

# JENNIE BAXTER: JOURNALIST

BY ROBERT BARR.

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

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"I don't pretend to understand diplomacy," continued Jennie, blushing slightly as she remembered Lord Donal, and it seemed that the same thought struck the princess at the same moment, for she looked quizzically at Jennie and burst out into a laugh.

"You may laugh, but I tell you that this is a serious business. They say it only needed a second 'new milk' speech from the premier to have England answer most politely in words of honey, and next instant the two countries would have been at each other's throat."

"Suppose we write to Lord Donal in St. Petersburg," suggested the princess, still laughing, "and ask him to come to Vienna and help us? He understands all about diplomacy. By the way, Jennie, did Lord Donal ever find out whom he met at the ball that night?"

"No, he didn't," answered Jennie shortly.

"Don't you ever intend to let him know? Are you going to leave the romance unfinished, like one of Henry James' novels?"

"It isn't a romance. It is simply a very distressing incident which I have been trying to forget ever since. It is all very well for you to laugh, but if you ever mention the subject again I'll leave you and go to a hotel."

"Oh, no, you won't!" chirped the princess brightly. "You daren't. You know I am the goddess of the machine. At any time I can send a letter to Lord Donal and set the poor young man's mind at rest. So, you see, Miss Jennie, you will have to talk very sweetly and politely to me and not make any threats, because I am like those dreadful persons in the sensational plays who hold the guilty secrets of other people and blackmail them. But you are a nice girl, and I won't say anything you don't want to hear said. Now, what is it you wish to find out about this political crisis?"

"I want to discover why the premier did not follow up his speech with another. He must have known when he spoke how his words would be taken in England. Therefore it is thought that he had some plans which unforeseen circumstances intervening have nullified. I want to know what those unforeseen circumstances were. For the past fortnight The Daily Bugle has had two men here in Vienna trying to throw some light on the dark recesses of diplomacy. Up to date they have failed, but at any moment they may succeed. It was because they failed that I am sent here. Now, have you anything to suggest, Madame la Princesse?"

"I suggest, Jennie, that we put our heads together and learn all that those clever diplomatists wish to hide. Have you no plans yourself?"

"I have no very definite plan, but I have a general scheme. These men I spoke of are trying to discover what other men are endeavoring to conceal. All the officials around their guard. They are highly placed and are not likely to be got at by bribery. They are clever, alert men of the world, so hoodwinking them is out of the question; therefore, I think, my two fellow journalists have a difficult task before them."

"But it is the same task that you have before you. Why is it not as difficult for you, Jennie, as for them?"

"Because I propose to work with people who are not on their guard, and there is where you can help me, if you are not shocked at my proposal. Each official has a wife, or at least most of them have. Some of these wives, in all probability, possess the information that we would like to get. Women will talk more freely with women than men will with men. Now, I propose to leave the officials severely alone and to interview the wives."

The princess clapped her hands. "Excellent!" she cried. "The women of Vienna are the greatest gossips you ever heard chattering together. I have never taken any interest in politics; otherwise I suppose I might have become possessed of some important government secrets. Now, Jennie, I'll tell you what I propose doing. I shall give a formal tea next Thursday afternoon. I shall invite to that tea a dozen or two dozen or three dozen wives of high placed officials about the court. My husband will like that, because he is always complaining that I do not pay enough attention to the ladies of the political circle of Vienna. He takes a great interest in politics, you know. If we discover nothing at the first tea meeting, we will have another and another and another until we do. We are sure to invite the right woman on one occasion or another, and when we find her I'll warrant the secret will soon be doing to us. Ah, here we are at home, and we will postpone the discussion of our plans until you have had something to eat and are rested a bit."

The carriage drew up at the magnificent palace, well known in Vienna, which belonged to the Prince von Steinheim, and shortly afterward Jennie Baxter found herself in possession of the finest suit of rooms she had ever beheld in her life. Jennie laughed as she looked around her rooms and noted their luxurious appointments.

These are not exactly what we should call 'digging' in London, are they?" she said to the princess, who stood by her side, delighted at the pleasure of her friend. "We often read of poor penny-liners in their garrets, but I don't think any penny-liner ever had such a parterre as this placed at her disposal."

"How would you like the rooms?"

myself, and I hope they will help to induce you to stay in Vienna as long as you can. I have given you my own maid, Gretlich, and I assure you it isn't every friend I would lend her to. She is a model servant."

"Oh, but you mustn't do that!" said Jennie. "I cannot rob you of your maid and also be selfish enough to monopolize these rooms."

"You are not robbing me. In fact, I am perhaps a little unkind in giving you Gretlich for she is down in the dumps this last week or two, and I don't know what in the world is the matter with her. I suspect it is some love affair, but she will say nothing although I have asked her time and again what is the trouble. Now, you are such a cheerful, consoling young woman that I thought if (Gretlich were in your service for a time she might brighten up and be her own self again. So, you see, instead of robbing me, I am really taking advantage of your good nature."

"I am afraid you are just saying that to make it easier for me to be selfish; still, you are so generous, princess, that I am not going to object to anything you do, but just give myself up to luxury while I stay in Vienna."

"That is right. Ah, here is Gretlich. Now, Gretlich, I want you to help make Miss Baxter's stay here as pleasant as she will never want to leave us."

"I shall do my best, your highness," said the girl, with quiet deference.

The princess left the two alone together, and Jennie saw that Gretlich was not the least ornamental appendage to the handsome suit of rooms. Gretlich was an excellent example of that type of fair women for which Vienna is noted, but she was, as the princess had said, extremely downcast, and Jennie, who had a deep sympathy for all who worked, spoke kindly to the girl and endeavored to cheer her. There was something of unaccustomed tenderness in the compassionate tones of Jennie's voice that touched the girl, for, after a brief and ineffectual effort at self-control, she broke down and wept. To her pitying listener she told her story.

She had been betrothed to a soldier whose regiment was stationed in the burg. When last the girl saw her lover, he was to be that night on guard in the treasury. Before morning a catastrophe of some kind occurred. The girl did not know quite what had happened. Some said there had been a dreadful explosion,

and I hope they will help to induce you to stay in Vienna as long as you can. I have given you my own maid, Gretlich, and I assure you it isn't every friend I would lend her to. She is a model servant."

"Dear me! I hadn't heard of it. It is a curious thing that one must come from London to tell us our own news. An explosion in the treasury, and so serious that a soldier was killed! That arouses my curiosity, so I shall just sit down and write another invitation to the wife of the master of the treasury."

"I wish you would, because I should like to know something further about this myself. Gretlich seems to have had but scant information regarding the occurrence, and I would like to know more about it, so that I might tell her."

"We shall learn all about it from madame, and I must write that note at once for fear I shall forget it."

On Thursday afternoon there was a brilliant assemblage in the spacious salon of the Princess von Steinheim. The rich attire of the ladies formed a series of vitreous pictures that were dazzling for Viennese women are adepts in the art of dress, as are their Parisian sisters. Tea was served, not in cups and saucers, as Jennie had been accustomed to, but in goblets of clear, thin Venetian glass, each set in a holder of incrustated filigree gold. There were all manner of delicious cakes, for which the city is celebrated. The tea itself had come overland through Russia from China and had not suffered the deterioration which an ocean voyage produces. The decoction was served clear, with sugar, if desired, and a slice of lemon, and Jennie thought it the most delicious brew she had ever tasted.

"I am so sorry," whispered the princess to Jennie when an opportunity occurred, "but Countess Stron has sent a messenger to say that she cannot be present this afternoon. It seems her husband, the premier, is ill, and she, like a good wife, remains at home to nurse him. This rather upsets our plans, doesn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Jennie. "It is more than likely that the wife of the premier would be exceedingly careful not to discuss any political question in this company. I have counted more upon the wife of a lesser official than upon Countess Stron."

"You are right," said the princess. "And now come with me. I want to introduce you to the wife of the master of the treasury, and from her perhaps you can learn something of the accident that befell the lover of poor Gretlich."

The wife of the master of the treasury proved to be a garrulous old lady, who evidently prided herself on knowing everything that was taking place about her. Jennie and she became quite confidential over their goblets of tea, a beverage of which the old lady seemed inordinately fond. As the conversation between them drifted on, Jennie saw that there was a person that would take a delight in telling everything she knew, and the only question which now arose was whether she knew anything Jennie wished to learn. But before she tried her on high politics the girl determined to find out more about the disaster that had made such an abrupt ending to Gretlich's young dream.

"I have been very much interested," she said, "in one of the maids here who lost her lover some weeks ago in an accident that occurred in the treasury. The maid doesn't seem to know very much about what happened, and was merely told that her lover, a soldier who had been on guard there that night, was dead."

"Oh, dear, you!" whispered the old lady, lowering her voice. "What a dreadful thing that was! Four men killed and eight or nine are now in the hospital! My poor husband has hardly had a wink of sleep since the event, and the premier is ill in bed through the worry."

"Because of the loss of life?" asked Jennie innocently.

"Oh, no, no! The loss of life wouldn't matter. It is the loss of the money that is the serious thing, and how they are going to replace it or account for its disappearance I am sure I don't know. The deficiency is something over 200,000,000 florins. Was it not awful?"

"Was the building shattered to such an extent?" inquired Jennie, who did not stop to think that such a sum would replace any edifice in Vienna, even if it had been wiped off the face of the earth.

"The treasury was damaged, of course, but the repairs will not cost much. No, my child, it is a much more disturbing affair than the destruction of any stonework in the empire. What has made the premier ill and what is worrying my poor husband into an untimely grave is nothing less than the loss of the war chest!"

"The war chest?" echoed Jennie. "What is that?"

"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 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 800,000,000 florins. My husband never told me exactly how much was there, but sometimes, when things looked peaceful, 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 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 hung 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 has 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 replaced."

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

"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 stoop 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 inter-

est 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 marvelous 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 to take her leave, 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 war

like 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."

"But couldn't you send it through by a code? My father used always to do his cabling by code. It saved a lot of money and also kept other people from knowing what his business was."

"I have a code, but I hesitate about trusting even to that."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said the princess. "I want you to stay in Vienna."

"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 denouement."

"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 magnifi-

cent," the telegram said. "I doubt 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 genii 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.

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