

"I do not know. Corona is rich in her own right, and Sant' Ilario has his mother's fortune. Of course, they will be poor compared with their present wealth. I am sorry for them——"

"Sorry?" Flavia looked at her husband in some astonishment. "It is their own fault. Why should you be sorry?"

"It is not exactly their fault. I could hardly have expected them to come to me and inform me that a mistake had been made in the last century, and that all they possessed was mine."

"All they possessed!" echoed Flavia, thoughtfully. "What a wonderful idea it is!"

"Very wonderful," assented San Giacinto, who was thinking once more of his former poverty.

The carriage rolled on and both were silent for some time, absorbed in dreaming of the greatness which was before them in the near future, San Giacinto enumerating in his mind the titles and estates which were soon to be his, while Flavia imagined herself in Corona's place in Rome, grown suddenly to be a central figure in society, leading and organising the brilliant amusements of her world, and above all, rejoicing in that lavish use of abundant money which had always seemed to her the most desirable of all enjoyments.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Faustina Montevarchi was delighted when her sister was at last married and out of the house. The two had always been very good friends, but Faustina felt that she had an enemy in San Giacinto and was relieved when he was gone. She had no especial reason for her suspicions, since he treated her with the same quiet and amicable politeness which he showed to the rest of the household; but her perceptions were extraordinarily true and keen, and she had noticed that he watched her whenever Gouache was in the room, in a way that made

her very uncomfortable. Moreover, he had succeeded of late in making Flavia accompany her to early mass on Sunday mornings on pretence of his wishing to see Flavia without the inevitable supervision of the old princess. The plan was ingenious; for Faustina, instead of meeting Gouache, was thus obliged to play chaperon while her sister and San Giacinto talked to their hearts' content. He was a discreet man, however, and Flavia was ignorant of the fact that Faustina and Anastase had sometimes met in the same way, and would have met frequently had they not been prevented. The young girl was clever enough to see why San Giacinto acted as he did; she understood that he was an ambitious man, and that, as he was about to ally himself with her family, he would naturally disapprove of her attachment to Gouache. Now that he was gone, she wondered whether he had devised any steps which would take effect after his departure.

Faustina was quite as much in love as Gouache himself, and spent much time in calculating the chances of a favourable issue from the situation in which she found herself. Life without Anastase was impossible, but the probabilities of her becoming his wife in the ordinary course of events were very few, as far as she was able to judge, and she had moments of extreme depression, during which she despaired of everything. The love of a very young girl may in itself be both strong and enduring, but it generally has the effect of making her prone to extremes of hope and fear, uncertain of herself, vacillating in her ideas, and unsteady in the pursuit of the smaller ends of life. Throw two equal weights into the scales of a perfectly adjusted balance, the arm will swing and move erratically many times before it returns to its normal position, although there is a potential equilibrium in the machine which will shortly assert itself in absolute tranquillity.

Love in a very young person is rarely interesting, unless it is attended by heroic or tragic circumstances. Human life is very like the game of chess, of which the openings are so limited in number that a practised player knows them all by heart, whereas the subsequent moves are susceptible of infinite variation. Almost all young

people pass through the early stages of existence by some known gambit, which has always a definite influence upon their later lives, but never determines the latter entirely. The game is played between humanity on the one side and the unforeseen on the other; but that which can really not be foretold in some measure rarely presents itself until the first effects of love have been felt, a period which, to continue the simile, may be compared in chess to the operation of castling. Then comes the first crisis, and the merest tyro knows how much may depend upon whether he castles on the king's side or on the queen's.

Now the nature of Faustina's first love was such as to make it probable that it would end in some uncommon way. There was something fatal in the suddenness with which her affection had grown and had upset the balance of her judgment. It is safe to say that not one young girl in a million would have behaved as she had done on the night of the insurrection in Rome; not one in a hundred thousand would, in her position, have fallen in love with Gouache.

The position of the professional artist and of the professional man of letters in modern European society is ill defined. As a man who has been brought up in a palace would undoubtedly betray his breeding sooner or later if transported to live amongst a gang of thieves, so a man who has grown to years of discretion in the atmosphere of studios or in the queer company from which most literary men have sprung, will inevitably, at one time or another, offend the susceptibilities of that portion of humanity which calls itself society. It is impossible that it should be otherwise. Among a set of people whose profession it is to do always, and in all things, precisely what their neighbours do, the man who makes his living by doing what other people cannot do, must always be a marked figure. Look at modern society. It cannot toil nor spin; it can hardly put together ten words in a grammatical sequence. But it can clothe itself. The man of letters can both toil and write good English, but his taste in tailoring frequently leaves much to be desired. If he would put himself in the hands of Poole, and hold his tongue, he might almost pass for a

member of society. But he must needs talk, and his speech bewrayeth him for a Galilean. There are wits in society, both many and keen, who can say something original, cutting and neatly turned, upon almost any subject, with an easy superiority which makes the hair of the learned man stand erect upon his head. The chief characteristic of him who lives by his brains is, that he is not only able to talk consecutively upon some subject, but that he actually does so, which, in society, is accounted a monstrous crime against manners. Let him write what he wants to say, and print it; society will either not understand him at all, or will read his works with a dictionary in the secrecy of its own chamber. But if he will hold his tongue in public, society will give him a cup of tea and treat him almost like a human being for the sake of being said to patronise letters. Any one who likes society's tea may drink his fill of it in consideration of wearing a good coat and keeping his wits to himself, but he will not succeed in marrying any of society's sisters, cousins or aunts without a severe struggle.

Anastase Gouache did not quite understand this. He sometimes found himself amidst a group of people who were freely discussing some person unknown to him. On such occasions he held his peace, innocently supposing that his ignorance was without any importance whatsoever, among a set of men and women with whom not to know every detail concerning every one else is to be little better than an outcast.

"Now do tell me all about the Snooks and Montmorancy divorce," says Lady Smyth-Tompkins with a sweetly engaging smile, as she holds out her hand.

"I did not know there was such a case — I don't know the people," you answer.

"Oh! I thought, of course, you knew all about it," Lady Smyth-Tompkins replies, and her features turn to stone as she realises that you do not know everybody, and leaves you to your own reflections.

O Thackeray, snobisme maxime! How well you knew them!

There are no snobs among the Latin races, but there is a worse animal, the sycophant, descended directly from

the dinner-tables of ancient Rome. In old-fashioned houses there are often several of them, headed invariably by the "giornale ambulante," the walking newspaper, whose business it is to pick up items of news during the day in order to detail them to the family in the evening. There is a certain old princess who sits every evening with her needlework at the head of a long table in the dismal drawing-room of a gigantic palace. On each side of the board are seated the old parasites, the family doctor, the family chaplain, the family lawyer, the family librarian, the peripatetic news-sheet and the rest.

"I have been out to-day," says her excellency.

"Oh! Ah! Dear me! In this weather! Hear what the princess says! The princess has been out!" The chorus comes up the table, all the answers reaching her ears at once.

"And I saw, as I drove by, the new monument! What a ridiculous thing it is."

"Ho! ho! ho! Hah! hah! hah! Dear me! What a monument! What fine taste the princess has! Hear what the princess thinks of the monument!"

"If you will believe it, the bronze horse has a crooked leg."

"He! he! he! Hi! hi! hi! Dear me! A crooked leg! How the princess understands horses! The princess saw that he had a crooked leg!"

And so on, for a couple of hours, in the cold, dimly-lighted room until her excellency has had enough of it and rises to go to bed, when the parasites all scuttle away and quarrel with each other in the street as they walk home. Night after night, to decades of years, the old lady recounts the little journal of her day to the admiring listeners, whose chorus of approval is performed daily with the same unvarying regularity. The times are changing now; the prince is not so easily amused, and the sycophant has accordingly acquired the art of amusing, but there still survive some wonderful monuments of the old school.

Anastase Gouache was a man of great talent and of rising fame, but like other men of his stamp he preferred to believe that he was received on a friendly footing for his own sake rather than on account of his reputation.

In his own eyes, he was, as a man, as good as those with whom he associated, and had as much right to make love to Faustina Montevarchi as the young Frangipani, for whom her father destined her. Faustina, on her part, was too young to appreciate the real strength of the prejudices by which she was surrounded. She could not understand that, although the man she loved was a gentleman, young, good-looking, successful, and not without prospects of acquiring a fortune, he was yet wholly ineligible as a husband. Had she seen this ever so clearly it might have made but little difference in her feelings; but she did not see it, and the disparaging remarks about Anastase, which she occasionally heard in her own family, seemed to her utterly unjust as well as quite unfounded. The result was that the two young people were preparing for themselves one of those terrible disappointments of which the consequences are sometimes felt during a score of years. Both, however, were too much in love to bear suspense very long without doing something to precipitate the course of events, and whenever they had the chance they talked the matter over and built wonderful castles in the air.

About a fortnight after the marriage of San Giacinto they were seated together in a room full of people, late in the afternoon. They had been talking for some time upon indifferent subjects. When two persons meet who are very much in love with each other, and waste their time in discussing topics of little importance, it may be safely predicted that something unusual is about to occur.

"I cannot endure this suspense any longer," said Gouache at last.

"Nor I," answered Faustina.

"It is of no use to wait any more. Either your father will consent or he will not. I will ask him and know the worst."

"And if it is the worst—what then?" The young girl turned her eyes towards Anastase with a frightened look.

"Then we must manage without his consent."

"How is that possible?"

"It must be possible," replied Gouache. "If you love me it shall be possible. It is only a question of a little

courage and goodwill. But, after all, your father may consent. Why should he not?"

"Because——" she hesitated a little.

"Because I am not a Roman prince, you mean." Anastase glanced quickly at her.

"No. He wants me to marry Frangipani."

"Why did you never tell me that?"

"I did not know it when we last met. My mother told me of it last night."

"Is the match settled?" asked Gouache. He was very pale.

"I think it has been spoken of," answered Faustina in a low voice. She shivered a little and pressed her hands together. There was a short silence, during which Anastase did not take his eyes from her, while she looked down, avoiding his look.

"Then there is no time to be lost," said Gouache at last. "I will go to your father to-morrow morning."

"Oh—don't, don't!" cried Faustina, suddenly, with an expression of intense anxiety.

"Why not?" The artist seemed very much surprised.

"You do not know him! You do not know what he will say to you! You will be angry and lose your temper—he will be cruel and will insult you, and you will resent it—then I shall never see you again. You do not know——"

"This is something new," said Gouache. "How can you be sure that he will receive me so badly? Have your people talked about me? After all, I am an honest man, and though I live by my profession I am not poor. It is true, I am not such a match for you as Frangipani. Tell me, do they abuse me at your house?"

"No—what can they say, except that you are an artist? That is not abuse, nor calumny."

"It depends upon how it is said. I suppose it is San Giacinto who says it." Gouache's face darkened.

"San Giacinto has guessed the truth," answered Faustina, shaking her head. "He knows that we love each other, and just now he is very powerful with my father. It will be worse if he wins the suit and is Prince Saracinesca."

"Then that is another reason for acting at once.

Faustina—you followed me once—will you not go with me, away, out of this cursed city? I will ask for you first. I will behave honourably. But if he will not consent, what is there left for us to do? Can we live apart? Can you marry Frangipani? Have not many people done before what we think of doing? Is it wrong? Heaven knows, I make no pretence to sanctity. But I would not have you do anything—what shall I say? Anything against your conscience." There was a shade of bitterness in the laugh that accompanied the last words.

"You do not know what things he will say," repeated Faustina, in despairing tones.

"This is absurd," said Gouache. "I can bear anything he can say well enough. He is an old man and I am a young one, and have no intention of taking offence. He may say what he pleases, call me a villain, a brigand—that is your favourite Italian expression—a thief, a liar, anything he pleases. I will not be angry. There shall be no violence. But I cannot endure this state of things any longer. I must try my luck."

"Wait a little longer," answered Faustina, in an imploring tone. "Wait until the suit is decided."

"In order to let San Giacinto get even more influence than he has now? It would be a mistake—you almost said so yourself a moment ago. Besides, the suit may for years."

"It will not last a fortnight."

"Poor Sant' Ilario!" exclaimed Gouache. "Does everybody know about it?"

"I suppose so. But nobody speaks of it. We all feel dreadfully about it, except my father and San Giacinto and Flavia."

"If he is in a good humour this is the very time to go to him."

"Please, please do not insist!" Faustina was evidently very much in earnest. With the instinct of a very young woman, she clung to the half happiness of the present which was so much greater than anything she had known before in her life. But Gouache would not be satisfied.

"I must know the worst," he said again, as they parted.

"But this is so much better than the worst," answered Faustina, sadly.

"Who risks nothing, wins nothing," retorted the young man with a bright smile.

In spite of his hopefulness, however, he had received a severe shock on hearing the news of the intended match with young Frangipani. He had certainly never expected to find himself the rival of such a suitor, and his sense of possibility, if man may be said to possess such a faculty, was staggered by the idea. He suddenly awakened to a true understanding of his position in Roman society, and when he contemplated his discovery in all its bearings, his nerve almost forsook him. When he remembered his childhood, his youth, and the circumstances in which he had lived up to a recent time, he found it hard to realise that he was trying to marry such a girl, in spite of her family and in opposition to such a man as was now brought forward as a match for her. It was not in his nature, however, to be discouraged in the face of difficulties. He was like a brave man who has received a stunning blow, but who continues to fight until he has gradually regained his position. Gouache could no more have relinquished Faustina than he could have abandoned a half-finished picture in which he believed, any more than he had given up the attempt to break away the stones at the Vigna Santucci after he had received the bullet in his shoulder. He had acquired his position in life by indomitable perseverance and hopefulness, and those qualities would not now fail him, in one of the most critical situations through which he had ever passed. In spite of Faustina's warning and, to some extent, in spite of his own better judgment, he determined to face the old prince at once and to ask him boldly for his daughter.

He had spoken confidently to Faustina of being married against the will of her father, but when he thought over this alternative he recollected a fact he had almost completely forgotten in considering his matrimonial projects. He was a soldier and had enlisted in the Zouaves for a term of years. It was true that by using the influence he possessed he might hope to be released from his engagement, but such a course was most repugnant

to him. Before Mentana it would have been wholly impossible, for it would have seemed cowardly. Now that he had distinguished himself and had been wounded in the cause, the thing might be done without dishonour, but it would involve a species of self-abasement to which he was not prepared to submit. On the other hand, to wait until his term of service should have expired was to risk losing Faustina altogether. He knew that she loved him, but he was experienced enough to know that a young girl is not always able to bear the pressure exercised upon her when marriage is concerned. In Rome, and especially at that time, it was in the power of parents to use the most despotic means for subduing the will of their children. There was even a law by which a disobedient son or daughter could be imprisoned for a considerable length of time, provided that the father could prove that his child had rebelled against his just will. Though Gouache was not aware of this, the fact that a similar institution existed in his own country made him suspect that it was to be found in Rome also. Supposing that Montevarchi refused to accept him for a son-in-law, and that Faustina, on the other hand, refused to marry young Frangipani, it was only too probable that she might be locked up — in a luxuriously furnished cell of course — to reflect upon the error of her ways. It was by no means certain that in the face of such humiliation and suffering Faustina would continue her resistance; indeed, she could hardly be blamed if she yielded in the end. Gouache believed in the sincerity of her love because the case was his own; had he heard of it in the life of another man he would have laughed at the idea that a girl of eighteen could be capable of a serious passion.

It is not necessary, however, to enter into an analysis of the motives and feelings of either Faustina or Anastase. Their connection with the history of the Saracinesca arose from what they did, and not from the thoughts which prompted their actions. It is sufficient to say that Gouache conceived the mad idea of asking Montevarchi's consent to his marriage and to explain the immediate consequences of the step he took.

Matters were rapidly approaching a climax. San Giacinto had seen the lawyers at Frascati, and he had brought

his wife back to Rome very soon in order to be on the spot while the case was being prepared. The men of the law declared that the matter was a very simple one and that no court could withhold its decision a single day after seeing the documents which constituted the claim. The only point about which any argument could arise related to the identity of San Giacinto himself, and no difficulty was found in establishing substantial proof that he was Giovanni Saracinesca and not an impostor. His father and grandfather had jealously kept all the records of themselves which were necessary, from the marriage certificate of the original Don Leone, who had signed the deed, to the register of San Giacinto's own birth. Copies were obtained, properly drawn up and certified, of the parish books and of the few government documents which were officially preserved in the kingdom of Naples before 1860, and the lawyers declared themselves ready to open the case. Up to this time the strictest secrecy was preserved, at the request of San Giacinto himself. He said that in such an important matter he wished nothing to transpire until he was ready to act; more especially as the Saracinesca themselves could not be ignorant of the true state of the case and had no right to receive notice of the action beforehand. As Corona had foreseen, San Giacinto intended to obtain the decision by means of a perfectly legal trial, and was honestly ready to court enquiry into the rights he was about to assert. When the moment came and all was ready, he went to the Palazzo Saracinesca and asked for the prince, who received him in the same room in which the two had met when the ex-innkeeper had made his appearance in Rome nearly three months earlier. As San Giacinto entered he felt that he had not wasted his time during that short interval.

"I have come to talk with you upon a business which must be unpleasant to you," he began. "Unfortunately it cannot be avoided. I beg you to believe that it is my wish to act loyally and fairly."

"I hope so," said Saracinesca, bending his bushy gray eyebrows and fixing his keen old eyes upon his visitor.

"You need not doubt it," replied San Giacinto rather proudly. "You are doubtless acquainted with the nature

of the deed by which our great-grandfathers agreed to transfer the titles and property to the younger of the two. When we first spoke of the matter I was not aware of the existence of a saving clause. I cannot suppose you ignorant of it. That clause provided that if Leone Saracinesca married and had a lawful heir, the deed should be null and void. He did marry, as you know. I am his direct descendant, and have children of my own by my first marriage. I cannot therefore allow the clause in question to remain in abeyance any longer. With all due respect to you, I am obliged to tell you quite frankly that, in law, I am Prince Saracinesca."

Having thus stated his position as plainly as possible, San Giacinto folded his great hands upon his knee and leaned against the back of his chair. Saracinesca looked as though he were about to make some hasty answer, but he controlled his intention and rose to his feet. After walking twice up and down the room, he came and stood in front of his cousin.

"Let us be plain in what we say," he began. "I give you my word that, until Montevarchi sent back those papers the other day, I did not know what they contained. I had not read them for thirty years, and at that time the clause escaped me. I do not remember to have noticed it. This may have been due to the fact that I had never heard that Leone had any living descendants, and should therefore have attached no importance to the words if I had seen them."

"I believe you," said San Giacinto, calmly. The old man's eyes flashed.

"I always take it for granted that I am believed," he answered. "Will you give me your word that you are what you assert yourself to be, Giovanni Saracinesca, the great-grandson and lawful heir of Leone?"

"Certainly. I pledge my honour that I am; and I, too, expect to be believed by you."

There was something in the tone of the answer that struck a sympathetic chord in Saracinesca's nature. San Giacinto had risen to his feet, and there was something in the huge, lean strength of him, in the bold look of his eyes, in the ring of his deep voice, that inspired respect. Rough he was, and not over refined or carefully trained

in the ways of the world, cruel perhaps, and overbearing too; but he was every inch a Saracinesca, and the old man felt it.

"I believe you," answered the prince. "You may take possession when you please. I am Don Leone, and you are the head of the house."

He made a gesture full of dignity, as though resigning then and there his name and the house in which he lived, to him who was lawfully entitled to both. The action was magnificent and worthy of the man. There was a superb disregard of consequences in his readiness to give up everything rather than keep for a moment what was not his, which affected San Giacinto strangely. In justice to the latter it must be remembered that he had not the faintest idea that he was the instrument of a gigantic fraud from which he was to derive the chief advantage. He instinctively bowed in acknowledgment of his cousin's generous conduct.

"I shall not take advantage of your magnanimity," he said, "until the law has sanctioned my doing so."

"As you please," answered the other. "I have nothing to conceal from the law, but I am prejudiced against lawyers. Do as you think best. A family council can settle the matter as well as the courts."

"Your confidence in me is generous and noble. I prefer, however, that the tribunal should examine the matter."

"As you please," repeated Saracinesca. There was no reason for prolonging an interview which could not be agreeable to either party. The old man remained standing. "No opposition will be made to the suit," he said. "You will simply produce your papers in proper form, and I will declare myself satisfied." He held out his hand.

"I trust you will bear me no ill-will," said San Giacinto rather awkwardly.

"For taking what is yours and not mine? Not in the least. Good-evening."

San Giacinto left the room. When he was gone, Saracinesca stood still for a moment, and then sank into a chair. His strong nature had sustained him through the meeting and would sustain him to the end, but he was

terribly shaken, and felt a strange sensation of numbness in the back of his head, which was quite new to him. For some minutes he sat still as though dazed and only half conscious. Then he rose again, shook himself as though to get rid of a bad dream and rang the bell. He sent for Giovanni, who appeared immediately.

"San Giacinto has been here," he said quickly. "He is the man. You had better tell your wife, as she will want to collect her things before we leave the house."

Giovanni was staggered by his father's impetuosity. He had realised that the danger existed, but it had always seemed indefinitely far removed.

"I suppose there will be some legal proceedings before everything is settled," he said with more calmness than he felt.

"What is that to us? We must go, sooner or later."

"And if the courts do not decide in his favour, what then?"

"There is no doubt about it," answered the prince, pacing the room as his excitement returned. "You and I are nobody. We had better go and live in an inn. That man is honest. I hate him, but he is honest. Why do you stand there staring at me? Were you not the first to say that if we are impostors we should give up everything of our own free-will? And now you seem to think that I will fight the suit! That is your logic! That is all the consistency you have acquired in your travels! Go and tell your wife that you are nobody, that I am nobody! Go and tell her to give you a title, a name for men to call you by! Go into the market and see whether you can find a name for your father! Go and hire a house for us to live in, when that Neapolitan devil has brought Flavia Montevarchi to live in the palace where your mother died, where you were born — poor Giovanni! Not that I pity you any more than I pity myself. Why should I? You are young and have done this house the honour to spend most of your life out of it. But after all — poor Giovanni!"

Saracinesca seized his son's hand and looked into his eyes. The young man's face was perfectly calm, almost serene in its expression of indifference to misfortune. His whole soul was preoccupied by greater and nobler

emotions than any which could be caused by worldly loss. He had been with Corona again, had talked with her and had seen that look in her face which he had learned to dread more than he had ever dreaded anything in his life. What was life itself without that which her eyes refused?

CHAPTER XIX.

Prince Montevarchi was very much surprised when he was told that Anastase Gouache wished to see him, and as he was very much occupied with the details of the suit his first impulse was to decline the visit. Although he had no idea that matters had already gone so far between the Zouave and Faustina, he was not, however, so blind as the young girl had supposed him to be. He was naturally observant, like most men who devote their lives to the pursuit of their own interests, and it had not escaped him that Faustina and Gouache were very often to be seen talking together in the world. Had he possessed a sense of humour he might possibly have thought that it would be inexpressibly comical if Gouache should take it into his head to fall in love with the girl; but the Italians are not a humorous people, and the idea did not suggest itself to the old gentleman. He consented to receive Gouache because he thought the opportunity would be a good one for reading the young man a lecture upon the humility of his station, and upon the arrogance he displayed in devoting himself thus openly to the daughter of Casa Montevarchi.

"Good-day, Monsieur Gouache," he said solemnly, as Anastase entered. "Pray be seated. To what do I owe the honour of your visit?"

Anastase had put on a perfectly new uniform for the interview, and his movements were more than usually alert and his manners a shade more elaborate and formal than on ordinary occasions. He felt and behaved as young men of good birth do who are serving their year in the army, and who, having put on their smartest

tunic, hope that in a half light they may be taken for officers.

"Will you allow me to explain my position in the first place?" he asked, seating himself and twisting his cap slowly in his hands.

"Your position? By all means, if you desire to do so. It is an excellent rule in all discourses to put the definition before the argument. Nevertheless, if you would inform me of the nature of the affair, it might help me to understand you better."

"It is very delicate — but I will try to be plain. What I am, I think you know already. I am a painter and I have been successful. For the present, I am a Zouave, but my military service does not greatly interfere with my profession. We have a good deal of time upon our hands. My pictures bring me a larger income than I can spend."

"I congratulate you," observed Montevarchi, opening his small eyes in some astonishment. "The pursuit of the fine arts is not generally very lucrative. For myself, I confess that I am satisfied with those treasures which my father has left me. I am very fond of pictures, it is true; but you will understand that, when a gallery is filled, it is full. You comprehend, I am sure? Much as I might wish to own some of the works of the modern French school, the double disadvantage of possessing already so many canvases, and the still stronger consideration of my limited fortune — yes, limited, I assure you —"

"Pardon me," interrupted Gouache, whose face reddened suddenly, "I had no intention of proposing to sell you a picture. I am not in the habit of advertising myself nor of soliciting orders for my work."

"My dear sir!" exclaimed the prince, seeing that he was on a wrong tack, "have I suggested such a thing? If my words conveyed the idea, pray accept all my excuses. Since you had mentioned the subject of art, my thoughts naturally were directed to my gallery of pictures. I am delighted to hear of your success, for you know how much interest we all feel in him who was the victim of such an unfortunate accident, due doubtless to the carelessness of my men."