

"And what did you write to him?"

"I requested him to come to me without delay, if he feel strong enough, and resume his former position at the head of the government."

"But you know Napoleon does not want Hardenberg to be your minister."

"I am now again, and intend remaining, master in my own country."

"Napoleon ordered that Hardenberg should not come within twenty leagues of the place where the king resides. Remember, dear friend, he is proscribed."

"But I disregard this proscription, and call Hardenberg to my side. If he is courageous enough he will come, and when he is here we shall take pains to pacify the emperor's wrath. He is at present too busily engaged in arranging his wedding festivities, and in preparing for the reception of his young wife; he will not have time to notice that the little King of Prussia has chosen another minister. We shall try to manage the matter as prudently as possible, and prevail upon Napoleon to leave Hardenberg at the head of my cabinet. I cannot do any thing with a minister who proposes to me to sacrifice the province of Silesia, and to sell loyal subjects like cattle. I will dismiss Altenstein, and appoint Hardenberg in his place. I have called him. If he is a good patriot, he will come; he must write a penitent letter to the emperor, that he may permit him to remain with us."\*

"Oh, he will come, my friend, and also write the letter," exclaimed the queen.

"And do you approve my resolution to intrust Hardenberg with Altenstein's department?" asked the king.

"Approve it? My heart rejoices at it! Now I have hopes again of Prussia; now I look full of confidence into the future, for Hardenberg is a true German patriot, who has the honor and dignity of his country at heart, who does not want us to become mere vassals of France, and who will not propose to sacrifice provinces when we may discharge our liabilities with money. Oh, my dear, beloved friend, how grateful I am to you for this joyful surprise! This paper is my most precious birthday gift, and it really makes my heart glad."

\*Hardenberg complied immediately with the king's request, and came to Potsdam, where he had a long interview with him, and declared his readiness to resume his position at the head of the administration. He submitted also to the galling necessity of conciliating Napoleon by an humble letter, in which he assured the emperor of his devotedness to France, and promised that the war-contributions should be promptly paid. Napoleon was favorably impressed with this letter, and ceased to object to Hardenberg's appointment.

"But I have another paper which will afford you pleasure," said the king, drawing it from his bosom. "Here, my dear, affectionate Princess of Mecklenburg, here is my second gift!"

He placed a folded paper into the hands of the queen. She opened it, and a joyous cry burst from her lips. "'Passenger ticket for Queen Louisa, good for a trip to Mecklenburg-Strelitz,'" she read, laughing. "'First travelling companion: Frederick William.' I am to go to Mecklenburg," cried the queen, joyously, "and you will accompany me? Oh, my beloved husband, you have divined, then, the most secret and ardent wish of my heart, and you grant it even before my lips have uttered it! Oh, how shall I thank you, my own dear friend?" She encircled the king's neck with her arms, with passionate tenderness, and pressed a long kiss on his lips. "Dear, dear husband, how shall I thank you?" she whispered, once more with tearful eyes.

The king looked at her long and lovingly. "That you are with me is my greatest happiness. I was thinking to-day of a poem written by good old Claudius; it expresses my own feelings. It is an echo of my heart's gratitude!"

"What poem is it?" asked the queen.

Frederick William laid his hand on her head, raised his eyes toward heaven, and said aloud:

"Ich danke dir mein Wohl, mein Glück in diesem Leben,  
Ich war wohl klug, dass ich dich fand;  
Doch ich fand nicht, Gott hat dich mir gegeben,  
So segnet keines Menschen Hand!"\*

## CHAPTER LVII.

### LOUISA'S DEATH.

THE happy and long-yearned-for day, the 25th of June, had dawned at last. The queen's wish was to be fulfilled; she was to set out for her old Mecklenburg home, for her paternal roof at Neustrelitz. The king intended to follow her thither in a few days, for he was detained in Berlin by state affairs;

\*On thee my joy, my hopes rely!  
How wise to win thee mine!  
But surely it was Heaven—not I,  
That made me ever thine.

To thee, my loving spouse, I owe  
Whate'er of good may be,  
Nor could a human hand bestow  
This priceless gift on me.

they were then to go with her family to the ducal country-seat of Hohenzieritz, and thence to return to Berlin.

How had the queen longed for this day! how joyously had she awaited the moment when she was to see her old home again! Even her separation from her beloved children, from her husband, did not shade her beautiful countenance. She was to miss her children but for a short time, and her husband was to join her at the earliest moment; she could therefore yield to the joy with which the prospect of seeing her father and his family, and of returning to her old home, filled her heart.

Home! The carriage rolled from the palace-gate of Charlottenburg, and the green fields as she passed had never seemed so beautiful. But her eyes were often turned to the sky, and she gazed on the white clouds floating over it as swans on an azure lake. "Precede me, clouds! inform my father and my brothers that I am coming!" she exclaimed, smiling. "Oh, why does not my soul unfold its wings, and carry me home through the air? The horses are too slow!"

And yet the horses were running along the turnpike, swiftly passing towns and villages, fields and meadows. The queen, in her impatience, counted the relays. "We are already at Gransee; the next town will be on Mecklenburg soil. The frontier of my father's state is between Gransee and Fürstenberg. Forward! home! home!"

"Queen, here we are on the frontier! Here is Mecklenburg!" exclaimed Madame von Berg.

"Mecklenburg!" said the queen, smiling. "Hail my native country!" And she kissed her hands to the landscape spread out before her in all its summer beauty. "I greet and kiss thee, my Mecklenburg! I return with a faithful heart!"

Why did the queen start up so suddenly, and press her hands so anxiously against her heart? "Oh, Caroline," she whispered, "the death-worm, the death-worm! Could it not be still at this moment? Could it not let me enjoy the bliss of this hour? Oh, how it tortures my heart!"

"O queen, why such gloomy thoughts now? Look at the sky, how bright it is!—how mild and pleasant the air—the air of Mecklenburg!"

"The air of my native country is fanning my face, but the death-worm is at work in my heart. The gates of my home above will soon be thrown open for me! But hush! Why put this drop of wormwood into the cup of joy? I will not

drink it, I will not listen to my palpitating heart! Let us see whether I am stronger than my pain. I will laugh and be happy!"

And the queen, leaning forward with smiling countenance, said: "I greet thee, my Mecklenburg, with thy waving wheat-fields and fragrant meadows, thy transparent lakes and forest oaks, and, above all, thy ruddy sons and daughters! Look, Caroline, what sunny waves are passing over those ripening fields, bringing to the farmer the fruits of his labor. Look at that pretty scene yonder! At the door of the lonely cottage, in the middle of the rye-field, sits a peasant's wife; her babe is resting on her breast, and three flaxen-haired children are playing at her feet. She does not see us; she sees nothing but her children, and sings to them. Stop, that I may hear the song of the good young mother!" The carriage halted. The wind swept across the plain, and played with the white veil of the queen, who listened with bated breath to the lullaby of the peasant's wife:

"Oh, schlop, mihn lewes, lüttes Kind,  
Oh, schlop un dröhm recht schön!  
Denn alle Engel bi di sünd  
Un Gott, de het di sehn.  
Leev Gott het alle Minschen gihrn,  
De Kinner doch am leevsten,  
Drüm wenn wi man wi Kinner wirn,  
Denn har uns Gott am leevsten!  
Oh, schlop, mihn lewes, lüttes Kind,  
Oh, schlop, und dröhm recht schön!"\*

The queen laughed with delight. "That is a Mecklenburg *patois* song," she exclaimed, "and yet how sweetly it sounds; how gentle and winning, as though it were the language of the heart! My native country has greeted me now with its most tender notes, with the song that the mother sings to her children! Forward! I am also a child of Mecklenburg, and long for my father's kiss and the embrace of my dear old grandmother!"

"There are the spires of a town in Mecklenburg! the spires of Fürstenberg!"

\*Oh sleep! my darling baby, sleep!  
And dream without a tear,  
For loving angels round thee keep  
Their watch, and God is near!  
O baby mine,  
Sweet dreams be thine!

If we as little children were  
The Lord would love us best;  
Of such he said, with tender care,  
Is heaven's eternal rest!  
O baby mine,  
Sweet dreams be thine!

The carriage rolled through the gloomy old gate, and halted in front of the palace.

"My father! My beloved father!"

"My daughter! My beloved Louisa! Welcome!—a thousand times welcome!" They embraced each other and wept with joy. He is no duke, she is no queen; he is a father, and she is his child!

From the arms of her father she sank into those of her brother—her darling George. "Oh, thanks, dear father and brother, thanks for this surprise! Now I shall have two hours of happiness more than I hoped for, for I thought I would meet you only at Neustrelitz."

"Come now, my daughter, come; the horses are ready, and your old grandmother is longing for you."

"Grandmamma, I am coming!" exclaimed the queen, and entered the carriage as merrily as a light-hearted child. Her father and brother were at her side, and the ladies of the queen took seats in the duke's coach.

"Forward, home!" Her hands clasping those of her father and her brother, the queen rode across the meadows and waving fields. Was the death-worm still at her heart? Which will triumph, that or the queen? She did triumph for a season—for holy love conquers all, even death.

The face of the queen beamed with happiness. Smiles played upon her lips; greetings flashed from her eyes to the people standing at the roadside, and loudly cheering her. She reached her destination! There is Neustrelitz, there is the palace! At the gate stood the old grandmother who had charge of Louisa in her childhood, the old landgravine, now eighty years of age. She stretched out her arms toward the queen; she called with tender words for her foster-child, her Louisa! And Louisa rushed into the arms of her grandmother. They remained locked in a long embrace, weeping. The duke himself wiped tears from his eyes. Happiness also has tears, and sometimes sadness.

"Grandmother," whispered the queen, "I have wept a great deal in grief and anguish. Now I am weeping in delight, and my tears are praising God!" The queen was at home with her father, and under the roof of her ancestors. The storms of adversity had spent their fury. Gladness beamed from her face as she welcomed the friends and acquaintances of former times.

A brilliant party was given at court on the second day. A

ball took place in the evening. Numerous guests were assembled in the festive halls; all were waiting for the arrival of the queen. Suddenly the folding doors opened; she entered the ball-room leaning on her father's arm, and greeted the assembled guests. How beautiful she was! Her whole bearing had an indescribable mildness and majesty. She had adorned herself, for the first time since her adversity, as it became a queen. Her noble figure was wrapped in a white satin dress, and her bare arms and neck were magnificently adorned.

"Oh, queen, how charming you are to-day!" exclaimed one of her early friends, transported with admiration. "And how splendid these pearls are!"

"Yes!" said the queen, "they are. I value them very highly, and retained them when I was obliged to part with my other jewelry. Pearls are more suitable to me, for they denote tears, and I have shed many." And as the queen uttered these words, she started and pressed her hand against her heart. Was the death-worm there again? Was it penetrating her heart? Was it, after all, stronger than the queen? No! Louisa triumphed over it! Joy was in her face; merry words dropped from her lips, and she glided in the mazes of the dance.

And this day was followed by another of still greater happiness. The king came to see again his longed-for consort and take her back to her second home, his house, and heart. She was again united with her most faithful friend. She gazed with delight at his fine, manly countenance; she was proud of his regal form, and his constant and earnest love transported her with gratitude. As she looked toward the king, who was leaving the room with the duke, in order to look at the old palace church,—“Oh, George,” she said to the hereditary prince, who had remained with his sister in the duke's sitting-room, “now I am altogether happy! I would like to repeat it to all of you!” And, as if these words were not sufficient, as if she ought to write them down—the queen hastened to her father's desk. She took a scrap of paper and a pen, and wrote in a hasty hand: “My dear father! I am very happy to-day as your daughter, and as the wife of the best of husbands. Louisa.”\* “So,” she exclaimed, “I have written it down. My father will not find it to-day, for we shall immediately set out for Hohenzieritz; but when he re-

\* These were the last words the queen ever wrote. The king preserved the scrap as a sacred relic, and carried it constantly in his memorandum-book.

turns the day after to-morrow, and steps to his desk, he will find this greeting from his Louisa, and it will gladden him, and—

"Why do you start so suddenly, my sister? Your lips are quivering, and you look so pale! What ails you, dear sister?"

"It is nothing, brother—it is nothing! An insignificant passing pain in my heart; it was sudden, but it is nothing, it is over now. And if you love me, George, you will forget it. You will not mention it to any one, and, least of all, to my husband. They are already returning, our dear ones! Let us meet them!"

They went from Neustrelitz to Hohenzieritz, the charming country-seat of the duke on the shore of Lake Tollen. The carriages halted in front of the palace-gate; Louisa, leaning on the king's arm, entered; suddenly a shudder shook her frame; a mortal pallor covered her cheeks, and she clung convulsively to her husband.

"What ails you, Louisa? Why do you look so ill, and tremble so violently? What is the matter?"

"I am quite well, my beloved friend, but I am cold, and the air here seems close and oppressive to me; and it is as silent and lonely as if death were dwelling here. Come, let us go into the garden. Come!" She hastened into the life and sunshine of the garden. The color came to her cheeks again, and her eyes assumed their serenity. She walked with her husband through the long, delightful avenues, and accompanied him to the lake. It lay before them, beautiful Lake Tollen, shining like silver, and fringed with gigantic oaks.

"Oh, my dear Mecklenburg, my dear native country, how beautiful thou art!" exclaimed the queen, and an echo replied from the opposite shore, "Beautiful thou art!"

"The echo is right," said the king. "And, as I am gazing at you, you seem to me again the young princess whom I saw seventeen years ago for the first time. Your return to your native country has made you once more a girl."

"But the girl of seventeen years ago was not so happy as is the matron and mother of to-day," said the queen. "At that time I did not have you, my husband, nor my beloved children! I am younger in my heart to-day than then, for love imparts and preserves youthfulness."

"God preserve you this youth, my Louisa, to the delight of myself and our children! But come, it is cool here by the lake, and you look pale again." They returned to the palace,

and the queen spent in the midst of her family a day of unalloyed pleasure. The last day!

When the next morning's sun shone into the queen's bedroom, Louisa attempted to raise herself; her head fell back heavily, and she pressed her hands convulsively against her bosom, exclaiming: "Oh, my heart!" Poor queen! The death-worm was conquering!

"It is nothing!" she whispered to her husband, when the struggle was over. "Nothing but a cold!" she repeated, when the doctors, who had been called from Neustrelitz, came to her bedside.

It was a cold, but the queen was unable to leave her bed to accompany the king to Berlin, when, a few days afterward, pressing state affairs called him back to the capital. She was obliged to remain a few days at Hohenzieritz, in order to rest and recover her strength. But the few days became weeks. She was still ill, and suffered as she had never suffered. Often, in the night, when her friend Caroline von Berg was sitting at her bedside, she beckoned to her and whispered in her ear: "The conquering death-worm! Did I not tell you, Caroline, that it was attacking my heart? Oh, I would the king, my beloved husband, were with me!"

Couriers went to Charlottenburg to the king, and they came every day to Hohenzieritz and inquired in his name for Louisa's health. He himself was unable to come; he was also ill with fever, confining him to his bed.

"And I am not with him!" lamented the queen. "I cannot nurse him, and smile away his cares! I am myself an object of anxiety to him! Oh, shall I not soon be well again? Tell me, dear Doctor Heim, you whom the king has sent, shall I not soon be well, that I may nurse my husband?"

"Yes, your majesty, if it please God, you will soon be well. But now let me deliver to you a letter from the king, which his majesty has intrusted to me."

Louisa's eyes beamed with joy; she opened the letter and read it. The words of tender love and ardent longing which the king addressed to her brought tears to her eyes. "What a letter!" she exclaimed. "How happy is she who receives such!" She kissed the paper and then laid it on her heart. "It shall remain there, and will cure me better than all your medicine, doctor. If the spasms would only leave me, I should be well! When they seize me, I cannot help thinking that my end is drawing nigh."

Doctor Heim made no reply; he turned and prescribed cooling beverages and anodynes. No one but God was able to help her. Her spasms became frequent and violent, and she often cried—"Air! air! I am dying!" She yearned more and more for her husband and children.

"Doctor! must I die, then? Shall I be taken from the king and from my children?" The doctor made no reply.

"My God, I am young to die!" groaned the queen. "Life has still to fulfil many promises to me; I have shed many tears and suffered much! Oh, there are these dreadful spasms again! Doctor, help me! Ah, nothing but death can help me!"

It was in the night of the 18th of July that the queen uttered these complaints to her physicians. It was a stormy night, and the gigantic trees in the garden of Hohenzieritz rustled weirdly and dark. The silence of the palace was broken only by low groans.

It was dawning when a carriage rolled into the palace-yard. The duke hastened out. A pale man alighted and rushed toward him. "How is she? How is Louisa?"

The duke was unable to make a reply. He took the king's arm and conducted him into the palace. The two sons of the king, who had arrived with their father, followed them in silence and with bowed heads. The duke conducted the king into his room, where he found the old landgravine and the three physicians of the queen.

Frederick William saluted the princess only with a silent nod; he then turned his quivering face toward the physicians. "How is the queen?" he asked. "What hopes have you?"

They made no reply, standing before him with gloomy faces and downcast eyes. The king's face turned livid, and, pressing his hand upon his forehead, covered with perspiration, he said, sternly and imperiously, "Reply to me, I want to know the truth! How is the queen? What hopes have you?"

"No hopes whatever, your majesty," said Dr. Heim, solemnly. "It is an organic disease of the heart, and in such cases our skill is powerless. The queen has but a few hours to live!"

The king staggered back to the wall. He neither spoke nor wept, so great was his sorrow. The venerable old landgravine went to him and laid her hand gently on his shoulder. "Hope still, my son," she said, solemnly, "Louisa still lives,

and so long as she lives there is hope. God in His mercy may yet preserve her to us!"

The king shook his head despairingly. "Ah," he cried in a husky, sombre voice, "if she were not mine, she would live. But as she is my wife, she will surely die! But I will see her, I must see her! So long as she lives she belongs to me!"

"I will go and inform the queen that the king has arrived," said Heim, and hastened into the sick-room.

A few minutes elapsed, and Louisa's voice exclaimed: "My Frederick! my beloved husband, come to me!"

The king rushed to her room, the door of which had just been opened by Dr. Heim. The queen lay on her couch, pale and beautiful as a broken lily.

"My husband! my beloved friend!" she exclaimed, raising herself and endeavoring to stretch out her arms toward the king, who stood at her bedside, but alas, she was unable to do so. "Oh," whispered Louisa, sadly, "I am a queen, but cannot move my arms!"

The king bent over, and, pressing her against his breast, kissed her beloved face. Louisa smiled, laid her head on his shoulder and looked at him long and tenderly. "You are here! You are mine again! But how are the children? Have you come alone?"

"No," said the king, "our two oldest sons accompany me."

"My sons! Where are they?" exclaimed the queen. "Let me see them, oh, pray let me see my sons!"

Heim hastened out and returned with the Princes Frederick and William. With eyes filled with tears, they stepped on tiptoe to the bedside of the queen.

"My children!" exclaimed Louisa, in a loud, powerful voice, and she raised herself up. Her maternal love gave her strength to extend her arms.

"Oh, my children, my beloved children!" She pressed them to her bosom, kissing them with the passionate tenderness of a mother.

The two young princes, entirely overcome by grief, sank on their knees at the bedside of their mother. She laid her hands on their heads, as if to bless them, and lifted her eyes to the king, who, pale and silent, was gazing at her in unutterable despair.

"Now I am happy," breathed the queen. "You are with me, and my beloved sons!"

The king's sorrow was overpowering him, and he quickly

turned and left the room. Heim approached the princes and begged them in a low voice to withdraw, because the queen was unable to bear so much excitement. They rose from their knees and kissed their mother's hands. Louisa was so faint that she could greet her children only with a smile, and was unable to bear their presence longer. But her eyes followed them steadfastly until they had withdrawn.

She lay long silent and motionless, and then whispered to her sister, the Princess of Solms: "The king acted as though he wished to take leave of me. Tell him not to do so, else I shall die immediately. But where is he? Where is my husband? Oh, why is he not with me?"

Frederick William stood in a corner of the anteroom, his head leaning against the wall, his hands pressed against his breast, in order to suppress the sobs which escaped from it in spite of him. His eyes were tearless; his quivering lips were murmuring: "My wife is dying! She is dying!"

"Louisa wishes to see you," whispered the Princess of Solms, approaching him. "But, pray be gentle; do not manifest your grief; Louisa says that else she would die immediately."

"No," said the king, sternly, "she shall not die. I will endeavor to be calm!" And, restraining his grief, he stepped to the queen's bedside. "I just had a conference with the physicians," he said, almost smilingly. "They make me hope for the best. Indeed, I never believed that you were in danger; I was only deeply moved because I saw you suffering so intensely."

The queen looked him full in the face, and made no reply. The king sat down on her bed and took her right hand. Louisa pressed his hand gently, and fixed her eyes with a thoughtful and grave expression on his countenance. Suddenly a dark shadow passed over her face. "It is coming! It is coming!" she cried in a tone of heart-rending anguish, and started up in excruciating pain.

The king went to the door and called the physicians, who hastened into the room, followed by the duke, the princes, and the whole family. Madame von Berg raised the groaning sufferer. The physicians were standing in the middle of the room. "We cannot help her. It is the last convulsion!"

"Air! air!" cried the queen.

Frederick William bent over her with tearless eyes. The agony she was suffering paralyzed his heart.

"Lord, end my sufferings!" cried the queen, with a last effort, and her head sank back into the arms of Madame von Berg. Another sigh—a long, tremulous sigh. The clock struck nine. A solemn silence reigned in the palace. The queen was dead!

THE END.