CHAPTER XLIV.

THE FANCY BALL.

THE king meanwhile had completed his toilet with Pöllnitz's help, and was now such a figure as were wandering by hundreds through the room.

"You do not think I shall be recognized?" asked the king, donning his mask.

"Sire, it is impossible! But you must graciously push the mask a little farther over your eyes, so as to shade them, otherwise your Majesty will surely be known, for no other human eye is like your own."

"I think these eyes will see some things presently that have been seen by few human eyes," said the king, with a smile. "Have you ever seen a battle-field covered with the fleeing enemy, or stood a victor among corpses?"

"Heaven defend me from it, sire! The enemies I have seen have never fled, but always put me to flight; and it is a miracle that I have always succeeded in escaping them!"

"Who are these victorious foes?"

"My creditors, sire; and your Majesty may well believe me when I say that they are for me a more fearful spectacle than a field full of corpses, for they are unfortunately not dead, but alive to torture me."

The king laughed. "Perhaps you may yet succeed in slaying them," he said. "When I have seen my battle-field as I describe it to you, when I return victorious, we must give our attention to slaying your foes as well. Until then, keep up a brave defence! But come, let us go into the dancing-hall; I have but one little half-hour left for pleasure!"

The king mingled with merry jests among the dancers, while Pöllnitz stood near the cabinet door watching for some one in the throng. At last a contemptuous smile played over his face, and he murmured softly: "There they are, all three! This nun, in whom no mortal could recognize the Morien. There is the card-king, the quinze-vingt Manteuffel, who does not dream that he has already lost the game, playing his trump in vain. And the gypsy there, telling fortunes from the maskers' palms, is the Brandt. How one small piece of paper can unmask three human minds!"

"Now, Baron Pöllnitz," whispered the nun, "will you fulfil your promise?"

"Dearest Madame Morien," replied the baron, with a shrug, "the king has most strictly forbidden me to betray him. His Majesty desires to remain unknown."

"Pöllnitz," whispered the nun, with a trembling voice, "have pity upon me; tell me the king's mask and win my undying gratitude! I know you love diamonds; see the costly brooch that I have brought you in exchange for this far costlier information."

"It is impossible to withstand you," cried the baron, reaching out his hand for the pin. "Listen. The king wears a sky-blue domino embroidered with narrow silver bars. In his hat is a white feather with a ruby pin, and his shoe-buckles are diamonds."

"I thank you," whispered the nun, hastily giving him the brooch and vanishing again into the throng.

Pöllnitz was still busily fastening the needle in his lace when the card-king laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Now, Baron, you see I keep our rendezvous. Answer the question I asked you yesterday, and I'll give you for it news that assure you a rich and happy future!"

"Accepted, Count. You wished to know from me what route the king proposes to follow and the strength of his troops. Here is a detailed schedule of the troops, and here a map of the route. I have both from an influential friend who is the king's most trusted servant. But I had to pay this friend a thousand crowns for the two papers, as I told you in advance."

"Here is a check for four thousand thalers," said the count, handing him a paper. "You see I have not forgotten the price."

"And the important secret?"

"Listen! In Nuremberg lives a family of friends of mine with an only daughter. The daughter is heiress to a million. The family is of civil rank, but longs to marry the daughter to a Prussian nobleman! I proposed you to them, and you are accepted. You have but to journey thither, give up this letter of introduction, and make your offer. You will be accepted, and at the wedding come into a million!"

"Hum, a million is not so much!" said Pöllnitz, with a shrug. "If I must marry a civilian to get my million, I know a girl that has as much and is in love with me, besides being young and pretty—which may not be the case with the Nuremberger."

"Take my letter, none the less," said the count, laughing, "and consider my proposition. You must at least admit that my secret is worth its price. Au revoir!"

And the count was about to depart when he turned about: "One thing more, my dear Baron! I forgot one little condition which goes with marrying the pretty Nuremberger. The family is strictly Protestant, and demands a Protestant husband for the daughter. If you should wish to marry her, you would therefore have the kindness to get yourself baptized, for, if I am not in error, you are at present of the Catholic faith."

"Yes, for the moment. But that would present no difficulty. I used to be a Protestant, and felt just as well as at present."

The count laughed and slipped away into the throng, while Pöllnitz looked reflectively into the paper which the count had given him.

"I think Anna Pricker must possess at least half a million thalers," he said, softly; "and half a million thalers are worth nearly as much as a million of those light Nuremberg gulden! Old Pricker is fatally ill with grief for the sudden death of his wife. If he dies, Anna will be a rich heiress as well as the Nuremberger. And if our plan succeeds she will really be a great singer, according to Quantz's opinion, so gaining influence over the king and making people forget that she is a tailor's daughter. I think I prefer Anna Pricker to the Nuremberger, whom I should have to take like a cat in a bag. But we will keep her in reserve in case Anna's fortune should be smaller than I think. Then I'll turn Protestant again and marry the Nuremberger."

At this point the gypsy stood before Pöllnitz, eying him with a roguish glance. At once he was the smiling cavalier again, answering the saucy gypsy with pert jests. But Madame Brandt, in the impatience of her feminine curiosity, was soon weary of the tourney of words.

"You promised me news of the letter which I lost at the court banquet," she said.

"Ah! the portentous letter which might well have compromised a gentleman and two ladies beyond measure. The owner must be most desirous of recovering that letter; even at some sacrifice."

"Oh yes, even at heavy sacrifice," she cried, impatiently. "You demanded a hundred louis d'or for the letter, I have brought them. Have you the letter?"

"I have it."

"Then take these rolls of gold pieces quickly and give it to me."

The baron hid the rolls in his bosom.

"Now the letter, give me the letter quickly!" urged Madame Brandt.

Pöllnitz searched his breast-pocket. "Heavens!" he said, "that letter seems to have wings and to vanish whenever it is most needed. Perhaps I have lost it in the dancing-room just as you did yourself. Let me hasten to seek it."

Pöllnitz wished to retreat at once, but Madame Brandt detained him.

"Be so good as to give me my money until you have found the letter," she said, trembling with rage.

"Your money?" said Pöllnitz, with an appearance of surprise. "Your money? I do not remember your ever giving me money to take care of. Let me hasten to seek the letter."

He tore himself away hastily, while Madame Brandt, speechless with anger, leaned against the wall to keep from falling. But Pöllnitz grinned as he counted his gains. "This evening has brought me a thousand crowns, two hundred louis d'or, the prospect of a rich bride, and possession of a diamond brooch. I think I may be content, and can live for a few months longer. Moreover, I stand well with the king despite all these intrigues, and who knows whether he may not give me a house after all, though Eckert's is unfortunately no longer vacant? Ah! there he is among the maskers."

Suddenly Pöllnitz heard his name whispered, and turning, met a lady in a black domino, her capuchin drawn low over her brow, her face concealed by an impenetrable mask of lace.

"Herr von Pöllnitz, one word, if I may ask it," said the lady, beckoning with her hand and passing through the crowd in advance of him. Pöllnitz followed her, studying her costume to find some mark by which to recognize the wearer. But in vain. They reached a vacant window-niche, and the lady entered it, beckoning Pöllnitz to follow.

"Baron von Pöllnitz," she said, in a low, timid voice, "they call you the noblest and most skilful of all the cavaliers. You will not refuse a favor to a lady?"

"Command me," said Pöllnitz, with his unfailing smile. "What lies in my power I will do."

"You know the king's disguise, doubtless. Tell me which it is."

Pöllnitz started backward, indignant. "That you call a favor, my beautiful domino? I am to betray the king's disguise to you? His Majesty has most strenuously forbidden me to betray his disguise to anyone, and if I should describe it to you that would be, not, as you call it, a favor, but an of-

fence against his majesty. You will not require such a crime of me?"

"Yet I beseech you, grant my request," she cried. "Believe me, it is no mere curiosity, it is the ardent and justifiable wish to speak a word with the king before his departure for the war, from which he may never return."

The lady, carried away by her eager desire, had spoken in her own voice, which seemed to Pöllnitz familiar. A vague suspicion awoke in his mind. But before speaking, he must be certain. He approached the lady more closely, and, watching her narrowly, said:

"Who vouches for it that you are not some Austrian enemy trying to tempt the king into God knows what dangers?"

"The word of a woman who has never uttered a falsehood," cried the lady. "Nay, Baron von Pöllnitz; God, who hears us and protects the dear life of our king, knows that in my heart there dwells no thought of wishing the king harm."

"Will you swear to this?"

"I swear it as truly as there is a God in heaven!" cried the lady, raising her arm to heaven. Pöllnitz followed the movement with eager eyes. He saw, as the long, broad sleeve of the domino glided back to the elbow, the wondrous bracelet of diamonds and emeralds clasped about the lady's arm. There was but one such bracelet at the court, and it belonged to Queen Elizabeth Christine. Pöllnitz, however, was too crafty a courtier to betray his surprise. He bowed calmly before the lady, who, terrified at her own thoughtlessness, had dropped the sleeve hastily over the traitorous ornament.

"Madame," he said, "you have taken a solemn vow which fully satisfies me. I am ready to accede to your wish. Meanwhile I must keep my word, not *telling* anyone the king's disguise. I must content myself with showing you the king. Be so good as to follow me. I am about to look for the king and shall speak with no one save himself. The domino whom I shall first address and before whom I shall bow, is the king."

"I thank you," whispered the lady, wrapping herself more closely in her domino. "I shall remember this hour, and if it is ever in my power to render you a service, I shall do so. You may rely upon me!"

"A fortunate evening, indeed," thought Pöllnitz, "for now I have won the favor of the queen, who has hitherto been disinclined toward me!"

He approached Frederick, who, recognizing him, greeted him instantly. Pöllnitz bowed, the lady stood behind him.

"You have kept me waiting a long time," said the king, in a low tone.

"I had to wait for our three masqueraders."

"Did all three come?"

"All three, your Majesty! Morien, Manteuffel, and Madame Brandt. Count Manteuffel is true to his rôle; he is always the harmless quinze-vingt, whom no one need fear, and to signify that, he appears to-day in the costume of a card-king!"

"And Madame von Morien?"

"Here as a nun, consumed with longing to speak with your Majesty. She begged so long to know your costume that I betrayed it to her, and if you care to go into the dark room which the gardener has transformed into a grotto, the repentant nun will doubtless willingly follow you thither, sire!"

"It is well. What costume is Madame Brandt wearing?"

"She is a gypsy, sire! A yellow skirt with hieroglyphics, a red, gold-embroidered waist, a tiny cap studded with diamonds upon her curls, and a huge mouche upon the left temple near the mask. She wanted the famous letter, and I sold it to her for a hundred louis d'or."

"Which you could not earn, because you had not the letter."

"Pardon, your Majesty, I deserved them, for I got them first and then declared I had lost the letter."

The king laughed.

"Pöllnitz, Pöllnitz," he said, "it is truly good luck that you are not married. Your sons would all be good for the gallows! Did you give Manteuffel the plan and schedule of troops?"

"I did so, sire! and the worthy count was so rejoiced thereat that he made me a present of four thousand thalers. I took the sum, and your Majesty will prescribe what I shall do therewith."

"Keep your booty. You've talent as a highway robber, and I prefer your exercising it upon the Austrians. There is no harm in the noble count giving four thousand thalers for his false news. For false plans it is enough. For true ones it were a ridiculous trifle! Go now, my Baron, but take care that I find my uniform in the cabinet yonder!"

CHAPTER XLV.

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT.

THE king had forgotten for the moment that he had any other business than that of amusing himself. But now he was reminded of it, for at his elbow stood the card-king, his once loved Count Manteuffel.

"I was looking for you," he said, in a low voice, laying his hand upon the count's shoulder. "You were wanting to my game, but now that I have you in my hand I shall win."

The count's ear was too well trained to mistake the voice, despite the disguise, but he was too skilful a diplomatist to betray his recognition.

"What game would you play with me, domino?" he inquired, rapidly following the king through the hall to a small deserted room.

"A wholly new game, the play of war, my card-king," answered the king, roughly.

"War?" repeated the count. "I am not acquainted with the game."

The king was pacing rapidly up and down.

"Count," he said, pausing before Manteuffel, "I am your friend and give you a piece of good advice. Leave Berlin to-night, never to return."

"Why do you give me this advice, domino?" asked the count, apparently unconstrained.

"Because, otherwise, you run the risk of imprisonment as a traitor and hanging as a spy! Do not reply, do not defend yourself. I am your friend, but I am the king's friend too. The king does not know that you are an Austrian spy in the service of Seckendorf and the empress. May he never know it, for his wrath would be the more terrible because he once loved you. The poor young prince was credulous and inexperienced enough to believe in your love and take you into his heart. It was a tender heart in those days, and is not yet hardened enough to bear with calmness the blows the king's traitorous friends inflict on it. A day will come when the work will be complete, when King Frederick will wear about his heart a coat of mail impenetrable, perhaps, even for true love. Then he would see in you, not his former friend, but a traitor and a spy only. Therefore flee before vengeance descends upon you, beyond the punishment of your own guilty conscience."

"But what if I should stay? should try to justify myself to the king?" asked the count, timidly.

"Do not attempt it, it would be vain. The moment you tried that, the king would be informed of all your intrigues, bribery, and treachery; he would know that you correspond with his cook, that Madame Brandt's diary is written for you to send to the Austrian court, and why you paid Madame Brandt considerable sums of money."

"Do you advise me to go before applying to his Majesty for dismissal?" asked the count, stupefied.

"I do not counsel you, I command you!" exclaimed the king, forgetting his disguise. "I command you to leave this palace without one word, one greeting, silent, as befits a detected criminal. Go!"

The count obeyed. Silently he bowed before the king, and, with tottering steps and bowed head, broken and humiliated, he quitted the dancing-hall.

The king watched him as he vanished into the throng. "For such men must we lose our trust in man," he murmured. "Is it true, as the wise men of old said, that we princes are condemned to solitude? But there is the coquettish gypsy, the worthy friend of our good Manteuffel. We will reverse matters, and I'll forecast her future."

The king hastened to overtake the gypsy. "Pöllnitz has found the letter," he whispered in her ear, "and is hurrying to give it to you."

"Where is he?" cried the gypsy, eagerly.

"Follow me!" answered the king, retiring to a window-niche, whither Madame Brandt followed in impatient haste.

"Here we are alone and can chat unobserved," he said.

Madame Brandt laughed. "To chat requires two. You enticed me here by mentioning a letter which Pöllnitz was to give me, but I see neither Pöllnitz nor the letter."

"Pöllnitz charged me to give you the letter. But first give me your hand, I will tell your fortune."

Madame Brandt gave her hand in speechless terror. She had recognized the voice. The king looked at the hand without touching it. "There are wonderful things to be read in this hand. According to them you are a dangerous intrigante, a treacherous subject, a cruel coquette."

"Do you believe this?" asked the gypsy, with a forced smile.

"I do not believe it, I know it. Fate never deceives, and

fate has written upon your hand and your brow—see, you may read it—that you received for traitorous services a large sum of money from a foreign country. Here I see diamonds, there a promise of twenty thouand thalers for the maintenance of a certain marriage. How you tremble! hold your hand still, that I may read your future. Here I see a dangerous letter that got into wrong hands through your imprudence. Should the king read it your ruin is inevitable. He will punish you for treason, banish you from court, shut you up in a fortress according to the custom when, in war times, a subject conspires with the enemy. So rejoice, for if you are wise and prudent the king shall know nothing, and you are saved!"

"How can I avoid this misfortune?" asked Madame Brandt, breathlessly.

"By banishing yourself from court and leaving Berlin upon some pretext. Retire to your husband's estate and reflect there upon your offence, in solitude. Leave Berlin to-morrow, and do not venture to return until the king summons you."

He left the window-niche, where Madame Brandt stayed, weeping with rage and humiliation, and went to the dark grotto. He saw the nun stealthily following him into the shrubbery. He tore away his mask and, turning to the nun, said roughly, "What do you want of me?"

"Your love!" she answered, sinking on her knees; "that love without which I shall perish, without which I suffer the tortures of the damned in the fires of hell."

"Then go and be d——d," answered the king, pushing away the arm she stretched to him and retreating a step farther from her. Go and suffer in the flames. God will not redeem you, and neither will I."

"To hear this and live!" she murmured through her tears. "Oh! my king, have mercy! Remember what intoxicating poison your looks and words and kisses poured into my veins, and do not punish me because that sweet poison has made me ill unto madness, unto death. See what it has made of me, how poor Leontine has changed since she no longer basks in the sunshine of your love!" With trembling fingers she drew aside the white veil which had covered her face. The king looked at her with stern, calm eyes.

"You have aged, madame," he said, "enough to enter without encountering remonstrance the path you have so wisely selected; enough to become a heroine of virtue after being so long a devotee of love. Accept the Order of Virtue which the Empress of Austria promised you, for the king will not divorce his

wife, and, this being wholly due to you, I think the empress cannot refuse you the promised decoration."

"He knows all and despises me," moaned Madame Morien, sobbing aloud, her hands before her face.

"Yes, he despises you!" repeated the king. "He despises you and has no pity upon you. Farewell."

Without a glance at the kneeling, weeping figure, he strode away. Suddenly he felt a hand lightly touching his shoulder.

"One word, King Frederick," whispered the disguised woman.

"Speak! what do you want of me?" he asked, kindly.

"Nothing," replied a gentle, trembling voice, "except to see your face once more before you go forth to battle and danger. Only to beg you to spare yourself a little. Remember, my king, that your life is an immeasurable treasure for which you are responsible, not to God only, but to your people. Oh! my king and master, do not rush into danger; preserve yourself for your family, your people, your country, to all of whom you are indispensable."

The king shook his head with a smile.

"No one can say that he is indispensable," he said. "Man is like a stone thrown into the water. For a moment there is a ripple, then all is as before. But I shall not vanish away without a trace. Should I perish in the war to which I march this night, my death shall be a glorious one, my grave wreathed with laurel, though no one will come to pay tribute of love and tears; for a king is never loved, and when he dies is never wept for, all the world being too busily engaged in greeting his successor."

"But you are loved," cried the disguised woman, carried away by her emotion. "I know a poor woman who lives only by your glance, your words, the sight of you. A woman who would die of joy if loved by you, as she would certainly die of grief if death should seize her hero, her god, her ideal. For the sake of this woman, who has laid her love at your feet, and day by day sacrificed her own heart, thanking God that she may at least lie at your feet—for her sake, have mercy and spare yourself, not plunging wilfully into danger."

The king laid his hand lightly upon the folded hands of the supplicant, whom he knew but too well.

"Do you know the queen so well that you know what transpires in her inmost soul?"

"Yes, I know the queen," she whispered, "and I may read her heart, for she has but one confidant in her misfortune,

and I am she. I alone know how she suffers, and how she loves!"

"If this be so, pray go to her and carry my farewell. Tell her that the king reveres no woman more than herself; that he esteems her so highly as to place her side by side with the women of antiquity; that he is convinced she will say to the king, departing for the field of battle, as the Roman matrons said to their fathers, husbands, and sons, when giving them their shields, 'With it or upon it.' Elizabeth Christine feels and thinks as the Roman matrons did, knows that the King of Prussia can return home only as a victor or a corpse, from the struggle upon which he now enters with his hereditary enemy, the House of Austria. His life is worth little, his honor everything, and this he must maintain though he pay for it with his blood. Say this to Queen Elizabeth Christine, and tell her that her brother and friend will think of her on the day of battle, not to spare himself, but to remember that in that hour a noble soul is praying for him. And with these words, farewell! I must go to my troops. Go to the queen!"

He bowed low before the poor, sobbing woman, and hastened into the dancing-room, where the music was just striking up a waltz.

While the queen retired to her apartment to weep and pray, and the king was hastily donning his uniform, the officers were assembling according to orders in the square below, and Prince Augustus William lingered in the dancing-room; but he was not dancing, and no one suspected that he was there. For he had been seen in costume, unmasked, and had left the dancing-hall to make, as he said, the last preparations for his departure. He had, however, returned in an inconspicuous domino with a mask. No one except Laura knew this, and with her he now stood in a window-niche, concealed by heavy damask curtains from the company.

The moment of parting had come. The officers were taking up their positions in the square, the trumpet blast sounded from the adjacent streets, calling the troops together.

"I must go, dearest," whispered the prince, clasping his weeping sweetheart in his arms.

"Never to return," sighed Laura.

"I shall return, Laura," he said, with a faint smile. "I am not born to die a hero on the field of battle. I know it, I feel it; and still it were, perhaps, much sorrow spared, for that is the quickest, least expected death, much to be preferred to our daily death in life. Yet nothing shall part us," he cried, passionately, "My honor demands to-day's departure, but

this shall be the last. When I return, I shall remind thee of thy holy vows."

Laura shook her head sadly. "I have no cheerful confidence in the future, nor yet the courage to bear the thought of separation from thee," she whispered. "Sometimes when I have been praying it seems to me that God will give me strength to bow in obedience to the commands of the queen mother and marry Count Voss. But when I try to speak the decisive word my lips are closed as if with seals and I can open them only to utter a cry of despair."

The prince clasped her passionately in his arms. "Swear to me that thou wilt never be so faithless and cowardly as to submit to my mother's threats," he said, almost savagely. "Swear to me that thou wilt be true to thy oath which thou hast taken as my bride."

"I swear it," she said, looking, with eyes full of love and tenderness, into his excited face.

"They will make the most of my absence to torture you," he continued. "My mother will storm you with threats and pleas, but if you love me you will find strength to resist them. My mother does not yet know that it is I whom you bless with your love. She thinks it is, if not the king, then one of the margraves or the young Prince of Brunswick who holds your heart in his possession. But any accident may betray our love and then her rage will be frightful. She will do anything, everything to separate us, will scorn no intrigue to attain her end. Believe no report, no letter, no message—believe me only, my spoken word. I shall not write, for my letters might be found. I shall send no messenger, for he might betray me. If I should fall in battle I shall, if God is merciful to me, find strength to give some pitying friend a greeting for you, for then our love need no longer fear the eye of the world, the wrath of the king, the cunning of my mother. I shall not write, but my thoughts will be with you constantly."

"And if you should fall, God will be merciful to me and deliver me out of this world which is but a grave for me," she whispered, clinging to him.

The prince kissed her brow reverently, and, drawing a ring from his finger, fastened it upon hers.

"This is our betrothal ring," he said. "Now you are mine, for you wear my ring. It is the first link in the chain which shall bind you now to me for all our lives. But listen! Do you hear the trumpets, the officers' hurrahs? The king is in the square and must be looking for me in amazement. I must go to the king. Farewell, beloved, farewell!"

He did not look at her again. He emerged carefully from behind the curtains, attracting no attention, passed the procession of masqueraders, who, obedient to the king's express command, continued their merriment undisturbed by the military preparations below. In the cabinet he threw off the domino which had concealed his uniform, and, seizing his helmet, hastened through the halls and down the stairs to the square. There stood the king, surrounded by his generals and officers. All eyes were fastened upon him. Every eye, every will, every trifling wish, was subordinated. He alone ruled.

Tall and brave, he stood in their midst, his handsome face beaming enthusiasm, his eyes gleaming, a smile playing upon his lips. Behind him stood the princes and generals, Prince Anhalt-Dessau, old Zoethen von Winterfeldt, and the adjutants, and above them all, illuminated by countless multitudes of torches, waved the flags whose new gold-embroidered inscription, "Pro gloria et patria," shone like a star in the dark background.

Frederick raised his sword, greeted the fluttering flags, and opened his speech.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am about to enter upon a war in which I have no allies beyond your bravery and good-will. My cause is just and I seek the support of fortune. Remember the glory which your ancestors won upon the battle-fields of Warsaw, Fehrbellin, and in the invasion of Prussia. Your fate is in your own hands. Honor and distinction await you. But I need not awaken your ambition. It inspires you sufficiently. We shall attack troops which, under Prince Eugene, enjoyed the greatest reputation. True, that prince is no more, but our fame as victors will be the greater because we have to measure our prowess with such a foe. Adieu. Depart. I shall follow you without delay to the field of glory."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE RETURN.

The young king's invasion of Silesia was a bloodless one. No other attack was made than that of a single general upon the cheek of a guardsman of the gate of Breslau, who refused the officer admission to the city. The general punished him with a sounding box upon the ear, and the vanquished

private tumbled backward, permitting the general with his staff to enter unhindered the conquered capital of Silesia, a province which was made to feel, only by means of countless taxes, that it belonged to Austria, and which for more than a century no member of the royal House of Austria had visited. Nor did Breslau decline to accept the handsome young king who greeted everyone so kindly as he marched into the city, had a winning smile for the ladies at the windows, and assured the Silesians in a manuscript proclamation that he was come with no hostile intention, and would maintain the rights, privileges, and liberties of each and all.

The bond that united the rich and fruitful province of Silesia with Austria had long been loosened, and the prophecy of the King of Prussia made in Krossen had found prompt fulfilment. As he entered Krossen from Berlin with his army, the great bell of the cathedral came crashing down, carrying with it a part of the old church. A superstitious terror ran through the Prussian army. Even the old generals were troubled, and interpreted the omen unfavorably for Prussia.

The king alone smiled, and as Cæsar exclaimed, "I hold thee, Africa!" when he stumbled on landing, so Frederick, when the bell fell, exclaimed, "This fall means that the mighty, the House of Austria, shall be laid low!"

The Prussian army had been welcomed in Breslau not alone by the Protestant inhabitants, who had long suffered under the heaviest religious compulsion, and to whom the Prussian King immediately granted complete freedom of conscience, but by the Catholics as well, including the priests and even the Jesuits, whom he had won over by his spirit and amiability. No one cherished a regret for the lost Austrian supremacy, and the Prussians soon became the favorites of the Silesian people, especially of the women, who welcomed the sturdy Prussian soldiers to their hearts and hastened to ratify the prompt alliance before the priest. Hundreds of weddings took place in the six weeks which the king spent in Silesia. It soon became the fashion for a Silesian maid to claim a Prussian lover, and the taller and statelier he was the prouder and happier the maid. Thus Bielfeld met one day a pretty young woman, weeping bitterly and wringing her hands. When he asked her the cause of her tears she answered, naïvely, "I promised a week ago to-day to marry a Prussian grenadier five feet nine inches tall, and I was happy and proud of him. But to-day I might have had a guardsman full six feet two—such a beautiful giant and so rare—and I cannot accept him!"

The King of Prussia won the hearts of the women of the people through his handsome soldiery, those of the ladies of the aristocracy by his own beauty, amiability, and eminent intellect. When he gave the aristocracy of Silesia a ball at Locatelli's, in Breslau, the most distinguished families, formerly most deeply devoted to Austria, all hastened to be present, vying with one another in homage to the young king, who united in his own person the qualities of the hero, the poet, the cavalier, the warrior, the sage, and the youth; who did not drape himself in ceremonies, but seemed to forget, in the presence of the ladies, that he was king, and when he invited one of them to dance, did so as if seeking a favor himself.

And as he won the ladies of the aristocracy by his amiability, he bound the gentlemen with titles and decorations, which he strewed with lavish hands among them. "I dreamed last night," he said, laughingly, to Pöllnitz, "that I created several princes, counts, and barons here in Breslau. Help me make my dream a reality by naming some families whom I can ennoble." Pöllnitz named several families, and the Prince of Pless, the Count of Hochberg, and several others were the products of this work of royal creation.

Silesia and Breslau were for the present the undisputed possession of Prussia. The king might return to Berlin, the prologue of the great drama known as the Seven Years' War was at an end, and the king could repose among the arts and sciences in the quiet enjoyment of social pleasures, collecting his forces for the approaching first act of the tragedy whose hero he proposed to be.

Berlin received the returning king with loud rejoicings, greeting with pride the ruler who was, in the eyes of arrogant Austria, no longer the little Marquis of Brandenburg, but a king who would accept no more Austrian prescriptions, being, on the contrary, about to dictate to the daughter of the Cæsars himself.

With gleaming eyes the queen mother, accompanied by the princesses, proceeded to meet the returning victorious sons. With eyes veiled with tears did Elizabeth Christine welcome her returning husband, who had for her only a cold, ceremonious bow.

Graun had composed a cantata for the day, and not the newly arrived Italian singer Laura Farinella only, but the pupil of Graun and Quantz, the German singer Anna Pricker, was about to make her *début* at the court concert.

This was the decisive day for Anna. What cared she that

her father lay groaning in his mortal illness? What cared she that her brother William had not entered the parental house for nearly three days, while no one knew where he was? Nor did she mourn her mother's recent death. She had but one thought, one longing—to become a famous singer, not for her own sake, but only to win the heart of a man—whom she neither loved nor respected, however—who possessed the great advantage of being a baron and influential at court.

The king had been back in Berlin two days, and Pöllnitz had already called upon Anna. He had never been so tender, for he now regarded as a very desirable possibility that which had formerly seemed to him inconceivable—a marriage with the tailor's daughter, Anna Pricker. Count Rhedern's example had given him courage. What the king had granted the merchant's daughter he would not refuse to the daughter of the court tailor, especially if she had opened the palace doors in advance by her exceptionial musical gifts.

If, therefore, Anna's voice should please the king and receive his praise, Pöllnitz would marry her as soon as possible, for his creditors were most intrusive, persecuting the poor baron in every way, and even threatening him with prosecution and imprisonment. So Pöllnitz had ventured to remind the king of the help promised on the return from Silesia, but in vain. The king had replied, "I have not yet seen a battlefield and am only at the beginning of the war, for which I shall need more money than my treasury contains. So wait until the day comes that I described, for then first can I think of keeping my promise."

The king was unusually gay and condescending. He had met his books and flute with real delight, and on entering the library felt that he was returning to his dearest home. He wrote verses; enthusiastic letters to Voltaire, whom he still revered and in a measure worshipped, though Voltaire's six days' sojourn in Rheinsberg, whither the king had come from the march from Breslau, had somewhat modified Frederick's deification of the French poet. The king, who had said of Voltaire after the first meeting at Castle Moylan, "He is eloquent as Cicero, delightful as Pliny, wise as Agrippa; in a word, he unites in himself all the virtues and all the talents of the three greatest men of antiquity," now called the author of the "Henriade" *un fou*. It grieved him to find that the great mind was united with a mean and selfish heart. He who had loved Voltaire as a friend was compelled to admit that the great man's friendship was a possession to be purchased with gold, not love. And he who, a few months before, had com-

pared Voltaire to Cæsar, Pliny, and Agrippa, now said to Jordan: "This miser, Voltaire, shall drink the dregs of his greed. He has thirteen hundred thalers to receive from me. Each one of the six days he spent with me cost me five hundred and fifty dollars. I call that paying *un fou* over much. I think no court fool was ever paid so well."

To-day the king was to have the pleasure of hearing his own Italian singer. He need now no longer engage Italian singers from Dresden, as he had had to do at the time of his father's funeral obsequies.

At last Graun gave his orchestra the signal for the overture. The king was so eager for the songs that he had no ears for the simple and touching music of his court composer, while Quantz's masterly solo won but a single bravo from him. At last the singers came, and the chorus began.

Pöllnitz's heart beat loudly as he gazed at Anna, standing, proud and grave, dressed in a most resplendent French costume, near Laura Farinella, and observing the company as calmly as though the sight were an accustomed one. The chorus came to an end, and Laura Farinella had the first aria. Anna Pricker would gladly have slain her for having the presumption to sing before herself, and she nearly cried aloud with rage as she saw the king nod and smile, while the whole company dutifully looked charmed, and even Pöllnitz forced a happy expression. The Farinella saw it too, and the royal approval inflamed her still further.

"Delicious! superb!" said the king, aloud, when the song died away.

"Glorious! divine!" cried Pöllnitz, and, the signal thus given, the court chimed in with half-suppressed murmurs of applause.

Anna Pricker felt herself turn pale, her feet tremble. She would have strangled the Italian with pleasure. But she had courage to take up the challenge. She said to herself, "I shall conquer her yet, for she is but a wretched charlatan, and her voice is thin as a thread and sharp as a needle, while mine is full and mighty as an organ. And as to her *fioritures*, I understand them as well as she does."

So she took up the notes with calm assurance, to await the moment when the *ritournelle* should cease. She fixed her eyes upon the leader's baton and smiled at his anxious face. The song began. The voice rose full and mighty above the orchestra, but the king sat silent and motionless, giving no slightest sign of approval. Anna saw this, and the voice which had not trembled with fear shook with rage. But she meant

to awaken the king's admiration at all costs, if only by the power and scope of her voice. He should applaud her as he had applauded the Farinella. She summoned all her forces and sent forth the tones from her chest with immoderate power, making such effort that she felt as though her poor chest must burst. At last she had the proud triumph of seeing the king smile. But it was still not the smile with which he had greeted the Farinella. He turned to Pöllnitz. "What is the name of the female who is roaring so atrociously?" he asked.

Pöllnitz shrugged his shoulders. He felt as though all his creditors were seizing him by the throat.

"Sire," he said, "I think it is Anna Pricker."

"The daughter of the court tailor?" asked the king.

"I think so, your Majesty," panted Pöllnitz.

The king did not smile now. He laughed in spite of the *fioritures* of the singer, who had seen Pöllnitz's shrug and vowed sanguinary vengeance upon him for it. He laughed, but let Anna Pricker toil and perspire as she might, he would not and did not applaud.

The last note had died away, and with palpitating heart she waited for the king's applause. It did not come. A deep silence reigned. Even Pöllnitz was mute.

"Are you certain that the roaring signorina is the court tailor's daughter?" asked the king, and, as Pöllnitz replied in the affirmative, the king continued, with another laugh: "Poor Pricker can force a camel through the eye of a needle more easily than he can make a songstress of his daughter. The Germans cannot sing, and it is an incomprehensible blunder of Graun to bring such a singer before us."

"Sire, she is a pupil of Quantz," said Pöllnitz, "and Quantz has often assured me that she would make a great singer."

"Ah! she is a pupil of Quantz!" repeated the king, looking at the teacher, who sat before the leader's desk, with a frightful frown. "We must try to pacify Quantz, and if this ma'm'selle sings again, I'll applaud a little out of consideration for him."

But Anna Pricker sang no more. She had sunk into her chair, struggling to keep down the tears that *would* rise to her eyes. With a cry, she sank fainting to the floor.

"What cry was that?" inquired the king, "and what is the meaning of the movement there among the singers?"

"Sire, the singer, Anna Pricker, seems to have fallen in a fainting fit," said Pöllnitz.