THE KING'S SWEETHEART;

OR, ADVENTURES IN SEARCH OF A PHOTOGRAPH.

BY CONAN DOYLE.

To Sherlock Holmes she is always the woman. It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise, but admirably balanced mind.

I had seen little of Holmes lately. My marriage had drifted us away from each other.

One night—it was on the 20th of March, 1888—I was returning from a journey to a patient (for I had now returned to civil practice), when my way led me through Baker street. As I passed the well-remembered door, which must always be associated in my mind with my wooing, and with the dark incidents of the study in scarlet, I was seized with a keen desire to see Holmes again.

I rang the bell, and was shown up to the chamber which had formerly been in part my own.

His manner was not effusive. It seldom was; but he was glad, I think, to see me.

"Wedlock suits you," he remarked. "I think, Watson, that you have put on seven and one-half pounds since I saw you."

"Seven," I answered.

"Indeed, I should have thought a little more. Just a trifle more, I fancy, Watson. And in practice again, I observe. You did not tell me that you intended to go into harness."

"Then how do you know?"

"I see it; I deduce it. How do I know that you have been getting yourself very wet lately, and that you have a most clumsy and careless servant girl?"

I could not help laughing at the ease with which he explained his process of deduction.

"By the way," he said, "since you are interested in these little problems, and since you are good enough to chronicle one or two of my trifling experiences, you may be interested in this."

He threw over a sheet of thick pink-tinted note paper which had been lying open upon the table. "It came by the last post," said he. "Read it aloud."

The note was undated and without either signature or address.

"There will call upon you to-night, at 7:45 o'clock," it said, "a gentleman who desires to consult you upon a matter of the very deepest moment. Your recent services to one of the royal houses of Europe have shown that you are one who may safely be trusted with matters which are of an importance which can hardly be exaggerated. This account of you we have from all quarters received. Be in your chamber then at that hour, and do not take it amiss if your visitor wear a mask."

"This is indeed a mystery," I remarked. "What do you imagine that it means?"

"I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts. But the note itself. What do you deduce_ from_ it?"

I carefully_ examined the_ writing, and the paper_ on which it was written.

"The_ man_ who__ wrote_ the_ note_ is_ a_ man_ of_ wealth_ and_ influence_ _ _ _