

there you are! That will make a difference in the settlement, believe me—a difference of a couple of millions at least, if—”

She arose abruptly. “You are positively disgusting, Will. Can’t you think of anything but—”

“Say, ain’t that Maudie coming up the drive now? Sure it is! By gracious, did you ever see anything to beat her? She’s got ‘em all beat a mile when it comes to looks and style and—Oh, by the way,”—lowering his voice to a hoarse confidential whisper,—“I wouldn’t say anything to her about the marriage just yet if I were you. I want to look him over first.”

CHAPTER II.

TWO COUNTRIES DISCUSS MARRIAGE.



PRINCE ROBIN OF GRAUSTARK was as goodlooking a chap as one would see in a week’s journey. Little would one suspect him of being the descendant of a long and distinguished line of princes, save for the unmistakable though indefinable something in his eye that exacted rather than invited the homage of his fellow man. His laugh was a free and merry one, his spirits as effervescent as wine, his manner blithe and boyish; yet beneath all this fair and guileless exposition of carelessness lay the sober integrity of caste. It looked out through the steady, unswerving eyes, even when they twinkled with mirth; it met the gaze of the world with a serene imperiousness that gave way before no mortal influence; it told without boastfulness a story of centuries. For he was the son of a princess royal, and the blood of ten score rulers of men had come down to him as a heritage of strength.

His mother, the beautiful, gracious and lamented Yevie, set all royal circles by the ears when she married the American, Lorry, back in the nineties. A special act of the ministry had legalized this union and the son of the American was not deprived of his right to succeed to the throne which his forebears had occupied for centuries. From his mother he had inherited the right of kings, from his father the spirit of freedom; from his mother the power of majesty; from his father the power to see beyond that majesty. When little more than a babe in arms he was orphaned and the affairs of state fell upon the shoulders of three loyal and devoted men who served as regents until he became of age.

Wisely they served both him and the people through the years that intervened between the death of the Princess and her consort and the day when he reached his majority. That day was a glorious one in Graustark. The people worshiped the little Prince when he was in knickerbockers and played with toys; they saw him grow to manhood, with hearts that were full of hope and contentment; they made him their real ruler with the same joyous spirit that had attended him in the days when he sat in the great throne and “made believe” that he was one of the mighty, despite the fact that his little legs barely reached to the edge of the gold and silver seat,—and slept soundly through all the befuddling sessions of the cabinet. He was seven when the great revolt headed by Count Marlaux came so near to overthrowing the government, and he behaved like the Prince that he was. It was during those perilous times that he came to know the gallant Truxton King, in whose home he was now a happy guest. But before Truxton King he knew the lovely girl who became the wife of that devoted adventurer, and who, to him, was always to be “Aunt Loraine.”

As a very small boy he had paid two visits to the homeland of his father, but after the death of his parents his valuable little person was guarded so jealously by his subjects that not once had he set foot beyond the borders of Graustark, except on two widely separated occasions of great pomp and ceremony at the courts of Vienna and St. Petersburg, and a secret journey to London when he was seventeen. (It appears that he was determined to see a great football match.) On each of these occasions he was attended by watchful members of the cabinet and certain military units in

the now far from insignificant standing army. As a matter of fact, he witnessed the foot-ball match from the ordinary stands, surrounded by thousands of unsuspecting Britons, but carefully wedged in between two generals of his own army and flanked by a minister of police, a minister of the treasury and a minister of war, all of whom were excessively bored by the contest and more or less appalled by his unregal enthusiasm. He had insisted on going to the match *incog.* to enjoy it for all it was worth to the real spectators—those who sit or stand where the compression is not unlike that applied to a box of sardines.

The regency expired when he was twenty years of age, and he became ruler in fact, of himself as well as of the half million subjects who had waited patiently for the great day that was to see him crowned and glorified. Not one was there in that goodly half-million who stood out against him on that triumphant day; not one who possessed a sullen or resentful heart. He was their Prince, and they loved him well. After that wonderful coronation day he would never forget that he was a Prince or that the hearts of a half-million were to throb with love for him so long as he was man as well as Prince.

Mr. Blithers was very close to the truth when he said (to himself, if you will remember) that the financial situation in the far-off principality was not all that could be desired. It is true that Graustark was in Russia’s debt to the extent of some twenty million gavvos,—about thirty millions of dollars, in other words,—and that the day of reckoning was very near at hand. The loan was for a period of twelve years, and had been arranged contrary to the advice of John Tullis, an American financier who long had been interested in the welfare of the principality through friendship for the lamented Prince Consort, Lorry. He had been farsighted enough to realize that Russia would prove a hard creditor, even though she may have been sincere in her protestations of friendship for the modest borrower.



STUBBORN element in the cabinet overcame his opposition, however, and the debt was contracted, taxation increased by popular vote and a period of governmental thriftiness inaugurated. Railroads, highways, bridges and aqueducts were built, owned and controlled by the state, and the city of Edelweiss rebuilt after the devastation created during the revolt of Count Marlaux and his minions. There seemed to be some prospect of vindication for the ministry and Tullis, who lived in Edelweiss, was fair-minded enough to admit that their action appeared to have been for the best. The people had prospered and taxes were paid in full and without complaint. The reserve fund grew steadily and surely and there was every prospect that when the huge debt came due it would be paid in cash. But on the very crest of their prosperity came adversity. For two years the crops failed and a pestilence swept through the herds. The flood of gavvos that had been pouring into the treasury dwindled into a pitiful rivulet; the little that came in was applied, of necessity, to administration purposes and the maintenance of the army, and there was not so much as a penny left over for the so-called sinking fund.

A year of grace remained. The minister of finance had long since recovered from the delusion that it would be easy to borrow from England or France to pay the Russians, there being small prospect of a renewal by the Czar even for a short period at a higher rate of interest. The great nations of Europe made it plain to the little principality that they would not put a finger in Russia’s pie at this stage of the game. Russia was ready to go to war with her great neighbor, Austria. Diplomacy—caution,

if you will,—made it imperative that other nations should sit tight and look to their own knitting, so to say. Not one could afford to be charged with befriending, even in a round about way, either of the angry grumblers.

It was only too well known in diplomatic circles that Russia coveted the railroads of Graustark, as a means of throwing troops into a remote and almost impregnable portion of Austria. If the debt were paid promptly, it would be impossible, according to international law, for the great White Bear to take over these roads and at least a portion of the western border of the principality. Obviously, Austria would be benefited by the prompt lifting of the debt but her own relations with Russia were so strained that an offer to come to the rescue of Graustark would be taken at once as an open affront and vigorously resented. Her hands were tied.

The northern and western parts of Graustark were rich with productive mines. The government had built railroads throughout these sections so that the yield of coal and copper might be given an outlet to the world at large. In making the loan, Russia had demanded these prosperous sections as security for the vast sum advanced, and Graustark in an evil hour had submitted, little suspecting the trick that Dame Nature was to play in the end.

Private banking institutions in Europe refused to make loans under the rather exasperating circumstances, preferring to take no chances. Money was not cheap in these bitter days, either in Europe or America. Caution was the watchword. A vast European war was not improbable, despite the sincere efforts on the part of the various nations to keep out of the controversy.

Nor was Mr. Blithers far from right in his shrewd surmise that Prince Robin and his agents were not without hope in coming to America at this particular time. Graustark had laid by barely half the amount required to lift the debt to Russia. It was not beyond the bounds of reason to expect her Prince to secure the remaining fifteen millions through private sources in New York City.

Six weeks prior to his arrival in New York, the young Prince landed in San Francisco. He had come by way of the Orient, accompanied by the Chief of Staff of the Graustark Army, Count Quinnox,—hereditary watch-dog to the royal family!—and a young lieutenant of the guard, Boske Dank. Two men were they who would have given a thousand lives in the service of their Prince. No less loyal was the body-servant who looked after the personal wants of the eager young traveler, an Englishman of the name of Hobbs. A very poor valet was he, but an exceptionally capable person when it came to the checking of luggage and the divining of railway time tables. He had been an agent for Cook’s. It was quite impossible to miss a train that Hobbs suspected of being the right one.

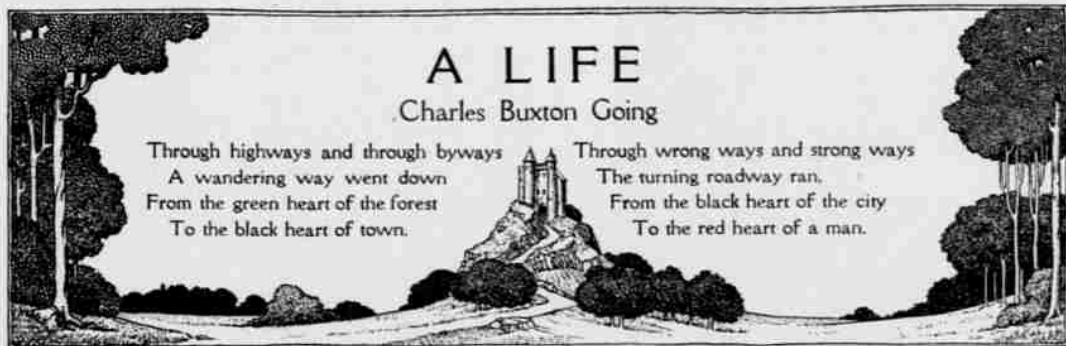
Prince Robin came unheralded and traversed the breadth of the continent without attracting more than the attention that is bestowed upon good looking young men. Like his mother, nearly a quarter of a century before, he traveled *incognito*. But where she had used the somewhat emphatic name of Guggensloeker, he was known to the hotel registers as “Mr. R. Schmidt and servant.”



HERE was romance in the eager young soul of Prince Robin. He reveled in the love story of his parents. The beautiful Princess Yevie first saw Grenfell Lorry in an express train going eastward from Denver. Their wonderful romance was born, so to speak, in a Pullman compartment car, and it thrived so splendidly that it almost upset a dynasty, for never—in all of nine centuries—had a ruler of Graustark stooped to marriage with a commoner.

And so, when the farsighted ministry and House of Nobles in Graustark set about to select a wife for their young ruler, they made overtures to the Prince of Dawsbergen, whose domain adjoined Graustark on the south. The Crown Princess of Dawsbergen, then but fifteen, was the unanimous choice of the amiable match-makers in secret conclave. This was when Robin was

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A LIFE

Charles Buxton Going

Through highways and through byways
A wandering way went down
From the green heart of the forest
To the black heart of town.

Through wrong ways and strong ways
The turning roadway ran,
From the black heart of the city
To the red heart of a man.