A NIGHT IN AUSTIN FRIARS

BY T. S. E. HAKE.

Gilbert Ringham stepped softly downstairs. The front-door stood open, and he went out. There was no one in the square—only a lean, black cat that wriggled between some area railings at sight of him and vanished.

In the bedroom of a commercial hotel hard by Ringham resolved upon his plan of action. He had been robbed mysteriously—robbed of foreign government securities amounting to thirty thousand pounds—in the back garret of a counting-house in Austin Friars. His first thought had been to telegraph this fact to Cairo by means of a secret code; but a moment's reflection showed him his first step should be to find Mr. Grinold and submit to him the bare truth. The safest course would be to seek his aid and protection. Could he possibly refuse? Anthony Grinold was the person most interested, and his advice would assuredly prove the most sound. It must rest with him to decide what action should be taken in the matter, what means employed to unravel the mystery.

The City clocks had not yet struck nine when Ringham again presented himself at Grinold's counting-house in Austin Friars. The office on the ground floor, with desks and high stools enough for a score of clerks, had a deserted appearance. The door stood open, but there was no one there. Ringham began to dread that there might be some delay—that he might be compelled to wait another hour—when he caught sight of a little man with a bald head and grayjsh beard pacing about in an inner room.

'Mr. Grinold?' he ventured to ask.

He approached the open door while speaking and he now perceived that the man was agitated. His fat, round face expressed solicitude. Ringham repeated his inquiry in a louder tone.

The man started out of his abstraction and looked around. 'No, my name is not Grinold,' said he, 'I'm Warrener—John Warrener—Mr. Grinold's manager. What is it?'

Ringham handed him his card. 'I've come from Cairo,' he said, watching the manager's face narrowly, 'with a letter of introduction to Mr. Grinold. It's about a matter of business.'

'A matter of business!' with his look bent upon the card. 'May I see the letter?'

The letter in question was produced. Warrener turned it over in his hand. The words 'Private and confidential' were inscribed upon the left hand upper corner, and it bore an official seal.

'Sit down. I must consult with Shuttleworth about this letter,' said he. 'Shuttleworth will be here directly, I expect. Sit down.'

Shuttleworth? The name was unknown to Ringham. Surely nothing could have happened to rouse the manager's suspicions? His nervous, distressful manner could not, surely, be associated with the stolen bonds. Ringham, standing with his hand upon the chair, hastened to answer: 'I cannot wait. Where does Mr. Grinold live? The matter upon which I have come to London is most urgent. I must see him at once.'

Ringham's words roused a drowsy interest not previously manifest. 'Urgent, is it? Well, it would be a waste of time to inquire into the nature of your business—only waste of time; for I shouldn't like to meddle with Mr. Grinold's private affairs without consulting Shuttleworth. He's Mr. Grinold's lawyer.'

It was now quite obvious to Ringham that John Warrener was in total darkness with regard to the errand upon which he had come. He would otherwise have shown eagerness to put him in direct communication with Mr. Grinold. He began to grow impatient.

'The lawyer can be of no service to me, Mr. Warrener! Perhaps,' he suggested—'perhaps I should find Mr. Grinold at home? Is his house any distance from here?'

'No, not any distance.'

'Will you give me his address,and?'—

'It would be useless,' said Warrener; 'Mr. Grinold is dead.'

The manager's confused manner—his repeated reference to Shuttleworth—all was now explained. Ringham turned this new and unexpected situation rapidly over in his mind. Why should he part with the letter of introduction? Mr. Grinold was dead. The letter was lying on the table unopened and he recovered it without any show of hesitation, while saying: 'I've put up at the "Two Swans." If you, or Mr. Grinold's lawyer, have any communication to make, you will find me there.' And he stepped towards the door.

'Stop!' said Warrener. 'I am forgetting myself; but you will excuse me under the circumstances. If Mr. Grinold had lived—he died quite suddenly this morning—you would have been his guest. Won't you be mine? Let me give you a line to my daughter. Any friend of Mr. Grinold's, any one coming from abroad with a letter to him, would receive a welcome from her. I'll try to get home to an early dinner,' added Mr. Grinold's manager, his face getting rounder at the prospect; 'and perhaps I may prevail upon Shuttleworth to join us — perhaps. He's a busy man.'

While saying this he sat down to pen a line, which he concluded by addressing to 'Miss Helen Warrener, Charterhouse Square.'

'One moment,' he went on as he rose and placed his hand on Ringham's arm. 'My daughter knows nothing about Mr. Grinold's death. May I ask you, as a favor, to break the news to her? She has a very great regard for the old gentleman—you won't be too abrupt, will you?'

It was impossible to refuse. Warrener had placed the note in his hand; though, in truth, Ringham was in no mood to condole with the manager's daughter. It had devolved upon him to make strenuous efforts, devote every moment of the day to the matter of the stolen bonds. He held an excellent position in the bank at Cairo; but that would be forfeited — ruin would in all likelihood stare him in the face—if this mystery remained many hours unexplained. On the way to Charterhouse Square, he stopped at the 'Two Swans,' and devised a telegram to Cairo. Done into plain English it ran as follows: 'Robbed of bonds—Grinold dead.'

When Gilbert Ringham's cab presently landed him at the door of a small, red-brick house, in the corner of a row of red-brick houses, facing the gray weather-beaten walls of a picturesque old monastery, he looked about him with curiosity at the ancient appearance of the place. In the centre of the square there was a garden with a broad walk under an avenue of limes. The solitary figure of a tall girl was moving beneath the trees, where the autumn leaves were fluttering down around her in russet-tinted showers. She wore a dark cloak and a fur-trimmed hat, and as she turned to retrace her steps the full face was directed toward him. He recognized her at once. It was the girl he had seen under the lamp—the girl who had locked the door in Austin Friars.

Why not speak to her? She had been the indirect cause of his disastrous loss. Might she not prove to be a tangible link in the chain of evidence wanted to unearth the affair? He was about to put his impulse into force, to cross over in to the garden, when the house door opened behind him.

'Is Miss Warrener at home?'

He was shown into a dingy, old-fashioned drawing-room upstairs. The windows gave upon the square. No sooner was the servant gone than Ringham hastened to a window and looked out into the garden. The girl was no longer there.

He stepped towards the drawing-room door. There was still time to overtake her; she could not have walked many paces away. He had grasped the handle, was on the point of opening the door with the thought to follow, when a light footfall on the stairs caused him to hesitate. Could it be? The footfall reminded him strangely of the one he had heard upon the stone steps under the lamp in Austin Friars on the previous night.

CHAPTER II.

The door opened, and she—the girl who had turned the key upon him in Austin Friars—stood there.

"Miss Warrener?"

It was Miss Warrener; there could be no shadow of doubt, for the manager's letter was open in her hand. But a still greater surprise was in store for Ringham that morning. No sooner had she greeted him, more cordially than he as a stranger had reason to expect, than the girl hastened to inquire:

'You have seen Mr. Grinold?'

'No.'

'Why not?' and her voice expressed vexation. 'He was looking for you every hour of yesterday. He is an old man, feeble in health, and he cannot bear the suspense. Will you go to him now?'

'I am afraid,' said Ringham, 'that it's out of the question. It was Mr. Warrener's wish'——

'My father? He knows nothing,' said the girl, 'absolutely nothing, about the business which has brought you to England. Nobody does, except Mr. Grinold and myself.'

'Nobody except this girl!' Ringham thought. The situation was becoming each moment more puzzling. Should he confide all his trouble to her? It suggested itself favourably to his mind. Meanwhile the task which had been imposed upon him, the task of breaking the news of Anthony Grinold's death, took an exaggerated shape in his brain. He tried to lead up to a contemplation of the bereavement suggestively:

'There was a block on the line—you know what a foggy day it was—and, therefore, how was it possible to reach Mr. Grinold yesterday? And now, this morning—as I learn from Mr. Warrener—he is so seriously indisposed'——

'Mr. Grinold ill—seriously ill?' and while speaking she moved towards the door. 'I will go to him at once, and'—

'No! I entreat you,' Ringham interposed, 'don't go. You—you can do no good—now.'

She glanced round, her look stricken with dread. 'Can you mean—is it possible—too late?'

Ringham made no answer, but he bent his head as a tacit token to her that she had surmised the truth.

Helen Warrener stood near the window, staring blankly before her. Her lips trembled; her beautiful dark eyes had filled with tears. Ringham watched her grief unobtrusively, moved by a sense of wonderment and admiration. What mysterious link of sympathy had held this young girl in such close communion with the old financier of Austin Friars?

Presently, seeming almost to divine his thoughts, she turned to him and said:

'You didn't know him, did you, Mr. Ringham?'

'I never even heard his name till this letter'—and he touched his breast pocket—'a letter of introduction, was given me to Mr. Grinold.'

'He was in a fever of impatience to get the securities into his own hands; and when he peered out upon the foggy weather—when he learnt that the mail-train might not reach London until after banking hours—he had a presentiment that— Why, Mr. Ringham,' she suddenly broke off, 'how perplexed you look! Does it surprise you that I should know more about Mr. Grinold than my father—than any one? It will surprise you still further to learn how I came to make his acquaintance. It was in a top room in Austin Friars?'

'In Austin Friars?'

'Yes; three or four years ago. Does it interest you? To me it proved quite a weird experience, I cannot tell you everything, though perhaps I may do so another day; but I can tell you how the meeting between Mr. Grinold and myself came about. Should you like to know?'

Ringham willingly assented. A top room in Austin Friars! He could hardly restrain the impulse to question her. Was it the garret in which he had lodged—the chance was not remote—in which he had been robbed? He would speak presently, when she had spoken. He would relate his own experience in a top room in Austin Friars, and with a full sense of trust in her generosity to give credence to his story. Meanwhile——

'It happened when I was barely seventeen,' said Helen; 'and I had got tired of waiting in the office for my father. He was busy over the books; and it was such dreary work sitting on a stool watching the leaves of his ledger flying to and fro as though caught in a high wind. It was monotonous; and so, while he was absorbed in his work, I slid off my stool and crept upstairs.'

She little thought how easily Ringham followed her as she went, step by step. The whole scene, by the light of flickering matches—instantly recurred.

'I wandered from room to room,' she went on, 'until I came to a back attic on the top floor that took my fancy. There was a big, cosy armchair in this room; and after my tiring expedition—I had never ventured upstairs before—I sat down to rest. It was such a sultry summer's afternoon—the house was so silent—and I fell asleep.

He could see her there—it was assuredly the garret in which he had slept—in the great chair, with her lovely brown head resting upon one of the arms. And then——

'When I woke it was night. Mr. Grinold came in with a light and found me there. He had never heard of my existence before, though my father had been in his employment for ever so many years. From that night Mr. Grinold and I were the best of friends. He constantly invited me to his house. Upon the first day I went to see him he discovered that I had a head for business and as a proof that he was in earnest, began to consult me seriously about his affairs. One day, not many weeks ago, he told me, in the strictest confidence, that he had worked out a scheme by which he calculated to double his fortune at a single stroke. It was a scheme for investing his whole capital in foreign bonds.'

'Not everything?' said Ringham in consternation.

'His whole fortune,' the girl affirmed. 'He even went so far as to mortgage the house in Austin Friars. But he kept everybody in ignorance of his speculation. My father would have opposed him; and Mr. Shuttleworth, his lawyer, would have considered him insane. But Mr. Grinold had a master-mind for finance, and could dispense with other people's advice. He seized the chance offered him, as you know, by your bank in Cairo. His capital was doubled. These foreign bonds, when realised, will show the estate to be worth thirty thousand pounds. Isn't that about the figure?'

While she still spoke Ringham was bracing himself to tell her everything. It seemed to him that Anthony Grinold would have urged him strenuously—was urging him in the spirit—to pursue this course. By a frank avowal might he not win an ally? The lawyer Shuttleworth—her father too—would doubtless regard his story of a night in Austin Friars with suspicion; and it would perhaps be in Helen Warrener's power to direct and aid him. One word from her might save him from stumbling blindly into entanglements; for if any doubt were thrown upon his word he might have reason to view the future with grave concern. But, as fate would have it, he was debarred from putting this worthy resolve into force. There was a rattling of the latchkey in the front-door, a footstep in the hall, and next moment Helen's father came in.

"I've not seen Shuttleworth yet," he said, answering Ringham's inquiring look. "But I've had a note from him. He's coming round as soon as he can get away. I told you what a busy man he was. There's no knowing when he'll turn up.

Ringham craved to be alone. He knew that no further talk with Helen Warrener—no reference to the stolen bonds—would now be possible. He would be compelled to act independently. No time must be lost in writing to the bank in Cairo. His version of the disaster should be despatched to-night; his record of the garret mystery in Austin Friars; and then Shuttleworth would have to be faced. He pleaded a business engagement, and hastened to take his leave; though with the distinct understanding that he should be sent for at the "Two Swans" the moment the lawyer made his appearance.

The letter to Cairo was completed; nothing had been kept back; and Ringham now paced to and fro in his room at the "Two Swans," each minute expecting the summons to Charterhouse Square. His courage began to waver. What would Helen Warrener have thought after all? Mr. Grinold's whole fortune gone! How could he hope to be believed? He stopped before his window and looked out upon the great, noisy thoroughfare. The street lamps were being lighted already; another fog-ridden, wintry night was closing around the crowded city. He pressed his hand to his heated forehead. What was there to hinder him from flight? It would not take him two minutes to pack his valise; his coat was hanging temptingly over the back of a chair. His look was desperate; his brain throbbed loudly, "Flight—flight!" He heard it in the roar of traffic without, in voices raised to shrill cries and maddening shouts, in the scurrying tramp of human life that hurried by. He stood at the brink; one step and the tide would carry him onward—beyond recall.

Meanwhile John Warrener, seated in his little back parlour beside the hearth had the appearance of a man resolved to take his troubles easily.

"Well, Helen!" said he, "I don't know what will become of us; our only support is removed. Who's likely to prop me up at my time of life?"

"Perhaps Mr. Shuttleworth——" Helen began.

"Not he! Shuttleworth knows I've fallen into lazy habits of late. And not to be wondered at either! Lazy habits? Why, there's been no business doing in Mr. Grinold's office for many a day. He dismissed all his clerks, as you know, a while back. It's surprising he didn't turn me adrift. He had a tidy fortune at one time," said the ex-manager retrospectively; "but I don't know what became of it! Lost it all, maybe; there's no saying."

Helen made no answer. It was not for her to instruct her father about Mr. Grinold's affairs. Mr. Shuttleworth would presently be here, and then, when Mr. Ringham had stepped over from the "Two Swans," every detail would doubtless be discussed. She was in no mood to touch upon the matter now.

The subject which gave her most anxiety—more than she would have cared to admit—had reference to her father's prospects. His affairs were in a serious plight. He had worked for Mr Grinold, ever since the financier had retired from active business, at a reduced salary. They had got into money troubles in consequence; and as a matter of fact, Mr. Shuttleworth, being taken into their confidence, had more than once helped them out of their difficulties. And Helen now recognised, with a sense of growing despair, that the problem with regard to repayment of that debt was one that might never be solved; and what made the thought of their liability still more uninviting, Mr. Shuttleworth had lately shown her marked attention. She was brooding over these matters—her father having fallen into a doze—when there came a knock at the front door. John Warrener looked up blinkingly. "It's Shuttleworth. Will you go to him, Helen? I'll just collect my thoughts, and join you in two seconds. I've been dreaming about Mr. Grinold's money, I do believe!"

Ralph Shuttleworth was standing upon the hearth-rug, warming his hands over the fire in the drawing-room, where the lamp had been lighted and the curtains drawn. He was a well-built, handsome bachelor of eight-and-thirty, with a keen-featured, close-shaven face. His hands were long and delicate, and persistently expressed to Helen a grasping nature. She was vexed with herself for harbouring this fancy, for she had never had cause to regard the lawyer otherwise, than as a frank-natured and generous friend. No woman was more quick to discover good qualities in others; and when discovered, as in Shuttleworth's case, she was ever ready to shut her eyes to a real or imagined blemish. To-night his look was unwontingly sedate, as became the occasion; and he ventured to retain her hand in his own while uttering words of sympathy and condolence.

"I have lost a friend," said Helen, simply—"a true friend."

"A truer friend, Miss Warrener," said Shuttleworth, "than you, perhaps, fully realize yet." Then he added, with a sudden change in his tone:

"Is the man from Cairo here? I have been given to understand that some one with a letter to Mr. Grinold was asking for me."

"Yes, a gentleman named Ringham. He's to be found at the "Two Swans." I'll send over at once," said Helen, "and let him know;" and she moved towards the bell.

"Stay!" said Shuttleworth, arresting her hand. "I'll step across to the inn myself presently. Mr. Ringham is in no particular hurry, I suppose? Pray sit down;" and he placed a chair for her near the table. "There's a little business I should like to mention—Ah!" he broke off as Helen's father came in. "will you sit here, Mr. Warrener? It's a matter that concerns you both."

He took a chair at the head of the table, and glanced from one to the other, seated on either side of him. He treated them as he would have treated a couple of clients in his own private office in Finsbury Circus hard by. He had of a sudden become every inch the lawyer.

"We have been appointed executors—you and I"—and he glanced at Warrener—"under Mr. Grinold's will. We'll go into details when letters of administration have been taken out. Meantime it will gratify you to learn, sir, that you have not been overlooked. Mr. Grinold has bequeathed to you the sum of two hundred pounds."

"I'm glad to hear it," and he nodded at the lawyer. "It will help me to pay my debts."

Shuttleworth waved the sentiment aside. "there is a will among Mr. Grinold's deeds," he resumed, referring to a note-book in his hand, "leaving all his property to a relation in New Zealand. But a subsequent will, drafted about the time Mr. Grinold became acquainted with your daughter, has made the former legacy null and void."

Helen's eyes, as well as her father's, were fixed intently upon the lawyer's face.

"In a word," Shuttleworth concluded, "by the last will and testament of the late Anthony Grinold, your daughter, Helen Warrener, has been appointed sole residuary legatee. May I be the first to congratulate her?"

"My daughter? What does it all mean?"

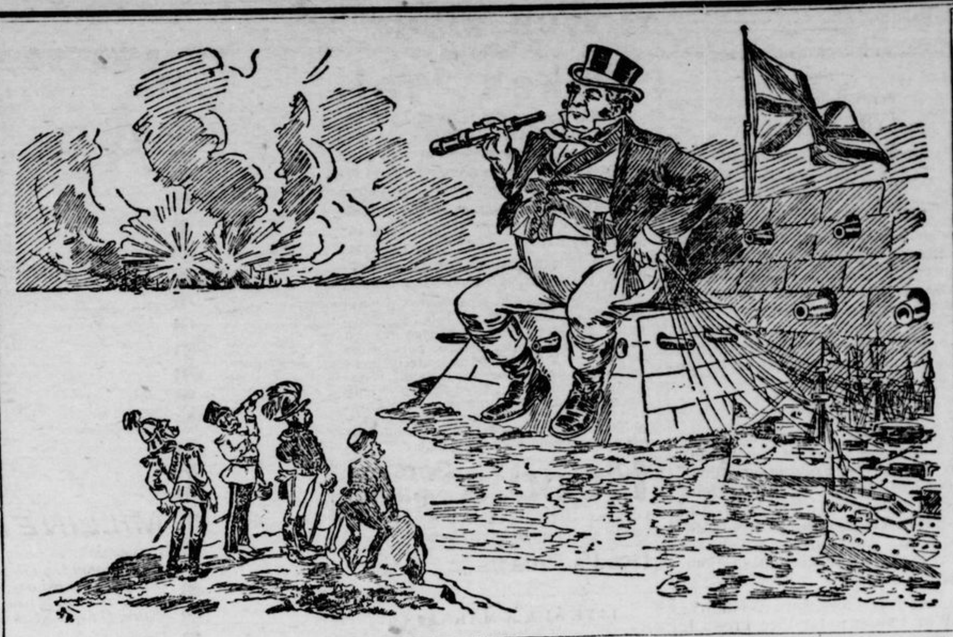
"It means," said Shuttleworth, "that Miss Warner has come into a handsome fortune, invested in foreign bonds."

"A handsome fortune?" said Warrener, with a dazed, inquiring look.

"Thirty thousand pounds," was Shuttleworth's reply.

At this moment they both turned their eyes curiously towards Helen. She stood at the window, holding back the curtain with an eager hand, and peered out into the fog.

(To be Continued.)



JOHN BULL AND THE GREAT POWERS; SATISFYING THEIR CURIOSITY.

The Continental Powers—What are you doing there?

John Bull—Oh! Nothing, nothing at all; just looking on!

COLOR IN FLAGS.

Red Predominates Largely in the Standard of the Chief Nations.

Though the policy of military authorities in using less glaring colors in uniforms has been very marked of late years, red remains the most popular color for national standards. Of twenty-five countries, nineteen have flags with red in them, the list including England, United States, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Mexico, Chili, Portugal, Venezuela and last, but not least, Cuba.

The countries which have blue as an element of their flags are Russia, France, England, United States, Holland, Ecuador, Sweden, Chili, Venezuela, Portugal and Cuba. Three countries have black as one of the elements of their flags, Germany, Belgium, and China, but Germany is the only one of three which has black and white together. There are five countries which have green as a color: Brazil, the flag, of which is green chiefly; Mexico, Egypt, Italy and Persia. There are nine countries in which the flag is partly yellow. These countries are Austria, Spain, Belgium, Egypt, Sweden, China, Persia, Brazil and Venezuela. Countries with flags partly white are the United States, France, Germany, Russia, Austria, and Italy, six of the seven chief powers. There is no white in the national standard of England, but the British naval flag has a white background. Other countries having white in their flags are Switzerland, Turkey, Persia, Japan, Mexico, Holland, Denmark, Portugal, Cuba, Chili and Ecuador, the flag of which is nearer white than any other country, being made up of two parallel white columns, between which is a column of blue, upon which are white stars.

UNDEVELOPED WEALTH.

A recent report on the resources of British Guiana and the British West India Islands by the assistant director of the Royal Gardens at Kew indicates that immense sources of wealth are there neglected, or undeveloped. Yet the British colonies in Guiana, Trinidad, Barbados, Jamaica and the other islands are distressed by hard times. The report argues that the cause of the distress is the fact that the colonists have heretofore practically given themselves over to the production of sugar alone, neglecting the other sources of wealth lying at their doors. Coffee, cotton, rice, bananas, cocoanuts, and, in fact, every kind of tropical production, can be successfully cultivated there and the forests abound in gutta-percha, india-rubber and valuable timber; but all these resources lie almost undeveloped. The colonists of Jamaica are said to have learned a lesson, and in recent years have improved their condition by cultivating fruit and spices, for which their soil and climate are well suited.

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THE PALACE OF GATSCHINA.

A Sanctuary of Safety for the Czar of All the Russias.

The palace of Gatschina can not be compared with such castles as Versailles, Sanssouci or Schoenbrunn. It has nothing of the artistic embellishment of the one, the historical memories of the other or the landscape beauty and comfort of the third. Situated in the middle of a wide and desert plain, it has no pretty surroundings, and, built without luxury, its exterior does not make an imposing impression. Gatschina lies between Tsarskoje-Selo and Krasnoje-Selo, and the roads from each of these places to the imperial palace, which have private court railway stations, are placed under particular supervision, and may not be used except by the court. A high wall incloses the park, in the center of which is the palace, and this wall is protected by patrols, which never leave the outer circle nor the part itself for one moment out of sight.

Entrance is only permitted by special order. Though the superintendence is so strict, it is said that the inhabitants of the palace are not, and must not be, aware of it. Their pleasures and comforts are not impaired by it, and all the amusements that could be agreeable to the Emperor and his family—drives, hunts, riding and rowing, evening parties, theatrical representations, etc.,—can be partaken of. Adjoining the well-tended park is an extensive wood—like the park, surrounded by a wall and guarded. In the park itself are two lake-like basins of water; the palace contains splendid saloons, and two colonnades which afford agreeable promenades in bad weather; all this aids in preventing the inhabitants from feeling anything of the anxious and never-tiring supervision held over them and the want of more charming surroundings.

Sometimes the royal family inhabit Peterhof, but always return to Gatschina. Peterhof is more magnificent, Oranienbaum prettier, but Gatschina is considered safer and quieter. For many years before the accession of Alexander III., the palace had been unused; he caused it to be restored and comfortably furnished. It has been seldom spoken of and scarcely more known of it than that the imperial hounds were kept there. The Gatschina race was celebrated, and a dog from the imperial pack was very valuable, but people cared little for the castle and park.

Still Gatschina has its history. Peter the Great made a gift of it to his favorite sister, Natalie; Catherine II. gave it to her favorite Orloff, who furnished it at great expense, and built additional edifices, by which, after the plans of the Italian architect, Rinaldi, it received quite a different form. After Orloff's death the empires rebought it from his family and gave it to the Archduke Paul, who inhabited it for some length of time. The palace forms a long square, at each corner of which is a stately tower. The dwelling rooms are in three stories. The colonnades run along the sides, and the pillars are of Finland marble. The rooms are not architectually beautiful, but are adorned with valuable pictures and sculpture from the imperial hermitage in St. Petersburg, from the Anitschkow palace and from the winter palace. The views are limited by the park and wood, which, however, have been beautifully laid out by the celebrated St. Petersburg landscape gardener.

COURT DRESS TRAINS.

The most expensive part of a court dress is the train, which on some elaborate gowns cost as much as $5,000. But they serve other uses, for as the majority of court trains are now all in one piece, they can afterward be admirably utilized for the making of handsome dinner dresses and tea gowns. Those economically inclined can generally turn a court costume into two dinner dresses and one ball bodice.

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