

CHAPTER VI.

THE REGENT ANNA LEOPOLDOWNA.

ANNA had succeeded, she was regent; she had shaken off the burden of the Bironic tutelage, and her word was all-powerful throughout the immeasurable provinces of the Russian empire. Was she now happy, this proud and powerful Anna Leopoldowna? No one had ever yet been happy and free from care upon this Russian throne, and how, then, could Anna Leopoldowna be so? She had read the books of Russian political history, and that history was written with blood! Anna was a woman, and she trembled when thinking of the poison, the dagger, the throttling hands, and flaying sword, which had constantly beset the throne of Russia, and in a manner been the means in the hands of Providence of clearing it from one tyrant, only, indeed, to make room for another. Anna, as we have said, trembled before this means of Providence; and when her eyes fell upon Münnich—upon his dark, angry brow and his secretly threatening glance—she then with inward terror asked herself: “May not Providence have chosen him for my murderer? Will he not overthrow me, as he overthrew his former master and friend Duke Biron?”

Anna now feared him whom she had chiefly to thank for her greatness. At the time when he had made her regent he had satisfactorily shown that his arm was sufficiently powerful to displace one regent and hurl him to the dust! What he had once done, might he not now be able to accomplish again?

She surrounded this feared field-marshal with spies and listeners; she caused all his actions to be watched, every one of his words to be repeated to her, in order to ascertain whether it had not some concealed sense, some threatening secret; she doubled the guards of her palace, and, always trembling with fear, she no longer dared to occupy any one of her apartments continuously. Nomadically wandered they about in their own palace, this Regent Anna Leopoldowna and her husband Prince Ulrich of Brunswick; remembering the sleeping-chamber of Biron, she dared not select any one distinct apartment for constant occupation; every evening found her in a new room, every night she reposed in a different bed, and even her most trusted servant often knew not in which wing of the castle the princely pair were to pass the night.*

She, before whom these millions of Russian subjects humbled themselves in the dust, trembled every night in her bed at the slightest rustling, at the whisperings of the wind, at every breath of air that beat against her closed and bolted doors.

She might, it is true, have released herself from these torments with the utterance of only one word of command; it required only a wave of her hand to send this haughty and dangerous Münnich to Siberia! Nor was an excuse for such a proceeding wanting. Count Münnich's pride and presumption daily gave occasion for anger; he daily gave offence by his reckless disregard of and disrespect for his chief, the generalissimo, Prince Ulrich; daily was it

* Leveque, vol. v., p. 218.

necessary to correct him and to confine him within his own proper official boundaries.

And such refractory conduct toward a Russian master, had it not in all times been a terrible and execrable crime—a crime for which banishment to Siberia had always been considered a mild punishment?

Poor Anna! called to rule over Russia, she lacked only the first and most necessary qualification for her position—a Russian heart! There was, in this German woman's disposition, too much gentleness and mildness, too much confiding goodness. To a less barbarous people she might have been a blessing, a merciful ruler and gracious benefactor!

But her arm was too weak to wield the knout instead of the sceptre over this people of slaves, her heart too soft to judge with inexorable severity according to the barbarous Russian laws which, never pardoning, always condemn and flay.

It was this which gradually estranged from her the hearts of the Russians. They felt that it was no Russian who reigned over them; and because they had no occasion to tremble and creep in the dust before her, they almost despised her, and derided the idyllic sentiments of this good German princess who wished to realize her fantastic dreams by treating a horde of barbarians as a civilized people!

The slaves longed for their former yoke; they looked around them with a feeling of strangeness, and to them it seemed unnatural not everywhere to see the brandished knout, the avenging scaffold, and the transport-carriages departing for Siberia!

Much as Ostermann importuned her, often as her own husband warned her, Anna nevertheless refused; she would not banish Field-Marshal Münnich to Siberia, but remained firm in her determination to leave him in possession of his liberty and his dignities.

But when Münnich himself, excited and fatigued with these never-ending annoyances, and moreover believing that Anna could not do without him, and therefore would not grant his request, finally demanded his dismissal, Anna granted it with joy; and Münnich, deceived in all his ambitious plans and expectations, angrily left the court to betake himself to his palace beyond the Neva.

Anna now breathed easier; she now felt herself powerful and free, for Münnich was at least removed farther from her; his residence was no longer separated from hers only by a wall, she had no longer to fear his breaking through in the night—ah, Münnich dwelt beyond the Neva, and a whole regiment guarded its banks and bridges by night! Münnich could no longer fall upon her by surprise, as she could have him always watched.

Anna no longer trembled with fear; she could yield to her natural indolence, and if she sometimes, from fear of Münnich, troubled herself about state affairs and labored with her ministers, she now felt it to be an oppressive burden, to which she could no longer consent to subject herself.

Satiated and exhausted, she in some measure left the wielding of the sceptre to her first and confidential minister, Count Golopkin. He ruled in her name, as Count Ostermann was generalissimo in the name of her husband

the Prince of Brunswick. Why trouble themselves with the pains and cares of governing, when it was permitted them to only enjoy the pleasures of their all-powerful position?

The minister might flourish the knout and proclaim the Siberian banishment over the trembling people; the scourged might howl, and the banished might lament, the great and powerful might dispose of the souls and bodies of their serfs; rare honesty might be oppressed by consuming usury; offices, honors, and titles might be gambled for; justice and punishment might be bought and sold; vice and immorality might universally prevail—Anna would not know it. She would neither see nor hear any thing of the outside world! The palace is her world, in which she is happy, in which she revels!

Ah, that charming, silent little boudoir, with its soft Turkish carpet, with its elastic divans and heavily curtained windows and doors—that little boudoir is now her paradise, the temple of her happiness! In it she lingers, and in it is she blessed. There she reposes, dreaming of past delightful hours, or smiling with the intoxication of the still more delightful present in the arms of the one she loves.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FAVORITE.

SEE how her eyes flash, how her heart beats—how beautiful she is in the warm glow of excitement, this beautiful Anna Leopoldowna!

The door opens, and a smiling young maiden looks in with many a nod of her little head.

“Ah, is it you, my Julia?” calls the princess, opening her arms to press the young girl to her heart. “Come, I will kiss you, and imagine it is he who receives the kiss! Ah, what would this poor Anna Leopoldowna be if deprived of her dear friend, Julia von Mengden?” And drawing her favorite down into her lap, she continued: “Now relate to me, Julia. Set your tongue in motion, that I may hear one of your very pleasantest stories. That will divert me, and cause the long hours before his coming to pass more quickly.”

Julia von Mengden roguishly shook her beautifully curling locks with a comic earnestness, and, very aptly and unmistakably imitating the somewhat hoarse and nasal voice of Prince Ulrich, said:

“Your grace forgets that you are regent, and have to hold the reins of government in the name of the illustrious imperial squaller, your son, since his imperial grace still remains in his swaddling-clothes, and has much less to do with state affairs than with many other little occupations!”

Anna Leopoldowna, breaking out in joyous laughter,

exultingly clapped her little hands, which were sparkling with brilliants.

"This is superb," said she. "You play the part of my very worthy husband to perfection. It is as if one saw and heard him. Ah, I would that he resembled you a little, as he would then be less insupportable, and it would be somewhat easier to endure him."

Julia von Mengden, making no answer to this remark, continued with her nasal voice and comic pathos:

"Your grace, this is not the time to analyze our diverting little domestic dissensions, and occupy ourselves with the quiet joys of our happy union! Your grace is, above all things, regent, and must give your attention to state affairs. Without are standing three most worthy, corpulent, tobacco-scented ambassadors, who desire an audience. Your grace is, above all things, regent, and must receive them."

"Must!" exclaimed Anna, suddenly contracting her brows. "We will first hear what they desire of us."

"The first is the envoy of the great Persian conqueror, Thamas-Kouli-Khan, who comes to lay at your feet the magnificent presents of his master."

"Bah! they are presents for the young Emperor Ivan. He may, therefore, be conducted to the cradle of my son, and there display his presents. It does not interest me."

"The second is a messenger from our camp. He brings news of a great victory obtained by one of your brave generals over the Swedes!"

"But what does that concern me?" angrily cried the regent. "Let them conquer or be defeated, it is all the

same to me. That concerns my husband the generalissimo! Let me be spared the sight of the warlike and blood-dripping messenger!"

"The third is the ambassador of the wavering and shaking young Austrian Empress Maria Theresa. He comes, he says, upon a secret mission, and pretends to have discovered a sort of conspiracy that is hatching against you."

"Let him go with his discovery to Golopkin, our minister of the interior. That is his business!"

"Your grace is, above all things, regent, and should remember—"

"Nothing—I will remember nothing!" exclaimed Anna Leopoldowna, interrupting her favorite. "I will not be annoyed, that is all."

"Well, thank God!" now cried Julia von Mengden, in her natural tone—"thank God, that such is your determination, princess! you are, then, in earnest, and I am to send these three amiable persons to the devil, or, what is just the same, to your husband?"

"That is my meaning."

"And this is beautiful in you," continued Julia, cowering down before her mistress. "These eternal, tiresome and intolerable state affairs would make your face prematurely old and wrinkled, my dear princess. Ah, there is nothing more tedious than governing. I am heartily sick of it! At first I was amused when we two sat together and settled who should be sent to prison and who should be pardoned; whom we should make counts and princes, or degrade to the ranks as common soldiers. But all that pleased only for a short time; now it is annoying, and why should we take

upon ourselves this trouble? Have we not the power to act and live according to our own good pleasure? Bah! that is the least compensation you should receive for allowing these horrid Russians the privilege of calling you their regent and mistress!"

"But, my little chatterer, you forget the three envoys who are waiting without," said Anna, with a smile.

"Ah, that is true! I must first send those wig-blocks away!" cried Julia, springing up and fluttering out of the room as lightly as a bird.

"How lovely she is, and how agreeable it is to have her with me!" said Anna, tenderly looking after her departing favorite. "She is, indeed, my good genius, who drives away the cares from my poor brain."

"So, it is done!" cried Julia, quickly returning to the room. "I have sent the gentlemen away. To the Persian envoy I said: 'Go to our emperor, Ivan. He feeds upon brilliants, and, as he has had no breakfast this morning, his appetite will be good. Go, therefore, and give him your diamonds for breakfast. Anna Leopoldowna wants them not; she is already satiated with them!'—To the second I said: 'Go and announce your glorious victory to our sublime generalissimo. He is at his toilet, and as he every morning touches his noble cheeks with rouge, your new paint, prepared from the purple blood of the enemy, will doubtless be very welcome to him!'—'And as to what concerns your secret mission and your discovered conspiracy,' said I to the Austrian ambassador, 'I am sorry that you cannot here give birth to the dear children of your inventive head; go with them to our midwife, Minister Golopkin, and hasten a little,

for I see in your face that you are already in the pangs of parturition!"

"Well," asked Anna Leopoldowna, loudly laughing, "what said their worships to that?"

"What did they say? They said nothing! They were dumb and looked astonished. They made exactly such eyes as I have seen made at home, upon my father's estate in Liefland, by the calves when the butcher knocked them upon the head. But now," continued Julia, nestling again at the feet of her mistress, "now give me a token of your favor, and forget for a while that you are regent. Let us chat a little like a couple of real genuine women—that is, of our husbands and lovers. Oh, I have very important news for you!"

"Well, speak quickly," said Anna, with eagerness. "What have you to tell me?"

Julia assumed a very serious and important countenance. "The first and most important piece of news is, that your husband, Prince Ulrich of Brunswick, is very jealous of me, and yet of one other!"

"Bah!" said Anna, contemptuously, "let him be jealous. I do not trouble myself about it, and shall always do as I please."

"No, no, that will not do," seriously responded Julia. "It is so tiresome to always hear the wrangling and growling of a jealous husband! I tell your grace that I must have quiet in his presence; I can no longer bear his grim looks and his constant anger and abuse. You must soothe him, Princess Anna, or I will run away from this horrible court, where a poor maiden is not allowed to love her friend

and mistress, the charming Princess Anna Leopoldowna, with all her heart and soul!"

The regent's eyes filled with tears. "My Julia," she tremulously said, "can you seriously think of leaving me? See you not that I should be thereby rendered very solitary and miserable?"

And, raising up her favorite into her arms, she kissed her.

Julia's bright eyes also filled with tears. "Think you, then, princess, that I could ever leave, ever be separated from you?" she tenderly asked. "No, my Princess Anna has such entire possession of my heart, that it has no room for any other feeling than the most unbounded love and devotion to my dear, my adored princess. But for the very reason that I love you, I cannot bear to have your husband fill the palace with his jealous complaints, and thus publishing to St. Petersburg and all the world your unfaithfulness and criminal intrigues. Oh, I tell you I see through this generalissimo, I know all his plans and secret designs. He would gladly be able to convict you of infidelity to him—then, with the help of the army he commands, declare his criminal wife unfit for the regency, and then make himself regent! He has a cunningly devised plan, but which my superior cunning shall bring to naught! I will play him a trick!—But no, I will tell you no more now! At the right time you shall know all. Now, Princess Anna, now answer me one question. Do you, then, so very much love this Count Lynar?"

The princess looked up with a dreamy smile. "Do I love him!" she then murmured low. "Oh, my God, Thou

knowest how truly, how glowingly my heart clings to him. Thou knowest that of all the world I have never loved any other man than him alone! And you, Julia, you who know every emotion and palpitation of my heart, you yet ask me if I love him? Do you remember, child, when, four years ago, I first saw him—when he stood before me in all his proud manly beauty, with his conquering glance, his heart-winning smile? Ah, my whole heart already then flew to meet him. I revelled in the sight of him, I thought only of him, I spoke to him in my thoughts, and my prayers, I lived only when I saw him; and that happy, that never-to-be-forgotten day when he confessed his love, when he lay at my feet and swore eternal truth to me—ah, why could I not have died on that day? I was then *so* happy!"

"Poor Princess Anna," said Julia, sympathetically, "they soon grudged you that happiness!"

"Yes," continued Anna with a bitter smile, "yes, the virtuous Empress Anna blushed in the arms of her lover, Biron, at this aberration of her sold and coupled niece. She found it very revolting that the poor sixteen-year-old Anna Leopoldowna dared to have a heart of her own and to feel a real love. They must therefore rob her of the only happiness Heaven had vouchsafed her. Consequently, they wrote to Warsaw, asking, nay, commanding the recall of the ambassador, and Lynar was compelled to leave me."

"Ah, I well know how unhappy you were at that time," said Julia, pressing the hand of the princess to her bosom; "how you wept, how you wrung your hands—"

"And how I nowhere found mercy or commiseration," interposed Anna, with bitterness, "neither on earth nor in

heaven. I was and remained deserted and solitary, and was compelled to marry this Prince Ulrich of Brunswick, for whom I felt nothing but a chilling, mortal indifference. But you must know, Julia, that when I stood with this man at the altar, and was compelled to become his wife, I thought only of him I loved; I vowed eternal truth only to Lynar, and when the prince folded me in his arms as his wife, then was my God gracious to me, and in a happy deception it seemed to me that it was my lover who held me in his arms—I thought only of him and breathed only his name, and loved him, kissed him, and became his wife, although he was far, alas, so immeasurably far from me! And when I felt a second self under my heart, I then loved with redoubled warmth the distant one whom I had not seen for years; and when Ivan was born, it seemed to me that the eyes of my lover looked at me through his, and blessed my son whose spiritual father he was! And, my child, what think you gave me the courage to overthrow Biron and assume the regency? Ah, it was only that I might have the power to recall Lynar to my side! I would and must be regent, that I might demand the return of Lynar as ambassador from Warsaw. That gave me courage and decision; that enabled me to overcome all timidity and anxiety. I thought only of him, and when the end was attained, when I was declared regent, the first exercise of my power was to recall Lynar to court. Julia, what a happy day was that when I saw him again!”

And the princess, wholly absorbed in her delightful reminiscences, smilingly and silently reclined upon the cushions of the divan.

“Ah, it must be love that so thinks and feels,” thoughtfully observed Julia. “I no longer ask you, Princess Anna, if you love the count, I now know you do. But answer me yet one question. Have you confidence in me—full, unlimited confidence? Will you never mistake, never doubt me?”

“Never!” said Anna Leopoldowna, confidently. “And if all the world should tell me that Julia von Mengden is a traitress, I would nevertheless firmly rely upon you, and reply to the whole world: ‘That is false! Julia von Mengden is true and pure as gold. I shall always love her.’”

Julia gratefully glanced up to the heavens, and her eyes filled with tears.

“I thank you, princess,” she then said, with a happy smile. “I now have courage for all. You shall now be enabled to love your Lynar without fear or trembling, and your husband’s clouded brow and reproaching tongue shall molest us no more. Confide in me and ask no questions. It is all decided and arranged in my mind. But hark! do you hear nothing?”

Anna’s face was transfused with a purple glow, and her eyes flashed.

“It is my beloved,” said she. “Yes, it is he. I know his step!”

Julia smilingly opened the concealed door, and Count Lynar, with a cry of joy, rushed to the feet of his beloved.

“At length!” he exclaimed, clasping her feet, and pressing them to his bosom.

“Yes, at length!” murmured Anna, looking down upon him with a celestial smile.

Julia stood at a distance, contemplating them with thoughtful glances.

"They should be happy," she murmured low, and then asked aloud: "Count Lynar, did you receive my letter?"

"I did receive it," said the count, "and may God reward you for the sacrifice you are so generously disposed to make for us! Anna, your friend Julia is our good angel. To her we shall owe it if our happiness is henceforth indestructible and indissoluble. Do you know the immense sacrifice this young maiden proposes to make for us?"

"No, Princess Anna knows nothing, and shall know nothing of it," said Julia, with a grand air. "Princess Anna shall only know that I love her, and am ready to give my life for her. And now," she continued, with her natural gayety, "forget me, ye happy lovers! Lull yourselves in the sweet enjoyment of nameless ecstasies! I go to watch the spies, and especially your husband, lest he break in upon you without notice!"

And Julia suddenly left the room, shutting the door upon Anna Leopoldowna and her lover, the Polish Count Lynar.

CHAPTER VIII.

NO LOVE.

PRINCE ULRICH of Brunswick, the husband of the regent, had assembled the officers of his general staff for a secret conference. Their dark, threatening glances were prophetic of mischief, and angrily flashed the eyes of the

prince, who, standing in their midst, had spoken to them in glowing words of his domestic unhappiness, and of the idle, dreamy, and amatory indolence into which the regent had fallen.

"She writes amorous complainings," he now said, with a voice of rage, in closing his long speech—"she writes sonnets to her lover, instead of governing and reading the petitions, reports, and other documents that come to her from the different ministries and bureaus, which she constantly returns unread. You are men, and are you willing to bear the humiliation of being governed by a woman who dishonors you by disregarding her first and holiest duties, and setting before your wives and daughters the shameful example of a criminal love, thus disgracing her own son, your emperor and master?"

"No, no, we will not bear it!" cried the wildly excited men, grasping the hilts of their swords. "Give us proof of her unfaithfulness, and we shall know how to act as becomes men over whom an adulterous woman would reign!"

"It is an unnatural and unendurable law that commands man to obey a woman. It is contrary to nature that the mother should rule in the name of her son, when the father is living—the father, whom nature and universal custom acknowledge as the lord and head of his wife and children!" cried the prince.

"Give us proof of her guilt," cried the soldiers, "and we will this very hour proclaim you regent in her stead!"

A confidential servant of the prince, who entered at this moment, now whispered a few words in his ear.

The prince's face flamed up. "Well, then, gentlemen,"