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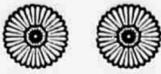


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# The Johnson Dry Goods Company.

## JENNIE BAXTER: JOURNALIST

BY ROBERT BARR.

### V.—The Prime Minister's Indiscretion.

(Continued.)

"My dear, every great nation has a war chest. England has one, France, Germany, Russia—no matter how poor a nation may be, nor how difficult it is to collect the taxes, that nation must have a war chest. If war were to break out suddenly, even with the most prosperous country, there would be instant financial panic; ready money would be difficult to obtain; a loan would be practically impossible, and what war calls for the very instant it begins is money—not promises of money, not paper money, not silver money even, but gold; therefore, every nation which is in danger of war has a store of gold coin. This store is not composed mainly, or even largely, of the coins of the nation which owns the store; it consists of the sovereigns of England, the louis of France, the willems d'or of Holland, the eight florin pieces of Austria, the double crowns of Germany, the half imperials of Russia, the double frederics of Denmark, and so on. All gold, gold, gold! I believe that in the war chest of Austria there were deposited coins of different nations to the value of something like 200,000,000 florins. My husband never told me exactly how much was there, but sometimes, when things looked peaceable, there was less money in the war chest than when there was imminent danger of the European outbreak which we all fear. The war chest of Austria was in a stone vaulted room, one of the strongest dungeons in the treasury. The public are admitted into several rooms of the treasury, but no stranger is allowed into that portion of the building which houses the war chest. This room is kept under guard night and day. For what happened my husband feels that he is in no way to blame, and I don't think his superiors are inclined to charge him with neglect of duty.

"It is a singular thing that the day before the disaster took place he of his own accord doubled the guard that



Tea was served.

watched over the room and also the approaches to it. The war chest was at its fullest. Never, so he tells me, was there so much money in the war chest as at that particular time. Something had occurred that in his opinion called for extra watchfulness, and so he doubled the guard. But about midnight there was a tremendous explosion. The strong door communicating with the passage was wrenched from its hinges and flung outward into the hallway. It is said that dynamite must have been used, and that in a very large quantity. Not a vestige of the chest remained but a few splintered pieces of iron. The four soldiers in the room were blown literally to pieces, and those in the

passageway were stunned by the shock. The fact that they were unconscious for some minutes seems to have given the criminal, whoever he was, his chance of escape. For, although an instant alarm was sent out, and none but those who had a right to be on the premises was allowed to go out or into the treasury, yet no one was caught, nor has any one been caught until this day.

"But the gold, the gold!" cried Jennie eagerly.

"There was not a florin of it left. Every piece had disappeared. It is at once the most clever and the most gigantic robbery of money that has taken place within our knowledge."

"But such a quantity of gold," said Jennie, "must have been of enormous weight. Two hundred million florins! Why, that is £20,000,000, isn't it? It would take a regiment of thieves to carry so much away. How has that been done, and where is the gold concealed?"

"Ah, my child, if you can answer your own questions the Austrian government will pay you almost any sum you like to name. The police are completely baffled. Of course nothing has been said of this gigantic robbery, but every exit from Vienna is watched, and, not only that, but each frontier is guarded. What the government wants, of course, is to get back its gold, the result of years of taxation, which cannot very easily be relieved."

"And when did this robbery take place?" asked Jennie.

"On the night of the 17th."

"On the night of the 17th?" repeated the girl, more to herself than to the voluble old woman. "And it was on the 16th that the premier made his war speech."

"Exactly," said the old lady, who overheard the remark not intended for her ears, "and don't you think there was something striking in the coincidence?"

"I don't quite understand. What coincidence?"

"Well, you know the speech of the premier was against England. It was not a speech made on the spur of the moment, but was doubtless the result of many consultations, perhaps with Russia, perhaps with Germany. Who knows? We have been growing very friendly with Russia of late, and, as England has spies all over the world, doubtless her government knew before the speech was made that it was coming. So the police appear to think that the whole resources of the British government were set at the task of crippling Austria at a critical moment."

"Surely you don't mean, madame, that the government of England would descend to burglary, robbery—yes, and murder, even, for the poor soldiers who guarded the treasure were as effectually murdered as if they had been assassinated in the street? You don't imagine that the British government would stoop to such deeds as those?"

The old lady shook her head wisely. "By the time you are my age, my dear, and have seen as much of politics as I have you will know that governments stop at nothing to accomplish their ends. No private association of thieves could have laid such plans as would have done away with 200,000,000 of florins in gold, unless they had not only ample resources, but also a master brain to direct them. Nations hesitate at nothing where their interests are concerned. It was to the interest of no other empire but England to deplete Austria at this moment, and see how complete her machinations are. No nation trusts another, and, if Austria had proof that England is at the bottom of this robbery, she dare not say anything because her war chest is empty. Then, again, she dare not allow either Germany or Russia to know how effectually she has been robbed, for no one can tell what either of these nations would do under the circumstances. The government dare not let even its own people know what has happened. It is a stroke of vengeance marvellous in its finality. Austria is crippled for years to come, unless she can find the stolen gold on her own territory."

The old lady had worked herself up into such a state of excitement during her recital that she did not notice that most of her companion visitors had taken their leave, and when the princess approached the two she arose with some trepidation.

"My dear princess," she said, "your tea has been so good and the company of your young compatriot has been so charming that I have done nothing but chatter, chatter, chatter away about things which should only be spoken of under one's breath, and now I must hurry away. May I venture to hope that you will honor me with your presence at one of my receptions when I send you a card?"

"I shall be delighted to do so," replied the princess, with that gracious condescension which became her so well.

The garrulous old lady was the last



"My dear, every great nation has a war chest," she said, "and when the princess was left alone with her guest she cried:

"Jennie, I have found out absolutely nothing! What have you discovered?"

"Everything!" replied the girl, walking up and down the floor in excitement over the finding of such a bonanza of news.

"You don't tell me so! Now, do sit down and let me know the full particulars at once."

When Jennie's exciting story was finished, she said:

"You see, this robbery explains why the premier did not follow up his warlike speech. The police seem to think that England has had a hand in this robbery; but, of course, that is absurd."

"I am not so sure of that," replied the princess, taking, as she spoke, the Chicago point of view and forgetting for the moment her position among the aristocracy of Europe. "England takes most things it can get its hands on, and she is not too slow to pick up a gold mine here and there. So why should she hesitate when the gold is already minted for her?"

"It is too absurd for argument," continued Jennie calmly; "so we won't talk of that phase of the subject. I must get away to England instantly. Let us find out when the first train leaves."

"Nonsense!" protested the princess. "What do you need to go to England for? You have seen nothing of Vienna."

"Oh, I can see Vienna another time! I must get to England with this account of the robbery."

"Won't your paper pay for telegraphing such an important piece of news?"

"Oh, yes! There would be no difficulty about that, but I dare not trust either the post or the telegraph in a case like this. The police are on the watch."

"Oh, I will return," said Jennie. "I've only just had a taste of this delightful city. I'll come right back."

"I can't trust you to do anything of the kind. When you get to London, you will stay there. Now, here is what I propose, and it will have the additional advantage of saving your paper a day. We will run down together into Italy—to Venice; then you can take down your code and telegraph from there in perfect safety. When that is done, you will return here to Vienna with me. And another thing, you may be sure your editor will want you to stay right here on the spot, to let him know of any outcome of this sensational denouncement."

"That isn't a bad idea," murmured Jennie. "How long will it take us to get to Venice?"

"I don't know, but I am sure it will save you hours compared with going to London. I shall get the exact time for you in a moment."

Jennie followed the suggestion of the princess, and together the two went to the ever entrancing city of Venice. By the time they reached there Jennie had her account written and coded. The long message was handed in at the telegraph office as soon as the two arrived in Venice. Jennie also sent the editor a private dispatch giving her address in Venice, and also telling him the reason for sending the telegram from Italy rather than from Austria or Germany. In the evening she received a reply from Mr. Hardwick. "This is magnificent," the telegram said. "I don't if anything like it has ever been done before. We will startle the world tomorrow morning. Please return to Vienna, for, as you have discovered this much, I am perfectly certain that you will be able to unearth the robbers. Of course all the police and all the papers of Europe will be on the same scent, but I am sure that you will prove a match for the whole combination."

"Oh, dear!" cried Jennie, as she handed the message to her friend.

"What a bothersome world this is! There is no finality about anything. One piece of work simply leads to another. Here I thought I had earned at least a good month's rest; but, instead of that, a further demand is made upon me. I am like the genie in fairy tales; no sooner is one apparently impossible task accomplished than another is set."

"But what a magnificent thing it would be if you could discover the robber or robbers!"

"Magnificent enough, yes; but that isn't to be done by inviting a lot of old women to tea, is it?"

"No; but we shall have to set our wits together in another direction. I tell you, Jennie, I know I have influence enough to have you made a member of the special police. Shall I introduce you as from America and say that you have made a specialty of solving mysteries? An appointment to the special police would allow you to have unrestricted entrance to the secret portion of the treasury building. You would see the rooms damaged by the explosion, and you would learn what others have discovered. With that knowledge we might then do something toward solving the problem."

"Madame la Princesse," cried Jennie enthusiastically, "you are inspired! The very thing. Let us get back to Vienna." And accordingly the two conspirators left Italy by the night train for Austria.

(To be continued next Thursday.)

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