

"The fools remain," he said, "and I must go. But no, I shall not go! Let the world believe me to be a dismissed minister, I remain minister after all. I shall rule through my creatures, Colloredo and Victoria. I remain minister until I shall be tired of all these miserable intrigues, and retire in order to live for myself."\*

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

FANNY VON ARNSTEIN.

THE young Baroness Fanny von Arnstein had just finished her morning toilet and stepped from her dressing-room into her boudoir, in order to take her chocolate there, solitary and alone as ever. With a gentle sigh she glided into the arm-chair, and instead of drinking the chocolate placed before her in a silver breakfast set on the table, she leaned her head against the back of her chair and dreamily looked up to the ceiling. Her bosom heaved profound sighs from time to time, and the ideas which were moving her heart and her soul ever and anon caused a deeper blush to mantle her cheeks; but it quickly disappeared again, and was followed by an even more striking pallor.

She was suddenly startled from her musings by a soft, timid rap at the door leading to the reception-room.

"Good Heaven!" she whispered, "I hope he will not dare to come to me so early, and without being announced."

The rapping at the door was renewed. "I cannot, will not receive him," she muttered; "it will be better not to be alone with him any more. I will bolt the door and make no reply whatever."

She glided with soft steps across the room to the door, and was just about to bolt it, when the rapping resounded for the third time, and a modest female voice asked:

"Are you there, baroness, and may I walk in?"

"Ah, it is only my maid," whispered the baroness, drawing a deep breath, as though an oppressive burden were removed from her breast, and she opened the door herself.

\* Thugut really withdrew definitely from the political stage, but secretly he retained his full power and authority, and Victoria de Poutet-Colloredo, the influential friend of the Empress Theresia, constantly remained his faithful adherent and confidante. All Vienna, however, was highly elated by the dismissal of Thugut, who had so long ruled the empire in the most arbitrary manner. An instance of his system is the fact that, on his withdrawal from the cabinet, there were found one hundred and seventy unopened dispatches and more than two thousand unopened letters. Thugut only perused what he believed to be worth the trouble of being read, and to the remainder he paid no attention whatever.—"Lebensbilder," vol. i., p. 327.

"Well, Fanchon," she asked, in her gentle, winning voice, "what do you want?"

"Pardon me, baroness," said the maid, casting an inquisitive look around the room, "the baron sent for me just now; he asked me if you had risen already and entered your boudoir, and when I replied in the affirmative, the baron gave me a message for you, with the express order, however, not to deliver it until you had taken your chocolate and finished your breakfast. I see now that I must not yet deliver it; the breakfast is still on the table just as it was brought in."

"Take it away; I do not want to eat any thing," said the baroness, hastily. "And now Fanchon, tell me your errand."

Fanchon approached the table, and while she seized the silver salver, she cast a glance of tender anxiety on her pale, beautiful mistress.

"You are eating nothing at all, baroness," she said, timidly; "for a week already I have had to remove the breakfast every morning in the same manner; you never tasted a morsel of it, and the *valet de chambre* says that you hardly eat any thing at the dinner-table either; you will be taken ill, baroness, if you go on in this manner, and—"

"Never mind, dear Fanchon," her mistress interrupted her with a gentle smile, "I have hardly any appetite, it is true, but I do not feel unwell, nor do I want to be taken ill. Let us say no more about it, and tell me the message the baron intrusted to you."

"The baron wished me to ask you if you would permit him to pay you immediately a visit, and if you would receive him here in your boudoir."

The baroness started, and an air of surprise overspread her features. "Tell the baron that he will be welcome, and that I am waiting for him," she said then, calmly. But so soon as Fanchon had withdrawn, she whispered: "What is the meaning of all this? What is the reason of this unusual visit? Oh, my knees are trembling, and my heart is beating so violently, as though it wanted to burst. Why? What have I done, then? Am I a criminal, who is afraid to appear before her judge?"

She sank back into her arm-chair and covered her blushing face with her hands. "No," she said, after a long pause, raising her head again, "no, I am no criminal, and my conscience is guiltless. I am able to raise my eyes freely to my husband and to my God. So far, I have honestly struggled against my own heart, and I shall struggle on in the same manner. I—ah! he is coming," she interrupted herself when she heard steps in the adjoining room, and her eyes were fixed with an expression of anxious suspense on the door.

The latter opened, and her husband, Baron Arnstein, entered. His face was pale, and indicative of deep emotion; nevertheless, he saluted his wife with a kind smile, and bent down in order to kiss her hand, which she had silently given to him.

"I suppose you expected me?" he asked. "You knew, even before I sent Fanchon to you, that I should come and see you at the present hour?"

Fanny looked at him inquiringly, and in surprise. "I confess," she said, in an embarrassed tone, "that I did not anticipate your visit by any means until Fanchon announced it to me, and I only mention it to apologize for the *dishabille* in which you find me."

"Ah, you did not expect me, then?" exclaimed the baron, mournfully. "You have forgotten every thing? You did not remember that this is the anniversary of our wedding, and that five years have elapsed since that time?"

"Indeed," whispered Fanny, in confusion, "I did not know that this was the day."

"You felt its burden day after day, and it seemed to you, therefore, as though that ill-starred day were being renewed for you all the year round," exclaimed the baron, sadly. "Pardon my impetuosity and my complaints," he continued, when he saw that she turned pale and averted her face. "I will be gentle, and you shall have no reason to complain of me. But as you have forgotten the agreement which we made five years ago, permit me to remind you of it."

He took a chair, and, sitting down opposite her, fixed a long, melancholy look upon her. "When I led you to the altar five years ago to-day," he said, feelingly, "you were, perhaps, less beautiful than now, less brilliant, less majestic; but you were in better and less despondent spirits, although you were about to marry a man who was entirely indifferent to you."

"Oh, I did not say that you were indifferent to me," said Fanny, in a low voice; "only I did not know you, and, therefore, did not love you."

"You see that want of acquaintance was not the only reason," he said, with a bitter smile, "for now, I believe, you know me, and yet you do not love me. But let us speak of what brought me here to-day—of the past. You know that, before our marriage, you afforded me the happiness of a long and confidential interview, that you permitted me to look down into the depths of your pure and noble soul, that you unveiled to me your innocent heart, that did not yet exhibit either scars or wounds, nor even an image, a souvenir, and allowed me to be your brother and your friend, as you would not accept me as a lover and husband. Before the world, however,

I became your husband, and took you to Vienna, to my house, of which you were to be the mistress and queen. The whole house was gayly decorated, and all the rooms were opened, for your arrival was to be celebrated by a ball. Only one door was locked; it was the door of this cabinet. I conducted you hither and said to you, 'This is your sanctuary, and no one shall enter it without your permission. In this boudoir you are not the Baroness Arnstein, not my wife; but here you are Fanny Itzig, the free and unshackled young girl, who is mistress of her will and affections. I shall never dare myself, without being expressly authorized by you, to enter this room; and when I shall be allowed to do so, I shall only come as a cavalier, who has the honor to pay a polite visit to a beautiful lady, to whom he is not connected in any manner whatever. Before the world I am your husband, but not in this room. Hence I shall never permit myself to ask what you are doing in this room, whom you are receiving here; for here you are only responsible to God and yourself.' Do you now remember that I said this to you at that time?"

"I do."

"I told you further that I begged you to continue with me one day here in this room the confidential conversation which we held before our marriage. I begged you to fix a period of five years for this purpose, and, during this time, to examine your heart and to see whether life at my side was at least a tolerable burden, or whether you wished to shake it off. I asked you to promise me that I might enter this room on the fifth anniversary of our wedding-day, for the purpose of settling then with you our future mode of living. You were kind enough to grant my prayer, and to promise what I asked. Do you remember it?"

"I do," said Fanny, blushing; "I must confess, however, that I did not regard those words in so grave a light as to consider them as a formal obligation on your part. You would have been every day a welcome guest in this room, and it was unnecessary for you to wait for a particular day in accordance with an agreement made five years ago."

"Your answer is an evasive one," said the baron, sadly. "I implore you, let us now again speak as frankly and honestly as we did five years ago to-day! Will you grant my prayer?"

"I will," replied Fanny, eagerly; "and I am going to prove immediately that I am in earnest. You alluded a few minutes ago to our past, and asked me wonderingly if I had forgotten that interview on our wedding-day. I remember it so well, however, that I must direct your attention to the fact that *you* have forgotten the principal portion of what we said to each other at that time, or

rather that, in your generous delicacy, and with that magnanimous kindness which you alone may boast of, you have intentionally omitted that portion of it. You remembered that I told you I did not love you, but you forgot that you then asked me if I loved another man. I replied to you that I loved no one, and never shall I forget the mournful voice in which you then said, 'It is by far easier to marry with a cold heart than to do so with a broken heart; for the cold heart may grow warm, but the broken heart—never!' Oh, do not excuse yourself," she continued, with greater warmth; "do not take me for so conceited and narrow-minded a being that I should have regarded those words of yours as an insult offered to me! It was, at the best, but a pang that I felt."

"A pang?" asked the baron, in surprise; and he fixed his dark eyes, with a wondrously impassioned expression, on the face of his beautiful wife.

"Yes, I felt a pang," she exclaimed, vividly, "for, on hearing your words, which evidently issued from the depths of your soul, on witnessing your unaffected and passionate grief, your courageous self-abnegation, I felt that your heart had received a wound which never would close again, and that you never would faithlessly turn from your first love to a second one."

"Oh, my God," murmured the baron, and he averted his face in order not to let her see the blush suddenly mantling it.

Fanny did not notice it, and continued: "But this dead love of yours laid itself like the cold hand of a corpse upon my breast and doomed it to everlasting coldness. With the consciousness that you never would love me, I had to cease striving for it, and give up the hope of seeing, perhaps, one day my heart awake in love for you, and the wondrous flower of a tenderness after marriage unfold itself, the gradual budding of which had been denied to us by the arbitrary action of our parents, who had not consulted our wishes, but only our fortunes. I became your wife with the full conviction that I should have to lead a life cold, dreary, and devoid of love, and that I could not be for you but an everlasting burden, a chain, an obstacle. My pride, that was revolting against it, told me that I should be able to bear this life in a dignified manner, but that I never ought to make even an attempt to break through this barrier which your love for another had erected between us, and which you tried to raise as high as possible."

"I!" exclaimed the baron, sadly.

"Yes, you," she said, gravely. "Or did you believe, perhaps, I did not comprehend your rigorous reserve toward me? I did not understand that you were wrapping around your aversion to me but a delicate veil? You conducted me to this room and told me that

you never would enter it, and that you would only come here when specially invited by myself to do so. Well, sir, you managed very skilfully to conceal your intention never to be alone with me, and to lead an entirely separate life from me under this phrase, for you knew very well that my pride never would permit me to invite you here against your will."

"Oh, is it possible that I should have been misunderstood in this manner?" sighed the baron, but in so low a voice that Fanny did not hear him.

"You further told me," she continued, eagerly, "that I should only bear the name of your wife before the world, but not in this room where I was always to be Fanny Itzig. You were kind enough to give to this moral divorce, which you pronounced in this manner, the semblance as though *you* were the losing party, and as though you were only actuated by motives of delicacy toward me. I understood it all, however, and when you left this room after that conversation, sir, I sank down on my knees and implored God that He might remain with me in this loneliness to which you had doomed me, and I implored my pride to sustain and support me, and I swore to my maidenly honor that I would preserve it unsullied and sacred to my end."

"Oh, good Heaven!" groaned the baron, tottering backward like a man suddenly seized with vertigo.

Fanny, in her own glowing excitement, did not notice it.

"And thus I commenced my new life," she said, "a life of splendor and magnificence; it was glittering without, but dreary within, and in the midst of our most brilliant circles I constantly felt lonely; surrounded by hundreds who called themselves friends of our house, I was always alone—I, the wife of your reception-room, the disowned of my boudoir! Oh, it is true I have obtained many triumphs; I have seen this haughty world, that only received me hesitatingly, at last bow to me; the Jewess has become the centre of society, and no one on entering our house believes any longer that he is conferring a favor upon us, but, on the contrary, receiving one from us. It is the *ton* now to visit our house; we are being overwhelmed with invitations, with flattering attentions. But tell me, sir, is all this a compensation for the happiness which we are lacking and which we never will obtain? Oh, is it not sad to think that both of us, so young, so capable of enjoying happiness, should already be doomed to eternal resignation and eternal loneliness? Is it not horrible to see us, and ought not God Himself to pity us, if from the splendor of His starry heavens He should look down for a moment into our gloomy breasts? I bear in it a cold, frozen heart, and you a coffin. Oh, sir, do not laugh at me because you see tears

in my eyes—it is only Fanny Itzig who is weeping; Baroness von Arnstein will receive your guests to-night in your saloons with a smiling face, and no one will believe that her eyes also know how to weep. But here, here in my widow-room, here in my nun's cell, I may be permitted to weep over you and me, who have been chained together with infrangible fetters, of which both of us feel the burden and oppression with equal bitterness and wrath. May God forgive our parents for having sacrificed our hearts on the altar of *their* God, who is Mammon; I shall ever hate them for it; I shall never forgive them, for they who knew life must have known that there is nothing more unhappy, more miserable, and more deplorable than a wife who does not love her husband, is not beloved by him."

"Is not beloved by him!" repeated the baron, approaching his wife who, like a broken reed, had sunk down on a chair, and seizing her hand, he said: "You say that I do not love you, Fanny! Do you know my heart, then? Have you deemed it worth while only a single time to fix your proud eyes on my poor heart? Did you ever show me a symptom of sympathy when I was sick, a trace of compassion when you saw me suffering? But no, you did not even see that I was suffering, or that I was sad. Your proud, cold glance always glided past me; it *saw* me rarely, it never *sought* me! What can you know, then, about my heart, and what would you care if I should tell you now that there is no longer a coffin in it, that it has awoke to a new life, and—"

"Baron!" exclaimed Fanny, rising quickly and proudly, "will you, perhaps, carry your magnanimity and delicacy so far as to make me a declaration of love? Did I express myself in my imprudent impetuosity so incorrectly as to make you believe I was anxious even now to gain your love, and that I was complaining of not having obtained it? Do you believe me to be an humble mendicant, to whom in your generosity you want to throw the morsel of a declaration of love? I thank you, sir, I am not hungry, and do not want this morsel. Let us at least be truthful and sincere toward each other, and the truth is, we do not love each other and shall never do so. Let us never try to feign what we never shall feel. And if you now should offer me your love I should have to reject it, for I am accustomed to a freezing temperature; and I should fare like the natives of Siberia, I should die if I were to live in a warmer zone. Both of us are living in Siberia; well, then, as we cannot expect roses to bloom for us, let us try at least to catch sables for ourselves. The sable, moreover, is an animal highly valued by the whole world. People will envy our sable furs, for they know them to be costly; they would laugh at us if we should adorn our

heads with roses, for roses are not costly by any means, they are common, and every peasant-girl may adorn herself with them."

"You are joking," said the baron, mournfully, "and yet there are tears glistening in your eyes. However, your will shall be sacred to me. I shall never dare to speak to you again about my heart. But let us speak about you and your future. The five years of our agreement have elapsed, and I am here to confer with you about your future. Tell me frankly and honestly, Fanny, do you wish to be divorced from me?"

She started and fixed a long and searching look on her husband.

"Your father died a year ago," she said, musingly, "you are now the chief of the firm; no one has a right to command any longer what you are to do, and being free now, you may offer your hand to her whom you love, I suppose?"

The baron uttered a shriek, and a death-like pallor overspread his face. "Have I deserved to be thus deeply despised by you?" he ejaculated.

Fanny quickly gave him her hand. "Pardon me," she said, cordially. "I have pained you quite unintentionally; the grief of this hour has rendered me cruel. No, I do not believe that you, merely for your own sake, addressed this question to me; I know, on the contrary, that you entertain for me the sympathy of a brother, of a friend, and I am satisfied that your question had my happiness in view as well as yours."

"Well," he said, with the semblance of perfect calmness, "let me repeat my question, then: do you want to be divorced from me?"

Fanny slowly shook her head. "Why?" she asked, sadly. "I repeat to you what I told you once already; we are living in Siberia—let us remain there. We are accustomed to a freezing temperature; we might die, perhaps, in a warmer zone."

"Or your heart might exult, perhaps, with happiness and delight," said the baron, and now *his* eyes were fixed inquiringly upon her face. "You called me just now your friend, you admitted that I felt for you the sympathy of a brother; well, then, let me speak to you as your brother and friend. Do not reject the offer of a divorce so quickly, Fanny, for I tell you now I shall never renew it, and if you do not give me up to-day, you are chained to me forever, for I shall never be capable again of a courage so cruel against myself. Consider the offer well, therefore. Think of your youth, your beauty, and your inward loneliness. Remember that your heart is yearning for love and pining away in its dreary solitude. And now look around, Fanny; see how many of the most distinguished and eminent cavaliers are surrounding you, and longing for a glance, for

a smile from you. See by how many you are being loved and adored, and then ask yourself whether or not among all these cavaliers no one would be able to conquer your heart if it were free? For I know your chaste virtue; I know that, although chained to an unbeloved husband, you never would prove faithless to him and avow love to another so long as you were not free. Imagine, then, you were free, and then ask your heart if it will not decide for one of your many adorers."

"No, no," she said, deprecatingly, "I cannot imagine a state of affairs that does not exist; as I am not free, I must not entertain the thoughts of a free woman."

Her husband approached her, and seizing her hand, looked at her in a most touching and imploring manner.

"Then you have forgotten that five years ago, on our wedding-day, you promised me always to trust me?" he asked. "You have forgotten that you took an oath that you would tell me so soon as your heart had declared for another man?"

Fanny could not bear his look, and lowered her eyes.

"It has not declared for another man, and, therefore, I have nothing to confide to you," she said, in a low voice.

The baron constantly held her hand in his own, and his eyes were still fixed on her face.

"Let us consider the matter together," he said. "Permit me to review your cavaliers and admirers, and to examine with you if there is not one among them whom you may deem worthy of your love."

"What!" ejaculated Fanny, having recourse to an outburst of merriment in order to conceal her embarrassment, "you want to make me a Portia, and perform with me a scene from the 'Merchant of Venice?'"

"Yes, you are Portia, and I will play the rôle of your confidant," said Baron Arnstein, smiling. "Well, let us begin our review. First, there is Count Palfy, a member of the old nobility, of the most faultless manners, young, rich, full of ardent love for—"

"For your dinner-parties and the rare dishes that do not cost him any thing," interrupted Fanny. "He is an epicure, who prefers dining at other people's tables because he is too stingy to pay for the Indian birds'-nests which he relishes greatly. As for myself, he never admires me until after dinner, for so soon as his stomach is at rest his heart awakes and craves for food; and his heart is a gourmand, too—it believes love to be a dish; *voilà tout!*"

"Next, there is the handsome Marchese Pallafredo," said her husband, smiling.

"He loves me because he has been told that I speak excellent and

pure German, and because he wants me to teach him how to speak German. He takes me for a grammar, by means of which he may become familiar with our language without any special effort."

"Then there is Count Esterhazy, one of our most brilliant cavaliers; you must not accuse him of stinginess, for he is just the reverse, a spendthrift, squandering his money with full hands; nor must you charge him with being an epicure, for he scarcely eats any thing at all at our dinner-parties, and does not know what he is eating, his eyes being constantly riveted on you, and his thoughts being occupied exclusively with you."

"It is true, he admires me," said Fanny, calmly, "but only a few months ago he was as ardent an adorer of my sister Eskeles, and before he was enamoured of her, he was enthusiastically in love with Countess Victoria Colloredo. He loves every woman who is fashionable in society for the time being, and his heart changes as rapidly as the fashions."

"Besides, there is the prebendary, Baron Weichs," said her husband; "a gentleman of great ability, a *savant*, and withal a cavalier, a—"

"Oh, pray do not speak of him!" exclaimed Fanny, with an air of horror. "His love is revolting to me, and fills me with shame and dismay. Whenever he approaches me my heart shrinks back as if from a venomous serpent, and a feeling of disgust pervades my whole being, although I am unable to account for it. There is something in his glances that is offensive to me; and although he has never dared to address me otherwise than in the most respectful and reserved manner, his conversation always makes me feel as though I were standing under a thunder-cloud from which the lightning might burst forth at any moment to shatter me. As you say, he is a man of ability, but he is a bad man; he is passionately fond of the ladies, but he does not respect them."

"And he does not even deserve mentioning here," said the baron, smiling, "for, even though you were free already, the prebendary never could enjoy the happiness of becoming your husband, and I know that your heart is too chaste to love a man who is unable to offer you his hand. Let us, then, look for such a man among the other cavaliers. There is, for instance, Prince Charles, of Lichtenstein, the most amiable, genial, and handsome of your admirers; a young prince who is neither haughty nor proud, neither prodigal nor stingy; who neither makes love to all ladies so soon as they become fashionable as does Count Esterhazy, nor wants to learn German from you, as does the Marchese Pallafredo; a young man as beautiful as Apollo, as brave as Mars, modest notwithstanding his learning, and affable and courteous notwithstanding his high birth.

Well, Fanny, you do not interrupt me? Your sharp tongue, that was able to condemn all the others, has no such sentence for the Prince von Lichtenstein. You suffer me to praise him. Then you assent to my words?"

"I can neither contradict you nor assent to your words," said Fanny, with a forced smile; "I do not know the prince sufficiently to judge him. He has been at Vienna but a very few months—"

"But he has been a daily visitor in our house during that period," said her husband, interrupting her, "and he is constantly seen at your side. All Vienna knows that the prince is deeply enamoured of you, and he does not conceal it by any means, not even from myself. A few days ago, when he was so unfortunate as not to find you at home, because you were presiding over a meeting of your benevolent society, he met me all alone in the reception-room. Suddenly, in the midst of a desultory conversation, he paused, embraced me passionately, and exclaimed: 'Be not so kind, so courteous, and gentle toward me, for I hate you, I detest you—because I hate every thing keeping me back from her; I detest every thing that prevents me from joining *her*! Forgive my love for her and my hatred toward you; I feel both in spite of myself. If you were not her husband, I should love you like a friend, but that accursed word renders you a mortal enemy of mine. And still I bow to you in humility—still I implore you to be generous; do not banish me from your house, from *her*, for I should die if I were not allowed to see her every day!'"

Fanny had listened to him with blushing cheeks and in breathless suspense. Her whole soul was speaking from the looks which she fixed on her husband, and with which she seemed to drink every word, like sweet nectar, from his lips.

"And what did you reply to him?" she asked, in a dry and husky voice, when the baron was silent.

"I replied to him that you alone had to decide who should appear at our parties, and that every one whom you had invited would be welcome to me. I further told him that his admiration for you did not astonish me at all, and that I would readily forgive his hatred, for—"

The baron paused all at once and looked at his wife with a surprised and inquiring glance. She had started in sudden terror; a deep blush was burning on her cheeks, and her eyes, which had assumed a rapturous and enthusiastic expression, turned toward the door.

The baron's eyes followed her glance, and he heard now a slight noise at the door.

"I believe somebody has knocked at the door," he said, fixing his piercing eyes on his wife.

She raised her head and whispered, "Yes, I believe so."

"And it is the second time already," said the baron, calmly. "Will you not permit the stranger to walk in?"

"I do not know," she said, in great embarrassment, "I—"

Suddenly the door opened, and a young man appeared on the threshold.

"Ah, the Prince von Lichtenstein," said the baron, and he went with perfect calmness and politeness to meet the prince who, evidently in great surprise, remained standing in the door, and was staring gloomily at the strange and unexpected group.

"Come in, my dear sir," said the baron, quietly; "the baroness will be very grateful to you for coming here just at this moment and interrupting our conversation, for it referred to dry business matters. I laid a few old accounts, that had been running for five years, before the baroness, and she gave me a receipt for them, that was all. Our interview, moreover, was at an end, and you need not fear to have disturbed us. Permit me, therefore, to withdraw, for you know very well that, in the forenoon, I am nothing but a banker, a business man, and have to attend to the affairs of our firm."

He bowed simultaneously to the prince and to his wife, and left the room, as smiling, calm, and unconcerned as ever. Only when the door had closed behind him, when he had satisfied himself by a rapid glance through the reception-room that nobody was there, the smile disappeared from his lips, and his features assumed an air of profound melancholy.

"She loves him," he muttered; "yes, she loves him! Her hand trembled in mine when I pronounced his name, and oh! how radiant she looked when she heard him come! Yes, she loves him, and I?—I will go to my counting-house!" he said, with a smile that was to veil the tears in his eyes.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE RIVALS.

THE baron had no sooner closed the door of the boudoir when the young Prince von Lichtenstein hastened to Fanny, and, impetuously seizing her hand, looked at her with a passionate and angry air.

"You did that for the purpose of giving me pain, I suppose?" he asked, with quivering lips. "You wished to prove to me that you did not confer any special favor upon me. Yesterday you were kind enough to assure me that no man ever had set foot into this