

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## THE GENIUS OF PRUSSIA.

THE queen was alone in her room. She sat on the sofa, and a dress of heavy silk, interwoven with flowers, lay spread out on the table before her. She turned over the dress, as if carefully examining it. "Sure enough, there it is!" she suddenly exclaimed. "Now, quick to work!" She hastened to her table, on which was to be seen a beautiful silk embroidery just finished by the queen. Among the threads she selected one that was of the same color as the dress, and hastily threaded her needle. "Now I will finish my work before any one surprises me," whispered Louisa. "She was so assiduously employed that she did not notice that the opposite door, softly opening, had admitted the king. He stood still for a moment and looked at the queen. Advancing, he asked, frowningly, "What are you doing, Louisa?"

The queen uttered a cry, and a deep blush suffused her cheeks. Pushing aside the table and the dress, she rose from the sofa and went to salute her husband. "Welcome, dearest!" she said, lovingly clinging to him; "you knew that it was cold and lonely here, and you come to gladden me. Thanks, my Frederick, thanks and welcome! I feel as though you were given to me anew, and I greet you every morning as with the young heart of a bride." She laid her beautiful head on his shoulder, and her delicate hand played with his hair.

But the king did not return her caresses, and his eyes, which usually looked so lovingly at his wife, were directed to the dress on the table. "You have not yet replied to me, Louisa," he exclaimed.

"Replied to what?" she asked, raising her head from his shoulder, and calmly looking at him.

"You know it," said the king—"to my question."

"To your question? And what did you ask?" replied the queen. "You asked me whether I loved you and had already

of the emperor gradually became milder. He approached the prince, embraced him affectionately, and exclaimed, "That is very generous, but it is impossible. Never would I accept such a sacrifice—never!" For the rest, the mission of the prince was an utter failure. Napoleon referred him to Minister Champagny, who, by all sorts of subterfuges, managed to protract and finally to break off the negotiations. The prince was detained several months in Paris, and returned, without having accomplished any thing, to Königsberg, whither the royal family had removed in the mean time.

thought of you this morning. Yes, my king and husband, you are the object of all my thoughts, and I think of you with every pulsation of my heart. And do you know what just occurred to me, and what I am going to propose to you? It is a fine winter-day, and the snow is sparkling in the sun. We have half an hour until dinner. Let us improve it and take a walk. Let us go to our two princes, who are skating with their instructor. Tell me, my friend, shall we do so?"

The king shook his head gloomily. "You wish to divert me from my question," he said, "which proves that you have heard it. I will repeat it. What were you doing with that dress when I entered?"

The queen hung her head in evident embarrassment, and her face assumed a melancholy air. "You insist on a reply, my husband?" she asked. "I hoped you would notice my confusion, and generously desist."

"I must know every thing that happens to you," said the king; "I must know the full extent of our misfortunes, that I may not be deceived by any illusions. Tell me, therefore, what were you doing?"

"Well, then, my husband, I will tell you," said the queen, resolutely. "I like the dress, not because it is made of very costly and beautiful materials, but you yourself selected it for me. You know that we give a party to-morrow to celebrate the birthday of the crown prince, and I wished to wear that dress. Now, I knew what no one else knew, that the last time I wore it I had torn it by a nail in the wall, on crossing the corridor. If I had informed my maid of this mishap, I should have been unable to wear it again, for custom, I believe, forbids queens to wear mended dresses. I was, however, bent on saving it. For this purpose I took it stealthily from my wardrobe to mend the small hole as rapidly as possible, while my lady of honor was taking a ride, and my maid was at dinner. I had just finished when you entered, and if you had come a few minutes later the dress would have disappeared, and no one would suspect to-morrow that my rich attire had been mended. Now, you know my secret, and I entreat you to keep it and allude to it no more. But you must also reply to me: shall we take a walk?"

The king made no answer, but gazed at her with melancholy tenderness. "You do this, Louisa, because you shrink from the expense of buying a new dress," he said. "Oh, do not deny it; do not try to deceive me. I know it to be true."

"And suppose it were true?" asked the queen, gently, drawing her head from his hands. "Will you be sad because I do in these times what all our subjects are obliged to do—because I try to be a little economical?"

"The Queen of Prussia, my consort," exclaimed the king, "is compelled to mend her own dresses! Is the cup of disgrace and humiliation not yet full!"

"And why do you speak of disgrace?" asked the queen, laying her hands on the shoulders of her husband, and looking tenderly in his face. "Why do you say I humble myself by mending my dress? I only followed the example of your noble ancestor, Frederick II. Did not the great king also mend and patch his clothes? Did he not repair with sealing-wax his scabbard, because he did not want to buy a new one? Well, I believe little Louisa will be allowed to do as the great Frederick did, and need not be ashamed of it. On the contrary, my husband, when I sat there sewing, my heart was glad, for the memories of my early years revived in my mind: I saw myself at the side of my venerable grandmother, the Landgravine of Hesse-Darmstadt, and I lived again in those sunny days that I spent with her in Hanover. My grandmother taught me how to mend, and I frequently profited by the skill I had acquired with her. For you married the daughter of a poor prince, who was not a sovereign at that time, but only a younger brother, and the Queen of Prussia does not blush to confess that when she was yet a princess of Mecklenburg, she not only mended her dresses but even trimmed her shoes with her own hands. It is no jest, my king and husband, I really often did so, and I never felt humiliated. Never did I consider it a disgrace to do sometimes what thousands of the most virtuous and amiable women are always doing. When I used to sew my shoes, I was poor, for I did not yet know you; but now, although I have repaired my dress, I am rich, for I have you—I have my children—I am the wife of a man who suffers because he values his honor higher than worldly greatness—who would perish rather than break an alliance he has sworn to, and refuses to give his neck to the tyrant's yoke. Oh, my husband, when I look at you, my soul is transported with gladness, and I thank God that I am allowed to love you. Since you are mine I feel happy, rich, and powerful."

She placed her beautiful arms around the king, who pressed her against his breast. "Thanks, my Louisa! thanks for

your joyful love. Your eyes gladden my life, and your voice is the only music that can lull my grief. That is the reason I come to you now. I seek here consolation in my affliction, for when you help me to bear the burden, it is less oppressive. I have received two letters to-day which gave me pain, and which I desire to communicate to you."

"I shall be grateful to you, my husband, for doing so," said the queen. "Come, let us sit down together, and communicate the letters to me. Who wrote them? Whence did they come?"

"One is from Königsberg, from our daughter Charlotte."

"From Charlotte!" exclaimed the queen, starting. "Has any thing happened to her? Has she been taken ill?"

"No, she is well, and nothing has happened to her. She is, on the contrary, in excellent spirits, and, like all young girls, wishes to dress well. She writes to me, asking me to send her money that she may renew her winter wardrobe. Here is the letter."

The queen quickly glanced over it. "Oh, the dear, good child," she exclaimed, "how tenderly she loves us—how prettily and affectionately she gives expression to her feelings! And yet she often appears outwardly cold and indifferent.—She resembles her noble father: she does not wear her heart on her tongue, but it throbs lovingly in her bosom. She is seemingly reserved and haughty, but she is affectionate. If God permits her to live I anticipate a brilliant future for her."\*

"A brilliant future!" echoed the king; "for *my* daughter—for the daughter of a king without a kingdom—of a man who is so poor as to be unable to gratify her just and modest wishes! She asks for money to replenish her winter wardrobe. Now, do you know what I have written to her? I have sent her five dollars, and given her at the same time the wretched consolation to be content with that sum, for it was all I could spare."

"Well," said the queen, with a gentle smile, "at all events, five dollars will enable her to buy a warm winter dress, and by and by our finances will improve."

"I do not see any such prospect," exclaimed the king, vehemently. "All our resources are exhausted; all the public funds are gone, and even your generosity will be unable to

\*The very words of the queen.—Vide 'Queen Louisa,' p. 302. This prophecy was fulfilled, for the Princess Charlotte afterward married the Emperor of Russia.

create new ones. My noble queen, in generous self-denial, sacrifices her jewels in order to gladden and comfort others, and to lay her own contribution on the altar of her country. She did not think of herself in doing so."

"Yes, I did," said the queen, smiling, "I did think of myself. I reserved five thousand dollars, and with that sum all the bills we owed—all our debts for the household, for the stable, and the servants, have been paid. But you intended communicating two letters to me. What about the second?"

"The second," said the king, mournfully, "is a farewell from my faithful subjects in the province of Mark, whom, alas! with a heavy heart, I have absolved from their oath of allegiance, and ordered to serve another sovereign, and to obey the new King of Westphalia. I am not ashamed of confessing it, Louisa, I wept on writing to them, and on reading their reply. There it is. Read it aloud. It will do me good to hear again these touching words."

The queen unfolded the large letter, to which several official seals were attached, and read in a tremulous voice:

"Our heart was rent when we read your farewell letter, good king. We cannot believe even now that we, who always loved you so affectionately, are to cease being your subjects. As sure as we live, it was neither your fault, nor ours, that your generals and ministers were too confused after the defeat of Jena to march the dispersed divisions of the army to us, and to lead them, united with our whole people, into a struggle which, with the blessing of God, would have been successful. We would have willingly risked our lives, for you must not doubt that the blood of the ancient Cherusians is still flowing in our veins; that we are proud of calling Hermann and Wittekind countrymen of ours, and of knowing that on our soil was that field of battle where our ancestors defeated their enemies in so decisive a manner that they never fought again. We also would assuredly have saved the fatherland, for we have, we believe, marrow in our bones, and remain uncorrupted by modern luxury and effeminacy. But no one can escape the decrees of Providence. Oh, farewell, then, our father and king! Heaven grant you more faithful generals and more sagacious ministers for the remainder of your states! You are not omniscient, and you were sometimes obliged to follow them into blind paths. Unfortunately, we must also submit to what cannot be helped. God help us! We trust our new sovereign will be a father to us, and honor

and respect our language and customs, our faith and rights, as you always did, dear and beloved king! Health, joy, and peace!"

"And you call us poor and disgraced when such hearts are throbbing for us," exclaimed the queen, with radiant eyes. "No, we are rich, for our subjects love us, and even when compelled to part with you, they send you their love-greetings!"

"But I cannot reward their love; I have no means of showing how my heart appreciates it," exclaimed the king, mournfully. "Oh, Louisa, I am a poor, wretched man; my heart is desponding, and even your cheering words are unable to console it. Wherever I look, whatever plans I form, I see nowhere a prospect of change for the better. My country is occupied by hordes of foreign soldiers. My subjects, exposed to the overbearing and avarice of the French, who think they are sovereign rulers of my states, are vainly praying to their king to come to their assistance. Their courage is exhausted; their strength gone; commerce is prostrated; manufacturers and mechanics are idle; the farmers have no seed-corn, nor courage to cultivate their fields, for they know that they will be robbed of the fruits of their labor. Our soldiers walk about with bowed heads, and scarcely dare to wear their uniforms, for they remind them of Jena and Auerstadt, of the capitulation of Prenzlau, of the surrender of so many fortresses, and, like myself, they wish they had been buried on the battle-field of Jena. Want, misery, and suffering are everywhere, and I am unable to help! I must still permit the enemy to inundate my states, although it was expressly stipulated by the treaty of Tilsit that the French army was to evacuate Prussia in the course of two months. I must also permit the Emperor Napoleon (though after the conclusion of peace, and contrary to the treaty) to take New Silesia, and add her to the kingdom of Warsaw; to transform the two leagues of the new territory of Dantzic into two German miles, and, without even asking my consent, to deprive me of my property. But I am determined to suffer this injustice and humiliation no longer, and to make the last sacrifice."

"What are you going to do, my husband?" exclaimed the queen, laying her hand with an anxious gesture on the arm of her husband. "What sacrifice?"

"Myself!" said the king, gloomily, "for it is I alone who bring misfortune on my people. A sinister fatality pursues

me, and has pursued me from my earliest youth. Only one star ever rose on my troubled firmament, and that was you, Louisa. But it will not set, even though I carry out my purpose. In solitude and sorrow it will still shine hopefully upon me. My childhood was wretched, and embittered by long-continued sufferings; while I was crown prince, I had to submit to the affliction of not possessing the heart of my father, and of being unable to approve his actions. I was so unfortunate as to be compelled to begin the first day of my reign with a demonstration against his course by having the woman arrested whom he had loved so long and ardently, and to whom the final wishes and thoughts of the dying sovereign had been devoted. It is his spirit, perhaps, that now brings all these calamities upon me. But my people shall not suffer; I will deliver them from the fatal influences attaching them to me, and in order to conciliate my fate I will voluntarily lay down my crown."

"Never! my husband, never shall you do so," exclaimed the queen in great excitement. "Never shall my noble and brave king declare that his spirit is crushed and vanquished. Majesty would thereby render itself guilty of suicide. For majesty, like life, is a boon sent by Providence, and you are no more allowed to divest yourself of it arbitrarily than to put a voluntary end to your life. And, least of all, are you permitted to do so in times of adversity and danger, for such a course would look like cowardice with which my king and husband assuredly cannot be charged. Charles V. and Christina of Sweden were at liberty to abdicate, for when they did so they were at the acme of their power, and yet they ever repented of it; they felt that all nations were scornfully exclaiming: 'Behold the faithless, suicidal servant of God! Behold the stigma on that anointed brow! The crown sanctifies the head that wears it. But that coward has dishonored himself, and the glory that God gave him.' Oh, my beloved husband, the nations must never speak in this manner of you; the annals of history must never report that you deserted your people when they were oppressed, and that, in order to obtain peace and safety for yourself, you gave up your country, and cast away your crown. It is true, fortune is imposing grievous burdens on us; but at such a time it behooves a true man to meet adversity with a bold front."

"Ah, if I were possessed of your unwavering faith and cheerfulness!" said the king, profoundly sighing. "But my

hope is gone; our misfortunes have crushed out not my courage but my belief in a better future."

"And yet they were necessary that we might one day obtain real happiness," said Louisa. "Oh, I begin to perceive distinctly that the events which have afflicted us will redound to our own welfare. Providence is evidently introducing a new era, because the old one has outlived itself. We fell asleep on the laurels of Frederick the Great, who was the master-spirit of another century; we did not progress with the times, and they outstripped us."

"There must be many changes, I am satisfied, in our administration," said the king, thoughtfully. "The army must be reorganized, and those who in the hour of danger are cowards must be judged with inexorable severity. Alas! all this will be in vain; I succeed in accomplishing nothing; all my measures turn out to my detriment, and to the advantage of our enemy."

"It is true," said the queen, sighing, "he has much success. Even our most deliberate plans are fruitless. Though the Russians and Prussians fight like lions, and are not defeated, they are obliged to evacuate the field of battle, and the French emperor claims a victory. Nevertheless, it would be blasphemous to say that God was on his side; he is an instrument of Providence in order to bury that in which life is extinct, but which still clings to that destined to live. We may derive lessons from him, and what he has accomplished ought not to be lost to us. Oh, I firmly believe in Providence, and a great moral system ruling the world. I cannot see it, however, in the brutal reign of force, and hence I believe that these times will be succeeded by more prosperous ones. All good men hope for them, and the eulogists of the hero of this day must not mislead us. All that has happened is not the ultimate order of things; it is a severe yet salutary preparation for a new and better destiny. We must not delude ourselves, my beloved friend, with the idea that this is remote; in spite of all obstacles, we must strive to reach it with strength, courage, and cheerfulness. With the merciful assistance of Providence, we must continue to battle for our honor and our rights!"

"Yes, be it so!" exclaimed the king, "God is with me, for He has placed you at my side; He has given me an angel who fills my heart with that courage which is based on faith in Him. Oh, forgive my timidity and despondency; I pledge

you my word I will meet the future with a strong heart. Only remain with me, my dearest Louisa; look at me with your cheering eyes, and inspire my heart with hope. Whenever I falter, remind me of this hour in which I vowed to you to struggle to the last."

"Thanks, my king and husband!" exclaimed the queen; "whatever may happen, let us meet it, united in love, hope, and faith in God!"

"Yes," said the king; "adversity itself is not devoid of exalted moments, and you, my Louisa, have become dearer to me in these days. I know now by experience what a treasure you are to me. Let the storm rage outside, if all is calm within."

"It is my pride and happiness to possess the love of the best of men," said the queen; "and though we leave no inheritance to our children, we shall leave them at least the example of our wedded life; let them learn from it to be happy in themselves."

"*Madame la Reine est servie!*" shouted a merry voice behind them; and when the queen turned, she saw her son, Crown-Prince Frederick William, who approached her with rosy cheeks and laughing eyes. "Pardon me, dearest parents, for venturing to enter the room without your permission, but I longed to salute you, and therefore assumed the duty of the steward, who was about to announce that dinner is ready."

"And I suppose my son found this announcement exceedingly interesting, and longed just as much for his dinner as for his parents," exclaimed the queen, smiling and looking with beaming eyes at her favorite son.

"Oh, no, no," said the crown prince, laughing, "I thought first of my beloved parents, but then—yes, I confess the idea of getting my dinner is very agreeable, considering that I have been on the ice for several hours."

"Well, my husband," asked the queen, merrily, "shall we comply with the wishes of the young epicure? Shall we permit him to conduct us to the dining-room?"

"Yes, certainly," said the king, offering his arm to his wife. "Lead the way, M. Steward!" The crown prince assumed a grave air, and, after bowing to his parents in the reverential manner of a royal steward, he preceded them with ludicrous strides, and commenced singing in a ringing voice: "*Immer langsam voran, dass die oesterreichische landwehr nachkommen kann.*"\*

\* "Always slowly forward, that the Austrian landwehr may be able to follow"—a well-known humorous song, ridiculing the slowness of the Austrian militia.

The king laughed more heartily than he had done for many weeks, while the queen looked lovingly at her son who had performed this miracle.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### A FAMILY DINNER.

IN the dining-room was William, the younger prince, who hastened to his parents, and returned the tender salutation of his beautiful mother by covering her hand with kisses. There were no guests at the royal table; the king preferred to dine *en famille*, and for several days the queen had ordered the ladies and gentlemen of the court to dine by themselves, and only with the royal family when company was not distasteful to her husband. The king looked with a smile of content at the small table, on which he noticed only four covers, and, conducting his wife to her seat, he said, with a grateful glance, "You have anticipated my most secret wishes, Louisa; I like, above all, to dine alone with my family. Guests and strange faces always bring etiquette with them, and that renders our repasts formal and unpleasant. Thanks, Louisa!"

It was a very frugal meal, hardly suitable to a royal dinner-table. Frederick William and the queen, however, contentedly partook of the plain, wholesome food; and, gayly chatting, they did not seem to notice that the dinner was served up in common china dishes, and that the plates before them were of the same cheap material. Prince William ate with the appetite of a healthy little boy; the crown prince, however, who was twelve years old, did not seem to relish his food. He had disposed of his soup, although he thought it weak and not well flavored, supposing the other courses would be more to his taste. But when it was succeeded by roast meat and cabbage, he made a wry face, and handled his fork very daintily.

"I suppose you do not like cabbage?" asked the king, who had noticed the reluctant appetite of the crown prince.

"No, your majesty," said the prince, smiling, "there are dishes that I like better, although I know it to be a very respectable one, with which the French just now are made acquainted. I will leave the *shucrout*\* to them, and console

\* French pronunciation of sour-cROUT.