

CHAPTER XLIX.

REVELATIONS.

THREE days had passed and Fritz Wendel was still waiting in vain for a sign, a message from his sweetheart. Day after day he crawled in vain through his subterranean way to the grotto, night after night he lingered in vain under her window. No one among the servants could give him tidings of the fate of poor Louise von Schwerin, who was kept in her room under the strict surveillance of a trusty chamber-maid. The queen had told her ladies that Louise von Schwerin was ill of a contagious rash, and the court physician confirmed the statement, warning the ladies against visiting the patient. So Louise was a neglected, abandoned prisoner, past whose door all the ladies hastened anxiously, fearing scarlet fever. The queen alone seemed to have no apprehension of contagion. She visited the suffering maid of honor daily, remaining a long time in the sick-room. No one suspected the torture which this tender sympathy inflicted upon the little maid of honor, whom the whole court envied for its sake, or what terror seized her whenever the queen entered her room. No one heard the stern threats, or suspected that the queen came, not to minister to the patient, but to subject her to an inexorable cross-questioning.

Louise had consistently defied the queen's threats. She had found courage to keep silence, maintaining an aspect of perfect innocence. She knew very well that she could not betray Laura's secret without seriously compromising herself, and that if the queen should discover Laura's flight, Louise's own relations to poor Fritz Wendel, and the secret meetings, rendered possible by the subterranean path, must all come to light. Louise dreaded being made ridiculous before the whole court by the discovery of her first adventure, and her fear gave her strength to endure the tedium of her imprisonment.

"This cannot last forever," she said to herself. "If I confess nothing and can, therefore, be convicted of nothing, the queen will be convinced some time of my innocence and will let me go."

Fritz Wendel, however, was less patient than his clever sweetheart. He could not endure the anxiety, and when the

fourth day brought him no tidings he determined to speak to the king.

With pert assurance he announced that he had important information to communicate. The king received him at once, dismissing his adjutant at Fritz Wendel's request.

"We are now without witnesses, speak!" said the king.

"I know a secret, your Majesty," said Fritz Wendel, "which affects the honor and the future of the royal family. Your Majesty will pardon me if I sell such a secret only for a high price."

The king's eyes rested with an annihilating glance upon Fritz Wendel's pert face. "Name the price, but do not forget that, if the secret prove not worth it, you may answer with your head, and most certainly with your freedom, for the offence."

"My secret is worth a heavy price, for it will save the Hohenzollern dynasty," said Fritz Wendel. "I will communicate it to your Majesty whenever your Majesty is so gracious as to grant me my price."

"Before I do that I must know what you demand," said the king, restraining his anger with difficulty.

"I demand the commission of a major and the hand of Fräulein von Schwerin."

At first the king looked at the impertinent boy almost with horror. Then an expression of pity spread over his features. "He is mad," thought the king; "I must be considerate of his whim!"

"I grant your price," he said aloud. "Speak!"

Fritz Wendel began. He betrayed to the king Prince William's engagement and his plan of flight. He was so exact and so positive in all his statements and explanations that King Frederick perceived the mistake of supposing him mad, and recognized in his story a threatening and terrible danger.

When, therefore, Fritz Wendel finished, the king paced several times up and down the room, his arms folded behind his back. Then he paused before Fritz Wendel, seeming to read the lad's inmost thought with his penetrating glance.

"Can you write?" asked the king.

"I can write German, French, English, and Latin," replied Fritz Wendel, proudly.

"Sit down there, and write in German what I dictate. Does Fräulein von Schwerin know your writing?"

"She has at least thirty letters from me, sire."

"Write her the thirty-first as I dictate it."

It was a brief, concise, but very loving and urgent letter that the king dictated. In it Fritz Wendel begged his sweet-heart to keep her word, and flee with him on the same day on which the prince and Laura had agreed to depart, to win the prince's assistance at Oranienburg, and secure the pastor's blessing. He fixed the hour for the flight, and called upon her to leave the palace at the time assigned and meet him at the gate.

"Now sign it," commanded the king, "and seal the letter as usual. So! Give me the letter, I will myself forward it to its destination."

"And my price, your Majesty?" asked Fritz Wendel, timidly, for the king's frowning brow threatened a storm.

"You shall have the price which your treachery and madness deserve," said the king, in that dreadful tone which made all tremble who heard it. "Were all these things true which you have had the impudence to relate, you would deserve to hang for a double crime—for treason to a royal prince, whose secrets you had learned by eavesdropping, to buy your own prosperity at a cost of the happiness of two noble souls. And you would be guilty of the shameful and unpardonable crime of seducing and ruining an innocent child far above you in birth and breeding. But, luckily for you, all these things are mere outgrowths of a sickly fancy, and instead of punishing I simply cure you. You will be placed in an insane asylum until you recover enough to recognize these mad lies as such. Then I shall pardon you when you are well, but not until then!"

So speaking the king rang the bell, and, turning to the adjutants who entered at once, he said: "Convey this person to the nearest sentinel and have him sent instantly to the military hospital, where he must be placed in the insane department. Let no one speak with him. Should he begin his crazy prating again, inform me at once of the fact. Now go!"

"Have mercy, your Majesty! Have mercy!" stammered Fritz Wendel. "Do not put me in an insane asylum; I will retract, will believe that I only dreamed it all."

The king signalled the adjutants, and they conducted the weeping Fritz Wendel out of the royal presence, to give him over to the sentinel. The king looked after him with an expression of profound sorrow.

"So it is reserved for a wretched gardener's lad and a licentious maid of honor to rescue the house of Hohenzollern from a catastrophe, and to rob the crown prince of the joy of life!

In spite of all my power, my greatness, and my army, Prince Augustus William would have made his escape to commit a crime which God and his conscience might well condone, but the king never. Poor William! Your heart will be down-trodden as once my own. Once, scarcely nine years ago. And I seem to have lived a century since then, and to have a coat of ice about my heart. And this coat grows harder day by day, and the very men do most to harden it whom I would so gladly love, and am forced more and more to despise."

Sorrowfully, with bowed head, he paced up and down, his features twitching with excitement. It lasted but a short time, however. "I will not be cruel," he said. "Though I must destroy his happiness, I will not drag it into the dust and dirt as they did mine, when they thrust my friend upon the guillotine, and lashed a poor, innocent child through the streets for the crime of loving the Crown Prince of Prussia. No, no, Fräulein von Pannewitz shall never know the fate of Doris Ritter."

He rang again, called for his carriage, put into his pocket the letter Fritz Wendel had written, and drove to the queen mother. A long, secret conference followed. The ladies in the adjoining room repeatedly heard the loud tones of the queen's voice, which, however, she instantly lowered, baffling all their attempts at eavesdropping. They even thought they heard her weeping, not with pain but sheer rage, for she uttered dreadful threats, and her voice became loud and harsh.

At last the bell rang, and Laura von Pannewitz was summoned to the queen. The page returned with the information that the maid of honor was not in her room, having gone to Schönhausen to Queen Elizabeth Christine.

"Then I will go thither," said the king, "and your majesty may be convinced that the queen will support me in the effort to separate this unfortunate couple in the most tender way."

"Ah! you sympathize with them even yet, my son?" said the queen, with a shrug.

"Madame, I sympathize with those who are forced to sacrifice their best and noblest human feelings to their royal duty," and he took his leave.

The king reached the palace gate just as the maid of honor was entering the grounds. He stopped, ordered the coachman to pace up and down the highway, and entered the grounds alone and unseen. With quick steps he crossed the park, and approached the small side-door through which, as

he well knew, a series of unoccupied rooms gave access to the queen's apartment. Expecting to find her in her boudoir, he was about to lift the portière, when he heard a woman's voice, broken and tearful, and another apparently comforting and consoling the first speaker.

The king withdrew his hand from the portière, and seated himself in the arm-chair near the door.

"Let us listen a little," he thought. "Women are always coquettes in the presence of men, let us hear what they do when alone. I shall become better acquainted with this dangerous Laura, and learn better how to work upon her, than in a long interview."

"Madame," said Laura, "your prophecies are promptly verified. The flowers of our love are faded, and that love itself on the verge of its tomb!"

"Poor Laura," said the queen, with a wan smile, "it required no prophetic gift to foresee this. No flowers grow beside the throne, but thorns only, and you were so blinded that you mistook them for flowers."

"My heart is torn and wounded by the thorns, and I hope it may bleed away. Oh! my queen, if you could fathom my despair you would have pity, and not be so cruel as to command me to renounce my happiness. If it were I alone and my mad wishes, I should not listen to the cry in my soul, but should go and do my duty. But the prince loves me. Oh! madame, think how great and strong that love must be when I have courage to boast of it. Yes, he loves me, and if I abandon him I shall not be unhappy alone. His tears and his despair will be my accusers, for I shall have robbed him of his happiness. Oh! I cannot bear the thought that his lips might pronounce a curse upon me."

"If they did so now, they would one day bless you the more," said the queen, "for he will perceive that you grieve him now because your love was great and holy enough to sacrifice itself to spare the beloved one misfortune in later years. For, however, you may love one another now, a day will come when he will require of you the future and the claim to the throne sacrificed for your sake. He will make his loss a cause of reproach, and never pardon you the weakness of yielding to his wishes. For, believe me, in the hearts of men there is but one lasting passion, and that is ambition. Love is for them the amusement of the passing hour, nothing more."

"Then let me die, for life is not worth having if this be true!" cried Laura.

"Life, my poor child, is not a pleasure, but a duty we must bear. You must not try to escape it, but if your sorrow is great your will must be yet stronger."

"What must I do? what is the duty I must take upon me? My fate is in your hands. Tell me, what shall I do?"

"Conquer yourself, Laura, renounce your love, follow the voice that spoke within you urging you to come to me."

"Ah! madame, you do not know what you require. Your pure heart knows no love."

"You say I know no love!" cried the queen, passionately. "You little know that my life is one long renunciation! Yes, I have loved, Laura, a sadder love than you will ever know, for I love and my love is not requited. I am telling you what no one save God alone has ever known. And I speak of this to you to comfort you and give you strength to bear your sorrow. I love my husband with the passion of a young girl, with the torture of the condemned who see Paradise before them and may never enter it. All my thought and all my heart are his. But he is not mine, my passion leaves him cold. There was a time when I thought it impossible to bear this torture, when my youth rebelled at being forced, like Tantalus, to bear and suffer, a time when I longed to give my crown for the right to weep in solitude. But the king willed it otherwise. He required me to remain at his side as his queen only, not his wife. And I, Laura, loved him so that I found strength to make this frightful sacrifice, not letting him know that my own heart lies crushed beneath his throne. Now, Laura, would you tell me still that I know nothing of love, have no means of measuring the sacrifice I demand of you?"

With tear-stained face the queen spread her arms and pressed the young girl to her heart, both weeping bitterly.

In the anteroom sat the king. His face was pale and his eye less clear than usual. He bent low over the knob of his stick, and suddenly upon its gold there gleamed a diamond, costlier, rarer than any jewel.

"Verily," he murmured, softly, "there is something exalted, noble in the heart of woman. I bow in all humility before it, but I cannot compel my heart. What is dead cannot be revived, and the buried comes nevermore to life!"

"You have conquered me, my Queen," said Laura, after a long pause. "I will deserve your friendship and respect. My love shall never reproach me with selfishness. I am ready for renunciation. I shall not obey his call, not flee with him, and when I know that he is waiting for me will lean upon you

and beseech you to pray God with me soon to deliver me from this torture."

"Not so, not so, my Laura," said the queen, with a sad smile. "You must make no half-sacrifice. It is not enough to renounce your beloved, you must build up an eternal barrier between yourself and him. You must marry, and set the prince an example of self-abnegation."

"Marry," sighed Laura. "Oh! Queen, it is a frightful sacrifice that you demand of me. To marry without love, and, doing so, bear the prince's reproaches of infidelity!"

"But I shall not be silent," said the queen, "I shall tell him of your sorrow and your great soul; and though he must cease to love his betrothed, he can revere her still as the guardian angel of his being."

"You promise me this? You will tell him that I was not faithless? that I do not marry him because I love him more than my own self?"

"I promise you this, Laura!"

"Then I will bow my neck under this yoke and bear my fate. I will accept Count Voss, and I leave you now to go to inform the queen mother that I yield to her wish."

"And I will accompany you to the queen mother," said the king, pushing back the portière and approaching the ladies, who were staring at him breathlessly. He approached Laura, and, bowing low before her, said:

"My brother is truly to be pitied that he is but a prince, and not a free man to live according to the promptings of his heart. For a wretched crown he must sacrifice the holiest possession, a noble woman's heart. You, Fräulein, will never envy us. But when, one day, you see my brother in the purple mantle of his kingship, when his people greet him with rejoicings, you will say to yourself 'It is I who made him king.' Come, I will escort you to the queen mother, and we shall tell her we should count ourselves happy were you our sister. I shall tell her too," turning to the queen, "that it was not our will which determined Fräulein von Pannewitz, but the noble eloquence of Queen Elizabeth, whom the Prussian folk already call their guardian angel, and who has now become one for the Royal House of Prussia."

He offered the queen his hand, but she did not take it; she looked at him, deathly pale, and, pointing to the portière, asked, breathlessly:

"You were there? You heard all that we said?"

The king approached her, and, placing his arm about her neck, whispered:

"I was there and heard all. I heard that I am a poor, blind man, to whom a kingdom is offered and who cannot accept it."

The queen, pale and faint, uttered a cry and leaned her head upon his shoulder for support.

"You will despise me," she said.

He looked long and silently at the pale face quivering with pain, and a ray of boundless pity lighted up his eyes.

"I have learned a noble secret this day," he said. "A secret which ought to be known, perhaps, to God alone. From this day I feel myself a priest of the holy of holies, and I will keep your secret as my most precious treasure. I swear it to you, and seal my promise with this kiss pressed upon your lips by a mouth which never again will touch the lips of a woman."

He bent over and pressed a warm kiss upon the queen's lips. Elizabeth, who had so often bravely met misfortune, had no strength to resist the painful bliss of this moment. She uttered a slight cry and fainted away. When she revived she was alone. The king had called her women about her, and, offering Fräulein von Pannewitz his hand, led her to the wagon and accompanied her to Berlin.

Elizabeth Christine was once more alone. But her eyes beamed with a holy joy, and she whispered:

"I thank thee, my God, for the joy of this hour. I feel his kiss upon my lips, and with it he has consecrated them, that they never again complain or murmur. He shall be reminded of me now and then," she said. "I shall become an author and an artist, to be something more than a poor, outcast queen. He shall find my books upon his table, my pictures upon his walls. Will that not force him to think of me kindly, now and then?"

CHAPTER L.

SURPRISES.

On the day of the king's conference with the queen mother the retinue was suddenly surprised by the news that the court physician had made a mistake in his diagnosis of Fräulein von Schwerin's illness; that it was not scarlet fever, but a mere nettle rash, of which she was now wholly cured. The little maid of honor therefore resumed her usual place in the circle

of ladies in waiting, and, except a slight pallor, there was no change in her outward appearance. No one was more astonished at this sudden cure than the little lady herself. With a sort of horror she observed that the queen had resumed her former gracious aspect, that the events of the past few days seemed wholly forgotten, and all former suspicion banished as by a miracle. At first Louise thought this all a trap, was very cautious, avoided going alone into the garden, and was very glad Fritz Wendel was so prudent as never to pass her window, and no longer to deposit his daily bouquet there. She soon observed, however, that she was subjected to no surveillance whatever. She therefore soon abandoned herself once more to her careless whims and childish fancies, and resumed her walks and greenhouse visits. But nowhere was Fritz Wendel to be seen. His sudden disappearance troubled her, awakened her longings afresh.

Louise von Schwerin, who had in the lonely stillness of the past few days begun to blush for her flirtation with the poor gardener's lad and repent of her mad love, now experienced all the fervor and might of her former passion.

"I shall conquer all obstacles," said the young girl. "I will play my romance to its end. Fritz Wendel loves me more passionately than any count or baron will ever love me, and the only reason for my not seeing him now is that he is suffering for his love. He is certainly shut up somewhere. But I shall free him, and flee with him far away into the wide world where no one will scoff at our love."

Her head filled with these thoughts, she returned from one of her walks in the garden, when, on entering her room, she observed one of those splendid bouquets upon her table which the handsome gardener had always brought her. In the midst of the bouquet was the letter which the king had dictated and Fritz Wendel written, calling upon her to flee with the gardener's lad. This was the appointed day. To-night at nine they were to depart. Louise hesitated not a moment. But how should she escape attendance at the toilet of the queen mother before the ball? At the hour for the morning walk she became suddenly ill, excused herself, and went to bed. The queen herself came to inquire for the little maid, expressing so much sympathy that Louise felt perfectly safe, and accepted, without a suspicion, the queen's proposition that she remain in her room instead of going to the ball. She had, therefore, no obstacles to overcome, and could busy herself with her preparations for the flight. When evening came an indescribable, vague apprehension of evil overwhelmed the

little maid. So near the final step, she experienced an anxious hesitation, and trembled at her own daring. Then the decisive hour came. She seemed to see her sweetheart's beseeching eyes, to hear his urgent voice. Forgetting all other considerations, she wrapped herself in her mantle, drew her hood tight over her head, and flew along the corridor and down the stairs to the gate of the palace.

Her heart beat high as she stepped into the street. There was a tall figure coming directly toward her. She could not see its face, but it was certainly he. Now he was at her side, whispering the word agreed upon. She answered with a trembling voice. The young man grasped her hand, drawing her rapidly toward the right hand corner of the square. There stood a wagon in readiness. The young man lifted her in, sprang in after her, and slammed the door.

"Forward!"

The wagon rolled away as if on the wings of the wind. Not a word was spoken. The twain sat with palpitating hearts, side by side. But Louise found her lover's silence painful and did not understand how he, who was always so tender and loving, could sit there so cold and indifferent. She felt as though she must escape from this unfeeling lover, who had not a word for her, who certainly must despise her for having followed him. When she thought of that a slight cry escaped her, and she sprang up to open the carriage door. His powerful hand checked her.

"We are not there yet, my Fräulein," he whispered.

She shuddered. Fritz Wendel called her "my Fräulein," and his voice sounded cold and strange. She leaned her head back upon the cushion of the carriage, stretching out her hand, pleading for help. The lover felt the hand upon his shoulder, seized it, pressed it to his lips, and remained silent. A horrible anxiety settled down upon the girl. She buried her face in her hands and wept aloud. The young man did not attempt to quiet her.

At last the horses stopped.

"We are at the place," whispered Louise's escort, springing from the wagon and lifting her out.

"Where are we?" she asked, trembling, and quite convinced that they were about to enter a prison or some remote place of banishment.

"We are in Oranienburg, and there is the church where the pastor awaits us."

He led her hastily to the church. The door was open and Louise saw candles burning in the chandelier above the altar.

The pastor stood with open book before the altar and from the organ came the first notes of the choral. The young man led Louise not to the altar but to the sacristy. There were candles burning there and a myrtle-wreath and lace veil lay upon the table.

"This is your bridal outfit," said the young man, the hood of his mantle still concealing his face. He loosened his mantle and reached her veil and wreath. Then at last he let his hood fall and took off his mantle. Louise uttered a cry of amazement and horror. It was not Fritz Wendel who stood before her, but a totally unknown young stranger in full-dress uniform.

"Pardon," he said. "It is by command of the king. He ordered me to be silent, to come here, and to give you this note before the ceremony. It is from the king's own hand."

Louise seized the king's note and opened it hastily. It was very short and concise. But it filled the maid of honor with horror. It read as follows:

"Since you wish to marry at all costs, I will fulfil your wish with consideration for your family. But the natty gardener's lad, Fritz Wendel, is unable to become your husband, because he is in the insane asylum. I have, therefore, selected a nice-looking young officer of good family, with a considerable fortune, and commanded him to marry you. If he pleases you the pastor will unite you at once and you will accompany your spouse to his garrison at Brandenburg immediately; if he does not please you, he has orders to re-enter the wagon and escort you to your mother, where you will have time to reflect upon your recklessness.

FREDERICK."

Louise read and reread the king's letter, and then read it again. Then she looked at the young man standing opposite her and watching her with smiling, questioning glances. She found him young, handsome, and apparently amiable, much more imposing, too, in his uniform than the young gardener in smock-frock, while Fritz Wendel's eyes were not a whit more sparkling and eloquent than those of the young cavalier.

"Well?" he asked, with a smile. "Have you decided, my Fräulein? Will you confer upon me the happiness of becoming the envied and happy groom of Fräulein von Schwerin, or do you reject me, thus robbing me of that great happiness?"

She looked into his eyes and heard his words with bated

breath. His voice was soft and gentle, not rough and hard like Fritz Wendel's, and it touched Louise's heart like music.

"Would you wish to marry me, even without the king's command?" asked Louise, with a smile.

"I would marry you in spite of the king and the whole world," said the young officer, "for the moment I saw you I fell in love with you."

Louise gave him her hand with a smile. "Very well," she said; "let us obey the king's command. He orders us to marry. Let us begin with that. Then we will see whether we can love one another without the king's command."

Young Captain von Kleist kissed her hand and laid the myrtle-wreath upon her head.

"Come," he said, "the priest is waiting, and I long to call you my wife." He led the fourteen-year-old maid of honor to the altar; the priest opened the sacred book and performed the marriage ceremony.

In the chapel of the king's palace in Berlin another wedding took place at the same hour. Before the altar stood Laura von Pannewitz and Count Voss. The king himself conducted the bride and Queen Elizabeth Christine had given her hand to Count Voss. The whole court witnessed the ceremony.

Prince Augustus William alone was absent. While Laura von Pannewitz was vowing eternal fidelity to Count Voss in the chapel, the prince was awaiting her appearance at the palace gate. The appointed time was past and gone. A torturing fear fell upon the lover. Had the king discovered the plan? Was it he who kept Laura back? Or had she forgotten the hour, turned faithless to her vows? Trembling with rage, anxiety, and fear, the prince mounted the palace stairs to return to the halls and find his beloved at all costs. In his anger and love he had even determined to carry her off by force.

Throwing off his mantle he entered the anteroom. No one noticed him. All eyes were turned toward the great hall. Thither the prince betook himself. The whole gorgeous court company was assembled, glittering with diamonds, orders, and gold and silver embroidery. The prince, however, saw nothing of all this. He saw only the tall figure and pale face beneath the myrtle-wreath and drooping bridal veil in the middle of the room. It was she, Laura von Pannewitz, and the sweetly smiling young man at her side was Count Voss.

What did it all mean? Why was the royal family surrounding Augustus William's betrothed, and why was she here in such array? Why is Elizabeth Christine giving her a

kiss and a diadem of diamonds? Why is the king giving his hand to Count Voss, who forthwith presses his lips to the same?

Prince Augustus William understood no single feature of the whole scene; he seemed paralyzed, tortured by evil dreams. With staring eyes he watched the newly married couple receiving the good wishes of the court. But the king's sharp eye had caught sight of him, and, rapidly passing through the crowd of courtiers, who reverently made way, he hastened to the prince.

"One word, brother," he whispered, and slipping his hand through the prince's arm drew him to the cabinet. "Now, my brother," he said, when the door closed behind them, "show yourself worthy of your ancestors and your royal avocation. Show that you deserve to be the ruler of a great people by mastering yourself. Fräulein von Pannewitz can never be yours. She is the wife of Count Voss."

The prince uttered so heart-rending a cry that the king himself turned pale and was filled with deep compassion.

"Courage, my poor brother," he said. "What you suffer, I, too, have suffered; everyone must suffer more or less who is called to assume a conspicuous place in the world. A prince has no right to live according to the dictates of his heart. He belongs to his people and to history, and must subordinate himself to both."

"It is not true, not possible!" stammered the prince. "Laura is mine; she can never belong to another. I demand no crown, no throne. I wish my Laura. It is not true that she has married Count Voss."

"It is true," whispered a broken, tearful voice behind him.

The prince turned hastily. His wild glance met Laura's calm, sad eyes resting upon him with an expression of indescribable love. Queen Elizabeth Christine had brought the young Countess Voss thither in accordance with an agreement with the king, and had then withdrawn into an adjoining apartment.

"I will grant your dying love its parting glow, brother," the king had said, gently. "Take leave of the departing sun, but do not forget that when the sun has set the stars remain." He nodded kindly and followed his wife into the adjoining room.

The prince was alone with Laura. What they said no one ever knew. At first the king heard the angry voice of his brother. Then the same voice grew soft and mild. In half an hour they re-entered the cabinet. The prince stood in the

middle of the room, Laura opposite him. Each looked into the pale, tearless face of the other; their hands were clasped.

"Farewell, my prince," said Laura, sadly. "I go away at once with my husband. Farewell; we shall never meet again."

"We shall meet again," said the prince, with a wan smile—"we shall meet again, but in another world. I shall await you there, Laura."

One more pressure of the hands. Then they both turned away. Laura returned to the adjoining room, where Count Voss awaited her.

"Come, my husband," she said, "I am ready to follow you, and, be assured, I shall be a true and devoted wife."

"My brother," said Prince Augustus William to the king, "I rebel no longer. Make the arrangements. I shall marry the Princess of Brunswick, according to your wish."

CHAPTER LI.

DISMISSAL OF BARON VON PÖLLNITZ.

THE morning after the ball, Baron Pöllnitz entered the king's cabinet. He was embarrassed and depressed, and for the first time in his life he could find no words for what he wanted to say. The king's eyes rested upon him with contemptuous irony.

"I believe Pöllnitz is about to make me his father confessor; his face has a poor, miserable-sinner expression."

"Sire," said Pöllnitz, "I should not mind that if I were not a poor sinner," answered Pöllnitz, with a shrug.

"Oh! the debts again. I am really weary of this litany, and forbid all further complaints. What one has brought upon himself one must bear."

"Then your Majesty will not be so gracious as to assist me?"

"God forefend that I should misuse money for a Pöllnitz that I need for soldiers and cannon," cried the king, gravely.

"Then," said Pöllnitz, softly and with hesitation, "I am obliged to beg your Majesty, most graciously, to confer my dismissal upon me."

"Your dismissal! Have you, then, found in the moon an idiotic prince willing to pay still higher for your wretched jokes and malicious tale-bearing than the King of Prussia?"

"Not in the moon, sir, is the foolish creature to be found, but in the German Empire, and it is no prince, but a pretty young girl, who thinks herself fortunate to become the Baroness Pöllnitz, and have the privilege of paying my debts."

"And they leave her at large!" cried the king. "But perhaps they reckon the house of Baron Pöllnitz an institution calculated to cure her. Has the girl who is rich enough to pay Pöllnitz's debts no relatives?"

"Both her parents are living, sire, and both bid me welcome as their son. My betrothed lives in Nuremberg and is the daughter of a distinguished patrician family."

"And buys you because she finds Baron von Pöllnitz a charming toy. Well, I have no objection, and as to the dismissal, I grant it with all my heart. Sit down. I will dictate it and you may write the document."

He beckoned Pöllnitz to the writing-table, and dictated the following to the baron, who wrote it, shaking with fury:

"We, Frederick, etc., hereby make known that Baron von Pöllnitz, native of Berlin, descended, so far as we know, from honorable parents, body-servant to our sainted grandfather of worthy memory, servant to the Duchess of Orleans, also departed, captain in the Spanish service, riding-teacher in the army of the deceased emperor, body-servant to the pope, also the Duke of Brunswick, standard-bearer to the Dukes of Weimar, body-servant to our blessed father of happy memory; finally, master of ceremonies in our service, being wholly overwhelmed by the stream of most honorable military titles deluging his person, weary of the world, and tempted by the bad example of Chamberlain Montaulieu, who ran away from our service a short time since, has requested his honorable dismissal, with a recommendation for the maintenance of his good name and reputation.

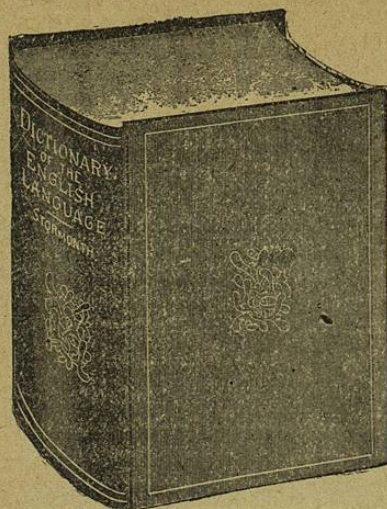
"Since we see no reason for declining to give our testimony to his worthy behavior and the important services which he has rendered the royal court by his jests, and to the pastime he has afforded our blessed father during nine long years, we do not hesitate to declare that during the whole time that he has passed in our service he has been neither a highwayman nor a pickpocket, nor has he dealt in poison; has neither robbed nor otherwise molested maidens, nor seriously injured the honor of any man, but has always comported himself as a gallant gentleman and made fitting use of the gifts which heaven bestowed upon him, attaining the end laid down as a principle for the stage, namely, reproducing the ridiculous in men in an amusing and pleasing manner for their improvement.

"The counsel of Bacchus, too, he has followed in moderation, and carried Christian love so far that he has always left to the peasants the text of Scripture, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' He knows most exactly the anecdotes of our castles and places of recreation and has impressed upon his memory a precise schedule of all our old house-furnishings and has always known how to make himself agreeable and useful to those who perceived the malice of his mind and his lack of goodness of heart.

"We further confer upon the aforementioned baron our certificate that he has never provoked us to anger save when, overstepping in his impudence the limits of respect, he sought to dishonor, in an unworthy and unendurable manner, the ashes of our glorious ancestors.

"Just as, in the most beautiful regions, unfruitful and barren places are to be found, the most beautiful figures have their deformities, and the paintings of the greatest masters are not without their defects, so we accept the foibles and weaknesses of the aforementioned baron and unwillingly grant him the desired dismissal. At the same time we abolish the office which he has filled, in order to destroy the memory thereof among men, being of the opinion that the man does not live who is worthy to occupy it as successor of the aforementioned baron."

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