

able theatres, you would run the risk of not being seen at all by some of the richest men in Paris."

Amélie shrugged her shoulders, and turned her face to the stage with an impatient sigh. The one rich man whom she wanted to win was not in the house to-night, and without him the world was a blank.

END OF VOL. II.

A

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ISHMAEL BY M. E. BRADDON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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A NOVEL.

BY

M. E. BRADDON,
AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," ETC. ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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ISHMAEL.

CHAPTER I.

“THOUGH THOU SET THY NEST AMONG THE STARS.”

NOT often in the history of mankind has earth been the theatre of such a scene of splendour as that which glorified Paris in the springtide and early summer of 1867. Perchance in some far-off Indian city, in ancient Benares or many-towered Delhi, there might be a greater glitter of gold and gems, statelier processions, Oriental pomp of palanquins and plumes, caparisoned elephants, peacock thrones, turbans luminous with emerald and ruby; but that barbaric show would have had but feeble historic meaning as compared with this meeting of the kings of the West, the statesmen and warriors, the financiers and long-headed schemers, the makers and unmakers of kings. It was a mighty rendezvous of the powers of the civilised world, a gathering of crowned heads, all seemingly intent upon the amusement of the hour, yet each in his heart of hearts intent upon making good

use of his opportunities, each determined to turn the occasion to good political account.

The Czar was among the first to come, accompanied by his two sons. It was not long since their elder brother had been laid in his coffin, heaped round with the fairest flowers of Nice, a fair young form, a calm dead face in the midst of roses and lilies, pale image of an imperial youth which had been but faintly reflected on the stream of life, surviving only in a photograph. William of Prussia was there, flushed with the tremendous victory of Sadowa—victory owed in great part to the neutrality of France, a service as yet unrecompensed as witness this late *fiasco* of the Luxembourg treaty. Beside the stern soldier-king in the open carriage in which he entered Paris sat the two master-spirits of his kingdom—his mighty general, Moltke, his mightier chancellor, Bismarck. Who could tell what dreams brooded behind those steel-blue eyes of the senator—large, full, projecting, luminous with the light of a master mind; what hidden plans lurked beneath that air of frank good fellowship, that outspoken Teutonic simplicity? Cavour, giant among statesmen, was as dead as Machiavelli; but his policy and his capacity lived in his Prussian pupil.

The East sent its potentates to swell the royal crowd. The Sultan's large grave face, with dark solemn eyes, looked calm and unmoved upon the Imperial show, while his suzerain, the Viceroy of Egypt, had come to see what kind of people these

Frenchmen were who wanted to cut a highway for the world through the sands of the desert. Even far-off Japan was represented by the brother of its secular ruler.

Princes there were amidst that brilliant throng, lighter souls, nursing no deep-laid schemes, hiding no slumbering fires—princes who came honestly to see the show, and to drink the cup of pleasure in that season which seemed one long festival. England's future king was there, in the flower of his youth, kindly, *débonnaire*, keenly intelligent, first favourite among the *élite* of Paris, a popular figure among the populace; the young princes of Belgium, the princes of Prussia—they who were to come three years later with fire and sword, bringing in their train death and ruin, burning instead of beauty. There was the Crown Prince of Orange—a *prince pour rire*, and princelings and princesses without number. Never saw the earth such a gathering of its great ones, or a city so fitted for the scene of a festival. The omnipotence of the Emperor, the millions poured out like water by Prefect Haussmann, had made Paris a city of palaces, a place in which even the monuments and statues of the past were scraped and purified to match the whiteness of the new boulevards—a city planned for the rich, built for the children of pleasure and of folly, as it would seem to Diogenes, looking in the summer eventide along that dazzling line of boulevards, that mighty thoroughfare which swept in a wide arc from the Bastille to the Champs Elysées, a double range of