

Universitätsbibliothek Wuppertal

The elusive Pimpernel

Orczy, Emmuska

London, 1908

Chapter XIII. Reflections

Nutzungsrichtlinien Das dem PDF-Dokument zugrunde liegende Digitalisat kann unter Beachtung des Lizenz-/Rechtehinweises genutzt werden. Informationen zum Lizenz-/Rechtehinweis finden Sie in der Titelaufnahme unter dem untenstehenden URN.

Bei Nutzung des Digitalisats bitten wir um eine vollständige Quellenangabe, inklusive Nennung der Universitätsbibliothek Wuppertal als Quelle sowie einer Angabe des URN.

urn:nbn:de:hbz:468-1-2820

CHAPTER XIII.

REFLECTIONS.

IT seemed indeed as if the incident were finally closed, the chief actors in the drama having deliberately vacated the centre of the stage.

The little crowd which had stood in a compact mass round the table began to break up into sundry small groups: laughter and desultory talk, checked for a moment by that oppressive sense of unknown danger, which had weighed on the spirits of those present, once more became general. Blakeney's light-heartedness had put everyone into a good humour; since he evidently did not look upon the challenge as a matter of serious moment, why then, no one else had any cause for anxiety, and the younger men were right glad to join in that bowl of punch which their genial host had offered with so merry a grace.

Lacqueys appeared, throwing open the doors. From a distance the sound of dance music once more broke upon the ear.

THE ELUSIVE PIMPERNEL.

A few of the men only had remained silent, deliberately holding aloof from the renewed mirthfulness. Foremost amongst these was His Royal Highness, who was looking distinctly troubled, and who had taken Sir Percy by the arm and was talking to him with obvious earnestness. Lord Anthony Dewhurst and Lord Hastings were holding converse in a secluded corner of the room, whilst Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, as being the host's most intimate friend, felt it incumbent on him to say a few words to ex-Ambassador Chauvelin.

The latter was desirous of effecting a retreat. Blakeney's invitation to join in the friendly bowl of punch could not be taken seriously, and the Terrorist wanted to be alone, in order to think out the events of the past hour.

A lacquey waited on him, took the momentous sword from his hand, found his hat and cloak, and called his coach for him: Chauvelin, having taken formal leave of his host and acquaintances, quickly worked his way to the staircase and hall, through the less-frequented apartments.

He sincerely wished to avoid meeting Lady Blakeney face to face. Not that the slightest twinge of remorse disturbed his mind, but he feared some impulsive action on her part, which indirectly might interfere with his future plans. Fortunately no one took much heed of the darkly-clad, insignificant little figure, that glided so swiftly by, obviously determined to escape attention.

In the hall he found Demoiselle Candeille waiting for him. She too had evidently been desirous of leaving Blakeney Manor as soon as possible. He saw

REFLECTIONS.

her to her chaise ; then escorted her as far as her lodgings, which were close by : there were still one or two things which he wished to discuss with her, one or two final instructions which he desired to give.

On the whole, he was satisfied with his evening's work : the young actress had well supported him, and had played her part so far with marvellous *sang-froid* and skill. Sir Percy, whether willingly or blindly, had seemed only too ready to walk into the trap which was being set for him.

This fact alone disturbed Chauvelin not a little, and as, half an hour or so later, having taken final leave of his ally, he sat alone in the coach which was conveying him back to town, the sword of Lorenzo Cenci close to his hand, he pondered very seriously over it.

That the adventurous Scarlet Pimpernel should have guessed all along that sooner or later the French Revolutionary Government—whom he had defrauded of some of its most important victims—would desire to be even with him, and to bring him to the scaffold, was not to be wondered at. But that he should be so blind as to imagine that Chauvelin's challenge was anything else but a lure to induce him to go to France could not possibly be supposed. So bold an adventurer, so keen an intriguer was sure to have scented the trap immediately, and if he appeared ready to fall into it, it was because there had already sprung up in his resourceful mind some bold coup or subtle counter-plan, with which he hoped to gratify his own passionate love of sport, whilst once more bringing his enemies to discomfiture and humiliation.

Undoubtedly Sir Percy Blakeney, as an accom-

THE ELUSIVE PIMPERNEL.

plished gentleman of the period, could not very well under the circumstances which had been so carefully stage-managed and arranged by Chauvelin, refuse the latter's challenge to fight him on the other side of the Channel. Any hesitation on the part of the leader of that daring Scarlet Pimpernel League would have covered him with a faint suspicion of pusillanimity, and a subtle breath of ridicule, and in a moment the prestige of the unknown and elusive hero would have vanished for ever.

But apart from the necessity of the fight, Blakeney seemed to enter into the spirit of the plot directed against his own life with such light-hearted merriment, such zest and joy, that Chauvelin could not help but be convinced that the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel at Boulogne or elsewhere would not prove quite so easy a matter as he had at first anticipated.

That same night he wrote a long and circumstantial letter to his colleague, Citizen Robespierre, shifting thereby, as it were, some of the responsibility of coming events from his own shoulders on to the executive of the Committee of Public Safety.

“I guarantee to you, Citizen Robespierre,” he wrote, “and to the members of the Revolutionary Government who have entrusted me with the delicate mission, that four days from this date, at one hour after sunset, the man who goes by the mysterious name of the Scarlet Pimpernel will be on the ramparts of Boulogne, on the south side of the town. I have done what has been asked of me. On that day, and at that hour, I shall have brought the enemy of the Revolution, the intriguer against the policy of the Republic, within the power of the Government which he has flouted

REFLECTIONS.

and outraged. Now look to it, citizens all, that the fruits of my diplomacy and of my skill be not lost to France again. The man will be there at my bidding; 'tis for you to see that he does not escape this time."

This letter he sent by the special courier which the National Convention has placed at his disposal in case of emergency. Having sealed it and entrusted it to the man, Chauvelin felt at peace with the world and with himself. Although he was not so sure of success as he would have wished, he yet could not see *how* failure could possibly come about: and the only regret which he felt to-night, when he finally, in the early dawn, sought a few hours' troubled rest, was that that momentous fourth day was still so very far distant.