at the Palace, and to deliver up his seals of office.

At the same time she summoned to her presence General Michailov, the Military Governor of Vescova, and Prince Vasiliev, the leader of the scant Conservative opposition in the Societe.

She

She awaited these gentlemen in the throne-room, surrounded by the officers of the household in full uniform. Florimond and I hovered uneasily in the background.

"By Jove, she does look her part, doesn't she?" Florimond whispered to me.

She wore a robe of black silk, with the yellow ribbon of the Lion of Monterosso across her breast, and a tiara of diamonds in her hair. Her eyes glowed with a fire of determination, and her cheeks with a colour that those who knew her recognised for a danger-signal. She stood on the steps of the throne, waiting, and tapping nervously with her foot.

And then the great white-and-gold folding doors were thrown open, and M. Tsargradov entered, followed by the aide-de-camp who had gone to fetch him.

He entered, bowing and smiling, grotesque in his ministerial green and silver; and the top of his bald head shone as if it had been waxed and polished. Bowing and smirking, he advanced to the foot of the throne, where he halted.

"I have sent for you to demand the return of your seals of office," said the Queen. She held her head high, and spoke slowly, with superb haughtiness.

Tsargradov bowed low, and, always smiling, answered, in a voice of honey, "If it please your Majesty, I don't think I quite understand."

"I have sent for you to demand the return of your seals of office," the Queen repeated, her head higher, her inflection haughtier than ever.

"Does your Majesty mean that I am to consider myself dismissed from her service?" he asked, with undiminished sweetness.

"It is my desire that you should deliver up your seals of office," said she.

Tsargradov's

Tsargradév's lips puckered in an effort to suppress a little good-humoured deprecatory laugh. "But, your Majesty," he protested, in the tone of one reasoning with a wayward school-girl, "you must surely know that you have no power to dismiss a constitutional Minister."

"I must decline to hold any discussion with you. I must insist upon the immediate surrender of your seals of office."

"I must remind your Majesty that I am the representative of the majority of the Soviets."

"I forbid you to answer me. I forbid you to speak in my presence. You are not here to speak. You are here to restore the seals of your office to your Sovereign."

"That, your Majesty, I must, with all respect, decline to do."

"You refuse?" the Queen demanded, with terrific shortness.

"I cannot admit your Majesty's right to demand such a thing of me. It is unconstitutional."

"In other words, you refuse to obey my commands? Colonel Karkov!" she called.

Her eyes were burning magnificently now; her hands trembled a little.

Colonel Karkov, the Marshal of the Palace, stepped forward.

"Arrest that man," said the Queen, pointing to Tsargradév.

Colonel Karkov looked doubtful, hesitant.

"Do you also mean to disobey me?" the Queen cried, with a glance . . . oh, a glance!

Colonel Karkov turned pale, but he hesitated no longer. He bowed to Tsargradév. "I must ask you to constitute yourself my prisoner," he said.

Tsargradév made a motion as if to speak; but the Queen raised her hand, and he was silent.

"Take

"Take him away at once," she said. "Lock him up. He is to be absolutely prevented from holding any communication with any one outside the Palace."

And, somehow, Colonel Karkov managed to lead Tsargradev from the presence-chamber.

And that ended the first act of our comical, precarious little melodrama.

After Tsargradev's departure there was a sudden buzz of conversation among the courtiers. The Queen sank back, in evident exhaustion, upon the red velvet cushions of the throne. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply, holding one of her hands pressed hard against her heart.

By-and-bye she looked up. She was very pale.

"Now let General Michailov and Prince Vasiliev be introduced," she said.

And when they stood before her, "General Michailov," she began, "I desire you to place the town of Vescova under martial law. You will station troops about the Palace, about the Chamber of the Soviete, about the Mint and Government offices, and in all open squares and other places where crowds would be likely to collect. I have just dismissed M. Tsargradev from office, and there may be some disturbance. You will rigorously suppress every sign of disorder. I shall hold you responsible for the peace of the town and the protection of my person."

General Michailov, a short, stout, purple-faced old soldier, blinked and coughed, and was presumably on the point of offering something in the nature of an objection.

"You have heard my wishes," said the Queen. "I shall be glad if you will see to their immediate execution."

The General still seemed to have something on his mind.

The

The Queen stamped her foot. "Is everybody in a conspiracy to disobey me?" she demanded. "I am the representative of your King, who is Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Are my orders to be questioned?"

The General bowed, and backed from the room.

"Prince Vasiliev," the Queen said, "I have sent for you to ask you to replace M. Tsargradev as Secretary of State for the Interior, and President of the Council. You will at once enter into the discharge of your duties, and proceed to the formation of a Ministry."

Prince Vasiliev was a tall, spare, faded old man, with a pointed face ending in a white imperial. He was a great personal favourite of the Queen's.

"It will be a little difficult," said he.

"No doubt," assented she. "But it must be done."

"I hardly see how I can form a Ministry to any purpose, with an overwhelming majority against me in the Soviete."

"You are to dissolve the Soviete and order a general election."

"The general election can scarcely be expected to result in a change of parties."

"No; but we shall have gained time. When the new deputies are ready to take their seats, M. Tsargradev's case will have been disposed of. I expect you will find among his papers at the Home Office evidence sufficient to convict him of all sorts of crimes. If I can deliver Monterosso from the Tsargradev superstition, my intention will have been accomplished."

"Now let's lunch," she said to Florimond and me, at the close of this historic session. "I'm ravenously hungry."

I dare say General Michailov did what he could, but his
troops

troops weren't numerous enough to prevent a good deal of disturbance in the town ; and I suppose he didn't want to come to bloodshed. For three days and nights, the streets leading up to the Palace were black with a howling mob, kept from crossing the Palace courtyard by a guard of only about a hundred men. Cries of "Long live Tsargradev !" and "Death to the German woman !" and worse cries still, were constantly audible from the Palace windows.

"Canaille !" exclaimed the Queen. "Let them shout themselves hoarse. Time will show."

And she would step out upon her balcony, in full sight of the enemy, and look down upon them calmly, contemptuously.

Still, the military did contrive to prevent an actual revolution, and to maintain the *status quo*.

The news reached the King at Vienna. He turned straight round and hurried home.

"Oh, my dear, my dear !" he groaned. "You *have* made a mess of things."

"You think so? Read this."

It was a copy of the morning's Gazette, containing Prince Vasiliev's report of the interesting discoveries he had made amongst the papers Tsargradev had left behind him at the Home Office.

There was an immediate revulsion of public feeling. The secret understanding with Berlin was the thing that "did it." The Monterossans are hereditarily, temperamentally, and from motives of policy, Russophils. They couldn't forgive Tsargradev his secret treaty with Berlin ; and they promptly proceeded to execrate him as much as they had loved him.

For State reasons, however, it was decided not to prosecute him. On his release from prison, he asked for his passport, that he might go abroad. He has remained an exile ever since, and (according to Florimond, at any rate) "is spending his declining years colouring a meerschaum."

"People talk of the ingratitude of princes," said the Queen, last night. "But what of the ingratitude of nations? The Monterossans hated me because I dismissed M. Tsargradev; and then, when they saw him revealed in his true colours, they still hated me, in spite of it. They are quick to resent what they imagine to be an injury; but they never recognise a benefit. Oh, the folly of universal suffrage! The folly of constitutional government! I used to say, 'Surely a good despot is better than a mob.' But now I'm convinced that a *bad* despot, even, is better. Come, Florimond, let us sing . . . you know . . . that song. . ."

"God save—the best of despots?" suggested Florimond.