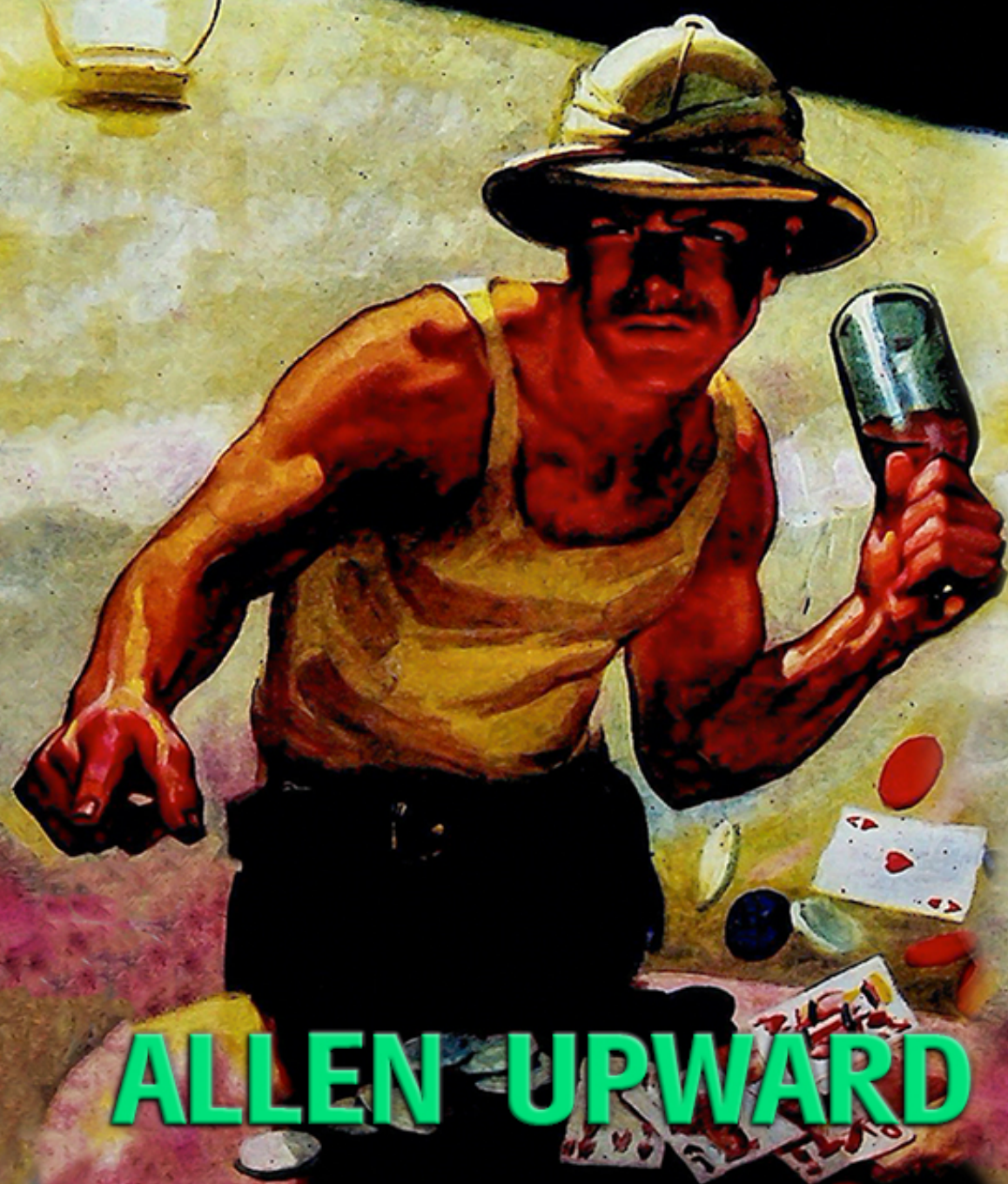


CLASSICS TO GO
THE
INTERNATIONAL SPY



ALLEN UPWARD

The International Spy

Allen Upward

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PROLOGUE—THE TWO EMPRESSES	9
I. THE INSTRUCTIONS OF MONSIEUR V ——	17
II. THE PRINCESS Y——'S HINT	24
III. THE HEAD OF THE MANCHURIAN SYNDICATE	36
IV. THE CZAR'S AUTOGRAPH	45
V. A DINNER WITH THE ENEMY	54
VI. DRUGGED AND KIDNAPPED	63
VII. THE RACE FOR SIBERIA	71
VIII. THE CZAR'S MESSAGE	76
IX. THE BETROTHAL OF DELILAH	87
X. THE ANSWER OF THE MIKADO	96
XI. WHO SMOKED THE GREGORIDES BRAND	107
XII. THE SECRET SERVICE OF JAPAN	113
XIII. HIS IMPERIAL HIGHNESS	123
XIV. THE SUBMARINE MINE	130
XV. THE ADVISOR OF NICHOLAS II	139
XVI. A STRANGE CONFESSION	145
XVII. A SUPERNATURAL INCIDENT	159
XVIII. THE MYSTERY OF A WOMAN	169
XIX. THE SPIRIT OF MADAME BLAVATSKY	180
XX. THE DEVIL'S AUCTION	192
XXI. THE FUNERAL	199
XXII. A PERILOUS MOMENT	210

XXIII. A RESURRECTION AND A GHOST	217
XXIV. A SECRET EXECUTION	224
XXV. A CHANGE OF IDENTITY	233
XXVI. TRAPPED	240
XXVII. THE BALTIC FLEET	246
XXVIII. ON THE TRACK	256
XXIX. AN IMPERIAL FANATIC	264
XXX. THE STOLEN SUBMARINE	272
XXXI. THE KIEL CANAL	279
XXXII. THE DOGGER BANK	287
XXXIII. TRAFALGAR DAY	292
XXXIV. THE FAMILY STATUTE	300
EPILOGUE	308

PROLOGUE^[A]

THE TWO EMPRESSES

Look!”

A fair, delicately-molded hand, on which glittered gems worth a raja’s loyalty, was extended in the direction of the sea.

Half a mile out, where the light ripples melted away into a blue and white haze upon the water, a small black smudge, like the back of a porpoise, seemed to be sliding along the surface.

But it was not a porpoise, for out of it there rose a thin, black shaft, scarcely higher than a flag-staff, and from the top of this thin shaft there trickled a faint wreathing line of smoke, just visible against the background of sky and sea.

“It is a submarine! What is it doing there?”

The exclamation, followed by the question, came from the second, perhaps the fairer, of two women of gracious and beautiful presence, who were pacing, arm linked in arm, along a marble terrace overlooking a famous northern strait.

The terrace on which they stood formed part of a stately palace, built by a king of the North who loved to retire in the summer time from his bustling capital, and gather his family around him in this romantic home.

From here, as from a watch-tower, could be seen the fleets of empires, the crowded shipping of many a rich port and the humbler craft of the fisherman, passing and repassing

all day long between the great inland sea of the North and the broad western ocean.

Along this narrow channel had once swept the long ships of the Vikings, setting forth on those terrible raids which devastated half Europe and planted colonies in England and France and far-off Italy. But to-day the scene was a scene of peace. The martial glory of the Dane had departed. The royal castle that stood there as if to guard the strait had become a rendezvous of emperors and queens and princes, who took advantage of its quiet precincts to lay aside the pomp of rule, and perhaps to bind closer those alliances of sovereigns which serve to temper the fierce rivalries of their peoples.

The pair who stood gazing, one with curiosity and wonder, the other with an interest of a more painful character, at the sinister object on the horizon, were imperial sisters. Born in the tiny sea kingdom, they had lived to wear the crowns of the greatest two realms the world has ever seen, two empires which between them covered half the surface of our planet, and included one-third of its inhabitants.

But though sundered in interests they were not divided in affection. As they stood side by side, still linked together, it was evident that no common sympathy united them.

The one who had been first to draw attention to the mysterious craft, and whose dress showed somber touches which spoke of widowhood, answered her sister's question:

"I never see one of those vessels without a shudder. I have an instinct which warns me that they are destined to play a dangerous, perhaps a fatal, part in the future. What is that boat doing here, in Danish waters?—I do not know. But it can be here for no good. If a war ever broke out in which we were concerned, the Sound would be our first line of

defense on the west. It would be mined, by us, perhaps; if not, by our enemy. Who can tell whether that submarine has not been sent out by some Power which is already plotting against peace, to explore the bed of the strait, with a view to laying down mines hereafter?"

The other Empress listened with a grave countenance.

"I hope your fears are not well founded. I can think of no Power that is ever likely to attack you. It is my nephew, or rather those who surround him, from whom the signal for war is likely to come, if it ever does come."

The widowed Empress bowed her head.

"You know what my hopes and wishes are," she answered. "If my son listened to me there would be no fear of his departing from the peaceful ways of my dear husband. But there are secret influences always at work, as stealthy in their nature as that very craft——"

The speaker paused as she glanced 'round in search of the black streak and gray smoke-wreath which had attracted her notice a minute before. But she looked in vain.

Like a phantom the submarine had disappeared, leaving no trace of its presence.

The Empress uttered an ejaculation of dismay, which was echoed by her sister.

"Where is it now? Where did it go? Has it sunk, or has it gone back to where it came from?"

To these questions there could be no answer. The smooth waters glistened in the sunlight as merrily as if no threatening craft was gliding beneath the surface on some errand fraught with danger to the world.

“Perhaps they saw they were observed, and dived under for concealment,” suggested the second Empress.

Her sister sighed gently.

“I was telling you that that submarine was a type of the secret dangers which beset us. I know, beyond all doubt, that there are men in the innermost circle of the Court, men who have my son’s ear, and can do almost what they like with him, who are at heart longing for a great war, and are always working underground to bring it about. And if they succeed, and we are taken unprepared by a stronger foe, there will be a revolution which may cost my son his throne, if not his life.”

There was a brief silence. Then the Empress who had listened to this declaration murmured in a low voice:

“Heaven grant that the war is not one between you and us!”

“Heaven grant it!” was the fervent reply. And then, after a moment’s reflection, the widowed Empress added in an eager voice:

“But we—cannot we do something to avert such a fearful calamity?”

Her sister pressed her arm as though to assure her of sympathy.

“Yes, yes,” the other continued. “We can do much if we will. Though my son does not always take my advice, he has never yet refused to listen to me. And in moments of grave stress he sometimes consults me of his own accord. And I know that you, too, have influence. Your people worship you. Your husband——”

The Western Empress interrupted gently:

“I cannot play the part that you play. I do not claim the right to be consulted, or to give direct advice. Do not ask me to step outside my sphere. I can give information; I can be a channel sometimes between your Court and ours, a channel which you can trust as I fear you cannot always trust your ministers and diplomatic agents. More than that I should not like to promise.”

“But that is very much,” was the grateful response. “That may be quite enough. Provided we can arrange a code by which I can always communicate with you safely and secretly, it may be possible to avert war at any time.”

“What do you propose?”

“It is very simple. If any crisis comes about through no fault of my son’s—if the party who are conspiring to make a war arrange some unexpected *coup* which we could not foresee or prevent—and if I am sure that my son sincerely desires peace, I can send you a message—one word will be enough—which you can take as an assurance that we mean to put ourselves right with you, and to thwart the plotters.”

The Western Empress bowed her head.

“I accept the mission. And the word—what shall it be?”

The other glanced ’round the horizon once more, and then, bending her lips to her imperial sister’s ear, whispered a single word.

The two great women who had just exchanged a pledge for the peace of the world were moving slowly along the terrace again, when the Western sister said, thoughtfully,

“I think I know another way to aid you.”

The Eastern Empress halted, and gazed at her with eagerness.

"I know the difficulties that surround you," her sister pursued, "and that the greatest of them all is having no one in your service whom you can entirely and absolutely trust."

"That is so," was the mournful admission.

"Now I have heard of a man—I have never actually employed him myself, but I have heard of him from those who have, and they tell me he is incorruptible. In addition, he is a man who has never experienced the sensation of fear, and his abilities are so great that he has been called in to solve almost every problem of international politics that has arisen in recent years."

"But this man—how can he be obtained?"

"At present he is retained in our secret service. I must not conceal from you that he is partly a Pole by descent, and as such he has no love for your Empire. But if it were made clear to him that in serving you he was serving us, and defeating the designs of the anti-popular and despotic clique at your Court, I feel sure he would consent to place himself at your disposal."

The Eastern Empress listened intently to her sister's words. At the close she said,

"Thank you. I will try this man, if you can prevail on him to come to me. What is his name?"

"I expect you must have heard of him already, It is——"

"Monsieur V——?"

The second Empress nodded.

No more was said.

The two imperial figures passed away along the terrace, silhouetted against the red and stormy sunset sky, like two

ministering spirits of peace brooding over a battleground of blood.

CHAPTER I

THE INSTRUCTIONS OF MONSIEUR V

The great monarch by whose gracious command I write this narrative has given me his permission to preface it with the following remarkable document:

Minute: It is considered that it cannot but promote the cause of peace and good understanding between the British and Russian Governments if Monsieur V— be authorized to relate in the columns of some publication enjoying a wide circulation, the steps by which he was enabled to throw light on the occurrences in the North Sea.

By the Cabinet.

In addition, I desire to state for the benefit of those who profess to see some impropriety in the introduction of real names into a narrative of this kind, that objections precisely similar to theirs were long ago raised, and long ago disposed of, in the case of Parliamentary reports, newspaper articles, society papers, and comic publications of all kinds; and, further, that I have never received the slightest intimation that my literary methods were displeasing to the illustrious personages whom my narratives are intended to honor.

With this apology I may be permitted to proceed.

On a certain day in the winter which preceded the outbreak of war between Russia and Japan, I received a summons to Buckingham Palace, London, to interview the Marquis of Bedale.

I am unable to fix the precise date, as I have forsworn the dangerous practice of keeping a diary ever since the head of the French police convinced me that he had deciphered a code telegram of mine to the Emperor of Morocco.

The Marquis and I were old friends, and, anticipating that I should find myself required to start immediately on some mission which might involve a long absence from my headquarters in Paris, I took my confidential secretary with me as far as the British capital, utilizing the time taken by the journey in instructing him how to deal with the various affairs I had in hand.

I had just finished explaining to him the delicate character of the negotiation then pending between the new King of Servia and Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria, when the train rolled into Charing Cross.

Not wishing any one, however high in my confidence, to know too much of my movements, I ordered him to remain seated in the railway carriage, while I slipped out of the station and into the closed brougham for which I had telegraphed from Dover.

I had said in the wire that I wished to be driven to a hotel in Piccadilly. It was not till I found myself in Cockspur Street that I pulled the check-string, and ordered the coachman to take me to Buckingham Palace.

I mention these details in order to show that my precautions to insure secrecy are always of the most thorough character, so that, in fact, it would be quite impossible for any one to unveil my proceedings unless I voluntarily opened my lips.

The instructions which I received from Lord Bedale were brief and to the point:

“You are aware, of course, Monsieur V—, that there is a possibility of war breaking out before long between Russia and Japan.”

“It is more than a possibility, I am afraid, my lord. Things have gone so far that I do not believe it is any longer possible to avert war.”

His lordship appeared gravely concerned.

“Do you tell me that it is too late for you to interfere with effect?” he demanded anxiously.

“Even for me,” I replied with firmness.

Lord Bedale threw at me a glance almost imploring in its entreaty.

“If you were to receive the most ample powers, the most liberal funds; if you were to be placed in direct communication with one of the most exalted personages in the Court of St Petersburg—would it still be impossible?”

I shook my head.

“Your lordship should have sent for me a fortnight ago. We have lost twelve days, that is to say, twelve battles.”

The Marquis of Bedale looked more and more distressed.

“At least you can try?” he suggested.

“I can try. But I am not omnipotent, my lord,” I reminded him.

He breathed a sigh of relief before going on to say:

“But that is only the preliminary. Great Britain is bound to come to the assistance of Japan in certain contingencies.”

“In the event of her being attacked by a second Power,” I observed.

“Precisely. I rely on you to prevent that contingency arising.”

“That is a much easier matter, I confess.”

“Then you undertake to keep the war from extending to us?”

“I undertake to keep a second Power from attacking Japan,” I answered cautiously.

Lord Bedale was quick to perceive my reservation.

“But in that case we cannot be involved, surely?” he objected.

“I cannot undertake to keep you from attacking Russia,” I explained grimly.

“But we should not dream of attacking her—without provocation,” he returned, bewildered.

“I fancy you will have a good deal of provocation,” I retorted.

“Why? What makes you think that?” he demanded.

I suspected that Lord Bedale was either sounding me, or else that he had not been taken into the full confidence of those for whom he was acting.

I responded evasively:

“There are two personages in Europe, neither of whom will leave one stone unturned in the effort to involve you in war with Russia.”

“And they are?”

Even as he put the question, Lord Bedale, as though acting unconsciously, raised one hand to his mustache, and gave it a pronounced upward twirl.

“I see your lordship knows one of them,” I remarked. “The other——”

He bent forward eagerly.

“Yes? The other?”

“The other is a woman.”

“A woman?”

He fell back in his chair in sheer surprise.

“The other,” I repeated in my most serious tone, “is a woman, perhaps the most formidable woman now living, not even excepting the Dowager Empress of China.”

“And her name?”

“Her name would tell you nothing.”

“Still——”

“If you really wish to hear it——”

“I more than wish. I urge you.”

“Her name is the Princess Y——.”

Scarcely had the name of this dangerous and desperate woman passed my lips than I regretted having uttered it.

Had I foreseen the perils to which I exposed myself by that single slip I might have hesitated in going on with my enterprise.

As it was I determined to tell the Marquis of Bedale nothing more.

“This business is too urgent to admit of a moment’s unnecessary delay,” I declared, rising to my feet. “If your lordship has no further instructions to give me, I will leave you.”

“One instant!” cried Lord Bedale. “On arriving in Petersburg you will go straight to report yourself to her majesty the Empress Dagmar.”

I bowed my head to conceal the expression which might have told his lordship that I intended to do nothing of the kind.

“Your credentials,” he added with a touch of theatricality, “will consist of a single word.”

“And that word?” I inquired.

He handed me a sealed envelope.

“I do not myself know it. It is written on a piece of paper inside that envelope, and I have to ask you to open the envelope, read the word, and then destroy the paper in my presence.”

I shrugged my shoulders as I proceeded to break the seal. But no sooner did my eyes fall on the word within, and above all on the handwriting in which that word was written, than I experienced a sensation of admiring pleasure.

“Tell the writer, if you please, my lord, that I am grateful for this mark of confidence, which I shall endeavor to deserve.”

I rolled up the paper into a tiny pellet, swallowed it, and left the room and the Palace without uttering another word.

CHAPTER II

THE PRINCESS Y——'S HINT

I never use the same stratagem more than once. It is to this rule that I attribute my success.

On previous missions to Russia I assumed the disguises of a French banker, of the private secretary to Prince Napoleon, of an emissary from an Indian Maharaja, and of an Abyssinian Maduga.

I now decided to go thither as an Englishman, or rather—for there is a distinction between the two—as a Little Englander.

It appeared to me that no character could be more calculated to gain me the confidence of the Anglophobes of the Russian Court. I anticipated that they would smother me with attentions, and that from their hypocritical professions I should stand a good chance of learning what was actually in their minds.

No sooner had I taken this decision, which was while the brougham was being driven along the Mall, than I gave the order “—— House.”

I was driven to the office of a well known review conducted by a journalist of boundless philanthropy and credulity. Mr. Place—as I will call him—was within, and I at once came to business.

“I am a Peace Crusader,” I announced. “I have devoted myself to the sacred cause of which you are the foremost champion. At present war is threatened in the Far East. I am going to Russia to persuade the war party to abandon their

designs. I have come here to ask you for your aid and countenance in this pious enterprise.”

The editor gave me a doubtful glance.

“If it is a question of financial aid,” he said not very encouragingly, “I must refer you to the treasurer of the World’s Peace League. I am afraid our friends——”

“No, no,” I interrupted him. “It is not a question of funds. I am a wealthy man, and if you need a subscription at any time you have only to apply to me. What I desire is your moral support, your valuable advice, and perhaps a few introductions to the friends of peace in the Russian capital.”

The editor’s face brightened.

“Of course!” he exclaimed in cordial tones. “I will support you with all my heart. I will write up your mission in the *Review*, and I will give you as many introductions as you need. What is your name, again?”

“Sterling. Mr. Melchisadek Sterling.”

The philanthropist nodded and touched a bell on his table.

“I will give you a letter,” he said, as his secretary came in and seated herself at the typewriter, “to the noblest creature I have ever met, a woman of high birth and immense fortune who has devoted herself to the cause.”

And turning ’round in his chair he dictated to the attentive secretary:

“My dear Princess Y——”

It needed all that command over my features which it has taken me twenty years to acquire to conceal the emotion with which I heard this name. Less than half an hour had passed since I had warned Lord Bedale that the Princess

would be the most formidable enemy in my path, and now, on the very threshold of my enterprise, her name confronted me like an omen.

I need not repeat the highly colored phrases in which the unsuspecting philanthropist commended me to this artful and formidable woman as a fellow-worker in the holy cause of human brotherhood.

Not content with this service, the editor wanted to arrange a meeting of his league or brotherhood, or whatever it was, to give me a public send-off. As I understood that the meeting would partake of a religious character I could not bring myself to accept the offer.

In addition to the letter to the Princess Y——, he gave me another to a member of the staff of the Russian Embassy in London, a M. Gudonov. He also urged me to call upon a member of Parliament, a rising politician who is not unlikely to have a ministerial post in the next government, and who has made himself known as an apologist of the Czar's. But as I had good reason to know that this gentleman was by no means a disinterested dupe, like Mr. Place, I prudently left him alone.

On going to the Russian Embassy to have my passport viséd I inquired for M. Gudonov.

The moment he entered the room I recognized him as one of the most unscrupulous agents of the notorious Third Section, one of the gang who drugged and kidnapped poor Alexander of Bulgaria. My own disguise, it is hardly necessary to say, was impenetrable.

This precious apostle of peace greeted me with unction, on the editor's introduction.

“You are going to our country on a truly noble errand,” he declared, with tears in his eyes. “We Russians have reason to feel grateful to worthy Englishmen like you, who can rise above national prejudices and do justice to the benevolent designs of the Czar and his advisers.”

“I hope that I may be instrumental in averting a great catastrophe,” I said piously.

“Even if you fail in preventing war,” the Russian replied, “you will be able to tell your countrymen when you return, that it was due to the insane ambition of the heathen Japanese. It is the ‘Yellow Peril,’ my friend, to which that good Emperor William has drawn attention, from which we are trying to save Europe.”

I nodded my head as if well satisfied.

“Whatever you and your friends in Petersburg tell me, I shall believe,” I assured him. “I am convinced of the good intention of your Government.”

The Russian fairly grinned at this simplicity.

“You cannot find a more trustworthy informant than the Princess Y—,” he said gravely. “And just now she is in a position to know a very great deal.”

“How so?” I asked naturally—not that I doubted the statement.

“The Princess has just been appointed a lady-in-waiting to her imperial majesty the Dowager Empress Dagmar.”

This was a serious blow. Knowing what I did of the past of Princess Y—, I felt that no ordinary pressure must have been brought to bear to secure her admission into the household of the Czaritza. And with what motive? It was a question to which there could be only one answer. The War

Party had guessed or suspected that the Czar's mother was opposed to them, and they had resolved to place a spy on her actions.

Inwardly thankful to Mr. Place for having been the means of procuring me this important information in advance, I received my passport and quitted the Embassy with the heartfelt congratulations of the ex-kidnapper.

Forty-eight hours later I had crossed the Russian frontier, and my life was in the hands of the Princess.

My first step on arriving in the capital of the North was to put up at the favorite hotel of English visitors. The coupons of a celebrated tourist agency were credentials in themselves, and I had not forgotten to provide myself with the three articles indispensable to the outfit of every traveling Briton—a guide book, a prayer book, and a bath sponge.

At the risk of incurring the suspicions of the police agent stationed in the hotel, I mingled some hot water in the bath which I took on the first morning after my arrival. Then, having made my toilet and eaten the heavy breakfast provided for English visitors, I set out, suffering sadly from indigestion, to present my letter of introduction to the Princess.

As this woman, the most brilliant recruit ever received into the Russian secret service, and a foe of whom I am not ashamed to confess that I felt some fear, has never been heard of by the public of Great Britain, I shall say a word concerning her.

The Princess, whose Christian name was Sophia, was the daughter of a boyar of Little Russia. Her extraordinary beauty, while she was still a very young girl, attracted the attention of the governor of the province, Prince Y——, who

was one of the wealthiest nobles in the Empire, and a widower. He made proposals for her hand which were accepted by her father, without the girl herself being asked to express an opinion in the matter, and at the age when an English girl would be leaving home for a convent or “high-school,” Sophia became the Governor’s wife.

Almost immediately the Prince resigned his government and went to live in his splendid palace on the Nevsky Prospect, in Petersburg. Before very long, society in the Russian capital was startled to hear of the sudden deaths in rapid succession of both the Prince’s children by his former wife, a son and a daughter. Then, after a brief interval, followed the tragic death of the Prince himself, who was found in bed one morning by his valet, with his throat cut.

The almost satanic beauty and fascination of the youthful Princess had made her from the very first one of the most conspicuous personages at the Imperial Court. These three deaths, following on the heels of one another, roused the most dreadful suspicions, and the Czar Alexander III. personally charged his minister of justice to see that the law was carried out.

Accordingly the police took possession of the palace while the corpse of its late owner still lay where it had been found. The most searching investigations were made, the servants were questioned and threatened, and it was rumored that the widow herself was for a short time under arrest.

Suddenly a great change took place. The police withdrew, professing themselves satisfied that no crime had been committed. The deaths of the son and daughter were put down to natural causes, and that of the Prince was pronounced a suicide, due to grief at the loss of his children. Some of the servants disappeared—it was said into Siberia—

and in due course the Princess resumed her place in society and at Court, as though nothing were amiss.

Nevertheless, from that hour, as I have every reason to know, her life was really that of a slave to the head of the secret police. She appeared to go about unfettered, and to revel in the enjoyment of every luxury; but her time, her actions, and the vast wealth bequeathed to her by her husband, were all at the disposal of her tyrant.

Time after time, in half the capitals of Europe, but more especially, of course, in that of Russia, I had come on traces of this terrible woman, not less terrible if it were true that she was herself the most miserable victim of the system of which she formed part.

But singularly enough, though I had heard so much of the Princess I had never actually found myself pitted against her. And, more singularly still, I had never met her.

From this it will be gathered that I experienced a sensation of more than ordinary curiosity and even apprehension as I presented myself at the house in the Nevsky Prospect, and asked to be admitted to the presence of its mistress.

“Her highness is on duty at the Palace to-day,” I was told by the chamberlain who received me in the inner hall. “Her carriage is just ordered to take her there. However, I will take up your letter, and inquire when her highness can see you.”

I sat down in the hall, outwardly a calm, stolid Briton, but inwardly a wrestler, wound up to the highest pitch of excitement and impatient for the sight of his antagonist.

To pass the time suitably, I took my guide-book out of my pocket and began to read. The book opened at Herr

Baedaker's description of the gloomy fortress of the Schlüsselburg, the dreaded prison of the foes of the Czar.

The description did not tend to soothe my nerves, conscious as I was that the woman I was about to meet could consign me to the most noisome dungeon in the fortress by merely lifting her little finger.

I was just closing the book with an involuntary shudder when I heard a light, almost girlish, laugh from above. I looked hastily, and saw the woman I had come to measure myself against standing poised like a bird on the top of the grand staircase.

As I rose hurriedly to my feet, taking in every detail of her superb yet delicate figure, her complexion like a blush-rose, her lustrous eyes—they were dark violet on a closer view—and the cloud of rippling gold that framed her brow, I was moved, yes, positively carried away for a moment, by a sentiment such as few women have been able to inspire in me.

Perceiving, no doubt, that she had produced the desired impression, the Princess ran lightly down the stairs and came toward me holding out two tiny hands, the fingers of which were literally gloved in diamonds.

"My friend! My noble Englishman!" she exclaimed in the purest French. "And since when have you known that dear Monsieur Place?"

I checked myself on the point of replying, pretended to falter, and then muttered in the worst French I could devise on the spur of the moment:

"Parlez-vous Anglais, s'il vous plaît, Madame?"

The Princess shook her head reproachfully.

“You speak French too well not to understand it, I suspect,” she retorted in the same language. Then dropping it for English, marred only by a slight Slavonic accent, she repeated:

“But tell me,—dear Mr. Place, he is a great friend of yours, I suppose?”

“I can hardly claim the honor of his personal friendship,” I replied, rather lamely. “But I have always known and admired him as a public man.”

“Ah! He is so good, is he not? So generous, so confiding, so great a friend of our dear Russia. You know Mr. ——?”

The name she uttered was that of the politician referred to above. She slipped it out swiftly, with the action of a cat pouncing.

I shook my head with an air of distress.

“I am afraid I am not important enough to know such a great man as that,” I said with affected humility.

The Princess hastened to relieve my embarrassment.

“What is that to us!” she exclaimed. “You are an Englishman, you are benevolent, upright, truthful, and you esteem our country. Such men are always welcome in Russia. The Czaritza is waiting for me; but you will come back and dine with me, if not to-night, then to-morrow, or the next day. I will send an invitation to your hotel. My friends shall call on you. You are staying at the——?”

I mentioned the name of the hotel, murmuring my thanks.

“That is nothing,” the beautiful woman went on in the same eager strain. “I shall have good news for you when we meet again, believe me. Yes—” she lowered her voice almost to a