

Literature, &c.

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THE DAUGHTER OF STANISLAUS.

LAUS.

A STORY.

It was the night of the 15th of February, and intensely cold, and notwithstanding the night and the cold, a young man rather thinly clad, was lurking about the castle of Wissemburg, a small town in Alsacia some leagues from Strasburg. After having made two or three circuits about the castle, he stopped before a Gothic window, through the curtains of which light was visible.

He was evidently waiting for some one, and soon he was relieved from his solitude by the approach of a person wrapped in a heavy cloak.

"I am glad you are punctual, Mikael," said the new comer. "Now for the work in hand. In that castle, perhaps in that room before us, is Stanislaus late king of Poland. All I desire is, that you contrive to get him to use this snuff box. It contains good Spanish snuff, an article which he is fond of. Here also is a basket of porcelain. You are to sell the whole. Maria Leschinska, the daughter of Stanislaus, will buy it all from you."

"All very good my lord," replied Mikael, "but should I not have a little payment in hand to excite my merchantile diligence? Look at my miserable clothing, which is even at this moment insufficient to keep out the cold, and my mother, too, she is in abject poverty—she is both cold and hungry."

"So long as Stanislaus lives, both you and she must be cold and hungry," was the only answer his employer deigned to give him as he strode away.

Mikael, as may be imagined, was on no good errand. Lingered about the castle till pretty well on in the morning, he presented himself at the gate, which opened to let out a servant, going upon some commission for the household. He approached and said, "have compassion on me, sir, and procure me an audience with the princess Larie."

"Another beggar coming to ask her charity," said the domestic, abruptly; "and he is early enough."

"Ah sir," said the youth, "I am a child of Poland, banished like your master, but still more unhappy than he, inasmuch as I am alone in the world."

"You are coming then, as his countryman to ask alms of him?" interrupted the valet.

Mikael replied humbly, "I am come to sell to the princess all that remains of former wealth—some china."

"Oh, that is quite a different matter," answered the servant. "Stay here—I will let the princess know; and closing the gate after him, he went back into the house."

The poor youth waited for a long time before the door opened. The day was far advanced and the rays of the sun had succeeded in making their way through the gray clouds of a wintry sky, when a gentle voice roused him from the stupor into which the cold was fast throwing him, saying, "I am told you have some beautiful porcelain for sale?"

At a glance Mikael perceived that the speaker was a young girl, with a countenance rather pleasing than pretty, she was accompanied by a middle-aged lady, who did not seem to be in the best of humours. It may be that the early rising was not very agreeable to her, or else the cold of the morning, from which the furs, in which they were both closely wrapped, could not protect them.

"Ah, princess," said Mikael, giving a most piteous tone to his voice, while his foreign accent led some probability to his words, "I am a poor child of Poland whose father perished in battle in the services of king Stanislaus. Come to France with my mother, who was of a good family, we have been obliged to sell for our subsistence, little by little, all that remained to us of past opulence; now only this porcelain is left to us."

"Poor boy! let us see your china," said the princess kindly. "But first come in, it is so dreadfully cold here."

"What are you thinking of princess, whispered the old lady to Maria, "to introduce a stranger into the castle?"

"But this is a Pole, Mockintzka," observed the princess.

"What proof have you that he is?" replied Mockintzka. "I am perhaps wrong, dear princess, but your noble father's life has been so often threatened, that it has rendered me suspicious; besides this man has a most forbidding countenance, and a downcast look, which in spite of myself, repels me."

"I confess Mockintzka that, like you I am obliged to struggle against the prejudice produced by the expression of his countenance," said Maria, still in a whisper, and looking at the pretended Pole, who at this moment betrayed a marked uneasiness. "But after all the poor boy did not make himself. Is it his fault that he is ugly, and ought we to visit it upon his head? However there is no harm in being cautious, so we may as well look at the china outside." Then approaching Mikael she added, raising her voice, "Let us see your porcelain my friend." The face of Mikael brightened at this demand, and he hastened to open his basket.

"Here," said he drawing out one by one the articles, which he presented alternately to the princess and her governess, "is a china vase with teacups of a set which a sea captain, a wealthy relative of ours, gave to my mother the day of her marriage with my father. Nothing but sore distress could make us part with so precious a souvenir. But look here! Oh this article though only Dresden china, is dearer to me than all! It was the snuff box which my father had in daily use."

have heard it said that king Stanislaus is particularly fond of Spanish snuff; indeed I could not be a Pole and be ignorant of it, for all the Poles are so warmly attached to their former king your noble father, and the father of us all, if I may dare call him so, that we know his tastes, his habits, his likings and dislikes just as we do those of our natural parents and knowing this, yesterday I spent the little I possessed in buying from an old Spaniard what remained to him of his snuff box. I have filled the box with it, and I think princess, you will have much pleasure in presenting your royal father with what he likes so much."

"Is it scented?" inquired Maria.

"Do not offer your highness a specimen," replied the false merchant, opening the box, but holding it at a distance from the ladies, "because it is very powerful—very powerful; it would get into your head, particularly into that of a young person. It requires the solid brain of a man in the prime of life to bear a pinch."

"How much is the box and the snuff," demanded the princess.

"Will not your highness take all?" inquired the merchant.

"Yes. How much are they altogether?" said the princess with a complacent look into the interior of the basket.

"Going to buy all? How can you think of dear princess?" interrupted the governess.

"Did you not yesterday give to two poor children who were crying with cold, all the money you had except that beautiful louis-d'or with the effigy of the young king of France, Louis XV, and which you prize so much, that you would buy nothing this week in order not to spend it?" "But, dear Mockintzka," said the princess with the coaxing look that so well became her almost infantine youthfulness of expression, "only think what a delight to give my father some of that Spanish snuff, which he is so fond of! And I think this porcelain so pretty, that if the young man will let me have the whole for my louis—"

"That is exactly what Monsieur Levi, a toy merchant, offered me yesterday morning," said the young Mikael, believing by the help of the lie, to make the princess more eager to buy.

"And you refused it?" said the princess.

"Yes, madame; but I will not refuse you, replied Mikael, "for since I may choose, I would much rather have you for a customer. So here is my basket."

"No, keep it," replied the princess, "while I go for the money."

The princess and her governess now re-entered the castle, leaving the pretended Pole waiting for them. He was sauntering about the gate, when suddenly his look became fixed, and his countenance assumed a strange expression; and though the bargain had been concluded, and he on the point of receiving his money he snatched up his basket and disappeared at full speed.

The person who had thus caused his alarm was a poor beggar woman, well known in all Weissenburg, not less for her honesty than her poverty.

The princess soon returned with her beautiful louis-d'or, and was gazing upon it as it sparkled upon her white glove, as we gaze on a beloved object we are to see no more, when raising her eyes to address the merchant she found that both merchant and porcelain had vanished.

She looked around in surprise, but perceiving only the old beggar woman, she called her. "My good mother," said she, "do you know where a lad who was selling porcelain is gone—he was here not a moment ago?"

"I have seen no one," replied the poor woman in a tone so expressive of extreme weakness, that the princess felt moved to the bottom of her heart.

"What is the matter with you, my good woman?" said she kindly.

"Cold and hunger," replied the beggar.

"Dear Mockintzka," said the princess, turning to her governess, "go, I beg of you, and desire something to be brought here for this poor woman."

"I am indeed very poor, and much to be pitied," replied the beggar, whilst Mockintzka went away; "but nevertheless I should not complain, madame if I suffered alone."

"You have children, then?" demanded Maria.

"Two madame—a son and daughter. My son!—may God give him grace to walk in the right way! As to my daughter, she is dying."

"Of what?" demanded the princess, her heart quite touched.

"Of want, madame. That is the sickness which kills in the most cruel manner—slowly and hopelessly."

"How shocking!" exclaimed the princess, clasping her hands. "And how old is she?"

"The same age as our young king, Louis XV., madame," replied the beggar. "She was borne on the same day as he, the 15th of February 1710. She was ten years old today."

"And can anything be done for her, my

good woman?" replied the princess. "Perhaps good air and wholesome food?"

"Good air!—we live in a cellar. Wholesome food!—all we have to eat is the offal of the streets! and we have not even sufficient covering for her poor little body, which is quite blue with the cold."

"Here—oh here, my good mother," said the princess; and forgetting the porcelain, forgetting the romantic interest she attached to the louis d'or, she put it into the hand of the old beggar. "Here, this is all I have. Oh, poor creature, how you must suffer at seeing your daughter dying before your eyes!"

"Am I to have all this?" demanded the beggar, whom the sight of the gold now in her hand seemed to overwhelm with astonishment—all this!"

"Alas! it is very little for so much wretchedness," said the princess.

"Oh my good princess!" exclaimed the beggar with a burst of gratitude, "may God bless you—and he will bless you! You deserve to be Queen of France!"

"Where do you live?" inquired the princess.

"At No. 3 of the old street of the Arcade," said the poor woman.

At this moment Mockintzka returned, followed by a servant carrying something to eat, which he gave to the beggar.

"Will you permit me not to eat it myself?" demanded she.

"Just us you please. Take it where you like, and you may expect to see me to-day."

The old woman did not need a second bidding, but went away, calling down the blessings of heaven on the compassionate princess.

"Here is the porcelain, your highness," said the voice of the pretended pedlar, who now reappeared.

"My good friend, I advise you to carry them to M. Levi. I have just disposed of my louis-d'or," said the princess.

So fierce an expression overspread the features of Mikael, that the princess recoiled almost in terror; but, in the unsuspecting goodness of her nature, she accounted for it by the thought that the destitution he had told her of must have rendered the disappointment a severe one; and she hastened to add, "If you do not sell them to M. Levi, return to-morrow, and I will see what I can do."

"I will return to-morrow!" said Mikael in a tone which almost sounded like a threat.

Mikael, as it may be supposed, carried the porcelain to no toy-merchant, so that the next day, at the appointed hour, he appeared at the castle, the asylum granted to the unfortunate king of Poland by the regent of France. This time, instead of the princess, he saw only a valet, who spoke gruffly to him, and did not waste much pains in softening his message.

"The princess neither can nor will buy your porcelain, so be off with yourself."

"It is as bad for you as for me; for intended to have shared the profits with you, replied Mikael."

"On second thoughts, you may come back to-morrow," said the valet, seduced by this unexpected offer. "The princess has no money to-day, but to-morrow she will have some; for the Princess Palatine, her grandmother, fills her purse whenever she knows it is empty."

The next day Mikael was again punctual at the same place. This time the princess had gone out, and was not to return till dinner time. Mikael took up his basket, and again went away; but as he was gloomily crossing a street, which led out of the town, a neighbour accosted him.

"Mikael, how comes it that you have not been near your mother for the last three days."

"I had something better to do," answered Mikael.

"Oh, is that the way with you?" replied the neighbour. "Well if you wish to know what has been going on at home, go and see. Strange things. Enough; that is all I have to say to you."

Though Mikael now eagerly called on him to explain himself, his neighbour went off whistling and without seeming to hear him. These words: "Strange things have been going on at home," went to the heart of the youth. He thought it was some new misery; for like all persons brought up in the school of misfortune; he anticipated nothing else. "Was his mother ill? or had his sister sunk under the malady which has so long undermined her health? And with every thought fixed upon them both—for the heart of Mikael was not yet so wholly corrupt as to be destitute of natural affection—he took the way to the city, and hastened to the abode of his mother."

It was the underground story of a house, built in so narrow a street; that the cheerful sunbeams could never find admission. As he set foot on the threshold of the house, a child playing near called out—Mikael, your mother has removed. She lives now in the street opening upon the fields; down there; near the garden. Oh; it is so nice! run, man, and see it!"

Astounded by this intelligence, which he could hardly understand; Mikael did not make up his mind to repair to the place pointed out to him by the child till perfectly assured that his mother no longer inhabited her old residence; he hesitated as he approached it, hardly believing that it was really the dwelling of his poor mother. Notwithstanding the snow which covered the ground; and hung from the shrubs like so many white and crystal teardrops, the good order of the garden, and the beauty of the fruit trees, were easily discernible. Then the house, small as it was; had an air of neatness and simplicity, the best substitute for elegance; and nearly as attractive. Suddenly he heard himself called.

"Well Mikael, what are you doing there?" and a young child, still pale, but with eyes sparkling with happiness appeared at the door.

It was his sister Louisa, who was so ill, only three days ago, that she had to be supported while getting a drink, and now she was walking alone and unaided.

"Louisa!" exclaimed he, darting toward her "what miracle is this?"

"A miracle indeed, dear Mikael," replied the child; "an angel has visited us. Won't you come in?" added she, drawing her brother into one division of the house, which served as a kitchen, and making him sit down by a good fire on which a pot was boiling. "Look all this is ours—mamma's and yours and mine. All this has been given us by a young lady, who wept on seeing our old house and said, 'I could not have believed it possible that there was such wretchedness in the world.' Yesterday she brought us here in a fine carriage, and we were expecting her here again to-day as she promised to come."

"Oh is that you my son?" said an old woman coming out of a neighbouring apartment.

"Louisa has told you all our happiness. But what have you there?" pointing to the basket which Mikael still continued to hold in his hand.

"It is china, which has been given to me to sell," replied Mikael.

"And that is what has kept you these 3 days from your mother, my son?" said she in that tone of tender reproach which, from the lips of a parent is almost a caress.

Before Mikael had time to invent a falsehood, as probably he would have done, a carriage stopped at the door of the house, from which alighted a young girl, who ran across the garden with a step so light, that it scarcely left its trace upon the snow; and entering the kitchen darted towards the fire. "Oh how cold it is!" said she. She was followed by an old lady, who also approached the fire, but without speaking. On the appearance of these two ladies Mikael made a movement as if to run away, but the youngest having perceived him, prevented him by saying, "well my little porcelain merchant have you concluded your bargain with M. Levi?"

"No madam," replied he stammering.

"What princess you know my son inquired the poor woman."

"What! this child of Poland is your son?" demanded in her turn the princess. Then seeing the confusion of the son, and the anger of the mother, the kind heart of the princess came to the aid of both.

"I guess it all, Mother Jalsen" added she. "You must forgive him as I do. Nothing can excuse falsehood; but it may be some palliation of his that he had recourse to it to get bread for you; and I suppose his story about the porcelain and M. Levi was like the rest. Well I trust it may be a lesson for him, for if he had told me the truth, and had not led me to think that he had so certain a sale for them, that my not buying them did him no injury—if he had but said to me 'my mother is dying of hunger, and my sister of disease' I should have given my louis-d'or to him as well as to you, Mother Jalsen; but I will say no more. So, then your porcelain is not sold?" added Maria, observing the basket.

"Alas! no madam" answered Mikael.

"My son! my son!" cried mother Jason sorrowfully; "for some time you have not been steady; you keep bad company; you no longer work at the currier's with whom I placed you. What are you doing; where do you go to? and where did you get that porcelain which I never saw before?"

"From a friend—from a real Pole," said Mikael with his eyes cast down; in his shame and embarrassment to avoid every eye.

"Then as your friends position remains unaltered, he is still in want: is it not so?" demanded the princess.

"Yes, yes," said Mikael.

"Fortunately I am just now rich enough to make many happy," said Maria gaily. "The princess Palatine, my grandmother, having heard yesterday from the gossiping of my people, and a little also, I believe, from that of dear Mockintzka," added Maria smiling archly at her governess, "how it fared with my poor purse, which I empty so often, has been good enough to fill it; so I can buy the porcelain of your Polish friend. At all events, I must have the snuff box for my father," continued the princess; and going to the basket, and uncovering it, she took out one by one the articles and laid them on the table. "I will give the bowl to the princess Palatine, the six cups to my dear mother—"

"And what for yourself?" demanded Mockintzka.

"Oh, as to me I shall be quite content if my father will give me a pinch of his good Spanish snuff."

As she uttered these words, Maria had taken the snuff-box, opened it, and was putting it to her nose, when Mikael, who for some minutes had been uneasily watching every motion of the princess, darted towards her, and pale, palpitating; as if beside himself, snatched it from her hands; and threw it into the fire. Then, as if terrified at what he had done, remained standing breathless and motionless.

"What can be the meaning of this?" cried in different tones each spectator of the scene. The princess alone said nothing. Indignant, but proudly calm, she sought to read, in his forehead and eye, the secret which made that scowling brow droop before her gaze.

"Speak young man," said Mockintzka to Mikael; "what motive that we do not understand"