that belongs to them in Silesia. War is inevitable, but let us keep our own counsel and surprise the Austrians. And now, gentlemen, let us consider the details."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE KING AND HIS FRIEND.

The king spent several hours closeted with his counsellors in earnest conference; and when they had left him he summoned Jordan, offering him his hand with a face glowing with enthusiasm.

"Now, Jordan, rejoice with me. The times of peace and rest are over, and life and movement come at last into the rusty machine of state. You often call me a bold eagle. Now we shall see whether my wings have strength for a bold flight."

"Then my surmises are correct and the king's crusade is directed against Austria?"

"Yes, against Austria."

"But for you, too, my king, peace, quiet, art, poetry, and study will be things of the past. Apollo's darling becomes a son of Mars, and we who are left behind can only watch with mourning eye the departing one, unable even to place ourselves between him and the danger of death."

"Away with sad thoughts, friend. Death awaits us all, and if he find me upon the field of battle, at least it is a bed of honor, and my friends, my people, and history will not forget me. I must achieve something great. It is not enough to be king by birth and inheritance—I must deserve it by my deeds. Silesia offers me the finest opportunity, therefore, under conditions which may form a solid foundation for my fame."

"I see," sighed Jordan. "Your Majesty is not satisfied with the love of your subjects, the enthusiastic, devoted love of your friends. It is fame for which you long."

"Yes, you are right!" exclaimed Frederick, with a smile. "The gleaming phantom known as fame appears before me every day. I know it is folly, but folly from which a man frees himself with difficulty when once possessed by her. Do not speak to me of dangers, cares, wear, and tear; what are they all in comparison with fame? It is so mad a passion

that I cannot comprehend why it does not turn everyone's head."

"Your Majesty, for thousands this passion has not only turned their heads, but cost their heads," said Jordan, sadly. "The battle-field is, of course, the golden book of the heroes, but their names are written in it in blood."

"It is true," said the king, reflecting, "a battle-field is a sorry sight for a poet and philosopher. Were I not born a prince I would fain be a philosopher. But every man must follow his trade, and I propose to do nothing by halves. I love war for the sake of fame. So do not mourn, dear friend, that the days of leisure and enjoyment are over, that I must march to the field while you amuse yourself with Horace, study Pausanias, laugh with Anacreon. I do not envy you. My youth, the fire of passion, the longing for fame, and, not to hide it from you, a share of curiosity; finally, an irresistible inward impulse, all together, have torn me from the calm repose of life, and the wish to see my name in the papers and in the books of history urges me to the field of war. There I will earn the laurels which not even a king finds in his cradle or upon his throne, but must win as a man and a hero."

"And which will one day crown the shining brow of my Frederick!" exclaimed Jordan, with tears in his eyes. "I see a glorious future before you. Perhaps I may no longer be here. But, wherever my spirit may be—and when I stand before you, my king, I feel the immortality of the soul—wherever my spirit may be, its noblest, most divine, most God-like essence will ever be with you, my king and master."

"Oh! do not speak of dying," cried the king, and his ardent glance was veiled with a tender emotion. "Nay, my friend, I need thee, and I think true friendship must be so strong as to conquer even death. We, Jordan, cannot desert one another. It were really cruel of thee to rob me of a possession which we poor kings so rarely boast—a faithful, trusty friend. Nay, Jordan, thou must not die. And though I go to the war I shall not perish; I shall need thee there. Thou shalt be my Cicero, defending the justice of my cause, and I thy Cæsar in its victorious defence."

Jordan was speechless. He shook his head sadly, and two large tears rolled slowly down his face. The king observed him anxiously. He saw the deep, feverish, purple spots, those roses of the grave, upon the hollow cheeks of his friend, saw that he grew daily weaker, heard the hot, feverish breath panting from his breast. A sad presentiment took possession of

his heart, the smile died away upon his lips, he could not conceal his emotion, and, walking to the window, leaned his hot brow upon the pane, shedding tears which none but God should see.

"My God, my God!" he murmured. "How poor we princes are. I have so few friends, and these perhaps but for a brief time longer. Suhm lies ill in Warsaw, and who knows whether I shall ever see him again? Jordan is here beside me, but I see death undermining his life and perhaps about to tear him from me!"

Jordan stood motionless, watching the king, who was still resting his head upon the pane. He did not venture to disturb him, and yet he had a piece of important and melancholy news to communicate. At last he approached the king, laying his hand lightly upon the shoulder of his royal friend.

"Pardon, my King," he said, in a tender, trembling voice—"pardon that I interrupt your reflections; but a hero must not yield to melancholy, and if he think of death, must greet it with a smile, even though Death stretch out his greedy hand toward the best and dearest friends; the hero and warrior must yield them as a sacrifice that he makes for his victories."

The king turned suddenly upon the speaker and his penetrating glance seemed to read his friend's innermost thought.

"You have news of a death to communicate, Jordan?" he asked, curtly, retiring from the window and leaning for support upon the high back of a fauteuil. "You have news of a death to communicate, Jordan?" he repeated, passionately, as Jordan kept silence.

"Yes, news of a death, my King," said Jordan, at last, deeply moved. "Destiny will accustom your Majesty by degrees to such sad news, so that your heart may not fail when in battle several friends perish at once."

"It is a friend, then, who is dead?" said the king, turning pale.

"A friend, sire—the dearest of them all."

The king did not respond at once. He sank into the fauteuil, leaning his head back and clutching the sides spasmodically. Then he asked, in a loud, hollow voice: "Is it Suhm?"

"Yes, it is Suhm, my King; he died in Warsaw. Here is his last letter to your Majesty; his brother sent it to me to be placed in your Majesty's hands."

The king uttered a cry and buried his ashy face in his hands. Great tears rolled between the slender fingers. Then,

brushing the tears from his eyes with a hasty movement, he opened and read the letter. "Suhm is dead," he murmured in a low voice, so plaintive that Jordan's heart ached—"Suhm is dead. This one friend who loved me as sincerely as I loved him, this noble friend who united so much talent, so much sincerity, so much feeling. I had lost millions rather than this one friend. I shall mourn him all my life and his memory will live in my heart while one drop of blood flows in my veins. His family shall be my own. Ah! my heart bleeds, and this wound is deeper than ball or sword inflicts."

Overcome by his sorrow the king laid his face upon the back of the fauteuil and wept aloud. After a long pause he arose and stood erect and proud before Jordan. His features had assumed a firm, almost iron expression, his eyes glowed like two sword-points.

"Jordan," he said, in a loud, full voice, "death can demand nothing further of me now. He has laid an iron coat of mail around my heart, and when I go to battle I shall be victorious over all my enemies, for death has taken my friend as the sacrifice of victory, and, because he would not strike me upon the field of battle, he has struck me in advance in the person of my friend. Jordan, Jordan, this wound bleeds sorely. But we will bind it up and no one shall see the blood-stained cloths. I have conquered death. Now I shall fight and conquer as a hero and a king. What cares the world whether I suffer? The world shall know nothing about it. A mask before our face; a disguise for our sorrows. Let us laugh and make merry while we mourn our friend, while we arm ourselves against the enemy. Let us play *Cæsar* and *Antony* quietly here until the time comes for imitating them more earnestly. Come, Jordan, come, we will go and rehearse *Cæsar's* death.

CHAPTER XLII.

FAREWELL AUDIENCE OF THE AUSTRIAN AMBASSADOR, MARQUIS BOTTA.

Pomp and splendor reigned in the palace in Berlin. A brilliant banquet was to be given by the king, then the court would drink coffee in the newly furnished rooms of the queen mother, and a masquerade was announced for the evening, when the court, the nobility, and the higher officials would be present.

The official mourning for the emperor's death was at an end, and people could devote themselves to the pleasures of the Carnival, now beginning. Never had the court led a more luxurious life than now; feast followed feast, and even the old-fashioned philister citizens of Berlin began to make friends with this new-fangled government that strewed money about and encouraged trade. People saw that a luxurious and extravagant court spent more money among the citizens, and reconciled themselves to lackeys in gold braid, to the gorgeousness of the new decorations in the royal palace, and even to the fact that one room among the apartments of the queen mother was decorated in massive gold—the tables, fender, chandeliers, candelabra; in short, all that could be made of gold. People told each other with pride that the French and English ambassadors had been amazed at the splendor of the queen's boudoir, and both had declared that such gorgeousness was scarcely to be found in all the world.

The king had carried his point. No one suspected the deep earnestness hidden behind his idle play. No one thought that this smiling prince was about to reverse all previous European politics and give to Germany a new map. He had not dropped his mask one moment, and his plans had ripened in inviolate secrecy. The moment for their execution had now come, and to-night, during the masquerade, the king, with his regiments, would leave Berlin to proceed at once to Silesia. The troops themselves were ignorant of their destination. The papers had announced that they were about to leave Berlin to take up new winter-quarters, and the story had found universal acceptance. Only a few trustworthy persons, besides the generals in charge, knew the secret. And with the generals the king had had a last conference in his work-room after the brilliant farewell dinner. He gave them the necessary orders, fixed the hour of their departure, and commanded the officers of all marching regiments to assemble in the palace square at the last moment.

"And now, gentlemen," he said, "having disposed of our business, let us devote ourselves to pleasure, from which we are taking leave we know not for how long. Let us dance with the ladies at the masquerade, before we begin the dance of arms."

When the generals had left him, the body-servant came to make the royal toilet, for which Pellissier had furnished a splendid new costume of the latest Parisian cut. Never had the king expended more care upon his dress, never more patiently submitted to the barber than to-day. At last he

stepped to the mirror, and examined the *tout ensemble* with critical care.

"Well," he said, softly, "if Marquis Botta is not deceived by the fop in yonder mirror, it is truly no fault of mine. The worthy Austrian ambassador would need a fine nose, truly, to find a soldier behind this lace-trimmed doll. I think he will have nothing to report to my good aunt, Maria Theresa, beyond this, that the King of Prussia dresses well, but is no soldier." And he betook himself to to the queen mother, in whose apartment the whole court was assembled, and where he meant to grant the ambassador of the young empress of Austria a farewell audience.

Frederick had been quite right. The Marquis was wholly deceived by the mask of harmless pleasure-seeking which, the king had fastened upon his whole court. He had been sent by the empress with secret instructions to sound the Prussian king's intentions, while officially charged to convey to the king the empress' thanks for the royal congratulations upon her ascending the throne.

"I go with the firm conviction," he said to Count Manteuffel, with whom he had retired into a window-niche while awaiting the king's arrival; "I go with the firm conviction that the king cherishes only friendly intentions, and does not think of breaking the peace."

Manteuffel shrugged his shoulders. "Your conviction will be shaken to-morrow, for the king leaves Berlin to-night to march with his army into Silesia."

At that moment there appeared in the door of the golden boudoir the diamond-glittering figure of the king himself. Sudden silence fell upon the company; everyone bowed in reverence before the gorgeous apparition. Frederick bowed and smiled, but remained standing in the open door. It seemed to give him pleasure to exhibit himself, as it were, to his court. Like a precious, living picture of youth, beauty, manhood, he stood, framed by the door-way, gleaming as though in a sea of light; while from above, the queen's golden chandelier illuminated his blue-velvet suit, with its costly silver embroidery, and silver-brocade waist, with huge diamond buttons burning and shimmering.

"Do but look at this amazingly gorgeous, handsome young man," whispered Marquis Botta. "See the face glowing with youth and pleasure, his fingers laden with diamonds, his hands in their lace-trimmed cuffs, white and delicate enough to do credit to the daintiest lady. See the tiny foot in its resplendent shoe, and then try to make me believe that foot will

march with a soldier's tread, instead of tripping a minuet; that that hand, fit for managing a smelling-bottle, or a pen at most, will carry a sword! Ah! my dear count, you make me laugh with your sinister forebodings."

"And yet, I beseech you, believe me, and hasten, as soon as this audience is at an end, to your hotel. Return with courier horses to Vienna. Do not allow yourself an hour's sleep, a moment's refreshment, before reaching Vienna, and inducing her Majesty to send her whole army, with forced marches, to Silesia, to Breslau. If you scorn my counsels, the King of Prussia will be in Breslau before you reach Vienna, and the empress will receive from the fleeing inhabitants of a province conquered without a blow the news you refuse to believe this night."

The count's deep earnestness was so convincing that Marquis Botta was shaken in his confidence, and looked with a surprised and baffled expression across at the young king, chatting and laughing with a group of ladies.

The king had not for a moment lost sight of the two gentlemen, reading their thoughts in their gestures and expression. He met the marquis' eye, and beckoned the ambassador to himself. The marquis solemnly approached the king, who had advanced to the middle of the room, standing surrounded by his generals and trusted counsellors.

A deep silence fell upon the company. All eyes were turned, with expectant attention, upon the brilliant group of which the young king was the gorgeous central figure. For those who knew the king's purpose, the scene was an interesting drama, a piquant jest; while for those who had not been initiated, and had but a dim suspicion that something portentous was about to take place, it was a moment of tense observation, capable, perhaps, of confirming or destroying their surmises.

The Austrian ambassador, standing directly opposite the king, made his ceremonious bow. The king nodded slightly. "You really come to say farewell, Marquis," said he, negligently.

"Sire, her Majesty, my exalted empress, calls me, and I must obey her commands, happy as I should be to sun myself longer in the presence of so noble and exalted a monarch."

"It is true, a little sun would do you good. You will have a cold homeward journey, Marquis."

"Oh! your Majesty, the cold might easily be borne," sighed the diplomatist.

"Are there other difficulties which disturb your journey?"

"Yes, sire; there are the fearful roads through that lamentable Austrian province, Silesia. Those are highways such as no one can imagine in your happy country, and which are impossible in the other Austrian provinces, too. This poor Silesia is the chief source of sorrow and anxiety of my exalted empress, and perhaps for that very reason she loves it, and would gladly help it. But nature herself seems determined to hinder her noble plans. Frightful rain-storms have again devastated highways which had just been made passable, and, as I learn to my horror, it is scarcely possible for a single traveller to journey over them without danger to life and limb."

"Ah," said the king, with condescension, "the worst that can happen to him who has to pass such roads, after all, is getting fast in the mud."

"Pardon, sire," cried the marquis, "health, life itself is at stake in these wretched roads, with their swampy beds. And the traveller runs the risk of plunging into an abyss of mud, just as among the Alps the snow-chasms await the unwary."

The king was weary of this crafty diplomatic play, was tired of having his face watched by the ambassador. In his assurance of victory, and the noble pride of his truthful nature, he longed to let fall the mask which hid his face from the marquis. The moment of action was come. There was no further need of secrecy.

"Sir," said the king, in a loud, firm voice, "if you so greatly dread the Silesian roads, I would advise you to stay here in Berlin. I will go to Silesia in your stead, and send word to my exalted relative, Maria Theresa, by the voice of my cannon, that the Silesian highways are dangerous for an Austrian, and full of risk for the King of Prussia, but direct and good for the march of an army to Breslau."

"How so? Your Majesty marches to Breslau?" asked the marquis, horrified.

"Yes, to Breslau! And since the Silesian highways are, as you observed a moment ago, dangerous for a single traveller, I shall take my army with me, to protect my wagon from mishap."

"Oh!" cried the marquis, sadly, "your Majesty intends invading the domains of my exalted monarch?"

The king darted a look of wrath and contempt at him. The courtiers murmured, the generals laid their hands on their swords, and glared threateningly at the Austrian who presumed to reproach the King of Prussia.

With a smile and a wave of the hand to his generals, the king said, turning again to the marquis:

"You express yourself wrongly, Marquis. I do not invade the domain of the Empress of Austria. I reclaim what is my own. My own by acknowledged right, mine by inheritance and ratified treaty, the parchments of which are buried under the dust of the Austrian State Department. We shall blow away some of this dust with the good lungs of our soldiers, that the empress may read the parchments once more, and convince herself of my good right to the province of Silesia."

"Your Majesty may, perhaps, destroy the House of Austria, but will most certainly destroy yourself."

"It rests with the empress to accept the offers I am now making her through my ambassador in Vienna," cried the king.

"Sire," said the marquis, "I must confess your troops are beautiful; the Austrian troops have not the outward splendor, but they are tried. They have often stood under fire."

"You find my troops beautiful," said the king. "*Eh bien!* I will convince you of their courage."

So speaking he nodded dismissal to the ambassador. The audience was at an end, the ambassador made his bow, and left the room, amid the profound silence of the court.

Scarcely had the door closed behind him when the king's face resumed its wonted expression.

With a smile and bow he said:

"Mesdames et messieurs, it is time to dress for the masquerade. We have laid our mask aside for a brief space, but you will doubtless find it time to don your own. Until then, farewell."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE MASQUERADE.

The halls of the palace were radiantly illuminated, and through them moved a procession of fabulous, fantastic figures. Representatives of all nations were there to greet the young hero and king. Greek and Turk and Russian, peasant maidens, Spaniards, odalisques, fairies, witches, monks and nuns, German girls of the mediæval city, knights in silver mail, and gypsies—a many-colored, charming scene.

In the farthest hall there was a group without masks. Both the queens, glittering in gold and jewels, sat there, for Sophia Dorothea needed no longer conceal her diamonds, and Elizabeth Christine, knowing that the king desired the Queen of

Prussia to appear in magnificence befitting her dignity, wore her tiara of emeralds and diamonds, which Bielfeld had pronounced a wonder of beauty and richness.

With the queens and the Princesses Amalie and Ulrica stood the king, who had retained his gorgeous costume, and back of the royal family stood the ladies and gentlemen of the retinue, all unmasked, but mask in hand, for no one might enter masked the room in which the queens and the royal family were.

The king and the queen mother were about to keep the promises which they had reciprocally made. Sophia Dorothea was about to permit the presentation of Count Néal, while the king bade the newly married Countess Rhedern welcome.

Pöllnitz's loud, ironical voice proclaimed the arrival of Count and Countess Rhedern and of Count Néal, and the personages thus solemnly announced entered the hall, that sanctuary which opens only to the privileged, to those near the royal family by birth, favor, or service.

Leaning upon the arm of her noble spouse, the newly created Countess Rhedern, *née* Orguelin, entered the sacred precinct. Her face was perfectly calm, cold, and grave, an expression of firm determination manifested itself in her features, which no longer possessed the charm of youth or beauty, yet were not wanting in interest. Extreme kindliness seemed to speak from her somewhat large but well-formed mouth. And out of the large dark eyes, which were not modestly cast down, but calmly directed toward the royal family, so much spirit, passion, and boldness spoke that the beholder saw at once here was no ordinary woman, but a strong, fiery determined nature, with courage to challenge her destiny, and, if it must be, bend it to her will.

But the proud and imperious Sophia Dorothea was unpleasantly impressed by the countess' serious and direct observation of herself. If the countess had approached her with downcast eyes, trembling, overwhelmed by the unheard-of royal condescension, the queen mother might have been inclined to pardon her the blemish of her nameless origin. But this calm, unembarrassed demeanor enraged her. Moreover, the countess' brilliant and costly costume offended her. The silver-embroidered train, which, fastened with diamond agrafes at the shoulders, fell in rich folds to the floor was of costlier stuff than the queen's robe. The necklace, bracelets, and diadem bore comparison with the queen's own, and the huge fan, which the countess carried half open, was of real Chinese

workmanship, with such incomparable ivory carving and delicately painted decoration that the queen felt a sort of envy at sight of the rare work of art to which she possessed no mate.

She therefore responded with curt nods to the threefold reverential courtesy of the countess, executed according to all the rules of etiquette ; while Queen Elizabeth Christine, who sat next to the queen mother, greeted the countess with a gracious smile. The king, observing the cloud upon his mother's brow, and well knowing its source, found keen amusement in the scene. It pleased him to see her, who had so energetically worked for the reception of Countess Rhedern, receiving her so brusquely, and he wished to tease his royal mother a little with her quickly evaporated enthusiasm for the nameless countess who had no other claim upon the privilege of appearing at court than the debts of the count, her husband, and her own millions. He therefore greeted the new countess with gracious and kindly words, and, turning to his mother, said, half inaudibly, "Indeed, your Majesty, you did well to invite Countess Rhedern to our court ; she will be a real ornament to it."

"Yes, a real ornament," said Sophia Dorothea, who now regarded the countess' dignified and unembarrassed bearing as impudent and wanting in respect to royalty, and had determined to punish this obtrusive woman. Casting proud and scornful looks upon her, she said :

"What a strange train you wear, Countess ! "

"It is an Indian product," replied the latter, undisturbed. "My father has connections with certain Dutch importing houses, and one of them procured us this rare stuff which has the honor to attract your Majesty's attention."

Sophia Dorothea blushed with shame and rage. This countess, scarcely emerged from the lowly estate of the tradesman, had the audacity not to blush for her past, not to conceal it under an impenetrable veil, but to speak in the presence of two queens of the business connections of her father ; while royalty had meant to be so gracious as to bury this blemish in eternal oblivion.

"You are wearing an article in which your father deals. That is, indeed, a very ingenious method of recommending it, and, in future, when we behold the toilet of the Countess Rhedern, the whole court will at once know which is the newest article for sale by Orguelin, the silk factor, the countess' father."

A scarcely suppressed laugh of the cavaliers and ladies who had heard the queen's words rewarded this cruel jest.

All eyes were contemptuously directed toward the countess, whose husband, trembling and deathly pale, stood by her side, not having courage to raise his eyes from the floor. The young Countess Rhedern alone remained perfectly quiet and unconstrained.

"Pardon, your Majesty," she said, in a full, clear voice, "if I venture to contradict you. My father's business is too well known for me to assume that anyone is ignorant of the kind of goods in which he deals."

"Well," asked the queen, angrily, "in what does he deal, then ? "

The countess bowed reverently. "Your Majesty," she said, "my father deals with understanding, dignity, generosity, and modesty."

The queen's eyes flashed lightning. A tradesman's daughter dared to snub the queen, and to defy her anger. Sophia Dorothea arose in the full majesty of her royal dignity. She was about to crush this arrogant "new-born" countess, and her lips parted for a sarcastic remark, the more annihilating from royal lips because no retort is possible. But the king saw the rising storm and wished to ward it off. His generous nature resented seeing a poor defenceless woman thus tortured, and he was too high-minded and free from prejudice to be displeased at the calm and dignified bearing of the poor countess. That which had irritated the queen mother had won the king's approval, and he forgave the countess her nameless birth in favor of her spirit and intelligence.

He laid his hand gently upon his mother's shoulder, and said, with a kind smile : "Does not your Majesty think that Countess Rhedern does credit to her birth ? Her father's dealings are carried on with understanding, dignity, generosity, and modesty. The countess seems to me to continue her father's business as an efficient heiress, worthy of all respect. My dear countess, I shall ever be a faithful patron of your house, provided you promise not to forget as Countess Rhedern what you say characterizes your father."

"I promise, your Majesty," said the countess, bowing low, an expression of pure delight illumining her face and making it almost beautiful. "I hope your Majesty may be so gracious," she replied, taking her husband's hand, "as some day to convince yourself that the house of Rhedern & Co. does honor to the king and is able to meet his demands."

The queen mother could hardly suppress a cry of anger and indignation. Countess Rhedern dared to give the king an invitation. This was an offence against the etiquette of the

court such as great ignorance or insolence alone could commit, and for which the king would doubtless punish the presumptuous woman with his proudest contempt. But Sophia Dorothea was mistaken. The king bowed, and, with an inimitable expression of kindliness, said, "Madame, I shall come very soon to see whether your establishment does credit to my patronage."

Sophia Dorothea almost fainted; she could endure this scene no longer, and, giving way to her stormy nature, was guilty of the same breach of etiquette which Countess Rhedern had committed in ignorance; she did that which her king or the reigning queen should, according to court etiquette, have done. She broke up the formal presentation. Rising with unwonted celerity from her fauteuil, she said, impatiently, "I think it is time to go and look at the dance in the large dancing-room. Listen, your Majesty, the music is most enticing. Let us go."

But the king laid his hand upon the queen's arm.

"Madame," he said, "you forget that there is a happy man waiting to be irradiated by the light of your countenance. You forget that you have consented to Count Néal's presentation."

"This, too," she murmured, sinking back into her fauteuil. She scarcely heard the solemn presentation of Count Néal, responded with a curt, silent nod to the poor count's reverent greeting, not seeing how he beamed with joy at having carried his point and being received by the queen mother.

The king was in the mood for playing peace-maker, and came to the assistance of his mother's angry silence.

"Madame," he said, "Count Néal is a man to be envied. He has seen what we shall probably never see, the sun of India. And in Surinam he was governor for a time."

"Pardon, your Majesty, I was not governor only, I bore the title of vice-regent," said the count, with a proud smile.

"Wherein consist the honors of the vice-regent?" asked the king, negligently.

"I was esteemed there as your Majesty is here," replied the count.

"Indeed," said the king, with a smile, "you stood upon an equality with the King of Prussia?" and, turning to Pöllnitz, who stood near, he continued: "You have been guilty of a grave breach of etiquette, you have forgotten to place a fauteuil for my half-brother, the vice-regent of Surinam. You must make allowance this one day, my dear step-brother. At the next masquerade we shall not forget that you are vice-regent of Surinam, and woe to the baron if he forgets to give you a fauteuil then."

So speaking, he offered his arm to the queen mother, and beckoned to Prince Augustus William to follow with the reigning queen into the dancing-room.

"If it is agreeable to you, madame," said the king, releasing his mother's arm, "we will dispense with ceremony for a half-hour and mix at ease with the dancers."

And without awaiting her reply, the king bowed and hastened through the room, accompanied by Pöllnitz, into the adjoining cabinet, where a domino and mask awaited him.

The whole court followed the king's example; the prince and princesses, even the reigning queen, availed themselves of the permission to forget etiquette for a half-hour.

The queen mother suddenly found herself alone in the middle of the great hall, deserted by all her court. Only the marshal, Count Rhedern, his wife, and the train-bearing pages remained. Sophia Dorothea sighed deeply, felt that she was no longer a queen, but only a poor widow, descended from the throne to the second rank. Luckily Countess Rhedern was there, and upon her the royal anger could be vented.

"Madame," said the queen, "your train is too long. You should have brought some boys from your father's shop to serve as train-bearers. Your father's ware could have been more minutely examined."

The countess bowed. "Your Majesty will kindly pardon me that I cannot obey your behest this time; I have no right to appropriate the boys in my father's store for my personal service. But if your Majesty seriously thinks that I need train-bearers, I would suggest that my father's principal debtors would gladly serve as such if my father would grant them a respite. Your Majesty may rest assured that, should you accept my proposition, I could at once select two of the most distinguished cavaliers of your Majesty's court, and should no longer put your court to shame."

The queen did not reply—she darted a hateful glance at this unconquerable woman standing beside her with undisturbed composure, and then stepped rapidly toward the throne erected for the royal family.