

Winterfeldt encountered the prince's angry glance with a quiet, cheerful look.

"Your highness does me too much honor in thinking that a poor soldier, such as I am, could be at enmity with a royal empress. What could this Russian empress have done to me, that could call for revenge on my part?"

"What has she done to you?" said the prince, with a mocking smile. "Two things, which man finds hardest to forgive! She outwitted you, and took your riches from you. Ah! general, I fear this war will be in vain, and that you will not be able to take your wife's jewels from St. Petersburg, where the empress retains them."

Winterfeldt subdued his anger, and replied: "You have related us a beautiful fairy tale, prince, a tale from the Arabian Nights, in which there is a talk of jewels and glorious treasures, only that in this tale, instead of the usual dragon, an empress guards them. I acknowledge that I do not understand your highness."

"But I understand you perfectly, general. I know your ambitious and proud plans. You wish to make your name renowned. General, I consider you are much in fault as to this war. You were the king's confidant—you had your spies everywhere, who, for heavy rewards, imparted to you the news by which you stimulated the king."

"If in your eyes," said Winterfeldt, proudly, "it is wrong to spend your gold to find out the intrigues of your own, your king's, and your country's enemies, I acknowledge that I am in fault, and deserve to be punished. Yes, everywhere I have had my spies, and thanks to them, the king knows Saxony's, Austria's, and Russia's intentions. I paid these spies with my own gold. Your highness may thus perceive that I am not entirely dependent on those jewels of my wife which are said to be in the Empress of Russia's possession."

At this moment the Prince of Prussia, who had been a silent witness to this scene, approached General Winterfeldt.

"General," said he, in a loud, solemn voice, "you are the cause of this unfortunate war which will soon devastate our poor land. The responsibility falls upon your head, and woe to you if this war, caused by your ambition, should be the ruin of our beloved country! I would, if there were no punishment for you on earth, accuse you before the throne of God, and the blood of the slaughtered sons of my country, the blood of my future subjects, would cry to Heaven for revenge! Woe to you if this war should be the ruin of Prussia!" repeated Prince Henry. "I could never forgive that; I would hold your ambition responsible for it, for you have access to the king's heart, and instead of dissipating his distrust against these foreign

nations, you have endeavored to nourish it—instead of softening the king's anger, you have given it fresh food."

"What I have done," cried Winterfeldt, solemnly raising his right hand heavenward—"what I have done was done from a feeling of duty, from love of my country, and from a firm, unshaken trust in my king's star, which cannot fade, but must become ever more and more resplendent! May God punish me if I have acted from other and less noble motives!"

"Yes, may God punish you—may He not revenge your crime upon our poor country!" said Prince Augustus William. "I have said my last upon this sad subject. From now on, my private opinions are subdued—I but obey the king's commands. What he requires of me shall be done—where he sends me I will go, without questioning or considering, but quietly and obediently, as it becomes a true soldier. I hope that you, my brother, Marshal Schwerin, and General Retzow, will follow my example. The king has commanded—we have but to obey cheerfully."

Then, arm in arm, the princes left the audience-room and returned to Berlin.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAUREL-BRANCH.

WHILE this last scene was passing in the audience-room, the king had retired to his study, and was walking up and down in deep thought. His countenance was stern and sorrowful—a dark cloud was upon his brow—his lips were tightly pressed together—powerful emotions were disturbing his whole being. He stopped suddenly, and raising his head proudly, seemed to be listening to the thoughts and suggestions of his soul.

"Yes," said he, "these were his very words: 'I protest against this war in the name of my rights, my children, and my country!' Ah, it is a pleasant thought to him that he is to be heir to my throne. He imagines that he has rights beyond those that I grant him, and that he can protest against an action of mine! He is a rebel, a traitor. He dares to think of the time when I will be gone—of the time when he or his children will wear this crown! I feel that I hate him as my father hated me because I was his heir, and because the sight of me always reminded him of his death! Yes, I hate him! The effeminate boy will disturb the great work which I am endeavoring to perform. Under his weak hands, this Prussia, which I would make great and powerful, will fall to pieces, and all

my battles and conquests will be in vain. He will not know how to make use of them. I will make of my Prussia a mighty and much-feared nation. And if I succeed, by giving up my every thought to this one object, then my brother will come and destroy this work which has cost me such pain and trouble. Prussia needs a strong, active king, not an effeminate boy who passes his life in sighing for his lost love and in grumbling at fate for making him the son of a king. Yes, I feel that I hate him, for I foresee that he will be the destroyer of my great work. But no, no—I do him wrong," said the king, "and my suspicious heart sees, perhaps, things that are not. Ah, has it gone so far? Must I, also, pay the tribute which princes give for their pitiful splendor? I suspect the heir to my throne, and see in him a secret enemy! Mistrust has already thrown her shadow upon my soul, and made it dark and troubled. Ah, there will come a cold and dreary night for me, when I shall stand alone in the midst of all my glory!"

His head fell upon his breast, and he remained silent and immovable.

"And am I not alone, now?" said he, and in his voice there was a soft and sorrowful sound. "My brothers are against me, because they do not understand me; my sisters fear me, and, because this war will disturb their peace and comfort, will hate me. My mother's heart has cooled toward me, because I will not be influenced by her; and Elizabeth Christine, whom the world calls my wife, weeps in solitude over the heavy chains which bind her. Not one of them loves me!—not one believes in me, and in my future!"

The king, given up to these melancholy thoughts, did not hear a knock at his door; it was now repeated, and so loudly, that he could not but hear it. He hastened to the door and opened it. Winterfeldt was there, with a sealed paper in his hand, which he gave to the king, begging him at the same time to excuse this interruption.

"It is the best thing you could have done," said the king, entering his room, and signing to the general to follow him. "I was in bad company, with my own sorrowful thoughts, and it is good that you came to dissipate them."

"This letter will know well how to do that," said Winterfeldt, handing him the packet; "a courier brought it to me from Berlin."

"Letters from my sister Wilhelmina, from Italy," said the king, joyfully breaking the seal, and unfolding the papers.

There were several sheets of paper closely written, and between them lay a small, white packet. The king kept the latter in his hand, and commenced reading eagerly. As he read, the dark, stern expression gradually left his countenance. His brow was smooth and calm, and a soft, beautiful smile played about his lips. He

finished the letter, and throwing it hastily aside, tore open the package. In it was a laurel-branch, covered with beautiful leaves, which looked as bright and green as if they had just been cut. The king raised it, and looked at it tenderly.

"Ah, my friend," said he, with a beaming smile, "see how kind Providence is to me! On this painful day she sends me a glorious token, a laurel-branch. My sister gathered it for me on my birthday. Do you know where, my friend? Bow your head, be all attention; for know that it is a branch from the laurel-tree that grows upon Virgil's grave! Ah, my friend, it seems to me as if the great and glorious spirits of the olden ages were greeting me with this laurel which came from the grave of one of their greatest poets. My sister sends it to me, accompanied by some beautiful verses of her own. An old fable says that these laurels grew spontaneously upon Virgil's grave, and that they are indestructible. May this be a blessed omen for me! I greet you, Virgil's holy shadow! I bow down before you, and kiss in all humility your ashes, which have been turned into laurels!"

Thus speaking, the king bowed his head, and pressed a fervent kiss upon the laurel. He then handed it to Winterfeldt.

"Do likewise, my friend," said he; "your lips are worthy to touch this holy branch, to inhale the odor of these leaves which grew upon Virgil's grave. Kiss this branch—and now let us swear to become worthy of this kiss; swear that in this war, which will soon begin, laurels shall either rest upon our brows or upon our graves!"

Winterfeldt having sworn, repeated these words after him.

"Amen!" said the king; "God and Virgil have heard us."

CHAPTER XI.

THE BALL AT COUNT BRÜHL'S.

COUNT BRÜHL, first minister to the King of Saxony, gave to-day a magnificent *fête* in his palace, in honor of his wife, whose birthday it was. The feast was to be honored by the presence of the King of Poland, the Prince Elector of Saxony, Augustus III., and Maria Josephine, his wife. This was a favor which the proud queen granted to her favorite for the first time. For she who had instituted there the stern Spanish etiquette to which she had been accustomed at the court of her father, Joseph I., had never taken a meal at the table of one of her subjects; so holy did she consider her royal person, that the ambassadors of foreign powers were not per-

mitted to sit at the same table with her. Therefore, at every feast at the court of Dresden, there was a small table set apart for the royal family, and only the prime minister, Count Brühl, was deserving of the honor to eat with the king and queen. This was a custom which pleased no one so well as the count himself, for it insured him from the danger that some one might approach the royal pair, and inform them of some occurrence of which the count wished them to remain in ignorance.

There were many slanderers in this wretched kingdom—many who were envious of the count's high position—many who dared to believe that the minister employed the king's favor for his own good, and not for that of his country. They said that he alone lived luxuriously in this miserable land, while the people hungered; that he spent every year over a million of thalers. They declared that he had not less than five millions now lying in the banks of Rotterdam, Venice, and Marseilles; others said that he had funds to the amount of seven millions. One of these calumniators might possibly approach the king's table and whisper into the royal ear his wicked slanders; one of these evil-doers might even have the audacity to make his unrighteous complaints to the queen. This it was that caused Count Brühl to tremble; this it was that robbed him of sleep at night, of peace by day, this fear of a possible disgrace.

He was well acquainted with the history of Count Lerma, minister to King Philip IV. of Spain. Lerma was also the ruler of a king, and reigned over Spain, as Brühl over Saxony. All had succumbed to his power and influence, even the royal family trembled when he frowned, and felt themselves honored by his smile. What was it that caused the ruin of this all-powerful, irreproachable favorite? A little note which King Philip found between his napkin one day, upon which was this address: "To Philip IV., once King of Spain, and Master of both the Indies, but now in the service of Count Lerma!" This it was that caused the count's ruin; Philip was enraged by this note, and the powerful favorite fell into disgrace.

Count Brühl knew this history, and was on his guard. He knew that even the air which he breathed was poisoned by the malice of his enemies; that those who paused in the streets to greet him reverentially when he passed in his gilded carriage, cursed him in their inmost hearts; that those friends who pressed his hand and sung songs in his praise, would become his bitterest enemies so soon as he ceased paying for their friendship with position, with pensions, with honors, and with orders. He spent hundreds of thousands yearly to gain friends and admirers, but still he was in constant fear that some enemy would undermine him. This had indeed once happened. During the time that the king's favor was shared equally

with Count Brühl, Count Sulkovsky, and Count Hennicke, whilst playing cards, a piece of gold was given to the king, upon which was represented the crown of Poland, resting upon the shoulders of three men, with the following inscription: "There are three of us, two pages and one lackey!"

The King of Poland was as much enraged by this satirical piece of gold as was the King of Spain by his satirical note. But Count Brühl succeeded in turning the king's anger upon the two other shoulder-bearers of his crown. Counts Sulkovsky and Hennicke fell into disgrace, and were banished from the court; Count Brühl remained, and reigned as absolute master over Poland and Saxony!

But reigning, he still trembled, and therefore he favored the queen's fancy for the strictest etiquette; therefore, no one but Count Brühl was to eat at the royal table; he himself took their napkins from their plates and handed them to the royal couple; no one was to approach the sovereigns who was not introduced by the prime minister, who was at once master of ceremonies, field-marshal, and grand chamberlain, and received for each of these different posts a truly royal salary. Etiquette and the fears of the powerful favorite kept the royal pair almost prisoners.

But for to-day etiquette was to be done away with; the crowned heads were to be gracious, so as to lend a new glory to their favorite's house. To-day the count was fearless, for there was no danger of a traitor being among his guests. His wife and himself had drawn up the list of invitations. But still, as there might possibly be those among them who hated the count, and would very gladly injure him, he had ordered some of the best paid of his friends to watch all suspicious characters, not to leave them alone for a moment, and not to overlook a single word of theirs. Of course, it was understood that the count and his wife must remain continually at the side of the king and queen, that all who wished to speak to them must first be introduced by the host or hostess.

The count was perfectly secure to-day, and therefore gay and happy. He had been looking at the different arrangements for this feast, and he saw with delight that they were such as to do honor to his house. It was to be a summer festival: the entire palace had been turned into a greenhouse, that served only for an entrance to the actual scene of festivities. This was the immense garden. In the midst of the rarest and most beautiful groups of flowers, immense tents were raised; they were of rich, heavy silk, and were festooned at the sides with golden cords and tassels. Apart from these was a smaller one, which outshone them all in magnificence. The roof of this tent rested upon eight pillars of gold; it was composed of a dark-red velvet, over which a slight gauze, worked with

gold and silver stars, was gracefully arranged. Upon the table below this canopy, which rested upon a rich Turkish carpet, there was a heavy service of gold, and the most exquisite Venetian glass; the immense pyramid in the middle of the table was a master-work of Benevenuto Cellini, for which the count had paid in Rome one hundred thousand thalers. There were but seven seats, for no one was to eat at this table but the royal pair, the prince-electoral and his wife, the Prince Xavier, and the Count and Countess Brühl. This was a new triumph that the count had prepared for himself; he wished his guests to see the exclusive royal position he occupied. And no one could remain in ignorance of this triumph, for from every part of the garden the royal tent could be seen, being erected upon a slight eminence. It was like a scene from fairyland. There were rushing cascades, beautiful marble statues, arbors and bowers, in which were birds of every color from every clime. Behind a group of trees was a lofty structure of the purest marble, a shell, borne aloft by gigantic Tritons and mermaids, in which there was room for fifty musicians, who were to fill the air with sweet sounds, and never to become so loud as to weary the ear or disturb conversation.

If the tents, the rushing cascades, the rare flowers, the many-colored birds, were a beautiful sight by daylight, how much more entrancing it would be at night, when illuminated by thousands of brilliant lamps!

The count, having taken a last look at the arrangements and seen that they were perfect, now retired to his rooms, and there, with the aid of his twelve valets, he commenced his toilet. The countess had already been in the hands of her Parisian *coiffeur* for some hours.

The count wore a suit of blue velvet. The price of embroidery in silver and pearls on his coat would have furnished hundreds of wretched, starving families with bread. His diamond shoe-buckles would almost have sufficed to pay the army, which had gone unpaid for months. When his toilet was finished, he entered his study to devote a few moments, at least, to his public duties, and to read those letters which to-day's post had brought him from all parts of the world, and which his secretary was accustomed to place in his study at this hour. He took a letter, broke the seal hastily, and skimming over it quickly, threw it aside and opened another, to read anew the complaints, the prayers, the flatteries, the assurances of love, of his correspondents. But none of them were calculated to compel the minister's attention. He had long ago hardened his heart against prayers and complaints; as for flattery, he well knew that he had to pay for it with pensions, with position, with titles, with orders, etc., etc. But it seemed as if the letters were not all of the usual sort, for the expression of indifference which had rested

upon his countenance while reading the others, had vanished and given place to one of a very different character. This letter was from Flemming, the Saxon ambassador in Berlin, and contained strange, wild rumors. The King of Prussia, it seemed, had left Berlin the day before, with all the princes and his staff officers, and no one knew exactly where he was going! Rumor said, though, that he and his army were marching toward Saxony! After reading this, Count Brühl broke out into a loud laugh.

"Well," said he, "it must be granted that this little poet-king, Frederick, has the art of telling the most delightful fairy-tales to his subjects, and of investing every action of his with the greatest importance. Ah, Margrave of Brandenburg! we will soon be in a condition to take your usurped crown from your head. Parade as much as you like—make the world believe in you and your absurd manœuvres—the day will soon come when she will but see in you a poor knight with naught but his title of marquis." With a triumphant smile he threw down the letter and grasped the next.

"Another from Flemming?" said he. "Why, truly, the good count is becoming fond of writing. Ah," said he, after reading it carelessly, "more warnings! He declares that the King of Prussia intends attacking Saxony—that he is now already at our borders. He then adds, that the king is aware of the contract which we and our friends have signed, swearing to attack Prussia simultaneously. Well, my good Flemming, there is not much wisdom needed to tell me that if the king knows of our contract, he will be all the more on his guard, and will make preparations to defend himself; for he would not be so foolhardy as to attempt to attack our three united armies. No, no. Our regiments can remain quietly in Poland—the seventeen thousand men here will answer all purposes.

"There is but one more of these begging letters," said he, opening it, but throwing it aside without reading it. Out of it fell a folded piece of paper. "Why," said the count, taking it up, "there are verses. Has Flemming's fear of the Prussian king made a poet of him?" He opened it and read aloud:

"A piece of poetry which a friend, Baron Pöllnitz, gave me yesterday. The author is the King of Prussia."

"Well," said the count, laughing, "a piece of poetry about me—the king does me great honor. Let us see; perhaps these verses can be read at the table to-day, and cause some amusement. 'Ode to Count Brühl,' with this inscription: '*Il ne faut pas s'inquieter de l'avenir.*' That is a wise philosophical sentence, which nevertheless did not spring from the brain of his Prussian majesty. And now for the verses." And straightening the paper before him, he commenced:

“ Esclave malheureux de la haute fortune,
D'un roi trop indolent souverain absolu.
Surchargé de travaux dont le soin l'important,
Brühl, quitte des grandeurs l'embarras superflu.
Au sein de ton opulence
Je vois le Dieu des ennuis,
Et dans ta magnificence
Le repos fait tes nuits.

“ Descend de ce palais dont le superbe faite
Domine sur la Saxe, s'élèvent aux cieux.
D'où ton esprit craintif conjure la tempête
Que soulève à la cour un peuple d'envieux :
Vois cette grandeur fragile
Et cesse enfin d'admirer
L'éclat pompeux d'une ville
Où tout feint de t'adorer.”*

The count's voice had at first been loud, pathetic, and slightly ironical, but it became gradually lower, and sank at last almost to a whisper. A deep, angry red suffused his face, as he read on. Again his voice became louder as he read the last two verses :

“ Connaissez la Fortune inconstante et légère;
La perfide se plait aux plus cruels revers,
On la voit abuser le sage, le vulgaire,
Jouer insolument tout ce faible univers ;
Aujourd'hui c'est sur ma tête
Qu'elle répand des faveurs,
Dès demain elle s'apprête
A les emporter ailleurs.

“ Fixe-t-elle sur moi sa bizarre inconstance,
Mon cœur lui saura gré du bien qu'elle me fait
Veut-elle en d'autres lieux marquer sa bienveillance,
Je lui remets ses dons sans chagrin, sans regret.
Plein d'une vertu plus forte
J'épouse la pauvreté
Si pour dot elle m'apporte
L'honneur et la probité.”

The paper fell from the count's hand and he looked at it thoughtfully. An expression of deep emotion rested upon his countenance, which, in spite of his fifty years, could still be called handsome—as he repeated in a low, trembling voice :

“ J'épouse la pauvreté,
Si pour dot elle m'apporte
L'honneur et la probité.”

The sun coming through the window rested upon his tall form, causing the many jewels upon his garments to sparkle like stars on

* See note, page 571.

the blue background, enveloping him in a sort of glory. He had repeated for the third time, “*J'épouse la pauvreté*,” when the door leading to his wife's apartments was opened, and the countess entered in the full splendor of her queenly toilet, sparkling with jewels. The count was startled by her entrance, but he now broke out into a loud, mocking laugh.

“Truly, countess,” said he, “you could not have found a better moment to interrupt me. For the last half hour my thoughts have been given up to sentiment. Wonderful dreams have been chasing each other through my brain. But you have again shown yourself my good angel, Antonia, by dissipating these painful thoughts.” He pressed a fervent kiss upon her hand, then looking at her with a beaming countenance, he said :

“How beautiful you are, Antonia; you must have found that mysterious river which, if bathed in, insures perpetual youth and beauty.”

“Ah!” said the countess, smiling, “all know that no one can flatter so exquisitely as Count Brühl.”

“But I am not always paid with the same coin, Antonia,” said the count, earnestly. “Look at this poem, that the King of Prussia has written of me. Truly, there is no flattery in it.”

While reading, the countess's countenance was perfectly clear; not the slightest cloud was to be seen upon her brow.

“Do you not think it a good poem?” said she, indifferently.

“Well,” said he, “I must acknowledge that there was a certain fire in it that touched my heart.”

“I find it stupid,” said she, sternly. “There is but one thing in it that pleases me, and that is the title—‘*Il ne faut pas s'inquiéter de l'avenir*.’ The little King of Prussia has done well to choose this for his motto, for without it, it strikes me, his peace would be forever gone, for his future will surely be a humiliating one.”

The count laughed.

“How true that is!” said he; “and a just answer to his stupid poem. Speak of something else.”

He tore the paper into small pieces, which, with a graceful bow, he laid at the feet of the countess.

“A small sacrifice,” said he, “which I bring to my goddess. Tread upon it, and destroy the king's words with your fairy foot.”

The countess obeyed him, laughingly.

“But now, count,” said she, “we will, for a moment, speak of graver things. I have received letters from London—from our son. Poor Henry is in despair, and he has requested me to intercede for him. You were always very stern with him, my friend, therefore he fears your anger, now that he has been a little imprudent.”

"Well, what is it?" said the count; "I hope it is no duel, for that would make me extremely angry."

"It is nothing of that kind. His imprudence is of another sort. He is in want of money."

"Money!" said the count, in amazement; "why, barely a month ago, I sent him six hundred thousand thalers. That, and what he took with him, three months ago, is quite a large sum, for it amounts to more than a million of thalers."

"But, my dear husband, in England every thing is so dear! and there, to move amongst and impress those rich lords, he must really have more. It seems that our Charles Joseph has fallen in love with a lady whom all London worships for her surpassing beauty. But she, having a cold heart, will listen to no one. She laughs at those who flatter her, and will receive no presents. She seemed an invincible fortress, but our son, thanks to stratagem, has taken it."

"I am curious to know how," said the count, laughing.

"He played a game of *écarté* with her. He played for notes to the amount of ten pounds, and, at first, Charles won, much to the displeasure of the proud lady, who did not relish being beaten, even in a game of cards. Charles, perceiving this, played badly. The lady won from him eighty thousand pounds."

"Eighty thousand pounds," cried the count, "why, that is a half a million of thalers!"

"And do you mean to say," said the countess, angrily, "that that is too much to gain the favor of a beautiful lady?"

"No! it is not too much; but it is certainly enough. I hope, at least, it was not in vain."

"No, no! and London is now raving about the intellectual, genial and generous son of Count Brühl. I trust, count, that you instantly sent him a check."

"Yes," said the count, shrugging his shoulders. "But, countess, if the king were to hear this story, it would cause much evil; for you know that he believes in economy; luckily for me, he believes me to be an economical man. Those enemies who would not dare to accuse us, would have no fears of saying evil of our son; he will certainly hear this eighty-thousand-pound story."

"We will tell him ourselves, but say that the story is much exaggerated."

"What a wonderful woman you are, Antonia!" said her husband; "your counsel is wise; we will follow it."

At this moment a slight knocking was heard at the door, and the secretary entered with a sealed letter.

"A courier from Torgau just arrived with this from the commandant."

The count's brow became clouded.

"Business! forever business!" said he. "How dared you annoy me with this, upon the birthday of my wife?"

"Pardon, your excellency; but the courier brought with this packet such strange news, that I ventured to disturb you, to communicate—"

The beating of drums and the thunder of cannon interrupted him.

"The king and queen are now entering their carriage," cried the count. "No more business to-day, my friend. It will keep till tomorrow. Come, Antonia, we must welcome their majesties." And taking his wife's hand, he passed out of the study.

CHAPTER XII.

THE INTERRUPTED FEAST.

As the Count Brühl and his wife entered the saloon, it almost seemed as if they were the royal couple for whom all this company was waiting. Every one of any rank or position in Dresden was present. There were to be seen the gold and silver embroidered uniforms of generals and ambassadors; jewelled stars were sparkling upon many breasts; the proudest, loveliest women of the court, bearing the noblest Saxon names, were there, accompanied by princes, counts, dukes, and barons, and one and all were bowing reverentially to the count and his wife. And now, at a sign from the grand chamberlain, the pages of the countess, clothed in garments embroidered with silver and pearls, approached to carry her train; beside them were the count's officers, followed by all the noble guests. Thus they passed through the third room, where the servants of the house, numbering upward of two hundred, were placed in military order, and then on until they came to the grand entrance, which had been turned into a floral temple.

The royal equipage was at the gate; the host and hostess advanced to welcome the king and queen, whose arrival had been announced by the roar of cannon.

The king passed through the beautiful avenue, and greeted the company placed on either side of him, gayly. The queen, sparkling with diamonds, forcing herself also to smile, was at his side; and as their majesties passed on, saying here and there a kind, merry word, it seemed as if the sun had just risen over all these noble, rich, and powerful guests. This was reflected upon every countenance.

The gods had demanded from Olympus to favor these mortals with their presence, and to enjoy themselves among them. And truly, even a king might spend some happy hours in this delightful garden.

The air was so soft and mild, so sweet from the odor of many flowers; the rustling of the trees was accompanied by soft whispers of music that seemed floating like angels' wings upon the air. Every countenance was sparkling with happiness and content, and the king could but take the flattering unction to his soul that all his subjects were equally as happy as the *élite* by which he was surrounded.

Pleased with this thought and delighted with all the arrangements for the *fête*, the king gave himself up to an enjoyment which, though somewhat clouding his character as a deity, was immensely gratifying to him.

He abandoned himself to the delights of the table! He devoured with a sort of amiable astonishment the rare and choice dishes which, even to his experienced and pampered palate, appeared unfathomable mysteries; luxuries had been procured, not only from London and Paris, but from every part of the world. He delighted himself with the gold and purple wines, whose vintage was unknown to him, and whose odor intoxicated him more than the perfume of flowers. He requested the count to give the name and history of all these wines.

The count obeyed in that shy, reverential manner in which he was accustomed to speak. He charmed him by relating the many difficulties he had overcome to obtain this wine from the Cape of Good Hope, which had to cross the line twice to arrive at its highest perfection. He said that for two years he had been thinking of this gloriously happy day, and had had a ship upon the sea for the purpose of perfecting this wine. He bade the king notice the strangely formed fish, which could only be obtained from the Chinese sea. Then, following up the subject, he spoke of the peculiar and laughable customs and habits of the Chinese, thus causing even the proud queen to laugh at his humorous descriptions.

Count Brühl was suddenly interrupted in an unusual manner.

His secretary, Willmar, approached the royal table, and without a word of excuse, without greeting the king, handed the count a sealed package!

This was such a crime against courtly etiquette that the count, from sheer amazement, made no excuses to the king; he only cast a threatening look at the secretary. But as he encountered Willmar's pale, terrified countenance, a tremor seized him, and he cast an eager glance upon the papers in his hand, which, no doubt, contained the key to all this mystery.

"They are from the commandant at Leipsic," whispered the secretary: "I entreat your excellency to read them."

Before the count had time, however, to open the dispatch, a still stranger event took place.

The Prussian ambassador, who, upon the plea of illness, had declined Count Brühl's invitation, suddenly appeared in the garden, accompanied by the four secretaries of his legation, and approached the royal table. Upon his countenance there was no sign of sickness, but rather an expression of great joy.

As he neared the tent, the gay song and merry jest ceased. Every eye was fixed inquiringly upon the individual who had dared to disturb this *fête* by his presence. The music, which had before filled the air with joyous sounds, was now playing a heart-breaking air.

Count Brühl now arose and advanced. He greeted the Prussian ambassador in a few cold, ceremonious words.

But Count Mattzahn's only answer to this greeting was a silent bow. He then said, in a voice loud enough to be heard by the king and queen:

"Count Brühl, as ambassador of the King of Prussia, I request you to demand an audience for me at once from the King of Saxony. I have an important dispatch from my king."

Count Brühl, struck with terror, could only gaze at him, he had not the strength to answer.

But King Augustus, rising from his seat, said:

"The ambassador of my royal brother can approach; I consent to grant him this audience; it is demanded in so strange a manner, it must surely have some important object."

The count entered the royal tent.

"Is it your majesty's wish," said Mattzahn, solemnly, "that all these noble guests shall be witnesses? I am commanded by my royal master to demand a private audience."

"Draw the curtain!" said the king.

Count Brühl, with trembling fingers, drew the golden cord, and the heavy curtains fell to the ground. They were now completely separated from the guests.

"And now, count," said the king, taking his seat by his proud, silent queen, "speak."

Bowing profoundly, Count Mattzahn drew a dispatch from his pocket, and read in a loud, earnest voice.

It was a manifesto from the King of Prussia, written by himself and addressed to all the European courts. In it, Frederick denied being actuated by any desire of conquest or gain, but declared that he was compelled to commence this war to which Austria had provoked him by her many and prolonged insults.

There was a pause when the count finished reading. Upon the gentle, amiable countenance of the king there was now an angry look. The queen was indifferent, cold, and haughty; she seemed to have paid no attention whatever to Count Mattzahn, but, turning to the princess at her side, she asked a perfectly irrelevant question, which was answered in a whisper.

Countess Brühl dared not raise her eyes; she did not wish her faithless lover, Count Mattzahn, whose cunning political intrigues she now perfectly understood, to see her pain and confusion. The prince-elect, well aware of the importance of this hour, stood at the king's side; behind him was Count Brühl, whose handsome, sparkling countenance was now deadly pale.

Opposite to this agitated group, stood the Prussian ambassador, whose haughty, quiet appearance presented a marked contrast. His clear, piercing glance rested upon each one of them, and seemed to fathom every thought of their souls. His tall, imposing form was raised proudly, and there was an expression of the noblest satisfaction upon his countenance. After waiting some time in vain for an answer, he placed the manifesto before the king.

"With your majesty's permission, I will now add a few words," said he.

"Speak!" said the king, laconically.

"His majesty, my royal master," continued Count Mattzahn, in a loud voice, "has commissioned me to give your majesty the most quieting assurances, and to convince you that his march through Saxony has no purpose inimical to you, but that he only uses it as a passway to Bohemia."

The king's countenance now became dark and stern, even the queen lost some of her haughty indifference.

"How?" said the king; "Frederick of Prussia does us the honor to pass through our land without permission? He intends coming to Saxony?"

"Sire," said Mattzahn, with a slight smile, "his majesty is already there! Yesterday his army, divided into three columns, passed the Saxon borders!"

The king rose hastily from his seat. The queen was deadly pale, her lips trembled, but she remained silent, and cast a look of bitter hatred upon the ambassador of her enemy.

Count Brühl was leaning against his chair, trembling with terror, when the king turned to him.

"I ask my prime minister if he knows how far the King of Prussia has advanced into Saxony?"

"Sire, I was in perfect ignorance of this unheard-of event. The King of Prussia wishes to surprise us in a manner worthy of the

most skilful magician. Perhaps it is one of those April jests which Frederick II. is so fond of practising."

"Your excellency can judge for yourself," said Count Mattzahn, earnestly, "whether the taking of towns and fortresses is to be considered a jest. For, if I am rightly informed, you have this day received two dispatches, informing you of my royal master's line of march."

"How?" said the king, hastily; "you were aware of this, count, and I was not informed? You received important dispatches, and I was not notified of it?"

"It is true," said the count, much embarrassed. "I received two couriers. The dispatches of the first were handed to me the same moment your majesties entered my house; I received the other just as Count Mattzahn arrived. I have, therefore, read neither."

"With your majesty's permission," said Count Mattzahn, "I will inform you of their contents."

"You will be doing me a great service," said the king, earnestly.

"The first dispatch, sire, contained the news that his majesty the King of Prussia had taken without resistance the fortresses of Torgau and Wittenberg!"

A hollow groan escaped the king as he sank in his chair. The queen became paler than before.

"What more?" said the king, gloomily.

"The second dispatch," continued Count Mattzahn, smilingly, "informed his excellency Count Brühl that the King of Prussia, my noble and victorious master, was pressing forward, and had also taken Leipsic without the slightest resistance!"

"How!" said the king, "he is in Leipsic?"

"Sire, I think he *was* there," said Count Mattzahn, laughing; "for it seems that the Prussians, led by their king, have taken the wings of the morning. Frederick was in Leipsic when the courier left—he must now be on his way to Dresden. But he has commissioned me to say that his motive for passing through Saxony is to see and request your majesty to take a neutral part in this war between Austria and Prussia."

"A neutral part!" said the king, angrily, "when my land is invaded without question or permission, and peace broken in this inexplicable manner. Have you any other message, count?"

"I have finished, sire, and humbly ask if you have any answer for my sovereign?"

"Tell the king, your master, that I will raise my voice throughout the land of Germany to complain of this unheard-of and arbitrary infringement of the peace. At the throne of the German emperor I will demand by what right the King of Prussia dares to

enter Saxony with his army and take possession of my cities. You can depart, sir; I have no further answer for his majesty!"

The count, bowing reverentially to the king and queen, left the royal tent.

Every eye was fixed upon the prime minister. From him alone, who was considered the soul of the kingdom of Saxony, help and counsel was expected. All important questions were referred to him, and all were now eagerly looking for his decision. But the powerful favorite was in despair. He knew how utterly impossible it was to withstand the King of Prussia's army. Every arrangement for this war had been made on paper, but in reality little had been accomplished. The army was not in readiness! The prime minister had been in want of a few luxuries of late, and had, therefore, as he believed there would be no war until the following spring, reduced it. He knew how little Saxony was prepared to battle against the King of Prussia's disciplined troops, and the ambassador's friendly assurances did not deceive him.

"Well, count," said the king, after a long pause, "how is this strange request of Frederick II., that we should remain neutral, to be answered?"

Before the count was able to answer, the queen said, in a loud voice:

"By a declaration of war, my husband! This is due to your honor. We have been insulted; it therefore becomes you to throw down the gauntlet to your presumptuous adversary."

"We will continue this conversation in my apartments," said the king, rising; "this is no place for it. Our beautiful feast has been disturbed in a most brutal manner. Count Brühl, notify the different ambassadors that, in an hour, I will receive them at my palace."

"This hour is mine!" thought the queen, as she arose; "in it I will stimulate my husband's soft and gentle heart to a brave, war-like decision; he will yield to my prayers and tears." She took the king's arm with a gay smile, and left the tent, followed by the princes, and the host and hostess.

Silently they passed the festive tables, from which the guests had risen to greet them. The courtiers sought to read in their countenances the solution of that riddle which had occupied them since the arrival of the Prussian ambassador, and about which they had been anxiously debating.

But, upon the queen's countenance there was now her general look of indifference. It is true, the king was not smiling as was his wont when amongst his subjects, but his pleasant countenance betrayed no fear or sorrow. The queen maintained her exalted bearing; nothing had passed to bow her proud head.

After the royal guests had left, Count Brühl returned. He also had regained his usual serenity. With ingenious friendliness he turned to his guests, and while requesting them, in a flattering manner, to continue to grace his wife's *fête* by their presence, demanded for himself leave of absence. Then passing on, he whispered here and there a few words to the different ambassadors. They and the count then disappeared.

The *fête* continued quietly; the music recommenced its gay, melodious sounds, the birds carolled their songs, and the flowers were as beautiful and as sweet as before. The jewels of the courtiers sparkled as brilliantly. Their eyes alone were not so bright, and the happy smile had left their lips. They were all weighed down by a presentiment that danger was hovering around them.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ARCHIVES AT DRESDEN.

COUNT MATZAHN'S prophecy came true. The King of Prussia came to Dresden, and there, as in every other part of Saxony, found no resistance. Fear and terror had gone before him, disarming all opposition. The king and prince-elector were not accustomed to have a will of their own; and Count Brühl, the favorite of fortune, showed himself weak and helpless in the hour of adversity. It needed the queen's powerful energy, and the forcible representations of the French ambassador, Count Broglio, to arouse them from their lethargy; and what Count Broglio's representations, and the queen's prayers and tears commenced, hatred finished. Count Brühl's sinking courage rose at the thought of the possibility of still undermining the King of Prussia, and putting an end to his victorious march. It was only necessary to detain him, to prevent him from reaching the Bohemian borders, until the Austrian army came to their assistance, until the French troops had entered and taken possession of Prussia. Therefore, Count Brühl sent courier after courier to Saxony's allies, to spread her cry for help to every friendly court. He then collected the army, ordered them to camp at Pirna, which was very near the boundary of Bohemia, and, as it was guarded on one side by the Elbe, and on the other by high rocks, appeared perfectly secure. When these preparations were commenced, the count's courage rose considerably, and he determined to prove himself a hero, and to give the Saxon army the inspiring consciousness that, in the hour of danger, their king would be in their midst.