

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BETROTHED.

REJOICING ran riot in the house of the rich silk factor, Orguelin. The proud daughter had consented to marry Count Rhedern, and the happy father, delighted with the prospect of speedily becoming father-in-law to a count, was busily preparing for wedding festivities the gorgeousness of which should make all Berlin talk. There was to be a banquet, at which his daughter should appear in the circle of her former friends for the last time, to take leave of them forever; for it was a matter of course that the Countess Rhedern must seek other society, form other friendships, than those known to Ma'm'selle Orguelin. But Father Orguelin wished to show his colleagues the manufacturers and merchants, the distinguished and resplendent gentleman now become his son. He wished to arouse the envy of his friends and impress them with the princely splendor of his house.

All this, however, failed wholly to suit the plans of Count Rhedern. Thanks to his debts and his creditors, he had been forced to decide to marry the rich factor's daughter, but he had no intention of entering upon relations, however distant, with the friends and relatives of his wife, and if he had had to resolve to recognize the rich father-in-law and show him the love and reverence of a son, this was far from being the same as appearing at his banquets to serve as chief decoration of the table. He shuddered to think of the cavaliers' jests, for whom it would be a bottomless spring of teasing fun that he, marshal of the queen, cavalier of the old nobility, had played the leading part at a banquet of the bourgeoisie, had dined and chatted, danced and made merry, with manufacturers and merchants. A nobleman might well decide, for the honor of his house, to marry a civilian possessing a million, but he must not humiliate himself so far as to count himself as a member of the family and take notice of this or that bourgeois.

So, with smiling face and tender greeting, he entered the brilliant boudoir of his betrothed, who was engaged at the moment in helping her father draw up a list of the wedding-guests. Count Rhedern seated himself beside his betrothed, and listened with horror to the barbarous names added to the list, whose possessors never could participate in a knightly tourney or a royal banquet.

"Well," inquired his father-in-law, triumphantly, "what do you say to our banquet? The richest and most respectable merchants of all Berlin will be present, representing more millions of thalers than Germany counts inhabitants. So you appreciate, my son, that to do honor to such guests requires especial preparation, for it is not easy to impress these proud gentlemen and arouse their wonder. It is nothing to surprise one of you counts and barons. You are happy if you are offered champagne or expensive Holstein oysters. But a rich merchant turns away with a sneer when turtle-soup or Indian birds'-nests are offered him. Yet I mean to astonish my proud guests with a dinner such as they have never eaten. I have ordered two of the best cooks of Paris, and they require two weeks for the necessary preparations. I pay them for this time a sum which, perhaps, excels the half yearly salary of a royal marshal. Besides this there will be fireworks, an illumination, music, and I had thought of engaging a French theatrical troupe for a comedy."

"But I fear," laughed his daughter, "that few of our guests would understand a word of the French comedy."

"It may be so, but what is French is the fashion at present, and it will create remark if we have a French play. But not a word do you say, my son! You even sigh and look sulky."

"I was sighing because you wish to postpone the wedding so long."

"A piece of flattery for you, daughter. Betrothed people are always impatient."

"But I was sighing, not only because I am to be robbed so long of the happiness of leading my dear Caroline to my house as my wife, but also because I lose the pleasure of introducing her at the largest and most brilliant ball of the court season, the opening one."

"But the king is still absent upon his pleasure journey," said Caroline.

"The king returns in a few days, and as the mourning is coming to an end he will give his court a masquerade, probably the only one for this season."

"A masquerade!" cried his betrothed. "I never took part in a masquerade."

"You would see a very brilliant one here. The queen mother had sent me an invitation for my betrothed and suggested that I should present her at court the same day."

"Is it impossible to hasten the wedding a little?" asked Caroline, impatiently.

"Quite impossible," replied Father Orguelin, solemnly.

"Why so?" asked the count, insinuatingly. "Might we not have the wedding a little earlier and the banquet later?—the wedding perfectly quiet, as is the custom in the aristocratic world, and the pomp and splendor apart? These noisy marriages are a trifle out of fashion, too, and at court it would be said that the rich and cultivated Father Orguelin scorns the customs of the young court and wishes to show his opposition by retaining with *éclat* the customs of the foregoing *régime*."

"Heaven forefend!" cried Father Orguelin, horrified.

"Father," said Caroline, with determination, "I hate boisterous festivities; I prefer a quiet wedding. Let no one say at court that Ma'm'selle Orguelin has jubilated with all her acquaintances over the monstrous luck of marrying a count. Later the count can give a gorgeous banquet and you respond to it. But let us be married quietly, according to the fashion."

Father Orguelin acquiesced, as he always did, in his daughter's determination. It was agreed that the wedding should take place next day, and a feast of Lucullus take place later at the house of the bride's father. "At that I shall, upon no condition, be present," thought Count Rhedern as he gave his assent.

But one thing was now wanting, a brilliant court toilet for the important day, and the count assured her with a sigh that it would be very difficult to obtain one duly, not because of the gold-brocaded train, but for want of a tailor.

"Pellissier, the new French tailor, declined to make even a little mantle for me," said the count, "and his ladies, now the most sought for dressmakers, have been for a week deaf to all entreaties."

"But I know that Father Pricker, tailor to the two queens, will make me the necessary dresses if he has to employ an assistant for the purpose."

"Then let us go to Father Pricker," said her betrothed, with a smile; "let us go at once, for the matter is pressing, and you will understand that I should be inconsolable if we were married and I could not present you at court at the first opportunity."

When the betrothed were alone in the carriage, a few moments later, Caroline Orguelin turned with a contemptuous smile to the count: "The wedding will take place the day after to-morrow," she said.

"Yes, my dearest Caroline, the day after to-morrow I shall be the happiest of men."

She shrugged her shoulders slightly. "Your creditors were very urgent, that you suddenly felt such longing for my dowery?"

"My creditors?" asked the count; "I do not understand you, dearest Caroline."

"You understand me very well," she said, with frosty coldness. "It is time for us to speak clearly. Know, then, that I have not been deceived by your tender assurances, nor your perfectly well played rôle of impatient lover. I am neither young nor beautiful enough to awaken the passion of so experienced a cavalier as Count Rhedern. You are poor in everything but debts, so you absolutely needed a rich wife, and as I accidentally possess more money than all the beautiful and aristocratic maidens of the nobility, you determined to take me with it. And I *bought* Count Rhedern with my million, because he can present me at court."

"Now, truly," said the count, with a forced smile, "these are most original confessions."

"But they are necessary, to save us from wearing ourselves in future with useless comedies, and with dissembling what neither of us feels. I still owe you an explanation of my urgent wish to become a court lady, for you surely will not hold me so insane as to have purchased a count for the mere purpose of being a countess."

"I should have found no insanity therein."

"Nay," continued his betrothed, "I wished to become a countess in order to be present at court, to enjoy a pleasure which thousands will envy me; though, like the poor, silly moth, I might flutter about the bright light only long enough to burn to death. I told you that I am no longer young; yet my heart is younger perhaps than that of many a court lady, for it has not been worn out and used up. It was hard and pure, and clear as mountain-crystal until——"

"Continue," he said, as she paused, "these are most enchanting admissions, such as are usually made *after* the wedding. You were speaking of your heart, which had been like mountain-crystal until——"

"Until I had seen the king," continued his betrothed, ardently.

"It was coronation day when you arrived at the bright idea of falling in love with the king?"

"Yes, it was coronation day when I first realized how proud, and high, and overwhelming a thing a true man is. I determined to be near him, and I, who had never wished to marry, decided in one moment to unite myself in marriage

with some cavalier. I asked my companion the names of the cavaliers standing behind the king and princes. Most of them were married, but you were not, and they told me you had many debts and no means. The same day I told my father I would marry the count, saying, 'Buy him for me as you recently bought this wonderful diamond-studded Nuremberg plaything.'

"A most flattering and ingenious way of looking at it," said the count, with a forced smile.

Caroline continued: "My father confided the matter to a broker, who did the business most adroitly. Now, my count, you will understand why I made the condition that you must secure me access to the court before I could decide to become your wife."

"I understand it perfectly," said the count, sulkily. "You use me as a bridge to pass from the shop to the royal palace, as I let you pay my debts."

"But, my dear count, you will at times suffer a little *gêne* through me," said the millionaire, laying her hand softly upon the count's shoulder. "It was not because of your creditors alone that you desired a speedy marriage, but still more because the count found it beneath his dignity to partake of a banquet with merchants and manufacturers, to be a comrade of the bourgeois. But I shall never forget that my father is a merchant, and all my friends are daughters of merchants and manufacturers. I shall force you to show my father reverence, my friends the respect which I shall never refuse yours."

"Force? you will force me?"

"You shall see that I can do so. My father promised you to give you a million with me, from which your debts and my outfit should be subtracted. Your debts are two hundred thousand thalers; my outfit, including my palace and my diamonds, costs quite as much; so there remains but six hundred thousand thalers, of which, according to the contract, you have joint use. But you will see that the interest of this little capital is too trifling for the daughter of a rich merchant to live upon, and that, cherishing the daring plan of entertaining the king in my house, I might use half our year's income in one evening for the purpose."

The count looked at his wife with admiration bordering upon reverence. "You think we cannot live upon the interest of six hundred thousand thalers?"

"I do not *think*, I know it certainly, for I used almost that sum as a girl. My father appreciates this, and

has therefore given me for pin-money a second million, which remains in his business, I receiving the interest in monthly payments. But this interest, mark well, belongs to me personally, not to my marriage portion, and I can, if I choose, pay your debts, buy horses and equipages, or I can give it to my father, who can make good use of it in his business. So often as you fail to show due consideration to your spouse, her father, and her friends, the pin-money returns to my father, and to your share falls the care for the necessary payments."

"But I shall ever be a tender and considerate husband, a devoted son of your father," cried the count, charmed with the thought of the second million.

"You will do well," said the bride, gravely, "for you will thereby have a surplus income of four thousand thalers a month. You see I am a true merchant's daughter, and good at arithmetic. I bought you because I recognized your value, but you shall never think you did me a favor in making me a countess, for you shall constantly be reminded that my father is a millionaire whose daughter and sole heir liberally pays you for your amiability, your title, and her admission to court. But here we are. Let us put up our mask again and be the sentimental couple about to marry for pure love."

"And, indeed, you deserve to be loved," cried the count, pressing her hand to his lips. "You are the cleverest and most piquant woman I ever saw, and I do not doubt that I shall some day fall violently in love with you."

"Poor count," she said, with a laugh, "on that day you will be much to be pitied, for I shall never love you. A heart like mine loves but once and dies of its first love."

"May it be a slow death, at least," said the count, springing out of the wagon and offering his hand helpfully to his betrothed.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE TAILOR FAMILIES, OR THE MONTAGUES AND CAPULETS OF BERLIN.

FATHER PRICKER was standing at the window, looking across at a house on the opposite side of the way, before which stood a motley array of beautiful ladies and distinguished cavaliers,

all entering with an air of importance; while stamping horses, gorgeous carriages, chattering jockeys and lackeys, awaited the return of their masters and mistresses. In this house dwelt Pellissier, the new French tailor, and for his sake was this throng.

Pricker felt this like a dagger thrust into his heart, for no one came to him and no throng was ever seen before his door. Since the arrival of the French tailor, Pricker was a lost and unfortunate man, wounded in his ambition, his feelings, his just claims upon the gratitude of mankind. Of what use was it that he was tailor to the two queens? The court had no work for him since he had declined to employ French assistants, and none of all the ladies who had formerly confided to him the mysteries of her toilet and her figure now remembered his discretion and his skill in concealing what was defective, replacing what was wanting. The weathercock world had deserted him, the Hohenzollern family had no recollection of all the heroic deeds and valuable services of the Pricker family, no longer appreciated its services, but scorned old customs and the habits of centuries.

Since Pellissier had come to live opposite his rival, Father Pricker was a broken-hearted man. Without a murmur he concealed his wound, and bore his affliction with a smile. But one eye was not to be deceived, one heart guessed his grief. Frau Pricker mourned in secret as her husband grew more and more silent, yet she never ventured to comfort him or speak a word of encouragement. At times he had thought of selling his house and moving to another part of the city, but the next moment he blushed at such unmanly weakness and accused himself of cowardice. It was a mortal combat to which Pellissier had challenged him, and it should never be said that Pricker had beat a retreat. He represented a principle, the maintenance of good old German custom against frivolous, changeable French fashion. He must prove to the world that there were people still who scorn the passion for change and cling to use and wont and ancient custom. So he stayed with his family in his respectable old mansion, that had so long sheltered the court tailors of the Prussian princes. But he carried death in his heart.

As he stood in the window, staring at the house of his hated rival, he saw to his grief another equipage rolling up. But this one halted before his own door. In the joy of his heart he was tempted to open the door, but he recollected himself in time and waited until his wife came to tell him, her face

radiant with pleasure, that rich Ma'm'selle Orguelin and her betrothed desired to speak with him.

Father Pricker approached the twain in proud silence, but could not help it that his eyes brightened, and a happy smile played about his pale lips.

"You will be surprised, my dear court tailor, that we come to you instead of summoning you to us. But it would have taken too much time, and our business demands great haste."

Pricker made a slight, proud bow.

"My house is accustomed to receiving distinguished persons," he said. "My great-grandfather had the good fortune to welcome the elector himself here. Let me hear how I can serve you."

"I need two complete court costumes," said Ma'm'selle Orguelin, with a proud smile. "One costume for the presentation, and the second for the great court ball."

"One robe with a brocade train and one stuff dress," said Pricker, solemnly. "I would recommend a robe of blue velvet, which is becoming to blond complexions."

"Let us take sky-blue velvet with a silver brocade train," said the millionaire. "As to the dress for the court ball, my father has given me a piece of beautiful goods, velvet shot with gold, such as are made only in India."

"Then we shall have a thoroughly suitable and distinguished costume, and I am assured that Countess Rhedern's first appearance at court will do honor to the house of Pricker."

"And I do not doubt that your work will do honor to my house in turn," cried the count, with a laugh; "but you will have to bind yourself, my dear master, to be ready in one week."

"In four days, if necessary," said Pricker, taking pompously the measure which his wife offered him, and approaching the lady.

"The pattern and trimming I leave to your taste," she said, "except that the dress must, of course, be of the latest French style."

Pricker let fall the measure, which he had just laid upon the lady's slender waist, and gazed at her in horror.

"From French patterns shall your dresses be made?" he asked, roughly.

"I think that is a matter of course," she answered, with a smile. "No respectable tailor works nowadays from antiquated German patterns."

Pricker rolled up his measure decidedly, and laid it upon the table.

"Then the dresses will not be made in my house," he said.
 "How so?" said Ma'm'selle Orguelin, in amazement. "You will not do my work?"

"With pleasure, but not from French patterns. That were a disgrace to my house and my ancestors."

"But remember that you lose," said the count, "not only the custom of my future wife, but of all the court; for no one will want your work until you bring yourself to work after French patterns."

"No one will wish me to work for her, that is true. But I shall remain true to my principles. I have lived a German man, and I shall die a German tailor!"

The count offered his arm to his betrothed, and said, with a smile:

"I am not at all convinced that a German tailor may not be a thorough-going fool as well, who would do well to remember that Frederick William is no longer alive to rejoice at such stupidity, but a young king who dresses in the French fashion, speaks French, and has more Frenchmen than Germans at his court. Come, my dear Caroline, let us go to Pellissier; he will not be so silly as to decline your patronage. Farewell, Pricker."

Pricker remained alone, proudly erect in the middle of the room, staring at the portraits of his ancestors. From the next room the trilling song of his daughter reached his ear. She was studying a new Italian aria with Quantz, the king's music-teacher.

"Nel tue giorni felice, ricordati da me!" sang pretty Anna, and Father Pricker ran frantically up and down the room, closing his ears to avoid hearing the shame that had come upon his house, and cursing his weakness in granting his daughter's prayer for music-lessons.

"My own heart I have closed to the enemy, but he will have power over my children."

Anna went on trilling her Italian aria with her silvery voice, and he heard the delighted teacher calling, "Bravo! bravo!"

"They are murdering me; they wound me to the heart!" he murmured, sinking into a chair exhausted, and leaning his head upon the back, so that his stiff, little pigtail, caught between his head and the chair-back, waved like an exclamation point above his pale, trembling countenance.

Presently the lesson came to its end, and Anna entered the room with dancing eyes and flaming cheeks.

"Father," she said, "my warmest wish is about to be fulfilled. This dear, noble Quantz, who has undertaken my

lessons because Graun is busy with an opera at the king's command, has managed an invitation for me to sing at the next court concert. The king returns next week, and I, the happiest girl in the world, am to sing my Italian aria before him."

"She will sing Italian," murmured her father. "I shall be dead before this calamity befalls my family."

Anna paid no attention to him, but sprang to her mother, who just then entered the room, and drew the little woman into a warm embrace.

Then approaching her father, she said, defiantly:

"It is high time to think of my costume. I must have a new and splendid dress to appear before the king and his court."

"That you shall have!" cried her father, solemnly. "To sing before the king is certainly an honor from which I must not hold you back. Your mother's wedding-dress we still have, and we'll make a court costume of it."

Anna laughed loud and long.

"Nay, father. The day is past and gone when women might wear the gowns of their grandmothers. Besides, the skirt is far too narrow to make a crinoline skirt of it."

"Crinoline!" shrieked her father.

"Why not?" asked Anna, amazed. "No lady with any claim to elegance can go without a crinoline now."

Just then rapid steps were heard before the door.

"O quel plaisir d'être amoureux!" sang a fresh male voice.

"French!" exclaimed Father Pricker, beside himself with rage. "William sings French!"

William appeared in a costume of the latest and most faultless cut, such as a few cavaliers of exceptional elegance were wearing—a tightly fitting blue coat with short waist and long tails, wide sleeves, and mother-of-pearl buttons; the coat-tails lined with scarlet silk, the small, high, standing collar and narrow cuffs decorated with embroidery in silver. Below the short waist of the coat a long, flesh-colored satin vest, richly embroidered in silver, more than half covered the short, black hose, fastened below the knee with silver buckles that held the scarlet and white-striped hose as well, which in turn gave place to silver-buckled shoes. Instead of a pigtail, young Pricker had done his hair into a cushion at the back and several heavily powdered curls at the sides. At the end of the cushion was fastened a broad, black ribbon, folded about the neck and fastened again in front to the broad lace jabot that welled forth from the vest. A tiny three-cornered

hat perched, soldier-fashion, toward the right side of his brow. On the left hip dangled a little sword, upon the handle of which was a great bow of dark-blue ribbon embroidered with gold, and his hand played with a tiny cane with amber head.

"Well?" inquired William; "do I not please you? Is not that a suit worthy of the finest nobleman, except that I cannot, like the proud cavaliers, wear the white plume, which they claim as the privilege of their rank? Otherwise my costume is faultless, and as I went along the street the ladies opened their windows to stare after me."

"Where did you get this suit?" asked his father. "Who gave you the money for this blamable suit, and who made it?"

"The money you will give me, dear father, for it is not yet paid for. The name Pricker has a substantial sound, and Pellissier gladly gave me credit, though at first he did not wish to work for me at all."

Old Pricker groaned with grief and rage. Then, feverishly seizing his son's long coat-tails and shaking him from side to side, he shrieked:

"Pellissier made it? The miserable botching creature has made such a caricature of my son! And thou, William, wert shameless enough to go to the enemy of thy house and accept from him this suit! Hadst thou no fear that thine ancestors would turn in their graves? Away with this ridiculous mummery. Away with these piebald garments. I will have my son again, my good, honorable, German son!"

And Father Pricker began to tear and drag his son's clothing with crazy violence. He knocked off the three-cornered hat and stamped upon it, clutched the lace jabot with clinched fingers, and laughed aloud at the tattered fragments. William was petrified with terror. His father's violence stupefied him. His sister's laughter and his mother's tears first restored his presence of mind.

"Father," he shrieked, furious at such treatment, "I am no longer a child, and I shall endure your ridiculous despotism no longer. I shall dress as I please, and wear a costume such as the fashion prescribes."

"Well said, brother," cried Anna, springing to his side. "We are children of the new age, and shall dress as our generation demands. Youth cannot be restrained like old age, and our parents must not require of us that we accept their views in preference to our own."

"Honor thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee," said Mother Pricker, solemnly.

Anna laughed.

"Another text! But that is all antiquated. Nobody quotes the Bible nowadays. It is not nearly so amusing as Voltaire!"

"Enough!" said Father Pricker. "Listen to my final determination. I command you so to live and so to dress as your father and mother have lived and dressed. Woe to you if you disobey my commands and defy your father, for then I shall disinherit you, and my curse shall rest upon you. If you enter yonder house across the street, or hold intercourse with the French tempters who dwell in it, or if you dress yourselves in the French fashion, you cease to be my children, and have nothing more to hope from me."

He took his weeping wife by the arm and left the room. The brother and sister remained *tête-à-tête*.

"Well," said Anna, after a long pause, "will you obey and go back to your pigtail and coarse cloth coat?"

"To be laughed at and have Blanche Pellissier scoffing at me? Ah! you do not know how we love one another, and she has vowed that she will be my wife."

"Then you will obey our father, and become a respectable tailor like all our ancestors?"

William laughed aloud.

"A tailor? Follow a miserable trade, when my father has bestowed upon me the education of a nobleman? Nay, nay, Anna, that cannot be a serious question."

"But our father means it seriously, for you know very well the Prickers have been tailors for centuries. I warn you, brother, be prudent and careful, and do not irritate our father to the point of really disinheriting you."

"Oh, he will have to bow to the inevitable as well as Father Pellissier, who will be furious, too, when he learns that I am Blanche's husband. But we shall marry in spite of them both. Ah! Blanche is an angel of beauty and amiability."

"Nevertheless, she is but a tailor's daughter, after all," said Anna, with a shrug.

"Like my pretty and amiable sister Anna."

"I shall soon be a famous singer, and the wife of a nobleman."

"Well, who says Blanche may not be the wife of a famous man, and that you may not all be proud of me yet?"

"Will you be a tailor or a dressmaker?" asked Anna, pertly.

"Neither. I shall be an actor. But keep this secret, Anna!"

CHAPTER XL.

IN RHEINSBERG.

THE deserted castle of Rheinsberg was inhabited once more. Merry greetings and laughter filled its halls. The happy days of old, when Frederick was crown prince, seemed about to be repeated. The same company, the same amusements, all as of old.

But nearly all those who had left Rheinsberg with proud hopes and aspiring wishes had returned disappointed, their wings thoroughly clipped.

They were still good friends, welcome companions of the king, but none had overstepped the bounds of submission and dependence which the king had laid down, within which, sufficing for himself in his strength of character and will, he stood wholly isolated.

They had gained nothing by Frederick's ascent to the throne, but none of them had lost by it.

One heart only was broken, bleeding in unseen, un murmuring resignation. That was the heart of Elizabeth, the poor rejected, widowed woman, who was nevertheless called the reigning queen, Frederick's spouse.

The king, returning from his pleasure journey to Strassburg, had reminded her of her promise to accompany his court to Rheinsberg, and the poor sufferer, though she knew the king's presence would be a daily and hourly torture for her, had not had courage to withstand the urgency of her longing. She had accepted his invitation, saying to herself, "I shall, at least, see him, and if he does not even speak to me, I shall hear his voice. My sufferings will be greater, but my joys also. *Soffri e taci.*"

And she was right. He never spoke with her, never looked at her. With a silent bow he bade her welcome daily, but he did not accompany her to the table, nor sit beside her. The presence of the Margrave and Margravine of Baireuth gave the king the pretext of a duty in giving to his favorite sister precedence over the queen as his guest. So the queen endured in silence. She grew daily paler, but she concealed her pallor under a mask of artificial rosiness—laid upon the furrows which sorrow was already ploughing in her youthful face the tiny *mouches* which the French fashion had imported, in company with cosmetics and crinoline. No one

should know that she suffered, not even the king. She took part in all amusements, laughed at Bielfeld's jests and Pöllnitz's anecdotes, let Knobelsdorf describe all the great plans for splendid new buildings, and gave her whole attention to Jordan's stories of the king's care for the poor and needy in his kingdom. She even took active part in the preparation for theatricals. Voltaire's "Death of Cæsar" and Boissy's "Frenchman in London," had been selected for the impromptu amateur theatre in Rheinsberg, and the king was to play a leading rôle in each piece. She was present at every rehearsal, helped the court ladies with the selection and arrangement of their costumes, viewed daily the work of the painter charged with the preparation of the scenery and curtain.

Meanwhile, the king was less often present in the circle of his friends, and his flute was less often heard. He spent the whole day in the library, where no one might disturb him, not even Quantz. Madame Brandt, who had accompanied the court to Rheinsberg, observed, with a sigh, during one of her secret interviews with Manteuffel: "The king has become unfaithful to the last of his sweethearts. He has abandoned even the flute."

"But how does he occupy himself the whole day?" asked the count.

"With scientific studies," said Madame Brandt, with a shrug. "Fredersdorf tells me that he spends the whole day over his maps and plans, surrounded with works upon military science, making measurements like a civil engineer. A harmless occupation, you see, having no bearing upon our affairs. The king will not separate from his wife further than has already taken place, and as to the marriage of Prince Augustus William, my mines are laid and will explode at the proper moment, sending the amour of pretty Laura von Pannewitz into the air. All goes well, and we have nothing to fear from the king's scientific studies."

"You call these harmless studies!" said the count, with a shrug. "But I assure you that they will greatly disturb the Austrian court, and I must report them instantly to my friend Seckendorf."

"You make a mountain of a molehill!" laughed Madame Brandt. "The king never absents himself from the evening gatherings, and is as care-free as in the merriest crown-prince days. Who knows? Perhaps he uses the solitude of the library to study his part, for we play the 'Death of Cæsar' to-morrow and the king appears as *Brutus*."

"Yes, it seems to me that the king plays the rôle of *Brutus*," said Manteuffel, reflectively; "outwardly he is cheerful, but who knows what sinister, fateful thoughts he buries in the depths of his soul?"

"You are always seeing ghosts," cried Madame Brandt, impatiently. "I tell you the king plays *Brutus*, but he is not *Brutus*."

Madame Brandt took leave of her confidant and hastened lightly toward the castle. But it was not necessary to dress for the last rehearsal that day. The king could not appear as *Brutus*, for he was ill. The intermittent fever which had been hanging about him all through the summer, and prevented his going to Amsterdam, and even fastened him to his bed at Castle Moyland, where Voltaire was making him the long-wished-for visit, had now returned with frightful violence. The king was scoffing at his physician for having no means of working a cure.

"There is a remedy," said Ellert, with a shrug, "but I dare not prescribe it for your Majesty."

"Why not?" asked the king.

"Because we must first test it upon some patient upon whose recovery the weal or woe of millions does not depend."

"A human life is always sacred, and if you are not sure of your remedy it is as unscrupulous to give it to a beggar as to a king."

"I believe in the remedy," said Ellert, "as did Louis XIV., who purchased it from the Englishman Talbot as an arcanum, for one hundred louis d'or a pound."

"Give it to me!" commanded the king.

"Pardon, your Majesty, I dare not, though I have a small quantity with me which I brought to show your Majesty as a curiosity. See this fine brown powder, prepared, not by an apothecary, but by nature herself."

"Then I have faith in it," said the king; "nature is the best apothecary and the best physician. What is your remedy called?"

"It is quinquina in the language of Peru, and kindly nature lets it grow in that home of fevers."

But the king was too ill to listen; his eyes closed and his dry lips murmured confused and disconnected sounds.

At that moment the door opened and Fredersdorf inquired, "How is the king? Is he in a condition to hear important news?"

"Not now; wait an hour, then he will be free from fever

and collected. Is it bad news?" inquired the physician. "In that case I would advise waiting until to-morrow."

"I think the king will not call it bad news," said Kaiserling, with a smile. "You, Bielfeld, as a diplomatist, must know how to interpret it."

"I think he will call it good; not because I am a diplomatist, but because the king is a hero slumbering and waiting to be awakened."

At last the king awoke, and Ellert pronounced his pulse wholly normal, adding, "You may communicate your news to the king."

Pöllnitz, as master of ceremonies, approached the bed.

"Sire, an hour ago a courier arrived, bringing news of importance."

"From whom does the courier come?" asked the king, quietly.

"From your Majesty's ambassador in Vienna, Baron von Borke, who sends his own body-servant as courier."

"Is the empress, our exalted aunt, ill again?" asked the king.

"The empress is perfectly well, but her husband the emperor—"

"Finish your sentence, Pöllnitz. What of the Emperor of Austria?"

"Sire, Emperor Charles VI. is no more; he died, October 20th."

"Indeed," said Frederick, letting his head sink slowly back to its cushion. "It is not worth the trouble to make so much of such trifling news. If the emperor is dead Maria Theresa will be Empress of Austria, and the matter does not further concern us."

He closed his eyes. The physician felt his pulse. "Perfectly normal," he said.

"Right," said the king. "On the day on which I receive the news of the emperor's death I must have no fever, or they may say in Vienna that fear has made me ill. Give me a quinine powder, Ellert."

"But I told your Majesty that I cannot do this because we have not tested the remedy sufficiently to be sure of its effect."

"Then try it on me," said the king, decidedly. "Give it to me."

In vain did the physician appeal to the cavaliers for support. In vain did they all beseech him not to endanger his life thus needlessly.

"Give me the powder at once. I command it."

"When your Majesty commands, I must obey," said Ellert; "but these be my witnesses that I acted under compulsion."

"Now you must rest, your Majesty," he added, when the king had taken the powder. "And you must not dream of returning to Berlin. In my capacity as physician, I have the right to forbid that."

"Why should we return to Berlin? A trifle like the death of the emperor involves no great changes. Now, gentlemen, you may go. I feel quite well and will arise. Fredersdorf may remain to dress me, and, Jordan, send me Eichel that I may dictate to him some necessary letters. Then we will all meet in the music-hall, where Quantz and I shall play a duo, to which I invite you as listeners."¹

The king dictated three letters: One to Field Marshal von Schwerin, the second to the Prince of Anhalt-Dessau, the third to Minister von Podewils. All contained the same word—the command to break up at once and come to the king at Rheinsberg instantly.

Then he went to meet his court in the music-hall, and never had he played more enchantingly or entertained his friends more genially than on the day of the death of the Emperor of Austria.

The next morning the three gentlemen arrived from Berlin, and were immediately received by the king in the library.

"The Emperor of Austria is dead," said Frederick, after greeting the new-comers, "and I have therefore summoned you to confer with you as to the benefit to be derived from his death."

"Your Majesty will hardly think of deriving benefit from a death which inflicts mourning upon a nearly related house and robs the reigning Queen of Prussia of her uncle!" cried the old Prince of Anhalt-Dessau with some warmth.

"It is a well-known fact that your allegiance is to the imperial family," said the king, with a smile.

"Nay, to the King of Prussia," cried the old prince; "a dissension with Austria were a misfortune for Prussia."

Frederick gave a slight shrug and turned to the other gentlemen.

"I wish to hear your opinions also, gentlemen," he said. "You are, all three, men of experience, heroes in war, and men of state; you must therefore not deprive my youth of your experience and counsel."

With a quiet smile he listened to the peaceful proposition.

¹ The king's own words.

of the field marshal and the minister, in which the Prince of Anhalt warmly acquiesced.

"Then you doubt my claim to Silesia?" said the king, after a slight pause. "You doubt my right to demand the cession of Silesia, which the Hapsburgs wrongfully wrested from my ancestors?"

"Your ancestors did not break the peace for its sake, preferring to leave the Imperial House of Austria in possession of Silesia."

"But while they did so," cried the king, "while my ancestors bowed to necessity and were robbed by the intrigues of the Imperial House of Austria, rewarded with rank ingratitude for service rendered, they called upon posterity to avenge them. Frederick William, the great elector, exclaimed, when the Austrian House faithlessly abandoned him, 'An avenger will arise out of my ashes.' When his son, the first King of Prussia, was compelled to surrender the town of Schwiebus to Austria he said to his ministers, 'My posterity will know what they have to do.' And, finally, when my father recognized the thanklessness of the Austrian House, he felt that between the House of Austria and Brandenburg there could never more be peace, and left to me the holy task of punishing and humiliating the haughty House of Austria. He showed me to his ministers, and said, 'There stands one who will avenge me.' The time has come when I must open the eyes of the Austrian family, and show them that the little Marquis of Brandenburg, of whom they said that his duty lies in offering the king napkin and finger-bowl at the close of the banquet, has become a free, independent, and equal king, who will neither permit himself to be insulted by Austria, nor recognize any master other than his God. Will you help me with your counsel in my work?"

"Yes," they all cried, with joyful enthusiasm. "Our life-blood belongs to our king and our country!"

The king offered them his hand.

"I counted upon you. Ziethen and Winterfeldt, too, will not be wanting, and we shall not open hostilities hastily or unprepared. Everything has been foreseen and arranged, and the only point remaining is the execution of plans which I have long cherished. Here are march-routes and plans of attack. And in order that the people may know that their king makes war only to regain his own good rights, I have charged Chancellor von Ludewig with the task of publishing a work explaining our claims to the dukedoms and princedoms of Jägerndorf, Liegnitz, Brieg, Wohlau, and all