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A QUEEN OF TEARS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE LOVE OF AN UNCROWNED QUEEN:

SOPHIE DOROTHEA, CONSORT OF GEORGE I., AND HER CORRESPONDENCE WITH PHILIP CHRISTOPHER, COUNT KONIGSMARCK.

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LONDON, NEW YORK AND BOMBAY.

O keep me innocent, make others great.

Caroline Mathilde.

After the painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1766.
Walter S. Colls, Ph. Sc.

A QUEEN OF TEARS

CAROLINE MATILDA, QUEEN OF DENMARK AND NORWAY AND PRINCESS OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

BY

W. H. WILKINS

M.A., F.S.A.

Author of "The Love of an Uncrowned Queen," and "Caroline the Illustrious, Queen Consort of George II."

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

IN TWO VOLUMES

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PREFACE

[Pg v]

Some years ago, when visiting Celle in connection with a book I was writing on Sophie Dorothea, *The Love of an Uncrowned Queen*, I found, in an unfrequented garden outside the town, a grey marble monument of unusual beauty. Around the base ran an inscription to the effect that it was erected in loving memory of Caroline Matilda, Queen of Denmark and Norway, Princess of Great Britain and Ireland, who died at Celle in 1775, at the age of twenty-three years. To this may be traced the origin of this book, for until I saw the monument I had not heard of this English Princess—a sister of George III. The only excuse to be offered for this ignorance is that it is shared by the great majority of Englishmen. For though the romantic story of Caroline Matilda is known to every Dane—she is the Mary Stuart of Danish history—her name is almost forgotten in the land of her birth, and this despite the fact that little more than a century ago her imprisonment nearly led to a war between England and Denmark.

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Inquiry soon revealed the full measure of my ignorance. The dramatic tale of Queen Caroline Matilda and her unhappy love for Struensee, her Prime Minister, has been told in Danish, German, French and English in a variety of ways. Apart from history and biography, it has formed the theme of novels and plays, and even of an opera. The most trustworthy works on the Queen and Struensee are written in Danish, a language not widely read. In English nothing of importance has been written about her for half a century,[1] and, owing to the fact that many documents, then inaccessible, have since become available, the books are necessarily incomplete, and most of them untrustworthy. Moreover, they have been long out of print.

[1] I except Dr. A. W. Ward's contribution to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, but this is necessarily brief. A list of the books which have been written about the Queen in different languages will be found in the Appendix.

My object, therefore, in writing this book has been to tell once more the story of this forgotten "daughter of England" in the light of recent historical research. I may claim to have broken fresh ground. The despatches of Titley, Cosby, Gunning, Keith and Woodford (British Ministers at Copenhagen, 1764-1775) and others, quoted in this book, are here published for the first time in any language. They yield authoritative information concerning the Queen's brief reign at the Danish court, and the character of the personages who took part, directly or indirectly, in the palace revolution of 1772. Even Professor E. Holm, of Copenhagen, in his admirable work, *Danmark-Norges Historie* (published in 1902), vol. iv. of which deals with the Matilda-Struensee

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period, is ignorant of these important despatches, which I found two years ago in the State Paper Office, London. To these are added many documents from the Royal Archives at Copenhagen; most of them, it is true, have been published in the Danish, but they are unknown to English readers. I have also, in connection with this book, more than once visited Denmark, and have had access to the Royal Archives at Copenhagen, and to the palaces in which the Queen lived during her unhappy life at the Danish court. I have followed her to Kronborg, where she was imprisoned, and to Celle, in Germany, where she died in exile. My researches at this latter place may serve to throw light on the closing (and little-known) years of the Queen's brief life. She rests at Celle by the side of her ancestress, Sophie Dorothea, whose life in many ways closely resembled her own.

A word of explanation is perhaps necessary for the first few chapters of this book. In all the biographies of Caroline Matilda written in any language, her life in England before her marriage has received scant consideration, probably on account of her extreme youth. As her parentage and education were largely responsible for the mistakes of her later years, I have sketched, with some detail, the characters of her father and mother, and her early environment. This plan has enabled me to describe briefly the English court from the death of Queen Caroline to the accession of George III., and so to form a link with my other books on the House of Hanover.

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My thanks are due to Miss Hermione Ramsden for kindly translating for me sundry documents from the Danish; to Mr. Louis Bobé, of Copenhagen, for much interesting information; and to the Editor of the *Nineteenth Century and After* for allowing me to re-publish certain passages from an article I recently contributed to that review on Augusta, Princess of Wales. I must also thank the Earl of Wharncliffe for permitting me to reproduce the picture of Lord Bute at Wortley Hall, and Count Kielmansegg for similar permission with regard to the portrait of Madame de Walmoden at Gülzow.

W. H. WILKINS.

November, 1903.

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BIRTH AND PARENTAGE.

1751.

Caroline Matilda, Queen of Denmark and Norway, Princess of Great Britain and Ireland (a sister of George III.), was born at Leicester House, London, on Thursday, July 22, 1751. She was the ninth and youngest child of Frederick Prince of Wales and of his wife Augusta of Saxe-Gotha, and came into the world a little more than four months after her father's death. There is a Scandinavian superstition to the effect that children born fatherless are heirs to misfortune. The life of this "Queen of Tears" would seem to illustrate its truth.

Caroline Matilda inherited many of her father's qualities, notably his warm, emotional temperament, his desire to please and his open-handed liberality. Both in appearance and disposition she resembled her father much more than her mother. Some account of this Prince is therefore necessary for a right understanding of his daughter's character, for, though she was born after his death, the silent forces of heredity influenced her life.

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Frederick Prince of Wales was the elder son of George II. and of his consort Caroline of Ansbach. He was born in Hanover during the reign of Queen Anne, when the prospects of his family to succeed to the crown of England were doubtful, and he did not come to England until he was in his twenty-second year and his father had reigned two years. He came against the will of the King and Queen, whose cherished wish was that their younger son William Duke of Cumberland should succeed to the English throne, and the elder remain in Hanover. The unkindness with which Frederick was treated by his father had the effect of driving him into opposition to the court and the government. He had inherited from his mother many of the graces that go to captivate the multitude, and he soon became popular. Every cast-off minister, every discontented politician, sought the Prince of Wales, and found in him a ready weapon to harass the government and wound the King. The Prince had undoubted grievances, such as his restricted allowance and the postponement of his marriage to a suitable princess. For some years after Frederick's arrival in England the King managed to evade the question of the marriage, but at last, owing chiefly to the clamour of the opposition, he reluctantly arranged a match between the Prince of Wales and Augusta, daughter of the reigning Duke of Saxe-Gotha.

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The bride-elect landed at Greenwich in April, 1736, and, two days after her arrival, was married to Frederick at the Chapel Royal, St. James's. The Princess was only seventeen years of age and could not speak a word of English. She was tall and slender, with an oval face, regular features, bright, intelligent eyes, and an abundance of light-brown hair. Frederick's marriage did not make him on better terms with his parents, and in this family quarrel the Princess, who soon showed that she possessed more than usual discretion, sided with her husband. The disputes between the King and the Prince of Wales culminated in an open act of revolt on the part of the latter, when, with incredible folly, he carried off his wife, on the point of her first lying-in, from Hampton Court to St. James's. Half an hour after her arrival in London the Princess was delivered of a girl child, Augusta, who later in life became Duchess of Brunswick. The King was furious at this insubordination, and as soon as the Princess was sufficiently recovered to be moved, he sent his son a message ordering him to quit St. James's with all his household. The Prince and Princess went to Kew, where they had a country house; and for a temporary London residence (while Carlton House, which the Prince had bought, was being repaired) they took Norfolk House, St. James's Square.

A few weeks after this rupture the illustrious Queen Caroline died, to the great grief of the King and the nation. Her death widened the breach in the royal family, for the King considered that his son's undutiful conduct had hastened his mother's death. Frederick now ranged himself in open

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opposition to the King and the government, and gathered around him the malcontent politicians, who saw in Walpole's fall, or Frederick's accession to the throne, their only chance of rising to power. The following year, 1738, a son and heir (afterwards George III.) was born to the Prince and Princess of Wales at Norfolk House. This event strengthened the position of the Prince, especially as the King's health was reported to be failing.

Frederick removed his household to Leicester House in Leicester Fields. It was here, eleven years later, that his posthumous daughter Caroline Matilda was born. Leicester House was built by the Earl of Leicester in the reign of James I. There was a field before it in those days, but a square was subsequently built around the field, and Leicester House occupied the north-east corner of what was then Leicester Fields, but is now known as Leicester Square. It was a large and spacious house, with a courtyard in front, and the state rooms were admirably adapted for receptions and levees, but as a residence it was not so satisfactory. Frederick chiefly made use of Carlton House and Kew for his family life, and kept Leicester House for entertaining. His court there offered a curious parallel to the one his father had held within the same walls in the reign of George I., when the heir to the throne was also at variance with the King. Again Leicester House became the rallying place of the opposition, again its walls echoed with the sound of music

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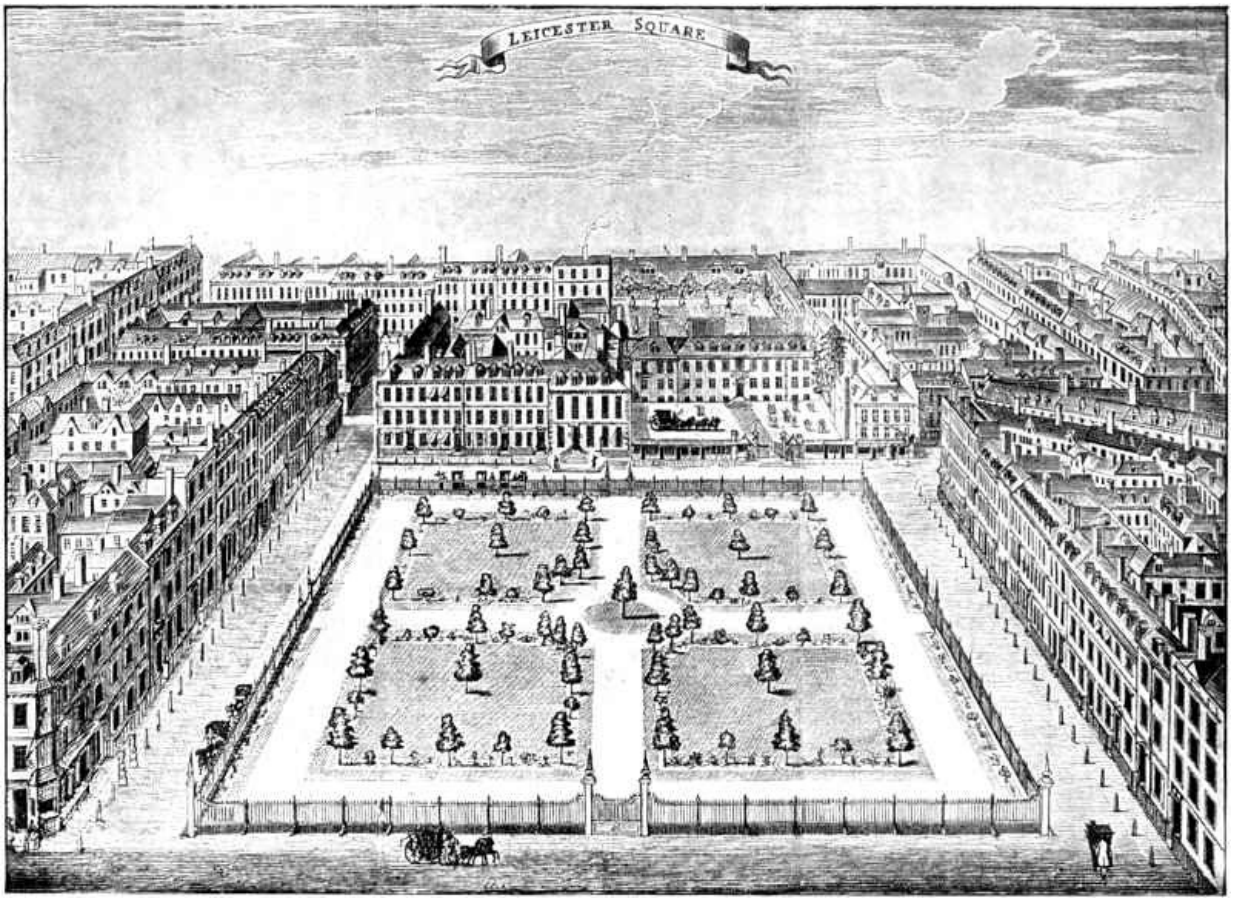
and dance, again there flocked to its assemblies ladies of beauty and fashion, elegant beaux, brilliant wits, politicians and pamphleteers. Frederick's intelligence has been much abused, but he was intelligent enough to gather around him at this time much of what was best in the social life of the day, and his efforts were ably seconded by his clever and graceful wife.



LEICESTER HOUSE, WHERE QUEEN MATILDA WAS BORN.

After the fall of Walpole several of the Prince's friends took office, and a formal, though by no means cordial, reconciliation was patched up between the King and the Heir Apparent, but there was always veiled hostility between them, and from time to time their differences threatened to become acute. For instance, after the Jacobite rising the Prince of Wales disapproved of the severities of his brother, the Duke of Cumberland, "the butcher of Culloden," and showed his displeasure in no unequivocal manner. When the Jacobite peers were condemned to death the Prince and Princess interceded for them, in one case with success. Lady Cromartie, after petitioning the King in vain for her husband's life, made a personal appeal, as a wife and mother, to the Princess of Wales, and brought her four children to plead with her as well. The Princess said nothing, but, with evident emotion, summoned her own children and placed them beside her. This she followed by praying the King for Cromartie's life, and her prayer was granted.

After the reconciliation the Prince and Princess of Wales occasionally attended St. James's, but since the death of Queen Caroline the court of George II. had lost its brilliancy and become both gross and dull, in this respect contrasting unfavourably with Leicester House. Grossness and dulness were characteristic of the courts of our first two Hanoverian kings, but whatever complaint might be brought against Leicester House, the society there was far livelier and more refined than that which assembled at St. James's. The popular grievance against Leicester House was that it was too French. France was just then very unpopular in England, and the British public did not like the French tastes of the Prince of Wales—the masques imitated from Versailles, the French plays acted by French players and the *petits soupers*. High play also took place at Leicester House, but the Princess did her best to discourage this. In the other frivolities which her husband loved she acquiesced, more for the sake of keeping her influence over him than because she liked them. Her tastes were simple, and her tendencies puritanical. [Pg 6]

At Kew the Prince and Princess of Wales led a quieter life, and here the influence of the Princess was in the ascendant. Kew House was an old-fashioned, low, rambling house, which the Prince had taken on a long lease from the Capel family. The great beauty of Kew lay in its extensive garden, which was improved and enlarged by Frederick. He built there orangeries and hothouses after the fashion of Herrenhausen, and filled them with exotics. Both Frederick and his wife had a love of gardening, and often worked with their children in the grounds, and dug, weeded and planted to their hearts' content. Sometimes they would compel their guests to lend a hand as well. Bubb Dodington tells how he went down to Kew on a visit, accompanied by several lords and ladies, and they were promptly set to work in the garden, probably to their disgust. Dodington's diary contains the following entries:— [Pg 7]

> "*1750, February 27.*—Worked in the new walk at Kew.
>
> "*1750, February 28.*—All of us, men, women and children, worked at the same place. A cold dinner."[2]

[2] Bubb Dodington's *Diary*, edition 1784.

It was like Frederick's monkeyish humour to make the portly and pompous Dodington work in his garden; no doubt he hugely enjoyed the sight. The Prince's amusements were varied, if we may

judge from the following account by Dodington:—

> "*1750, June 28.*—Lady Middlesex, Lord Bathurst, Mr. Breton and I waited on their Royal Highnesses to Spitalfields to see the manufactory of silk, and to Mr. Carr's shop in the morning. In the afternoon the same company, with Lady Torrington in waiting, went in private coaches to Norwood Forest to see a settlement of gypsies. We returned and went to Bettesworth the conjurer, in hackney coaches. Not finding him we went in search of the little Dutchman, but were disappointed; and concluded the particularities [Pg 8]
> of this day by supping with Mrs. Cannon, the Princess's midwife."[3]

[3] Bubb Dodington's *Diary*, edition 1784.

These, it must be admitted, were not very intellectual amusements. On the other hand it stands to Frederick's credit that he chose as his personal friends some of the ablest men of the day, and found delight and recreation in their society. Between him and Bolingbroke there existed the warmest sympathy. When Bolingbroke came back to England after Walpole's fall, he renewed his friendship with Frederick, and often paced with him and the Princess through the gardens and shrubberies of their favourite Kew, while he waxed eloquent over the tyranny of the Whig oligarchy, which kept the King in thrall, and held up before them his ideal of a patriot king. Both the Prince and Princess listened eagerly to Bolingbroke's theories, and in after years the Princess instilled them into the mind of her eldest son. Chesterfield and Sir William Wyndham also came to Kew sometimes, and here Frederick and Augusta exhibited with just pride their flower-beds to Pope, who wrote of his patron—

> And if yet higher the proud list should end
> Still, let me add, no follower, but a friend.

The Prince not only sought the society of men of letters, but made some attempts at authorship himself. His verse was not very remarkable; the best perhaps was the poem addressed to the Princess beginning:—

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> 'Tis not the liquid brightness of those eyes,
> That swim with pleasure and delight;
> Nor those heavenly arches which arise
> O'er each of them, to shade their light:

and so on through five stanzas of praise of Augusta's charms, until:

> No,—'tis that gentleness of mind, that love
> So kindly answering my desire;
> That grace with which you look, and speak, and move,
> That thus has set my soul on fire.

Perhaps it was of these lines that the Prince once asked Lord Poulett his opinion. "Sir," replied that astute courtier, "they are worthy of your Royal Highness."

Notwithstanding his admiration of his wife, Frederick was not faithful to her. But it may be doubted whether, after his marriage, he indulged in any serious intrigue, and his flirtations were probably only tributes offered to the shrine of gallantry after the fashion of the day. In every other respect he was a good husband. He was also a devoted father, a kind master to his servants, and a true friend. In his public life he always professed a love of liberty. To a deputation of Quakers he once delivered the following answer: "As I am a friend to liberty in general, and to toleration in particular, I wish you may meet with all proper favour, but, for myself, I never gave my vote in parliament, and to influence my friends, or direct my servants, in theirs, does not become my station. To leave them entirely to their own consciences and understandings, is a rule I have hitherto prescribed to myself, and purpose through life to observe." "May it please the [Pg 10]
Prince of Wales," rejoined the Quaker at the head of the deputation, "I am greatly affected with thy excellent notions of liberty, and am more pleased with the answer thou hast given us, than if thou hadst granted our request."

Frederick avowed a great love for the country over which he one day hoped to reign; and, though French in his tastes rather than English, he did all in his power to encourage the national sentiment. For instance, it is recorded on one of his birthdays: "There was a very splendid appearance of the nobility and gentry and their ladies at Leicester House, and his Royal Highness observing some lords to wear French stuffs, immediately ordered the Duke of Chandos, his Groom of the Stole, to acquaint them, and his servants in general, that after that day he should be greatly displeased to see them appear in any French manufacture".[4]

[4] *The Annual Register*, January, 1748.

Moreover, he instilled in the minds of his children the loftiest sentiments of patriotism. In view of the German predilections of his father and grandfather the training which Frederick gave his children, especially his eldest son, had much to do in after years with reconciling the Tory and Jacobite malcontents to the established dynasty. The wounds occasioned by the rising of 1745 were still bleeding, but the battle of Culloden had extinguished for ever the hopes of the Stuarts, and many of their adherents were casting about for a pretext of acquiescing in the inevitable.

These Frederick met more than half way. He was not born in England (neither was Charles Edward), but his children were, and he taught them to consider themselves Englishmen and not Germans, and to love the land of their birth. His English sentiments appear again and again in his letters and speeches. They crop up in some verses which he wrote for his children to recite at their dramatic performances. On one occasion the piece selected for representation was Addison's play of *Cato*, in which Prince George, Prince Edward, and the Princesses Augusta and Elizabeth took part. Frederick wrote a prologue and an epilogue; the prologue was spoken by Prince George. After a panegyric on liberty the future King went on to say:— [Pg 11]

> Should this superior to my years be thought,
> Know—'tis the first great lesson I was taught.
> What! though a boy! it may with pride be said
> A boy—in England born, in England bred;
> Where freedom well becomes the earliest state,
> For there the laws of liberty innate—etc., etc.

There came an echo of this early teaching years later when George III. wrote into the text of his first speech to parliament the memorable words: "Born and educated in this country, I glory in the name of Briton".

In the epilogue spoken by Prince Edward similar sentiments were expressed:—

> In England born, my inclination,
> Like yours, is wedded to this nation:
> And future times, I hope, will see
> Me General in reality.[5] [Pg 12]
> Indeed, I wish to serve this land,
> It is my father's strict command;
> And none he ever gave shall be
> More cheerfully obeyed by me.

[5] Prince Edward, Duke of York, became a Vice-Admiral of the Blue.

We get many pleasant glimpses, in contemporary letters and memoirs, of the domestic felicity of the royal household at Kew and Leicester House; of games of baseball and "push pin," with the children in the winter, of gardening and cricket in the summer, and of little plays, sometimes composed by the Prince, staged by the Princess and acted by their sons and daughters all the year round. "The Prince's family," Lady Hervey writes, "is an example of innocent and cheerful amusement,"[6] and her testimony is corroborated on all sides.

[6] Lady Hervey's *Letters*.

Frederick Prince of Wales died suddenly on March 20, 1751, to the great grief of his wife and children, and the consternation of his political adherents. The Prince had been suffering from a chill, but no one thought that there was any danger. On the eighth day of his illness, in the evening, he was sitting up in bed, listening to the performance of Desnoyers, the violinist, when he was seized with a violent fit of coughing. He put his hand upon his heart and cried, "*Je sens la mort!*" The Princess, who was in the room, flew to her husband's assistance, but before she could reach his side he was dead. Later it was shown that the immediate cause of death was the breaking of an abscess in his side, which had been caused by a blow from a cricket ball a few weeks before. Cricket had been recently introduced into England, and Frederick was one of the first to encourage the game, which soon became national. He often played in matches at Cliveden and Kew. [Pg 13]

No Prince has been more maligned than Frederick Prince of Wales, and none on less foundation. He opposed Walpole and the Whig domination, and therefore the Whig pamphleteers of the time, and Whig historians since, have poured on him the vials of their wrath, and contemptuously dismissed him as half fool and half rogue. But the utmost that can be proved against him is that he was frivolous, and unduly fond of gambling and gallantry. These failings were common to the age, and in his case they were largely due to his neglected youth. Badly educated, disliked by his parents, to whom he grew up almost a stranger, and surrounded from the day of his arrival in England by malcontents, parasites and flatterers, it would have needed a much stronger man than Frederick to resist the evil influences around him. His public utterances, and there is no real ground for doubting their sincerity, go to show that he was a prince of liberal and enlightened views, a friend of peace and a lover of England. It is probable that, had he been spared to ascend the throne, he would have made a better king than either his father or grandfather. It is possible that he would have made a better king than his son, for, though he was by no means so good a man, he was more pliant, more tolerant, and far less obstinate. Speculation is idle in such matters, but it is unlikely, if Frederick had been on the throne instead of George III., that he would have encouraged the policy which lost us our American colonies. Dying when he did, all that can be said of Frederick politically is that he never had a fair chance. Keeping the mean between two extreme parties in the state he was made the butt of both, but the fact remains that he attracted to his side some of the ablest among the moderate men who cared little for party and much for the state. Certainly nothing in his life justified the bitter Jacobite epigram circulated shortly after his death:— [Pg 14]

Here lies Fred,
Who was alive, and is dead,
Had it been his father,
I had much rather;
Had it been his brother,
Still better than another;
Had it been his sister,
No one would have missed her;
Had it been the whole generation,
So much better for the nation;
But since ’tis only Fred,
Who was alive, and is dead,
There’s no more to be said.

George II. was playing cards when the news of his son’s death was brought to him. He turned very pale and said nothing for a minute; then he rose, whispered to Lady Yarmouth, “*Fritz ist todt*,” and quitted the room. But he sent that same night a message of condolence to the bereaved widow.

FREDERICK, PRINCE OF WALES, FATHER OF QUEEN MATILDA.
From the Painting by J. B. Vanloo at Warwick Castle, by permission of the Earl of Warwick.

The death of her husband was a great blow to Augusta Princess of Wales. Suddenly deprived of the prospect of becoming Queen of England, she found herself, at the age of thirty-two, left a widow with eight young children and expecting shortly to give birth to another. Her situation excited great commiseration, and among the people the dead Prince was generally regretted, for despite his follies he was known to be kindly and humane. Elegies were cried about the streets, and very common exclamations were: “Oh, that it were his brother!” “Oh, that it were the Butcher!” Still it cannot be pretended that Frederick was deeply mourned. A conversation was overheard between two workmen, who were putting up the hatchment over the gate at Leicester [Pg 15]

House, which fairly voiced the popular sentiment: “He has left a great many small children,” said one. “Aye,” replied the other, “and what is worse, they belong to our parish.”

Contrary to expectation the King behaved with great kindness to his daughter-in-law, and a few days after her bereavement paid her a visit in person. He refused the chair of state placed for him, seated himself on the sofa beside the Princess, and at the sight of her sorrow was so much moved as to shed tears. When the Princess Augusta, his eldest granddaughter, came forward to kiss his hand, he took her in his arms and embraced her. To his grandsons the King said: “Be brave boys, be obedient to your mother, and endeavour to do credit to the high station in which you are born”. He who had never acted the tender father delighted in playing “the tender grandfather”.[7] [Pg 16]

[7] *Vide* Horace Walpole’s *Reign of George II.*

A month after his father’s death Prince George was created Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester, but the young Prince, though always respectful, never entertained any affectionate feelings for his grandfather. This may have been due, in part, to the unforgiving spirit with which the old King followed his son even to the tomb. Frederick’s funeral was shorn of almost every circumstance of state. No princes of the blood and no important members of the government attended, and he was buried in Westminster Abbey “without either anthem or organ”. Of the few faithful friends who attended the last rites, Dodington writes: “There was not the attention to order the board of green cloth to provide them a bit of bread; and these gentlemen of the first rank and distinction, in discharge of their last sad duty to a loved, and loving, master, were forced to bespeak a great, cold dinner from a common tavern in the neighbourhood; at three o’clock, indeed, they vouchsafed to think of a dinner and ordered one, but the disgrace was complete—the tavern dinner was paid for and given to the poor”.[8]

[8] Dodington’s *Diary*, April 13, O.S., 1751, edition 1784.

Some five months after Frederick’s death his widow gave birth to a princess, the subject of this book. Dodington thus records the event, which, except in the *London Gazette*, was barely noticed by the journals of the day:—

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> “On Wednesday, the Princess walked in Carlton Gardens, supped and went to bed very well; she was taken ill about six o’clock on Thursday morning, and about eight was delivered of a Princess. Both well.”[9]

[9] Dodington’s *Diary*, July 13, O.S., 1751, edition 1784.

The advent of this daughter was hardly an occasion for rejoicing. Apart from the melancholy circumstances of her birth, her widowed mother had already a young and numerous family,[10] several of whom were far from strong, and all, with the exception of her eldest son, the heir presumptive to the throne, unprovided for.

[10] Table. See next page.

Eleven days after her birth the Princess was baptised at Leicester House by Dr. Hayter, Bishop of Norwich, and given the names of Caroline Matilda, the first being after her grandmother, the second harking back to our Norman queens. Except in official documents she was always known by the latter name, and it is the one therefore that will be used in speaking of her throughout this book. The infant had three sponsors, her aunt the Princess Caroline (represented by proxy), her eldest sister the Princess Augusta, and her eldest brother the Prince of Wales. In the case of the godfather the sponsorship was no mere form, for George III. stood in the light of guardian to his sister all through her life.

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TABLE SHOWING THE CHILDREN OF FREDERICK AND AUGUSTA, PRINCE AND PRINCESS OF WALES, AND ALSO THE DESCENT OF HIS MAJESTY KING EDWARD VII. FROM FREDERICK PRINCE OF WALES.

Frederick Prince of Wales (son of George II. and Caroline of Ansbach). ═══ Augusta of Saxe-Gotha (daughter of Frederick II. Duke of Saxe-Gotha).

—Augusta, b. 1737, d. 1813, m. Charles William Duke of Brunswick, and had issue among others

Caroline, Consort of George IV., who had issue

Princess Charlotte, d. in childbirth, 1817.

—George III., b. 1738, d. 1820, m. Charlotte Princess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, and had issue among others

Edward Duke of Kent

Queen Victoria

King Edward VII.

—Edward Duke of York, b. 1738, d. 1767, unmarried.

—Elizabeth, b. 1739, d. 1759, unmarried.

—William Henry Duke of Gloucester, b. 1743, d. 1805, m. Maria Countess Dowager Waldegrave, illegitimate dau. of Sir Edward Walpole, and had issue among others

William Frederick Duke of Gloucester, m. Mary, dau. of George III., no issue.

—Henry Frederick Duke of Cumberland b. 1745, d. 1790, m. Anne, dau. of Lord Irnham, afterwards Earl of Carlhampton, and widow of Andrew Horton, no issue.

—Louisa Anne, b. 1748, d. 1768, unmarried.

—Frederick William, b. 1750, d. 1765, unmarried.

—CAROLINE MATILDA, b. July 11, 1751, m. 1766, Christian VII., King of Denmark, d. 1775, and had issue

Frederick VI., King of Denmark, d. 1839, and
Louise Augusta, Duchess of Augustenburg, d. 1843.

CHAPTER II.

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CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH.

1751-1760.

The early years of the Princess Matilda were passed at Carlton House and Kew. After her husband's death the Princess-Dowager of Wales, as she was called, resided for the most part in London at Carlton House. She used Leicester House on state occasions, and kept it chiefly for her two elder sons who lived there with their tutors. Carlton House was a stately building fronting St. James's Park with an entrance in Pall Mall. It was built by a Lord Carlton in the reign of Queen Anne, and was sold in 1732 to Frederick Prince of Wales. The great feature of Carlton House was its beautiful garden, which extended along the Mall as far as Marlborough House, and was laid out on the same plan as Pope's famous garden at Twickenham. There were smooth lawns, fine trees and winding walks, and bowers, grottoes and statuary abounded. This garden gave Carlton House a great advantage over Leicester House in the matter of privacy, and was of benefit to the children.

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Cliveden, near Maidenhead, and Park Place, Henley-on-Thames, two country places, owned, or leased, by Frederick were given up, but the Princess retained her favourite house at Kew, and sent her younger children down there as much as possible. The greater part of Matilda's childhood was spent there, and Kew and its gardens are more associated with her memory than any other place in England. The Princess-Dowager encouraged in all her children simplicity of living, love of fresh air and healthy exercise. Each of the little princes and princesses was allotted at Kew a small plot of ground wherein to dig and plant. Gardening was Matilda's favourite amusement, and in one of the earliest of her letters she writes to a girl friend:—

> "Since you left Richmond I have much improved my little plot in our garden at Kew, and have become quite proficient in my knowledge of exotics. I often miss your company, not only for your lively chat, but for your approbation of my horticultural embellishments.... You know we [the royal children] have but a narrow circle of amusements, which we can sometimes vary but never enlarge."[11]

[11] The authenticity of this letter is doubtful. It first appeared in a work entitled *Memoirs of an Unfortunate Queen, interspersed with letters written by Herself to several of her Illustrious Relatives and Friends*, published 1776, soon after Matilda's death. Some of the letters may be genuine, others are undoubtedly spurious.

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The Princess was better educated than the majority of English ladies of her time, many of whom could do little more than read and write (but seldom could spell) with the addition of a few superficial accomplishments. Matilda was a fair linguist, she could speak and write French well, and had a smattering of Italian. Like her brothers and sisters she committed to memory long passages from English classics, and recited them with fluency and expression. She had a great love of music, and played on the harpsichord, and sang in a sweet and pleasing voice. She was thoroughly trained in "deportment," and danced to perfection. She was a pretty, graceful girl, not awkward, even at the most awkward age, and early gave promise of beauty. She rejoiced in an affectionate, generous disposition and a bright and happy temperament. She stood in awe of her mother, but she was devoted to her brothers and sisters, especially to her eldest sister, Princess Augusta.

This Princess was the one who was suddenly hurried into the world on a July night at St. James's Palace. She was fourteen years of age when Matilda was born, and was a woman before her youngest sister ceased to be a child, so that she stood to her in the place of friend and counsellor. Augusta had not the beauty of Matilda, but she was a comely maiden with regular features, well-shaped figure, pleasant smile, and general animation. She was the best educated of the family. This was largely due to her thirst for knowledge. She read widely, and interested herself in the political and social questions of the day to a degree unusual with princesses of her age. She was sharp and quick-witted, and in her childhood precocious beyond her years. "La! Sir Robert," she

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pertly exclaimed, when only seven years of age, to Sir Robert Rich, whom she had mistaken for Sir Robert Walpole, "what has become of your blue string and your big belly?" Sir "Blue-string" was one of the Tory nicknames for Walpole, and in the caricatures of the time his corpulence was an endless subject of ridicule. Her parents, instead of reprimanding her, laughed at her pleasantries, with the result that they often found her inconveniently frank and troublesome. After Frederick's death her mother, who had no wish to have a grown-up daughter too soon, kept her in the background as much as possible, a treatment which the lively Augusta secretly resented.

Matilda's other sisters, the Princesses Elizabeth and Louisa Anne, were nearer her in age and were much more tractable than Augusta. They both suffered from ill-health. Her eldest brother George Prince of Wales was a silent youth, shy and retiring, and not demonstrative in any way. Edward, her second brother, afterwards Duke of York, was livelier and was always a favourite with his sister. Her three youngest brothers, William Henry, afterwards Duke of Gloucester, Henry Frederick, later Duke of Cumberland, and Frederick William (who died at the age of fifteen), were her chief playmates, for they were nearer her in age. The children of Frederick Prince of Wales and Augusta had one characteristic in common; clever or stupid, lively or dull, sickly or strong in health, they were all affectionate and fond of one another. Quarrels were rare,

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and the brothers and sisters united in loving and spoiling the pet of the family, pretty, bright little Matilda.

For eighteen months after her husband's death the Princess-Dowager of Wales remained in closest retirement. At the end of that time she reappeared in public and attended court, where, by the King's command, she received the same honours as had been paid to the late Queen Caroline. She was also made guardian of her eldest son, in case of the King's demise during the Prince of Wales' minority. William Duke of Cumberland bitterly resented this appointment as a personal affront, and declared to his friends that he now felt his own insignificance, and wished the name of William could be blotted out of the English annals. It increased his jealousy of his sister-in-law, and she, on her part, made no secret of her inveterate dislike of him. Her children were taught to regard their uncle as a monster because of his cruelties at Culloden, and he complained to the Princess-Dowager of the "base and villainous insinuations" which had poisoned their minds against him.

The Princess-Dowager of Wales rarely attended St. James's except on ceremonial occasions. Nominally George II.'s court, for the last twenty years of his reign, was presided over by the King's eldest unmarried daughter, Princess Amelia, or Emily, a princess who, as years went on, lost her good looks as well as her manners. She became deaf and short-sighted, and was chiefly known for her sharp tongue and her love of scandal and high play. She had no influence with the [Pg 24] King, and her unamiable characteristics made her unpopular with the courtiers, who treated her as a person of no importance. In reality the *dame regnante* at St. James's was Madame de Walmoden, Countess of Yarmouth, who had been the King's mistress at Hanover. He brought her over to England the year after Queen Caroline's death, lodged her in the palace, created her a peeress, and gave her a pension. In her youth the Walmoden had been a great beauty, but as she advanced in years she became exceedingly stout. Ministers, peers, politicians, place-hunters of all kinds, even bishops and Church dignitaries, paid their court to her. She accepted all this homage for what it was worth, but though she now and then obtained a place for a favourite, she very wisely abstained from meddling in English politics, which she did not understand, and chiefly occupied herself in amassing wealth.

MADAME DE WALMODEN, COUNTESS OF YARMOUTH.
From the Painting at Gülzow, by permission of Count Kielmansegg.

Lady Yarmouth was the last instance of a mistress of the King of England who received a peerage. Her title did not give her much prestige, and her presence at court did not add to its

lustre. During her ten years' reign Queen Caroline had set an example of virtue and decorum, which was not forgotten, and the presence of a recognised mistress standing in her place was resented by many of the wives of the high nobility. Some of these ladies abstained from going to St. James's on principle, others, and these the more numerous, because the assemblies there had [Pg 25] become insufferably dull and tedious. If the court had been conducted on the lavish scale which marked the reigns of the Stuarts, if beauty, wit and brilliancy had met together, some slight lapses from the strict path of virtue might have been overlooked. But a court, which was at once vicious and dull, was impossible.

The Princess-Dowager of Wales, who prided herself on the propriety of her conduct and the ordered regularity of her household, was the most conspicuous absentee, and though she now and then attended St. James's as in duty bound, she never took her daughters to court, but declared that the society there would contaminate them. She rarely, if ever, honoured the mansions of the nobility with a visit, and her appearances in public were few and far between. She lived a life of strict seclusion, which her children shared. During the ten years that elapsed between Frederick's death and George III.'s accession to the throne, the Princess-Dowager was little more than a name to the outer world; the time had not come when the veil of privacy was to be rudely torn from her domestic life, and the publicity from which she shrank turned on her with its most pitiless glare.

The policy of the Princess was to keep in the background as much as possible and devote herself wholly to the care and education of her numerous family. She did her duty (or what she conceived to be her duty) to her children to the utmost in her power, and in her stern, undemonstrative way there is no doubt that she loved them. She ruled her household with a rod [Pg 26] of iron, her children feared and obeyed, but it could hardly be said that they loved her. Despite her high sense of duty, almsgiving and charity, the Princess-Dowager was not a lovable woman. Her temperament was cold and austere, her religion was tinged with puritanism, and her views were strict and narrow. She had many of the virtues associated with the Roman matron. There was only one flaw in the armour of the royal widow's reputation, and this her enemies were quick to note. That flaw was her friendship with Lord Bute.

John, third Earl of Bute, had been a favourite of Frederick Prince of Wales. He owed his introduction to the Prince to an accident which, slight though it was, served to lay the foundations of his future political career. He was watching a cricket match at Cliveden when a heavy shower of rain came on. The Prince, who had been playing, withdrew to a tent and proposed a game of whist until the weather should clear. At first nobody could be found to take a fourth hand, but presently one of the Prince's suite espied Bute and asked him to complete the party. The Prince was so much pleased with his new acquaintance that he invited him to Kew, and gave him a post in his household. Bute soon improved his opportunities, and the Princess also extended to him her confidence and friendship; perhaps she found in his cold, proud temperament and narrow views some affinity with her own character and beliefs. Frederick [Pg 27] rather encouraged this friendship than otherwise. He was very much attached to his excellent and virtuous wife, but no doubt her serious way of looking at things wearied his more frivolous nature occasionally. According to the scandalous gossip of Horace Walpole: "Her simple husband when he took up the character of the regent's gallantry had forced an air of intrigue even upon his wife. When he affected to retire into gloomy *allées* of Kew with Lady Middlesex, he used to bid the Princess walk with Lord Bute. As soon as the Prince was dead, they walked more and more, in honour of his memory."[12]

[12] *Memoirs of George II.*, vol. ii.; see also Wraxall's *Hist. Memoirs*, vol. ii.

At the corrupt court of George II., where the correct conduct of the Princess was resented as a tacit affront, the intimacy between the Princess and Lord Bute was soon whispered into an intrigue. Once at a fancy dress ball during the lifetime of Frederick when the Princess was present, the beautiful Miss Chudleigh appeared as Iphigenia and so lightly clad as to be almost in a state of nudity. The Princess threw a shawl over the young lady's bosom, and sharply rebuked her for her bad taste in appearing in so improper a guise. "*Altesse*," retorted Miss Chudleigh, in no wise abashed, "*vous savez, chacun a son but*." The impertinent witticism ran like wildfire round the court, and henceforth the names of the Princess and Lord Bute were associated [Pg 28] together in a scandalous suggestion, which had nothing to warrant it at the time beyond the fact that the Princess treated Lord Bute as an intimate friend.

After Frederick's death the scandal grew, for the Princess was very unpopular with the Walmoden and her circle, and they delighted to have the chance of painting her as bad as themselves. Yet Bute was some years older than the Princess. He was married to a beautiful wife, the only daughter and heiress of Edward Wortley Montagu, by whom he had a large family, and he was devoted to his wife and children. He was a man of high principle, and lived a clean life in an age of uncleanness. Lady Hervey writes of him: "He has always been a good husband, an excellent father, a man of truth and sentiments above the common run of men". Bute was not a great man, but his abilities were above the average, and he possessed considerable force of character. He acquired complete ascendency in the household of the Princess-Dowager, and exercised unbounded influence over the young Prince of Wales. Princess Augusta and Prince Edward disliked him, and secretly resented his presence and his interference in family matters. The other children were too young to understand, but Lord Bute was a factor which made itself felt in the daily life of them all, and not a welcome one. Life had become appreciably duller with the royal children since their father's death. Gone were the little plays and masquerades, the singers and dancers. Gone were the picnics and the children's parties. Even the cards were [Pg 29] stopped, and the utmost the Princess-Dowager would allow was a modest game of comet. The

children suspected Lord Bute of aiding and abetting their mother in her Spartan treatment of them, and disliked him accordingly.

The Princess-Dowager had need of a friend and counsellor, whether Lord Bute was the wisest choice she could have made or not. She was quite alone in the world, and had to fight against many intrigues. She was not a woman to make friendships quickly, and she disliked the society of her own sex. Thus it came about that in the secluded life she led, except for the members of her household, two persons only were admitted to Carlton House and Kew. One was Lord Bute, the other Bubb Dodington.

Bubb Dodington, whose diary we have quoted before, was a wealthy *parvenu* whose ambition in life was to become peer. Walpole had refused him his coveted desire, and he therefore attached himself to Frederick Prince of Wales, who borrowed money from him, and invented a post in his household for his benefit. As far as it was possible for Dodington to be attached to any one, he seems to have been attached to his "Master," as he calls him. After Frederick's death, when, to use his own phrase, "there was little prospect of his doing any good at Leicester House," he again courted the favour of the government. But he retained a sentimental attachment to his master's widow, or (for he was a born intriguer) he wished to keep in touch with the young Prince of [Pg 30] Wales. In either case he was careful not to break off his friendship with the Princess-Dowager, and often waited upon her at Carlton House. The Princess, though she did not wholly trust him, clung to him as a friend of her husband's. He was useful as a link with the outer world, he could retail to her all the political gossip of the day, and she, in turn, could make him the medium of her views, for she knew what she told him in apparent confidence would be retailed to all the town before the day was over. Dodington was an inveterate gossip, and his vanity was too much flattered by being made the confidant of the Princess-Dowager for him to conceal the fact. Moreover, he was wealthy, and a shrewd man of business. The Princess sorely needed advice in money matters, for her dower was only £50,000 a year, and out of that sum she had to keep up Leicester House, Carlton House and Kew, educate and maintain her numerous family, and to pay off by instalments her husband's debts—a task which she voluntarily took upon herself, though it crippled her financially for years. She did all so well that her economy was a triumph of management.

From Dodington's diary we get glimpses of the domestic life of the Princess-Dowager and her children after her husband's death. For instance, he writes: "The Princess sent for me to attend her between eight and nine o'clock. I went to Leicester House expecting a small company, or little musick, but found nobody but her Royal Highness. She made me draw a stool and sit by the [Pg 31] fireside. Soon after came in the Prince of Wales, and Prince Edward, and then the Lady Augusta, all in an undress, and took their stools and sat round the fire with us. We continued talking of familiar occurrences till between ten and eleven, with the ease and unreservedness and unconstraint as if one had dropped into a sister's house that had a family to pass the evening. It is much to be wished that the Prince conversed familiarly with more people of a certain knowledge of the world."[13]

[13] Dodington's *Diary*, Nov. 17, 1753, edition 1784.

This last point Dodington ventured to press upon the Princess more than once, for it was a matter of general complaint that she kept her children so strictly and so secluded from the world. They had no companions or playmates of their own age besides themselves, for the Princess declared that "the young people of quality were so ill-educated and so very vicious that they frightened her.... Such was the universal profligacy ... such the character and conduct of the young people of distinction that she was really afraid to have them near her children. She should be even in more pain for her daughters than her sons, for the behaviour of the women was indecent, low, and much against their own interests by making themselves so cheap."[14]

[14] Dodington's *Diary*, edition 1784.

We have dwelt thus on Augusta Princess of Wales not only because she was the mother of Princess Matilda, but because so little is known of her. The scandalous tales of Whig [Pg 32] pamphleteers, and the ill-natured gossip of her arch-maligner Horace Walpole cannot be accepted without considerable reserve. No adequate memoir has ever been written of this Princess. Yet she was the mother of a king whose reign was one of the longest and most eventful in English history, and the training she gave her eldest son moulded his character, formed his views and influenced his policy. It influenced also, though in a lesser degree, the life of her youngest daughter. Matilda inherited certain qualities from her father, but in her early education and environment she owed everything to her mother. To the strict seclusion in which she was brought up by this stern mother, who won her children's respect but never their confidence, and to her utter ignorance of the world and its temptations (more particularly those likely to assail one destined to occupy an exalted position), may be traced to some extent the mistakes of her later years.

There were breaks in the children's circle at Carlton House and Kew. Prince Frederick William died in 1765 at the age of fifteen, and Princess Elizabeth in 1759 at the age of nineteen. Of the first nothing is recorded, of the latter Horace Walpole quaintly writes: "We have lost another princess, Lady Elizabeth. She died of an inflammation in her bowels in two days. Her figure was so very unfortunate, that it would have been difficult for her to be happy, but her parts and [Pg 33] application were extraordinary. I saw her act in *Cato* at eight years old when she could not stand alone, but was forced to lean against the side scene. She had been so unhealthy, that at that age she had not been taught to read, but had learned the part of *Lucia* by hearing the others studying their parts. She went to her father and mother, and begged she might act; they put her off as

gently as they could; she desired leave to repeat her part, and, when she did, it was with so much sense that there was no denying her."[15]

[15] Walpole's *Letters*, vol. iii., edition 1857.

The following year a life of much greater importance in the royal family came to a close. George II. died at Kensington Palace on October 25, 1760, in the seventy-seventh year of his age, under circumstances which have always been surrounded by a certain amount of mystery. The version generally received is as follows: The King rose in the morning at his usual hour, drank his chocolate, and retired to an adjoining apartment. Presently his German valet heard a groan and the sound of a heavy fall; he rushed into the room and found the King lying insensible on the floor with the blood trickling from his forehead, where he had struck himself against a bureau in falling. The valet ran to Lady Yarmouth, but the mistress had some sense of the fitness of things, and desired that the Princess Amelia should be sent for. She arrived to find her father quite dead. His death was due to heart disease and was instantaneous.

George II. was buried in Henry VII.'s Chapel, Westminster Abbey. His last wishes were fulfilled to the letter. He had desired that one of the sides of Queen Caroline's coffin (who had predeceased him by twenty-three years) should be removed and the corresponding side of his own coffin should be taken away, so that his body might lie side by side with hers, and in death they should not be divided. This touching injunction was piously carried out by command of his grandson, who now succeeded him as King George III. [Pg 34]

CHAPTER III.

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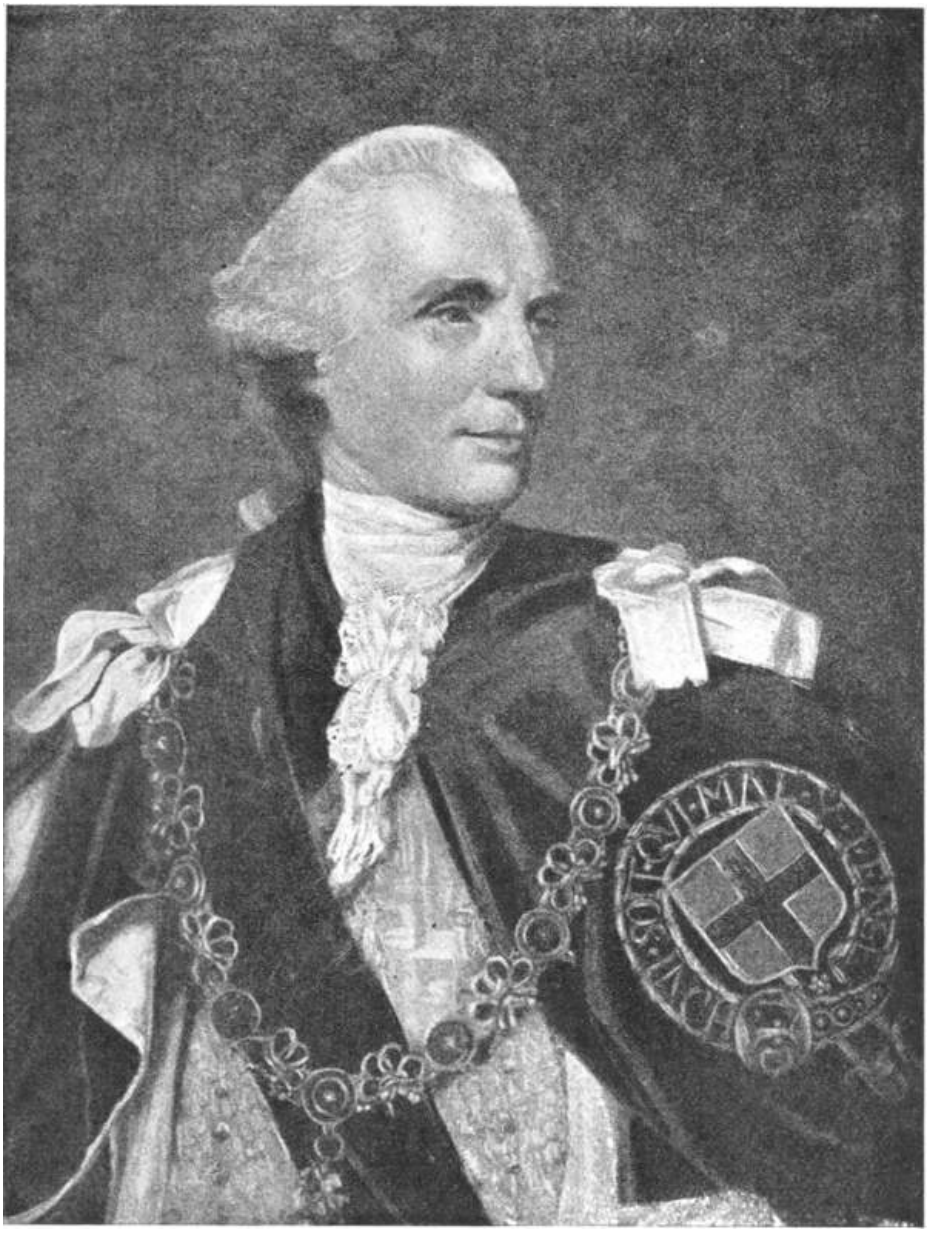
THE BETROTHAL.

1760-1765.

The accession of George III. to the throne made at first little difference in the lives of his brothers and sisters, especially of the younger ones. It made a difference in their position, for they became brothers and sisters of the reigning king, and the public interest in them was quickened. But they remained under the control of the Princess-Dowager, and continued to live with her in the seclusion of Carlton House and Kew.

The Princess-Dowager's dominion was not confined to her younger children, for she continued to exercise unbounded sway over the youthful monarch. He held his accession council at her residence at Carlton House, and there he delivered his first speech—not the composition of his ministers, who imagined they saw in it the hand of the Princess-Dowager and Lord Bute. "My Lord Bute," said the King to the Duke of Newcastle, his Prime Minister, "is your very good friend, he will tell you all my thoughts." Again in his first speech to Parliament the King wrote with his own hand the words, to which we have already alluded: "Born and educated in this country, I [Pg 36] glory in the name of Briton". Ministers affected to find in all this an unconstitutional exercise of the royal prerogative, and the Whig oligarchy trembled lest its domination should be overthrown.

Hitherto the influence of the Princess-Dowager with her eldest son, and the intimate friendship that existed between her and Lord Bute, had been known only to the few, but now the Whigs found in these things weapons ready to their hands, and they did not scruple to use them. They instigated their agents in the press and in Parliament, and a fierce clamour was raised against the Princess as a threatener of popular liberties. Her name, linked with Lord Bute's, was flung to the mob; placards with the words "No Petticoat Government!" "No Scottish Favourite!" were affixed to the walls of Westminster Hall, and thousands of vile pamphlets and indecent ballads were circulated among the populace. Even the King was insulted. "Like a new Sultan," wrote Lord Chesterfield, "he is dragged out of the seraglio by the Princess and Lord Bute, and placed upon the throne." The mob translated this into the vulgar tongue, and one day, when the King was going in a sedan chair to pay his usual visit to his mother, a voice from the crowd asked him, amid shouts and jeers, whether he was "going to suck".



JOHN, EARL OF BUTE.
From the Painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds at Wortley Hall, by permission of the Earl of Wharncliffe.

The Princess-Dowager was unmoved by the popular clamour, and her influence over the young King remained unshaken; indeed it was rather strengthened, for his sense of chivalry was roused [Pg 37] by the coarse insults heaped upon his mother. Lord Bute continued to pay his visits to Carlton House as before, the only difference made was that, to avoid the insults of the mob, his visits were paid less openly. The chair of one of the Princess's maids of honour was often sent of an evening to Bute's house in South Audley Street, and he was conveyed in it, with the curtains close drawn, to Carlton House, and admitted by a side entrance to the Princess's presence. These precautions, though natural enough under the circumstances, were unwise, for before long the stealthy visits leaked out, and the worst construction was placed upon them.

In the first year of the King's reign the supremacy of the Princess-Dowager was threatened by an attachment the monarch had formed for the beautiful Lady Sarah Lennox, daughter of the second Duke of Richmond. But the house of Lennox was a great Whig house, and its members were ambitious and aspiring, therefore the Princess-Dowager and Bute determined to prevent the marriage. That they succeeded is a matter of history. Lady Sarah's hopes came to an end with the announcement of the King's betrothal to Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz. The announcement was not popular, for the nation was weary of royal alliances with the petty courts of Germany. But the Princess-Dowager had made confidential inquiries. She was told that Charlotte, who was very young, was dutiful and obedient, and no doubt thought that she would [Pg 38] prove a cipher in her hands. In this the Princess-Dowager was sadly mistaken. Lady Sarah Lennox, or an earlier candidate for the honour, a Princess of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, would have been pliable in comparison with Charlotte of Mecklenburg, who, on her arrival, showed herself to be a shrewd, self-possessed young woman, with a tart tongue, and a full sense of the importance of her position. Charlotte soon became jealous of her mother-in-law's influence over the King. Her relations with her sisters-in-law also were never cordial, and with the Princess Augusta she was soon at open feud.

George III. and Charlotte were married at the Chapel Royal, St. James's Palace, on September 8, 1761, and a fortnight later were crowned in Westminster Abbey. The Princess Matilda, then ten years of age, witnessed her brother's wedding, but unofficially, from a private pew. Her first public appearance was made at the coronation, when we find her following the Princess-Dowager in a procession from the House of Lords to Westminster Abbey. A platform, carpeted with blue baize and covered by an awning, had been erected across Palace Yard to the south door of the Abbey, and over this platform the Princess-Dowager and all her children passed, except the King, who was to be crowned, and Prince Edward and Princess Augusta, who were in their Majesties' procession.

"The Princess-Dowager of Wales," it is written, "was led by the hand by Prince William Henry, dressed in white and silver. Her train, which was of silk, was cut short, and therefore not borne [Pg 39] by any person, and her hair flowed down her shoulders in hanging curls. She had no cap, but only a circlet of diamonds. The rest of the princes and princesses, her Highness's children, followed in order of their age: Prince Henry Frederick, also in white and silver, handing his sister Princess Louisa Anne, dressed in a slip with hanging sleeves. Prince Frederick William, likewise in white and silver, handing his youngest sister, the Princess Matilda, dressed also in a slip with hanging sleeves. Both the young princesses had their hair combed upwards, which was contrived to lie flat at the back of their heads in an elegant taste."[16]

[16] *The Annual Register*, September 22, 1761.

For some time after George III.'s marriage the Princess-Dowager and Bute continued to be all-powerful with the King. The aged Prime Minister, the Duke of Newcastle, clung to office as long as he could, but at last was forced to resign, and in 1762 Lord Bute became Prime Minister. The Princess-Dowager's hand was very visible throughout Bute's brief administration; her enemy the Duke of Devonshire, "the Prince of the Whigs," as she styled him, was ignominiously dismissed from office, and his name struck off the list of privy councillors. Other great Whig Lords, who had slighted or opposed her, were treated in a similar manner. Peace was made with France on lines the Princess-Dowager had indicated before her son came to the throne, and a still greater triumph, the peace was approved by a large majority in Parliament, despite the opposition of the [Pg 40] Whig Lords. "Now," cried the Princess exultingly, "now, my son *is* King of England!" It was her hour of triumph.

But though the Whigs were defeated in Parliament, they took their revenge outside. The ignorant mob was told that the peace was the first step towards despotism, the despotism of the Princess-Dowager and her led-captain Bute, and the torrent of abuse swelled in volume. One evening when the Princess was present at the play, at a performance of Cibber's comedy, *The Careless Husband*, the whole house rose when one of the actresses spoke the following lines: "Have a care, Madam, an undeserving favourite has been the ruin of many a prince's empire". The hoots and insults from the gallery were so great that the Princess drew the curtains of her box and quitted the house. Nor was this all. In Wilkes's periodical, *The North Briton*, appeared an essay in which, under the suggestive names of Queen Isabella and her paramour "the gentle Mortimer," the writer attacked the Princess-Dowager and the Prime Minister. Again, in a caricature entitled "The Royal Dupe," the young King was depicted as sleeping in his mother's lap, while Bute was stealing his sceptre, and Fox picking his pocket. In *Almon's Political Register* there appeared a gross frontispiece, in which the Earl of Bute figured as secretly entering the bedchamber of the

Princess-Dowager; a widow's lozenge with the royal arms hung over the bed, to enforce the identity. Worst of all, one night, when the popular fury had been inflamed to its height, a noisy mob paraded under the windows of Carlton House, carrying a gallows from which hung a jack-boot and a petticoat which they afterwards burned (the first a miserable pun on the name of John Earl of Bute, and the second to signify the King's mother). The Princess-Dowager heard the uproar from within and learned the cause from her frightened household. She alone remained calm. "Poor deluded people, how I pity them," she said, "they will know better some day." [Pg 41]

What her children thought of all this is not precisely recorded, but it would seem that the King stood alone among them in the sympathy and support he gave to his mother. Prince Edward, Duke of York, and the Princess Augusta were openly hostile to Lord Bute. Prince Edward declared that he suffered "a thousand mortifications" because of him. Prince William Henry, Duke of Gloucester, was sullenly resentful, and even Prince Henry Frederick, Duke of Cumberland, made sarcastic remarks. What Matilda thought there is no means of knowing; she was too young to understand, but children are quick-witted, and since her favourite brother, Edward, and her favourite sister, Augusta, felt so strongly on the subject, she probably shared their prejudices. There is little doubt that the mysterious intimacy between the Princess-Dowager and Lord Bute was the cause of much ill-feeling between her and her children, and had the effect of weakening her authority over them and of losing their respect. Years after, when she had occasion to remonstrate with Matilda, her daughter retorted with a bitter allusion to Lord Bute. [Pg 42]

The Princess Augusta had inherited her mother's love of dabbling in politics, and as her views were strongly opposed to those of the Princess-Dowager the result did not conduce to the domestic harmony of Carlton House. The Princess Augusta, of all the royal children, had suffered most from the intimacy between her mother and Lord Bute. Horace Walpole wrote of her some time before: "Lady Augusta, now a woman grown, was, to facilitate some privacy for the Princess, dismissed from supping with her mother, and sent back to cheese-cakes with her little sister Elizabeth, on the pretence that meat at night would fatten her too much".[17] Augusta secretly resented the cheese-cakes, but she was then too young to show open mutiny. Now that she had grown older she became bolder. She was the King's eldest sister, and felt that she was entitled to a mind of her own. Therefore, with her brother, the Duke of York, she openly denounced Lord Bute and all his works, and lavished admiration on his great rival, Pitt. This was a little too much for the Princess-Dowager, who feared that Augusta would contaminate the minds of her younger brothers and sisters. She resolved therefore to marry her to some foreign husband, and thus remove her from the sphere of her present political activities. Moreover, it was quite time that Augusta was married. She had completed her twenty-sixth year and her youthful beauty was on the wane. "Lady Augusta," writes Horace Walpole, "is not handsome, but tall enough and not ill-made, with the German whiteness of hair and complexion so remarkable in the royal family, and with their precipitate yet thick Westphalian accent."[18] [Pg 43]

[17] *Memoirs of the Reign of George III.*, vol. iii.

[18] *Ibid.*

Augusta might have married before, but she was extremely English in her tastes, and had a great objection to leaving the land of her birth. Neither her mother nor her brother would entertain the idea of an English alliance, and so at last they arranged a marriage between her and Charles William Ferdinand, Hereditary Prince of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, a famous soldier, and the favourite nephew of Frederick the Great. The Prince arrived in England in January, 1764. He had never seen his bride before he came, not even her portrait, but when he saw her he expressed himself charmed, adding that if he had not been pleased with her he should have returned to Brunswick without a wife. Augusta, equally frank, said that she would certainly have refused to marry him if she had found him unsatisfactory. They were married in the great council chamber of St. James's Palace with little ceremony. The bride's presents were few and meagre, and Augusta declared that Queen Charlotte even grudged her the diamonds which formed the King's wedding gift. Four days after the marriage a civic deputation waited upon the pair at Leicester House, and presented an address of congratulation. Princess Matilda was present, and stood at the right hand of her mother. [Pg 44]

The King did not like the popularity of his brother-in-law, and therefore hurried the departure of the newly wed couple. The Princess of Brunswick shed bitter tears on leaving her native land. The day she left she spent the whole morning at Leicester House saying good-bye to her friends, and frequently appeared at the windows that the people outside might see her. More than once the Princess threw open the window and kissed her hand to the crowd. It was very tempestuous weather when the Prince and Princess set out on their long journey to Brunswick, and after they had put to sea rumours reached London that their yacht had gone down in the storm; but, though they were for a time in great danger, eventually they landed and reached Brunswick safely.

The marriage of the Princess Augusta was soon followed by the betrothal of her youngest sister. The Princess Matilda was only in her thirteenth year. But though too young to be married, her mother and the King, her brother, did not think it too soon to make arrangements for her betrothal.

The reigning King of Denmark and Norway, Frederick V., for some years had wished to bind more closely the ties which already existed between him and the English royal family. The late Queen of Denmark, Queen Louise, was the youngest daughter of King George II. She had married Frederick V., and had borne him a son and daughters. After her death the King of Denmark cherished an affectionate remembrance of his Queen and a liking for the country whence she came. He therefore approached the old King, George II., with the suggestion of a marriage in the [Pg 45]

years to come between his son, the Crown Prince Christian, then an infant, and one of the daughters of Frederick Prince of Wales. After George II.'s death the idea of this alliance was again broached to George III. through the medium of Titley,[19] the English envoy at Copenhagen.

[19] Walter Titley, whose name occurs frequently in the negotiations of this marriage, was born in 1700 of a Staffordshire family. He was educated at Westminster and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he took a distinguished degree. He entered the diplomatic service in 1728 and became *chargé d'affaires* at Copenhagen in the absence of Lord Glenorchy. In 1730 he was appointed Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary. In 1733 Richard Bentley, the famous master of Trinity College, Cambridge, offered him the physic fellowship of the College. Titley accepted it, resigned his diplomatic appointment, but found that he had become so much attached to his life at Copenhagen that he was unable to leave it. The King of Denmark, with whom he was a great favourite, urged him to stay, and the Government at home were unwilling to lose a valuable public servant who possessed a unique knowledge of the tortuous politics of the northern kingdom. So Titley resumed his post and held it for the remainder of his life. He died at Copenhagen in February, 1768.

The King, after consultation with his mother, put forward his second surviving sister, the Princess Louisa Anne (who was about the same age as the Crown Prince Christian), as a suitable bride. But Bothmar, the Danish envoy in London, reported to the court of Copenhagen that Louisa Anne, [Pg 46] though talented and amiable, was very delicate, and he suggested that the King of Denmark should ask for the Princess Matilda instead. This Princess was the beauty of the family, and her lively disposition and love of outdoor exercise seemed to show that she had a strong constitution. George III. demurred a little at first, on account of his sister's extreme youth, but after some *pour-parlers* he gave his consent, and the King of Denmark sent orders to Bothmar to demand formally the hand of the Princess Matilda in marriage for his son the Crown Prince. At the same time Bernstorff, the Danish Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,[20] wrote to Titley, acquainting him with the proposed alliance, but asking him to keep the matter a profound secret until all preliminaries were arranged.[21]

[20] Count Johan Hartvig Ernst Bernstorff was a Hanoverian by birth, and a grandson of Bernstorff of Hanover and Celle, Minister of George I. He early entered the service of Denmark, and represented his adopted country as envoy at the courts of St. James's and Versailles. When he left the diplomatic service he became Minister of State for Foreign Affairs at Copenhagen, and filled other important posts. Finally he became Count and Prime Minister. He must not be confounded with Count Andreas Peter Bernstorff, his nephew, who was later Prime Minister of Denmark under Frederick VI.

[21] Sa Majesté, qui se souvient toujours avec plaisir et avec la bienveillance la plus distinguée, de vos sentiments pour sa personne, et pour l'union des deux familles royales, m'a commandé de vous faire cette confidence; mais elle m'ordonne en même temps de vous prier de la tenir entièrement secrète, jusqu'a ce qu'on soit convenu de part et d'autre de l'engagement et de sa publication. (Bernstorff to Titley, August 18, 1764.)

A few days later Titley wrote home to Lord Sandwich: "I received from Baron Bernstorff (by the [Pg 47] King of Denmark's command) a very obliging letter acquainting me with the agreeable and important commission which had been sent that same day to Count Bothmar in London.... The amiable character of the Prince of Denmark is universally acknowledged here, so that the union appearing perfectly suitable, and equally desirable on both sides, I hope soon to have an opportunity of congratulating you, my Lord, upon its being unalterably fixed and settled."[22]

[22] Titley's despatch to Lord Sandwich, Copenhagen, August 29, 1764.

Within the next few months everything was arranged except the question of the Princess's dower, which had to be voted by Parliament. In the meantime a preliminary treaty between the King of Denmark and the King of Great Britain was drafted and signed in London by Lord Sandwich on the one part and Bothmar on the other. This was in the autumn, when Parliament was not sitting, but the Danish Government stipulated that the announcement of the marriage was not to be delayed beyond the next session of Parliament, though the marriage itself, on account of the extreme youth of both parties, would be deferred for a few years.

Accordingly, at the opening of Parliament on January 10, 1765, George III. in his speech from the throne said:—

> "I have now the satisfaction to inform you that I have agreed with my good brother the [Pg 48] King of Denmark to cement the union which has long subsisted between the two crowns by the marriage of the Prince Royal of Denmark with my sister the Princess Caroline Matilda, which is to be solemnised as soon as their respective ages will admit".

In the address to the throne Parliament replied to the effect that the proposed marriage was most pleasing to them, as it would tend to strengthen the ancient alliance between the crowns of Great Britain and Denmark, and "thereby add security to the Protestant religion".[23]

[23] Presumably the alliance would strengthen the Protestant religion by weakening the influence of Roman Catholic France at Copenhagen. It must be borne in mind that Denmark was then a much larger and more important country than it is now. Norway had not broken away from the union, and Denmark had not been robbed of the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein by Prussia.

On January 18 the King gave a grand ball at St. James's Palace in honour of the double event of his youngest sister's betrothal and Queen Charlotte's birthday. On this occasion the Princess Matilda made her first appearance at court, when she opened the ball by dancing a minuet with her brother, Prince Edward Duke of York. The Princess was then only thirteen and a half years old, but she won the admiration of all the court by her beauty and grace. She was very fair, with hair almost flaxen in hue, pale gold with a gleam of silver in it, large tender blue eyes, an arched nose, a well-shaped mouth (the underlip perhaps a little too full), and a complexion like the wild rose. Her figure was shapely and developed beyond her years, and she carried herself with ease and dignity. [Pg 49]

The feelings of the Princess Matilda, who was thus betrothed to a Prince whom she had never seen, were not consulted in the slightest degree. The proposed marriage seemed a suitable one; and it was more brilliant than that of her sister, the Princess Augusta; moreover, it would strengthen the political alliance between England and Denmark, and, it was hoped, give England more influence in the Baltic. These considerations were sufficient for her brother, George III., who must be held directly responsible for this marriage. The question of his sister's happiness, or unhappiness, did not enter. The child Princess disliked the idea from the first; her ladies-in-waiting noticed that so far from showing any pleasure at her added dignity she became pensive and melancholy. She was too young to realise all this marriage would mean to her, but she knew that it would involve exile from her native country, and separation from her family, and she grieved much in secret, though afraid to show her unhappiness openly. She gave some hint of her feelings to her aunt, the Princess Amelia, soon after her betrothal.

The Princess Amelia often went to Bath, then a very gay place, where she played cards and talked scandal to her heart's content. She had a great liking for her little niece, and she asked permission to take her to Bath on one of these visits for a few weeks. Matilda, weary of the dulness and seclusion of Carlton House, pleaded hard to go, but the Princess-Dowager would not hear of it. She disliked her sister-in-law and disapproved of her card-playing proclivities. Matilda was greatly disappointed at her mother's refusal, and said that she had been looking forward to the journey, for she loved to travel. The Princess Amelia tried to cheer her niece, and remarked jocularly: "It will not be long before you will have plenty of travelling". "I know what you mean," said Matilda, "but surely it would be happier for me to stay where I am, than go so far for a Prince I have never seen." [Pg 50]

THE ELDER CHILDREN OF FREDERICK AND AUGUSTA, PRINCE AND PRINCESS OF WALES, PLAYING IN KEW GARDENS.
From a Painting, temp. 1750.

The Princess found consolation in the thought that her dreaded marriage would not take place for some time (it was to be deferred for two years, until 1767), and in a few months after her betrothal she recovered her spirits, and interested herself once more in her gardening and other simple pleasures, and in little acts of beneficence to the poor families whom she took under her especial protection at Kew. She pursued her studies diligently, the better to qualify herself for the high position she was intended to fill. At the suggestion of the King of Denmark, she began to learn German, the language then most spoken at the Danish court.[24] It is characteristic of the English tendencies of Frederick Prince of Wales, that, though both he and his wife were born in Germany, not one of their children was taught German as a necessary part of his, or her, education, and several of them remained ignorant of it. [Pg 51]

[24] Letter of the Duke of Grafton to Titley, St. James's, March 14, 1766.

We must now give some account of the Princess Matilda's betrothed husband, the Crown Prince Christian, and of the court of Denmark.

CHAPTER IV.

[Pg 52]

THE TRAINING OF A KING.

1749-1766.

The Crown Prince Christian (afterwards Christian VII. of Denmark and Norway) was born on January 29, 1749, and was therefore two years and six months older than his first cousin and betrothed bride, Princess Matilda.

When he was in his third year Christian lost his mother, Louise, daughter of George II. of England and consort of Frederick V. of Denmark. Queen Louise was very beautiful, and had inherited from her mother, Queen Caroline, her grace and dignity and her virtues and talents. She was possessed of great tact, and won the love and reverence of all classes, and, what was more difficult, of all races of her husband's subjects, whether Danes, Norwegians or Germans. The Danes compared her to their sainted Dagmar, and her early death was regarded as a national calamity. During Louise's illness the streets of Copenhagen were thronged from early dawn by people waiting for news, and the churches were filled with praying and weeping men and women. Every night, outside the palace gate, crowds waited patiently for hours, their faces, [Pg 53] white in the darkness, turned towards the wing of the palace where the Queen lay dying. Louise died in 1751 (the year that Caroline Matilda was born), and left behind her the legacy of a bright example. The Danes owed England a debt of gratitude for sending them this admirable princess, a debt they amply repaid a century later when they gave to the English people a descendant of Queen Louise, a princess even more beautiful and beloved than her illustrious ancestress—our gracious Queen Alexandra.[25]

[25] A short table showing the descent of Her Majesty Queen Alexandra from Queen Louise of Denmark:—

Louise daughter of George II. of England and Queen of Frederick V. of Denmark.
|
Charlotte Princess of Denmark.
|
Caroline Princess of Denmark.
|
Christian IX. King of Denmark.
|
Queen Alexandra.

King Frederick was overwhelmed with grief at his consort's death and refused to be comforted. He could not mention her name without weeping; he commanded the deepest court mourning for a year and prohibited all public amusements for the same period. Yet, like many bereaved widowers, before and since, the more deeply this royal widower mourned his wife, the more quickly he sought consolation by giving her a successor. Six months of the stipulated mourning had scarcely passed when the King cast off his sables and wedded Princess Juliana Maria of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. This princess was the youngest of six daughters, two of whom had [Pg 54] already made great alliances. The eldest was married to Frederick the Great, and the second to Prince Augustus William, the heir presumptive to the throne of Prussia. One of her nieces came near to be married to George III., but was rejected by him on the advice of his mother. This slight upon her house did not tend to make Juliana Maria well disposed towards the English royal family; and the love of the Danes for the English princess who was her predecessor contrasted vividly with her own unpopularity. Juliana Maria was a handsome and determined woman, rigidly correct in her conduct and unblemished in her morals, but she was of a cold and selfish nature, a profound intriguer and dissembler. Frederick V. married her from a sense of duty; he wanted a queen to preside over his court, and a wife to give him another son. Juliana Maria fulfilled both these conditions; she looked every inch a queen, and in due time presented her husband with a prince, who was named Frederick. But though she shared her husband's throne she had no place in his affections.

Frederick V. was popular with his subjects, who named him "Frederick the Good". The first part of his reign as fully justified this title as the latter part belied it. Queen Louise was his good angel and led him to higher things, but when her beneficent influence was gone he abandoned himself to evil habits, especially to his besetting one of drunkenness. So much did he give way to this vice that he became a confirmed dipsomaniac, and the reins of government passed out of his hands [Pg 55] into those of his Prime Minister, Count Moltke, and of his mother, the Queen-Dowager, Sophia Magdalena.

This princess, the widow of Christian VI.,[26] was a daughter of the Margrave of Brandenburg-Culmbach. She had obtained considerable political influence in her husband's lifetime, and she continued to hold it throughout the reign of her son. She was a woman of narrow and strict views, but had a great love of display. Between her and Moltke an alliance existed for a time. They played into one another's hands so cleverly that Juliana Maria, despite her ambitious and intriguing disposition, found herself outwitted by her mother-in-law and the Prime Minister. Sophia Magdalena's superior knowledge of Danish affairs gave her an advantage over Juliana Maria, who, though the King's wife, laboured under the disability of not being in the King's confidence. Count Moltke was not a minister of great ability, and he was suspected of selling his country's interests to other powers. Certain it is that during the last years of Frederick V.'s reign

the foreign envoys of France, Russia and England were in turns the real rulers of Denmark. With Moltke the French influence was generally paramount.

[26] Christian VI., the son of Frederick IV., was born in 1699, ascended the throne in 1730 and died in 1746, after a peaceful and prosperous reign. He was succeeded by his son Frederick V.

The Crown Prince Christian suffered an irreparable loss in his mother's death, for she was devoted to her son and kept him with her as much as possible, though this was contrary to the [Pg 56] traditional etiquette of the Danish court. After Queen Louise died the Crown Prince and his sisters were handed over to the loveless care of governesses and tutors, and their father never troubled about them. Juliana Maria was not an affectionate stepmother, and left her husband's children severely alone. Even if she had wished to give them personal supervision, the etiquette of the Danish court would have prevented her. Moreover, any movement she might have made in that direction would have been regarded with suspicion. Juliana Maria regarded the Crown Prince Christian as an obstacle in the path of her ambition. If he were out of the way her son Frederick would succeed to the throne. She probably wished him out of the way, but the stories that she plotted against the life of her stepson rest on no trustworthy evidence, and may be dismissed as unworthy of credence.

At the age of six Christian was taken out of the nursery and given an establishment of his own. Count Berkentin, a privy councillor, was appointed his governor, and Count Reventlow his chamberlain and tutor. Berkentin was an old man, indolent and easy-going, who was glad to shift the responsibility of his troublesome charge on other shoulders, and asked for nothing more than to draw his salary and be left in peace. The training of the Crown Prince therefore devolved wholly on Reventlow, who was a Danish noble of the most reactionary and barbarous type. Reventlow's one idea of education was to harden the lad, to make, as he said, a man of him—he [Pg 57] might rather have said to make a brute of him. He took no account of the idiosyncrasies of Christian's character, or of his nervous, highly strung temperament. He sought to crush him down to one low level, the level of himself. The boy was brought up in slave-like fear of his brutal master, and sometimes beaten for trifling errors so inhumanly that foam gathered on his lips and he writhed in agony. Even in his boyhood, Christian's nervous paroxysms sometimes degenerated into fits of an epileptic nature, and so encouraged the growth of a terrible malady.

Reventlow superintended the Crown Prince's education, that is to say, his training and his daily life. He did not teach him his lessons. The learned German author, Gellert, was first asked to undertake this duty, but he refused. The King then appointed one Nielsen, who had been tutor to several of the young Danish nobility. Nielsen was a very learned man, but unfortunately had not the capacity of imparting his learning in a lucid and attractive manner, and he was too fond of abstruse speculations to teach things which would be useful to the royal pupil. Nielsen was a Lutheran clergyman, but he was notoriously unorthodox, and he mixed his religious instruction with a good deal of profane philosophy. The poor little prince was not old enough to understand theological, or philosophical, disquisitions; they weighed like a nightmare on his youthful mind, and the result of this teaching in after life was a curious mixture of freethinking and superstition. [Pg 58] The Crown Prince was taken to church twice every Sunday, where he sat between his two tormentors, Reventlow and Nielsen, and listened to dull and interminable sermons. If his attention flagged for a moment Reventlow would pinch him, and when he came out of church Nielsen would catechise him concerning the sermon, and make him repeat the preacher's arguments at length. Christian regarded these religious exercises with intense dislike, and dreaded Sunday as his chief day of torment.

In the Crown Prince's hours of recreation he was neglected, and allowed to keep bad company. His chief companions were two youths employed about the court; one was Sperling, a page of the chamber and a nephew of Reventlow; the other was Kirschoff, a servant of the chamber, and a friend of Sperling. Both these youths were vicious and corrupt. They were older than the Crown Prince and acquired great influence over him. They set him a bad example by their evil habits, they poisoned his mind by retailing all the scandals of the court, and they corrupted his heart by mocking at everything good and noble. It has been well said that they occupy the same place in the history of Denmark as Louis XV.'s infamous servants Bachelier and Le Bel do in the history of France.

It stands to Juliana Maria's credit that she objected to these youths as playmates of the Prince and to Reventlow's system of education, and remonstrated with the King, but Frederick V. would [Pg 59] not listen to her. Later Bernstorff made similar representations and with more success, for when Christian was eleven years of age a change took place for the better. A Swiss named Reverdil[27] was appointed to instruct the Crown Prince in mathematics and French, and he gradually extended his teaching to other branches of learning. Reverdil was an upright man, and did his duty according to his lights. He saw clearly that the boy's physical and mental health was being ruined by Reventlow's barbarous methods, and did what he could to improve things. But well meaning though he was he made his pupil's life unhappier by introducing a new torture in the form of public examinations. The Crown Prince was examined twice yearly in the knight's hall of the Christiansborg Palace[28] in the presence of the King, the Ministers, and the *corps* [Pg 60] *diplomatique*, and if we may judge from the courtly reports of the foreign envoys he acquitted himself well. Yet, this testimony notwithstanding, it is certain that he was not well educated, for he was ignorant of solid acquirements. But he could dance a minuet with much grace and could play the flute, sing, ride and fence well. He was a fair linguist and spoke German and French. More important still he was taught the Danish language, which had been neglected at the Danish court, and the household of the Prince, except his French and German tutors, were forbidden to

speak to him in other language but Danish.

[27] Reverdil was born in 1732 in the Canton of Vaud, and educated at the University of Geneva. He became professor of mathematics at the University of Copenhagen in 1758, and two years later was appointed assistant tutor to the Crown Prince Christian. He has left a record of his experiences at the Danish court in a book entitled *Struensee et la cour de Copenhague 1760-1772, Mémoires de Reverdil*. To this work I am indebted for much valuable information.

[28] The Christiansborg Palace, situated on an island in the heart of Copenhagen, was originally erected by Christian VI. in 1733-40. It was a magnificent building both externally and internally, and for five reigns was the principal palace of the Kings of Denmark. It was partially burned down in 1794, but rebuilt. It was again gutted by fire in 1884; but the walls are still standing. The palace could be restored to its pristine splendour, and it is a reproach that this residence, so rich in historic associations, has not been rebuilt. A bill is occasionally introduced for the Danish parliament to grant the necessary funds, but it has hitherto been defeated by the democratic party on the ground that the King is well housed in his palace of the Amalienborg, which, in point of fact, is much too small to be the chief royal palace of the capital.

The Crown Prince was precocious in some things and backward in others. He was naturally quick-witted and had a gift of sarcasm and mimicry in which he freely indulged; he made buffoon parodies of the preachers and their sermons, and he mimicked ministers of state, high court officials and even the august royal family. Some of his boyish sarcasms show that he felt the cruel way in which he was treated and the subordinate position in which he was kept. For instance, Frederick V., in one of his generous moods (probably after a hard spell of drinking), made Moltke a present of the palace of Hirschholm and all its contents. It was a common ground of complaint that Moltke took advantage of his master's weakness to enrich himself. The Crown Prince, hearing of this princely gift, waylaid Moltke coming from the audience chamber of the King, and [Pg 61] thrust into his hand a picture of Hirschholm.[29] "Content yourself with this, your Excellency," said the Prince, "for, believe me, unless you get the crown as well, Hirschholm will never be yours." The Prime Minister, taken aback at this display of authority on the part of the heir apparent, wisely forebore to press the matter further, and Hirschholm remained the property of the crown. On another occasion, when the King and his favourite minister were drinking together, the Crown Prince was present. The King commanded Christian to fill glasses for himself and Moltke. Christian hesitated. The King repeated his order, and told him that he could fill his own glass as well. The Prince then filled Moltke's glass to the brim, the King's glass half full, and into his own he poured only a few drops. "What do you mean by this?" said the King. "I mean, sire," replied his son, "to denote our relative importance in the state. His Excellency being all-powerful I have filled his glass to the full. You being only second in authority I half filled yours; as for me, since I am of no consequence, a drop suffices."

[29] It is possible that his grandmother Sophia Magdalena may have instigated him to do this, as Hirschholm was her favourite palace.

Despite his precocity, Christian had some extraordinary crazes and superstitions. One of them he cherished from the nursery. His Norwegian nurse had told him many legends of Scandinavian Vikings whose physical perfections rivalled the gods, mighty warriors who were invulnerable in battle, like the legendary heroes of ancient wars. At this time there was a very widespread belief [Pg 62] in northern Europe in a foolish superstition called the "Art of Passau," a secret charm which made men hard and invulnerable in battle. The young Crown Prince's imagination was fired by it, and he determined to acquire the secret of the charm and so attain his ideal of supreme physical perfection. Gradually he came to believe that he had found it, and soon the hallucination extended to his thinking that he was also endowed with superhuman mental attributes, and he saw himself a mightier ruler and warrior than Peter the Great or Frederick the Great, and a greater philosopher than Leibniz or Voltaire. The fulsome despatches of Cosby, the assistant English envoy,[30] would almost seem to warrant this preposterous belief, for he describes the Crown Prince in the most extravagant terms.

[30] In 1763 the envoy, Titley, on the ground of age and infirmity, was granted an assistant, and the British Government sent Cosby to Copenhagen, and he virtually took over the whole business of the legation, Titley only intervening in domestic matters connected with the royal families of England and Denmark. Cosby conducted the diplomatic business until his recall in 1765. He suddenly went insane.

QUEEN LOUISE, CONSORT OF FREDERICK V. OF DENMARK AND DAUGHTER OF GEORGE II. OF ENGLAND.
From a Painting by Pilo in the Frederiksborg Palace.

"I had yesterday," he writes, "the honour of an audience with the Prince Royal, and was greatly charmed with the graceful and affectionate manner in which his Royal Highness received and answered the compliment I had the honour to make him on the part of the King [George III.].[31] This young Prince already promises everything that the most sanguine hopes of this nation can [Pg 63] expect. To an amiable and manly countenance, a graceful and distinguishing figure, he joins an address full of dignity, and at the same time extremely affable. But what struck me most was the great resemblance of his Royal Highness, both in person and manner, to the King [George III.] when his Majesty was of the age the Prince now is [sixteen]. The likeness is in truth so striking that it seems rather that of a royal brother than of a Prince more distantly related [a first cousin] to his Majesty."[32]

[31] Wherever square brackets occur the matter is interpolated.

[32] Cosby's despatch, Copenhagen, March 27, 1764.

Soon after this exchange of compliments between George III. and his cousin of Denmark the negotiations began which resulted in Christian's betrothal to Matilda of England. The formal announcement was not made at Copenhagen until January 18, 1765, when it was enthusiastically received by the Danish people, who cherished a fond remembrance of their last Queen from England—Queen Louise. Cosby writes: "The intended nuptials of the Prince Royal with the Princess Matilda were declared at court yesterday. There was a very brilliant ball and supper at the royal table on this occasion, and the evening concluded with illuminations, and every possible demonstration of joy from all ranks of people."[33]

[33] Cosby's despatch, Copenhagen, January 19, 1765.

On Palm Sunday, 1765, Christian, who had now reached his seventeenth year, and was already betrothed, was confirmed by the Bishop of Copenhagen in the chapel of the Christiansborg [Pg 64] Palace in the presence of the King and royal family, the ministers, foreign envoys and all the court. The occasion was one of much state and ceremonial, for confirmation in Denmark was, and is, regarded as a very important rite, and signifies the taking upon oneself the serious responsibilities of life. The inevitable examination preceded the Crown Prince's confirmation. Accounts differ as to how he acquitted himself under this ordeal. Some said that when the Bishop examined the Prince he discovered that he was well acquainted with Tindal but ignorant of the Bible. On the other hand, the courtly Cosby writes: "He excited the admiration of all present by his graceful delivery and thorough knowledge of the subject of religion; ... the masterly ease and dignity with which he expressed his sentiments as well as such promising abilities had an effect on the whole audience".[34] And Titley wrote later: "As the religious sentiments of a person

brought up for absolute sovereignty may deserve some attention, I have taken the liberty of adding hereunto as close a translation as I could make of what the Prince Royal declared at the late solemnity of his being confirmed. This young Prince, who is of a very amiable genteel figure, discovers the greatest humanity and goodness of disposition, and is also distinguished by a most lively understanding which has been carefully cultivated in a noble, rational way. The declaration is said to be entirely his own, and I am the more apt to believe it, as having been assured that he is particularly well grounded in the study of the law of nature and in general theology."[35] [Pg 65]

[34] Cosby's despatch, Copenhagen, April 2, 1765.

[35] Titley's despatch, Copenhagen, April 23, 1765.

The declaration was as follows:—

> "I do acknowledge in the presence of God, in the presence of the King, in the presence of this congregation, and of all those who have been my instructors, that there is an eternal and unalterable law of nature; from the obligation and force of which no man can be exempted by any station, or dignity, or power upon earth. I am likewise fully convinced that the right and true way to salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ; and I profess it to be my steadfast purpose to live and die in this belief.
>
> "I am also sensible of the general and particular functions to which God has called me; and which I will always endeavour, by the assistance of the Divine grace, to fulfil. But as, from human weakness, I must be continually in danger of falling, so I hope that God will strengthen and support me, that I may not be entangled in the snares of Satan. And therefore I am persuaded, that, not only the congregation here present, but also the whole people of this country, will join their prayers with mine, that I may be enabled to sustain the combat of faith to the end, and persevere, without spot or blame, in the law prescribed to me, till the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."[36]

[36] "A declaration made by the Prince Royal of Denmark when he was confirmed in the King's Chapel on Palm Sunday, March 31, 1765."

Though the betrothal of the Crown Prince to an English princess was exceedingly popular with the Danish people, it was not universally so in other and more exalted quarters. It was especially obnoxious to France, and soon after Christian's confirmation an intrigue was set afoot to break it off. The English envoy took fright lest the intrigue should be successful, but his fears were groundless, for the alliance had a firm friend in Frederick V., who, though weak on other points, was firm as a rock on this one. Titley sought an audience of the King of Denmark about this time and writes home:— [Pg 66]

> "His Danish Majesty received me in the most gracious manner as usual, and told me he had now a picture of the Princess [Matilda] and was extremely well pleased with it. That he had always highly approved alliances of blood with the royal family of Great Britain, which he hoped would in time produce close and perfect national union, and that he heartily wished these family connections might still be repeated and continued between the two courts through all posterity.... (*In cipher*) In speaking of this marriage the King of Denmark could not but remember his late Queen, whose behaviour he praised, and whose loss he lamented with such an overflowing tenderness as filled his eyes with tears, which he strove in vain to stifle, and often wiped away with his handkerchief."[37]

[37] Titley's despatch, Copenhagen, June 4, 1765.

The picture to which the King of Denmark referred was a painting of the Princess Matilda which had been sent from England to Copenhagen at his express wish. The King declared himself delighted with the picture, wherein he found many points of resemblance to his lamented Louise. We find Titley writing again:— [Pg 67]

> "The picture of the Princess Matilda, having been put into a fine frame by his Danish Majesty's order, was placed some days ago over the toilet of the Prince Royal at Frederiksberg[38] unknown to his Royal Highness. The Prince, as I am told, was equally surprised and delighted to find it there, and after having surveyed it over and over with great attention and inexpressible pleasure, declared his approbation and satisfaction in terms of rapture. Yesterday being the birthday of the Princess Matilda it was celebrated in a private manner by the royal family at Fredensborg,[39] whither the Prince went two or three days before on purpose to assist at the festivity."[40] [Pg 68]

[38] The Frederiksberg Palace is situated in the western suburb of Copenhagen. It must not be confounded with Frederiksborg, which is some twenty miles from the capital, near the village of Hilleröd. Frederiksberg was built by Frederick IV., about 1720-30, in the Italian style. There is a fine view from the terrace. It is surrounded by a well-timbered park, and the gardens contain many shady promenades. The palace is now used as a military academy: the grounds are a favourite resort of the citizens of Copenhagen.

[39] Fredensborg Slot (or castle) was built in 1720-24 in memory of the recently concluded peace between Sweden and Denmark, and was known as the "Castle of Peace". It is a plain unpretentious building, but the gardens and park are beautiful, and reveal lovely views over the blue lake of Esrom. The woods are extensive and the trees very fine. Fredensborg is now used as the summer residence of the Danish royal family. The family

gatherings which have assembled within its walls during the reign of Christian IX. have made Fredensborg famous over Europe.

[40] Titley's despatch, Copenhagen, July 23, 1765.

Some few months after this pleasing incident the English match lost its most powerful friend at the court of Copenhagen. On January 13, 1766, Frederick V. died, in the forty-third year of his age and the twenty-first of his reign. His health for some time previously had been going from bad to worse, and his malady, dropsy, was increased by his habits of intemperance. Latterly his mind had become affected as well, but before the end his brain cleared, and he called his son to his bedside and said:—

> "My dear son, you will soon be the King of a flourishing people, but remember, that to be a great monarch it is absolutely necessary to be a good man. Have justice and mercy, therefore, constantly before your eyes, and above all things reflect that you were born for the welfare of your people, and not your country created for your mere emolument. In short, keep to the golden rule of doing as you would be done by, and whenever you give an order as a sovereign examine how far you would be willing to obey such an order were you a subject."[41]

[41] *Gentleman's Magazine*, February, 1766.

A few hours after Frederick V.'s death Bernstorff proclaimed the new King to the people from the balcony of the Christiansborg Palace in these words: "King Frederick V. is dead, but King Christian VII. lives. The Crown Prince has become the ruler of the united kingdoms of Denmark and Norway." Whereupon all the people shouted: "May the King live long and reign well like his father!" Christian was then pleased to show himself to his people, and was afterwards proclaimed throughout the city by the heralds.

CHAPTER V.

[Pg 70]

"THE NORTHERN SCAMP."

1766.

Few monarchs ever began their reign with more ardent prayers of their people, or inspired brighter hopes, than "Christian VII., by the grace of God King of Denmark, Norway, of the Goths and Wends, Duke of Schleswig-Holstein, Stormarn and the Dittmarsches, Count of Oldenburg and Delmenhorst"—to quote his full style and titles. The young King was regarded as the probable regenerator of Denmark. "The eminent virtues and truly royal disposition of the new Sovereign afford a very agreeable prospect of his future reign," writes Titley. Again: "He is in all respects a very hopeful Prince, virtuously disposed, with excellent natural parts, and solidity as well as vivacity of understanding".[42] The envoy's views were echoed by all who came in contact with the King.

[42] Titley's despatch, Copenhagen, January 18, 1766.

Christian VII. held his first council a few days after his father's death and acquitted himself with tact and dignity. It was his introduction to affairs of state, for though, according to the *Lex Regia* of Denmark, the heir apparent came of age when he reached the age of fourteen, Christian had [Pg 71] been kept quite ignorant of public business. This was the more inexcusable as his father's failing health made it likely that his accession would take place at any moment. Christian VII. was seventeen years of age when the call came for him to ascend the throne, and it found him utterly unprepared. To quote a Swedish writer: "The young monarch exchanged the schoolroom and the birch-rod for the throne and sceptre".

This policy of keeping the heir apparent in ignorance of the constitution and government of the country was part of a set plan. The Ministers wished to retain all power in their own hands, and they viewed with alarm the possibility of a new ruler taking the initiative. For the King of Denmark and Norway in those days was no mere puppet of sovereignty. He was invested with absolute power, and was in theory, at any rate, as much an autocrat as the Tsar of all the Russias. The late King, from indolence and indifference, had let all the power drift into the hands of his ministers, but there was no reason why Christian VII. should do the same. The royal policy of *laissez-faire* had not been so successful in the last reign that the nation desired its continuance in this. The trend of foreign policy under Moltke had been to sell Denmark bound hand and foot to France. In home affairs, the army and navy had drifted into a deplorable state of inefficiency, the national debt was abnormally large, and the taxes burdensome. Many of the nobility were [Pg 72] disaffected and corrupt, the middle classes sullen and discontented, and the peasants ground down to the level of beasts of burden. Undoubtedly there was something rotten in the state of Denmark.

The young King at first made a laudable effort to do what he could. "He begins, they say," wrote Titley, "to show a desire of becoming thoroughly master of the state of his affairs, and it is not to be doubted that he will soon make great progress in that knowledge, if he takes right methods and his application is equal to his capacity." Again: "Sensible people here begin to conceive great hopes of their young Sovereign, and cannot enough admire his application to business, and also the quickness and solidity of his understanding".[43] And again: "With a great share of vivacity and youthful levity he yet thinks very seriously and strives to make himself master of his affairs, so far at least as not to be under the necessity of blindly following the suggestions of anybody; ... he is unwilling to do anything that he cannot understand or rationally approve".[44]

[43] Titley's despatch, Copenhagen, January 21, 1766.

[44] *Ibid.*, March 14, 1766.

If this show of authority somewhat alarmed Moltke and his placemen, the inexperienced King at first did nothing to displace them. For the first few months of his reign Christian VII. ruled through a triumvirate, composed of Moltke, Bernstorff and Reventlow. The triumvirate, though they detested each other, united in an attempt to discourage the King from governing. If [Pg 73] Christian expressed an opinion on any matter of state, they either raised difficulties, or embarked on wearisome discussions. Baffled and discouraged at every turn the young King resolved not to yield without a struggle to his dictators. He knew that the affairs of the nation were in confusion, and he asked a distinguished servant of the state, Count Frederick Danneskjold-Samsöe,[45] to draw up for him an independent report of the condition of the kingdom. Danneskjold-Samsöe performed his task with alacrity, and painted an appalling picture of the distress of the people, the corruption and mismanagement in the great spending departments of the state, and the misgovernment of ministers. He inveighed against the whole policy of the ministers, and especially against that of Bernstorff, whom he regarded as chiefly responsible for the marriage arranged between the King and the English Princess Matilda. This marriage he boldly declared was displeasing to the nation. But in this respect he met with no success; the King showed no [Pg 74] inclination to hurry into matrimony, but the betrothal remained unaltered. So far as could be judged Christian inherited his father's liking for England. "I am told," wrote the English envoy, "that he has a predilection towards England. He often talks in private of the British blood in his veins, and often intimates the satisfaction it would give him to lead his army in person in the cause of Great Britain."[46]

[45] Count Frederick Danneskjold-Samsöe was a grandson of Christian V. The first Count was Christian V.'s son by Sophie Amalie, daughter of Paul Mothe, an apothecary. His

daughter by his first marriage, Frederica Louise, married in 1720 Christian Augustus, Duke of Holstein-Sondeburg-Augustenburg. This marriage played an important part in the interminable Schleswig-Holstein question as affecting the legitimacy of the Pretender. Christian, the late Duke of Augustenburg, and his brother Prince Frederick, also married daughters of the house of Danneskjold-Samsöe. The mother of Prince Christian of Schleswig-Holstein was a Countess Danneskjold-Samsöe.

[46] Titley's despatch, Copenhagen, May 13, 1766.

Christian VII. acted so far on Danneskjold-Samsöe's report as to dismiss his Prime Minister, Moltke, without a pension, and to strip him of all his offices. He had always disliked Moltke, whom he considered chiefly responsible for his having been kept in subjection and in ignorance of public affairs during the late King's lifetime. Contrary to expectation he did not treat Reventlow with the same severity. He gave him titular honours, but quietly put him on one side. Bernstorff triumphantly acquitted himself of the charges brought against him, and rapidly advanced in the King's favour. He soon became the most powerful minister in Denmark.

A firm friend of Bernstorff and of the English alliance was Prince Charles of Hesse.[47] This Prince was Christian VII.'s first cousin, and, like him, had an English mother—Princess Mary, [Pg 75] daughter of George II. This Princess married the Landgrave Frederick of Hesse, who after his marriage became a Roman Catholic. His sons were then taken away from his guardianship, and sent, for the greater security of their Protestantism, to Copenhagen, where they grew up under the protection of Frederick V. Prince Charles was much loved by King Frederick, who betrothed him to his daughter the Princess Louise. Prince Charles was good-looking, clever and high principled, but he was almost penniless, and the proposed alliance was considered a poor one for the Danish Princess. They, however, were very much in love with one another, and Christian VII. approved of the betrothal quite as much as the late King.

[47] Prince Charles of Hesse, afterwards Landgrave, left behind him a manuscript entitled *Mémoires de mon Temps*. After nearly a century it was ordered to be printed by King Frederick VII. of Denmark for private circulation. It is the authority for many passages in this book.

Prince Charles was at this time a great favourite with his royal cousin, who often sought his advice. The young King had need of a disinterested counsellor who was not afraid to speak, for before long the bright hopes entertained concerning him began to fade. The tactics of his ministers in seeking to blunt the edge of the King's interest in state affairs had been only too successful. They wished him not to interfere, or take the initiative in any way, but they wanted him to be diligent in doing what they told him, and punctual in the discharge of routine duties. But Christian VII. soon developed a distaste for all work, and showed an inclination to shirk the most formal duty. He rarely attended a council, and would leave the necessary papers unsigned [Pg 76] for days.[48]

[48] "The late ministry," wrote Gunning after the fall of Bernstorff's Government in 1770, "are said to have neglected no means of presenting all business to His Majesty's youthful eye through the terrifying medium of labour and drudgery. They used many efforts (and at length they succeeded) to inspire him with a thorough distaste for everything but ease and dissipation, with the sole design of maintaining their own power and consequence. They equally diverted his application from civil or military business, the former with a view of managing it themselves, the latter in order to prevent any great exertion of the natural power of an arbitrary government, which without an army is a mere chimæra." (Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, April 4, 1771.)

KING CHRISTIAN VII.
From the Painting by P. Wichman, 1766.

In other ways, too, Christian showed signs of change, not for the better. For a few months after his accession he spent his evenings in the circle of the royal family, with his sisters and stepbrother, the Hereditary Prince Frederick. He by turns visited the two Dowager-Queens, Juliana Maria and Sophia Magdalena. Juliana Maria treated him with great friendliness, and his grandmother, Sophia Magdalena, was genuinely fond of him. But the company of the two dowagers was not lively, and it was made worse by the stiff etiquette that prevailed in their circles. It pleased the King's wayward humour to outrage all these laws of etiquette, and even to descend to the level of practical jokes, sheltering himself against retaliation by his position. On one occasion he blew a cup of scalding tea into a lady's face when she was in the act of drinking it; on another he exposed his august grandmother to derision by powdering her hair with sugar. In addition to the two Dowager-Queens there was another old princess at the Danish court, the [Pg 77] King's aunt, Charlotte Amelia, who lived only for religious practices and charity. Even the halo of sanctity which surrounded this royal spinster did not protect her from insult. She was constantly tormented by the King and jeered at before the courtiers. At first Charlotte Amelia treated this insolence as boyish fun, but at last things became so bad that she withdrew from court. Her limit of endurance was reached when one of the King's pages crawled under the dining-table on all fours, disguised as a savage, and nearly frightened her to death. She retired to the Amalienborg and could never be persuaded to return to court. The King's practical joke cost him dear, for the Princess Charlotte Amelia revoked her will, and left her large fortune away from her nephew to the poor.

When he was weary of tormenting old ladies Christian VII. introduced the custom of retiring to his own apartments after dinner, and there, surrounded by a chosen circle of his intimates, he would lay aside his kingly dignity and make merry with his friends. No doubt these evening gatherings were in imitation of those of his exemplar, Frederick the Great, where ceremonial and etiquette were banished and the Prussian King and his friends engaged in intellectual conversation and social enjoyment. Unfortunately for the parallel, Christian's clique consisted of foolish and dissipated young courtiers, and their conversation mainly turned upon current scandals, or *risqué* French novels were read and commented on. When in turn the King was [Pg 78] wearied of these diversions, he conceived the idea of prowling about his capital at night, disguised like another Haroun al Raschid, but from a very different motive to that which guided the enlightened Caliph, and with very different results. Soon strange rumours were heard of these nocturnal expeditions, of wild sallies and adventures, of street fights, breaking of windows and conflicts with the watchmen. In these excursions Kirschoff and Sperling accompanied the King, and aided and abetted him in his wildest extravagancies. The sober Danes began to take fright lest their young monarch should be thoroughly corrupted by his evil companions. He was already earning the title, which the English ladies gave him later, of "The Northern Scamp". The British minister, who at first had nothing but praise for Christian VII., now writes:—

> "As this young gentleman [Sperling] is not eminently qualified to be of any particular use or amusement to his Sovereign, otherwise than by assisting him in the gratification of irregular passions, people are alarmed at such a connection, and the greatest care will be taken to prevent the evil effects which are naturally to be apprehended from it". [49]

[49] Titley's despatch, February 4, 1766.

Something had to be done, so the ministers made a scapegoat of Kirschoff and sent him away from court with a pension. Kirschoff, though quite as vicious, was far less dangerous than Sperling, for he had not the same influence with the King. But unfortunately this arch-corrupter [Pg 79] was suffered to remain, and by example and precept he continued to encourage his master in vice and dissipation. The young King's only restraint to the indulgence of gross and unbridled passions was the superstition engendered by his gloomy creed. His teachers had instilled into him a lively terror of hell and the devil, and had painted in darkest colours the eternal punishment of the wicked. Christian's mind often dwelt upon these things, and eventually the torments of hell became with him a monomania. He used to discuss this, and other religious questions, with Prince Charles of Hesse, who had a liking for theological conversations; but his serious moods did not last long. For instance, on one occasion the two young men argued long and earnestly on the efficacy of the sacrament, and then prayed together. The King was apparently deeply moved, but half an hour later, when they went to see Queen Sophia Magdalena, he made a mockery of the whole thing. "Charles and I have been praying together most piously," he said, and burst into boisterous laughter. With such a volatile temperament, never in the same mind two hours together, with the spirit warring against the flesh, and the flesh warring against the spirit, surrounded by temptations and evil example, the King did well to hearken to Prince Charles when he urged him to marry as soon as possible. Things were going from bad to worse, and it seemed that in a happy marriage lay the only hope of the young monarch's salvation.

The Danish nation eagerly desired to see their King married, for they wished to have the [Pg 80] succession to the throne assured in the direct line. The Ministers also desired it (even those who were opposed to the English alliance), partly for political reasons, and partly because they thought that the evil tendencies of the King could only be checked in this way. Christian, himself, was averse from marriage, but since it was inevitable, it was easier for him to yield now than to postpone the question, only for it to be revived later. And if he must wed, his English cousin would do as well as any other bride.

The marriage had been arranged to take place the following year, 1767, but, under the circumstances, it was thought advisable by the Government at Copenhagen that it should take place sooner, and representations were made to the court of St. James to that effect. The English envoy, who was in constant dread lest the influence of the French party should break off the match, also wrote home urging the speedy fulfilment of the contract. Moreover, English interests conspired to make it advisable that the marriage should take place soon. Gunning,[50] who had [Pg 81] succeeded Cosby at Copenhagen, wrote: "There can be scarce any doubt that if the marriage takes place before a renewal of the French treaty, the influence of so amiable a Princess, as her Royal Highness is, on so young a Prince (who as yet has given way to no tender attachment) will operate powerfully in favour of the mutual interests of the two kingdoms".[51] Titley was no less zealous, and while Gunning spoke of the political advantages of a speedy union, he extolled the virtues of the royal bridegroom. "In his way of living he is regular and sober," he writes, "eats heartily, but drinks little or no wine. His temper is compassionate and good, but equitable and firm. He has a quick apprehension, with a sound and not uncultivated understanding, and his mind is well seasoned with the principles of virtue and religion. He is now impatient for the accomplishment of his marriage, and as he is hitherto under no prepossession, there is the greatest reason to believe he will find his happiness in that union."[52] What higher praise could be given of any prince!

[50] Robert Gunning (afterwards Sir Robert Gunning) was born in 1731, and came of a distinguished Irish family. On the recall of Cosby through ill-health, he was appointed Minister Resident at the court of Denmark in November, 1765, but he did not arrive in Copenhagen until April, 1766. His instructions were to assist the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, Walter Titley, and to keep the British Government well informed of passing events. He performed his duties so well, that, on the death of Titley in 1768, he was appointed his successor at Copenhagen. He remained there until June, 1771, when he was appointed Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the court of Prussia. Eventually he was transferred to the Russian court, and after a distinguished diplomatic career died a Baronet and a Knight of the Bath in 1816.

[51] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, April 19, 1766.

[52] Titley's despatch, Copenhagen, May 13, 1766.

The British King and Government, who were most anxious to check the designs of France in the Baltic, responded with alacrity, and matters advanced so quickly that, at the end of May, Bernstorff despatched a messenger to Bothmar in London with instructions to conclude the [Pg 82] marriage contract, and to propose the completion of it in October.

During the summer of 1766 the nuptials of the King of Denmark's two sisters took place in Copenhagen, the elder to the Crown Prince of Sweden, and the younger to Prince Charles of Hesse. These events were solemnised with considerable magnificence, and so was the birthday of the future Queen of Denmark, now aged fifteen. Gunning writes: "To-day was celebrated at the

palace of Frederiksberg with every possible demonstration of joy and festivity the birthday of the Princess Matilda. His Danish Majesty omitted nothing that could tend to show the satisfaction he felt upon that happy occasion. He did Mr. Titley and me the honour of admitting us to his table, that we might be witnesses of it, a favour conferred on none of the other foreign ministers."[53]

[53] Gunning's despatch, July 26, 1766.

English influence was decidedly in the ascendant at Copenhagen, but the envoy's desired alliance of England, Russia and Denmark against the designs of France and Sweden did not advance rapidly. It was hoped that Matilda on her arrival at the Danish court would help it forward. She was regarded as a pawn in the diplomatic game, and we find Titley writing home before the marriage, to advise the part she was to play. "The partisans of France," he writes, "still keep up their spirits here in spite of very discouraging appearances. I have heard that they place some hopes even in the future Queen, expecting to work upon her youth and inexperience so far as to [Pg 83] incline her to favour their cause. Therefore ... I would beg leave to intimate that it were to be wished that her Royal Highness before she comes hither might be a little prepared, and put upon her guard against all such impressions, since it is very certain that her authority here will be always precarious, whatever flattering prospects may be held out to her, if any foreign interest should prevail to the prejudice of England. It cannot, however, be doubted that her Royal Highness will preserve a favourable remembrance of her native country, especially when she finds her Royal Consort and the generality of the nation giving in to those very sentiments which must be natural to her."[54]

[54] Titley's despatch, Copenhagen, July 7, 1766.

These representations were doubtless communicated to Matilda. Her brother, George III., signified his consent to the marriage taking place in October, and commanded his minister at Copenhagen to inform the court of Denmark that his sister would set out for her new home as soon as the necessary formalities were accomplished.

CHAPTER VI.

[Pg 84]

MATILDA'S ARRIVAL IN DENMARK.

1766.

When Matilda was told that her marriage would take place a year earlier than at first arranged she burst into tears, and no longer concealed her extreme reluctance to the Danish match. The Princess-Dowager of Wales commanded Sir Joshua Reynolds to paint the portrait of the future Queen of Denmark before her departure from England, and the great painter complained that he was unable to do justice either to the Princess or himself, because she was always weeping.[55] But neither tears nor lamentations had any effect with the Princess-Dowager; that stern mother told her daughter to remember that princes and princesses were not as ordinary mortals, free to wed as inclination suggested, and she recalled the fact that she, herself, had been sent from her secluded German home at the age of seventeen to England, to wed a husband whom she had never seen.

[55] Northcote's *Memoirs of Sir J. Reynolds*, vol. i.

Matilda's home had not been altogether a happy one because of this same mother, but she was fondly attached to her brothers and to her invalid sister Louisa Anne, and she loved the land of her birth. She forced a smile in response to those who came to offer their congratulations, but she took no interest in the preparations for her marriage. She seemed to have a foreboding of evil, and it was evident to all that she was a most unwilling bride, sacrificed upon the altar of political expediency.

[Pg 85]

Not much time was allowed the young Princess for reflection, for soon after the message was received from the Danish court her marriage and departure were pushed on with all speed. On June 3, 1766, a message from the King was delivered to Parliament asking for the marriage portion of the Princess Matilda. After some debate, more on matters of form than the actual sum, a portion was voted of £100,000.

This important preliminary over, the King decided that his sister was to be married by proxy in England on October 1, and leave for Denmark the next day. The event excited some public interest, and we glean the following particulars from the journals concerning the preparations for the bride's journey:—

> "Tuesday the provisions dressed in the royal kitchen at Somerset House were sent on board the yachts at Gravesend. The Princess Matilda's baggage was yesterday sent down and the yachts sailed last night for Harwich."[56]

[56] *The Gazetteer*, September 23, 1766.

> "There are orders for two coaches, two post-chaises and four saddle horses to be ready on Thursday next at five o'clock to attend the Queen of Denmark to Harwich."[57]

[Pg 86]

[57] *The Gazetteer*, September 29, 1766.

> "We hear that Princess Matilda has ordered genteel presents to all her servants, and also some benefactions to be distributed among a number of poor persons after her departure."[58]

[58] *The Public Advertiser*, September 29, 1766.

> "Detachments of the Queen's, or Second Regiment of Light Dragoons, are stationed on the Essex Road to escort the Queen of Denmark to Harwich. 'Tis imagined the Princess will only stop to change horses, as the necessary refreshments are carried in the coach. One of the King's cooks goes over with her Royal Highness."[59]

[59] *The Public Advertiser*, October 1, 1766.

George III. personally superintended the arrangements for his sister's marriage and journey to Denmark. We find from him the following letter to the Secretary of State:—

> "I return you the proposed ceremonial for the espousals of my sister which I entirely approve of. The full power must undoubtedly *ex officio* be read by you, and the solemn contract by the Archbishop of Canterbury. I desire, therefore, that you will have it copied, only inserting the royal apartments of St. James's Palace instead of the Chapel Royal, and my brother's Christian name in those places where it has, I think, evidently been, through the negligence of the copier, omitted where he speaks. As in all other solemn declarations, that is always used as well as the title. The Archbishop should then have it communicated to him, that he may see whether it is conformable to precedents, besides the dignity of his station calls for that mark of regard from me."[60]

[Pg 87]

[60] Letter of King George III. to the Right Honourable Henry Seymour Conway, Secretary of State, Queen's House, September 20, 1766. British Museum, Egerton MS. 82, fol. 20.

On Wednesday, October 1, 1766, between seven and eight o'clock in the evening, the Princess Matilda was married by proxy to the King of Denmark in the council chamber of St. James's Palace. Her brother, the Duke of York, stood for Christian VII., and the ceremony was performed

by the Archbishop of Canterbury in the presence of the King, the Queen, the Princess-Dowager of Wales, and other members of the royal family. A large company of nobility, gentry and foreign ministers were also present. Immediately after the ceremony the Queen of Denmark, as she was called, received the congratulations of the court, but she looked pale and dejected and her eyes were full of unshed tears. The same evening the Queen took formal leave of her brother, George III.

Matilda slept that night at Carlton House, and the next morning at half-past six, in the grey light of a chill October dawn, she said good-bye to her mother, and set out on her long journey. Three coaches were waiting to convey the Queen to Harwich, the road was lined with infantry, and a company of Life Guards was drawn up to escort her as far as Mile End. These preparations [Pg 88] caused a small crowd to assemble in Pall Mall. The parting between Matilda and her mother was most affecting. The marriage had been the Princess-Dowager's pet project, but even she felt a pang when she bade her youngest child farewell and sent her to the keeping of a strange prince in a far-off land. Her farewell present to her daughter was a ring on which the words were engraved, "May it bring thee happiness". When the young Queen came out of the house to enter her coach it was noticed by the waiting crowd that she was weeping bitterly, and this so affected many of the women and children that they wept in company. The Duke of Gloucester, Baron Bothmar,[61] the Queen's vice-chamberlain, who had been sent from Denmark to escort her Majesty, and Lady Mary Boothby accompanied Queen Matilda. The Life Guards conducted her as far as Mile End, and were there relieved by a detachment of Light Dragoons who escorted the Queen as far as Lord Abercorn's house at Witham, where it was arranged that she would dine and sleep the night. Of this stage of her journey it is written: "Her Majesty was dressed in bloom-colour with white flowers. Wherever she passed the earnest prayers of the people were for her health and praying God to protect her from the perils of the sea. An easy melancholy at times seemed to affect her on account of leaving her family and place of birth, but upon the whole she [Pg 89] carried an air of serenity and majesty which exceedingly moved every one who beheld her."[62]

[61] A brother of the Danish envoy at the court of St. James's.

[62] *Public Advertiser*, October 5, 1766.

The next morning Matilda set out again, and escorted by another detachment of Light Dragoons reached Harwich soon after four o'clock in the afternoon, but the wind being in the north-east, and the sea rough, it was not thought advisable for her to embark. She therefore went to the house of the collector of customs where she supped and lay the night, and the next morning at half-past eleven went on board the royal yacht with her retinue. Here she took leave of her brother the Duke of Gloucester who returned to London. The wind was still rough and the yacht lay all the morning in the Roads, but towards evening, when the gale had abated, she set sail for the coast of Holland. Matilda came on deck and watched the shores of her native land until the last lights faded from her view.

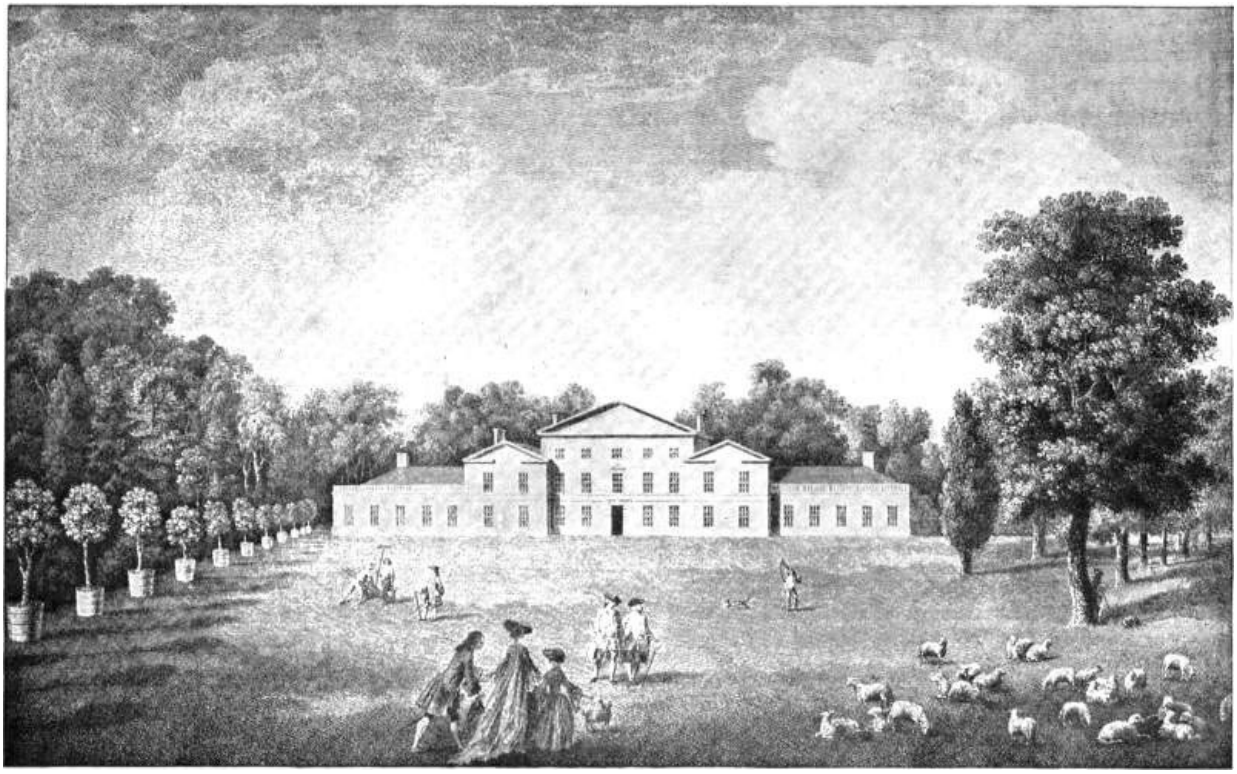
The evening of her departure, it is interesting to note, the eloquent Nonconformist minister, George Whitefield, preached a sermon at his Tabernacle in London on the marriage of the youthful Queen, and concluded with an impassioned prayer for her future happiness.[63]

[63] *Vide Public Advertiser*, October 8, 1766.

It was known how unwilling she had been to go, and very general pity was felt for her. "The poor Queen of Denmark," writes Mrs. Carter to Miss Talbot on October 4, 1766, "is gone out alone into the wide world: not a creature she knows to attend her any further than Altona. It is worse [Pg 90] than dying; for die she must to all she has ever seen or known; but then it is only dying out of one bad world into another just like it, and where she is to have cares and fears and dangers and sorrows that will all yet be new to her. May it please God to protect and instruct and comfort her, poor child as she is! and make her as good, as beloved and as happy as I believe her Aunt Louisa was! They have just been telling me how bitterly she cried in the coach so far as anybody saw her."[64]

[64] Mrs. Carter's *Letters*, vol. iii.

The Queen had a very rough crossing, and did not arrive at Rotterdam until six days after she had embarked at Harwich. She landed under a discharge of cannon, and she was received with considerable ceremony by the Prince Stadtholder and other personages. From Rotterdam to Copenhagen is a distance of some six hundred miles. It had been arranged that the Queen should accomplish this by slow stages, and every resting-place on the line of route had already been decided upon.



KEW PALACE, WHERE QUEEN MATILDA PASSED MUCH OF HER GIRLHOOD.
From an Engraving, temp. 1751.

At Rotterdam she embarked on the Stadtholder's yacht and proceeded by water to Utrecht, where she stayed the night at the house of a Dutch nobleman. From Utrecht she proceeded by coach, and passed in due course into her brother's Hanoverian dominions. Her retinue was a large and splendid one, and everywhere on the route she attracted great attention, the people coming out to cheer and bless her. She lay for one night at Osnabrück, in the castle, and [Pg 91] (tradition says) in the same room where her great-grandfather, George I., was born and was driven back to die. She was received there, as elsewhere, with great marks of distinction. At Lingen in Westphalia a cavalcade of students, arrayed in blue uniforms, came out of the town gate on horseback to meet her. They conducted her to the house where she was to rest, they serenaded her, and kept guard all night under her windows. The next morning they escorted her three leagues on the road to Bremen, where they took their leave. Her Majesty thanked them for their gallant conduct.

At Harburg on the Elbe Matilda embarked upon a richly decorated barge, which had been built by the city of Hamburg for her use. On this she sailed down the Elbe to Altona. The river was covered with boats and all kinds of craft, flying the British and Danish flags, and as the barge came in sight of Hamburg (a city adjacent to Altona) the Queen was saluted by a discharge of thirty guns. The quays of Hamburg were gaily decorated, and thronged with people anxious to catch sight of the youthful Queen.

A few minutes before Matilda's landing at Altona the Stadtholder of Schleswig-Holstein went on board to pay his respects to the Queen of Denmark, and to present to her Madame de Plessen, her first lady-in-waiting, the maids of honour, and the men of her household, who had there assembled to meet her. At Altona the Queen first set foot in Danish dominions. She landed at six o'clock in the evening, and passed down a bridge covered with scarlet cloth, and between two [Pg 92] lines of maidens dressed in white, who strewed flowers before her feet. The streets, through which she drove, were lined with burghers under arms, thronged with people, and decorated with flags, mottoes and triumphal arches. The Queen passed under one of these arches, beautifully illuminated, just in front of her house. That same evening the chief ladies of the city were presented to her, and she supped in public. The Queen rested at Altona over Sunday. In the morning she went to church, and on her return held a court. She also received a deputation of the magistrates of Altona, and one of them read the following address:—

> "Your Majesty now gives us a mark of goodness, which we cannot sufficiently acknowledge, in graciously permitting us to testify the boundless veneration and joy which are excited in the hearts of the burgesses and the inhabitants on your happy arrival in this city. It is true that in every part of your journey your Majesty will receive from your faithful subjects transports of joy and most ardent vows, nevertheless, our fidelity is surpassed by none, and Altona at the same time enjoys this happy privilege, that she is the first of all the cities in the kingdom to admire in your Majesty's person a Princess the most accomplished, and a Queen to whose protection we have the honour to recommend ourselves with all possible submission."[65]

[65] *Public Advertiser*, letter from Hamburg, November 4, 1766.

Matilda graciously replied, and charmed every one by her youth and affability. When the court [Pg 93] was over, the Queen, attended by a detachment of Hamburg troops and Danish cuirassiers, made

a progress through Altona and Hamburg, and was greeted with enthusiasm by all classes of the people.

The next morning, Monday, the Queen took leave of her English suite, who were now to return to England. The parting moved her to tears, and she presented Lady Mary Boothby, who had been with her for years, with a watch, set with diamonds, and a cheque for a thousand crowns. It had been stipulated by the Danish court that Matilda should bring no English person in her train to Denmark, so that she might more readily adapt herself to the customs of her adopted country.

The Danish suite were, of course, all strangers to the Queen, and the first aspect of her chief lady-in-waiting, Madame de Plessen, was not reassuring. Madame de Plessen was the widow of a privy councillor, and was a little over forty years of age. She had been lady-in-waiting to Queen Sophia Magdalena, who held her in high esteem: it was through her influence that she obtained this appointment. Madame de Plessen was a virtuous and religious woman, with a strict sense of duty and high moral principles, and could be trusted to guide the young Queen in the way she should go. But she had been trained in the old school, and her ideas of etiquette were rigid in the extreme. She sought to hedge round the Queen with every possible form and ceremony, and at [Pg 94] first her chill formalism frightened the timid Queen, who had not yet discovered that behind her austere demeanour Madame de Plessen concealed a kind heart.

Madame de Plessen was a clever and ambitious woman, and like her former mistress, Sophia Magdalena, she favoured the French party at Copenhagen. Her appointment, as head of the Queen's household, was therefore viewed with no little apprehension by Gunning, who, some time before Matilda's arrival in Denmark, wrote to warn the British Government:—

"The person at the head of the list [of the Queen's household]," he writes, "is a lady of an excellent understanding, possessing a thorough knowledge of the world, and a most intriguing disposition. These talents have recommended her to the Ministers here as a proper person to place about the future Queen, but they are not the only ones. Her being entirely devoted to the French system and interest, pointed her out as the fittest instrument, to either give the young Princess the bias they wish (which they think will not be difficult at her age), or, by circumventing her, prevent that influence they conclude she will have on the King. Their having unhappily effected the latter in the late reign, gives them hopes of being equally successful in this; but if her Royal Highness be prepared against these snares, her good sense and discernment will prevent her falling into them, or being persuaded by all the arguments (however specious) they may use, that it is not the interest of this country [Denmark] to engage itself too [Pg 95] close with England."[66]

[66] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, May 20, 1766. Marked "*secret*".

It soon became apparent that the English envoy's fears were not without foundation, and before long Madame de Plessen gained a great ascendency over her young mistress. But at first she put aside all thought of political intrigue, and her only instinct was maternal sympathy for the lonely little Queen. Within a few days Matilda completely won Madame de Plessen's heart, and the duenna determined at all hazard to protect her charge against the perils and temptations of the corrupt court whither she was bound.

From Hamburg Matilda proceeded by easy stages through her Danish dominions. She was received at the gates of the city of Schleswig by the chief burgesses and clergy, who complimented her on her arrival. Her journey was a triumphal progress. Gunning writes from Copenhagen: "We have an account of her Majesty's being arrived at Schleswig in perfect health. The transports of the common people at the expectation of again seeing an English princess on the throne are scarcely to be described. Her Majesty's affability and condescension have already gained her the hearts of all those who have had an opportunity of approaching her."[67]

[67] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, October 25, 1766.

Matilda arrived at the historic town of Röskilde,[68] near Copenhagen, on the evening of [Pg 96] November 1, and rested there the night. Here Titley and Gunning were waiting to have audience, and a courier was sent ahead to inform the King, who was at the Christiansborg Palace, that his Queen was at Röskilde. The next morning, as early as seven o'clock, Christian VII., with his brother the Hereditary Prince Frederick, and his cousin Prince Charles of Hesse, set out in all haste for Röskilde. Here the King and Queen saw one another for the first time. The King greeted his bride with great heartiness, and bade her welcome to his kingdom. So delighted was he with her that, in defiance of etiquette, he embraced and kissed her in the presence of all the company. The little Queen seemed much comforted by this warm welcome, and at first sight was favourably impressed with her husband. The young King had charming manners, and was by no means ill to look upon. Though considerably under middle height he was perfectly proportioned, and possessed agility and strength. His features were regular, if not handsome, and, like his Queen and cousin, he was very fair, with blue eyes and yellow hair. His personal appearance was greatly enhanced by his dress, which was magnificent and in the best of taste.

[68] Röskilde, an ancient town on the fjord of that name, once the capital of the kingdom, and afterwards the residence of the Bishop of Zealand. It has a magnificent cathedral, containing the tombs of the Kings and Queens of Denmark. They are buried there to this day. Röskilde is about twenty English miles from Copenhagen.

After the first greetings were over, a procession was formed to escort Matilda to Frederiksberg, [Pg 97] where she was to stay until her marriage. Again Christian put etiquette on one side and insisted on entering the same coach as the Queen—an ornate state coach drawn by six white horses. The coach was preceded by an escort of guards and followed by a train of other coaches.

Frederiksberg was reached about noon, and here the Queen-Mother, Sophia Magdalena, the Queen-Dowager, Juliana Maria, the Princess Louise, the King's sister, and a great number of the nobility were assembled to welcome the bride. Matilda was received by all with the greatest marks of affection and respect. Even Juliana Maria, who saw in her advent a blow to her hopes, forced herself to greet the young Queen with some show of cordiality. As for the old Queen, Sophia Magdalena, she frankly was delighted with her granddaughter-in-law, and sent a special message to Titley, as to an old friend, to tell him "how extremely satisfied and charmed she was with the person and conversation of the new Queen".[69] Matilda gave universal satisfaction, and the envoys wrote enthusiastically:—

> "She has everywhere been received in these dominions with all due honours and the greatest demonstrations of joy. She seems to gain universal applause and affection wherever she appears, and her particular attendants are unanimous in giving the highest praises to her disposition and behaviour."[70]

[69] Titley's despatch, Copenhagen, November 4, 1766.

[70] *Ibid.*

Immediately on her arrival at Frederiksberg Matilda held a court, at which many personages of distinction were presented to her. The court was followed by a banquet, when the King and his bride, the two Dowager-Queens and the rest of the royal family dined in public. After the banquet the King and all the other personages present took their leave and returned to Copenhagen, leaving Matilda to well-earned rest. Her long journey had occupied a month; she left England on October 2, and reached Frederiksberg on November 2. All this time she had been on the road, and perpetually receiving congratulations and deputations. It was no small tribute to the tact and amiability of this princess of fifteen that she everywhere won golden opinions. And it was proof of the strength of her constitution that she bore the long and tedious journey across northern Europe, in inclement weather, without illness or undue fatigue. [Pg 98]

Matilda rested at Frederiksberg for five days. On Saturday, November 8, she made her public entry into Copenhagen—on the occasion of the marriage the same evening. Her entry was attended with every circumstance of pomp and enthusiasm. About noon Princess Louise drove to Frederiksberg, where her young sister-in-law was ready to receive her. Accompanied by the Princess, Queen Matilda drove to a common outside Copenhagen behind the "Blaagaard" [Blue Farm], where she found a long procession awaiting her. The Queen here descended from her coach and entered another, beautifully decorated and gilt. The procession then set out for Copenhagen in the following order:[71] A squadron of Horse Guards; a band of mounted drummers and trumpeters, twelve royal pages in gold and crimson liveries on horseback, and a cavalcade, under the command of the Master of the Horse, consisting of many officers of the court. Then followed the ministers of state and the ambassadors in their coaches; each coach vied with the other in magnificence, and each was drawn by six horses and escorted by six running footmen. Then came the Knights of the Order of the Elephant, wearing their robes and insignia; the Knights of the Order of the Dannebrog, also in their robes; the Royal Head Riding-Master, mounted on the "Dancing Horse" (whatever that may mean), and a bevy of beautifully dressed ladies in coaches. The climax of all this magnificence was the lovely young Queen in robes of silver tissue and ermine, with a circlet of diamonds on her fair hair, seated in her coach drawn by eight white horses, and surrounded by royal lackeys in gorgeous liveries. Immediately behind the Queen's coach came the members of her household; and twelve halberdiers, arrayed in scarlet cloaks and equipped with pikes, closed the procession. [Pg 99]

[71] The following description of the Queen's entry into Copenhagen and her marriage is based upon official documents in the archives of the Court Marshal at Copenhagen, and from Danish papers of the time.

The procession entered Copenhagen through the Nörreport [North Gate] and passed along the Nörregade [North Street] to the Gammeltorv [Market Place]. Cannon thundered as the Queen passed under the gate, and all the bells of the churches clashed forth joyous chimes. The route was gaily decorated with flags and draperies; companies of burghers lined the streets, and the balconies, windows, and even the housetops were crowded with people, who cheered with wild enthusiasm. The little Queen, looking like a fairy in her robes of silver tissue, was seen, bowing and smiling, through the windows of her great gorgeous coach, and she captured all hearts at once. "The English rose," the Danes called her, and they hailed her as another Queen Louise, who would act as a guide and helpmate to her husband, a purifier of his court, and a true friend of the people. [Pg 100]

In the Market Place the procession came to a halt for a few minutes before the Town Hall, and the Queen was met by a bevy of eighteen young girls, dressed in white, and who carried wreaths and baskets of flowers. Here was a magnificent arch, seventy feet high, representing a Corinthian portcullis, and through the archway was revealed a background in perspective of the Temple of Hymen. A statue of Hymen looked down upon an altar, and above this altar allegorical figures of Denmark and England clasped hands. A pretty ceremony took place; the maidens passed up the steps and laid their wreaths upon the altar of Hymen singing:

God bless King Christian the Mild
And his Caroline Mathilde.

Then they cast flowers before the Queen's coach, and at "the same moment was heard the most [Pg 101]

delightful music, which broke forth simultaneously from all sides". Thus amid music, song, flowers and shouts of joy and welcome, Matilda proceeded on her way through the city, and at last reached the Christiansborg Palace.

As her coach drew up at the main entrance, the guard presented arms, and the heralds blared on their silver trumpets. The heir presumptive, Prince Frederick, was waiting to receive the Queen; he assisted her to alight, and conducted her up the grand staircase into the King's presence. The King received his bride with every mark of affection and honour, and then led her to the knights' hall, where a state banquet was served. The King pledged his Queen in a superb wedding goblet of crystal and gold, manufactured for the occasion.[72]

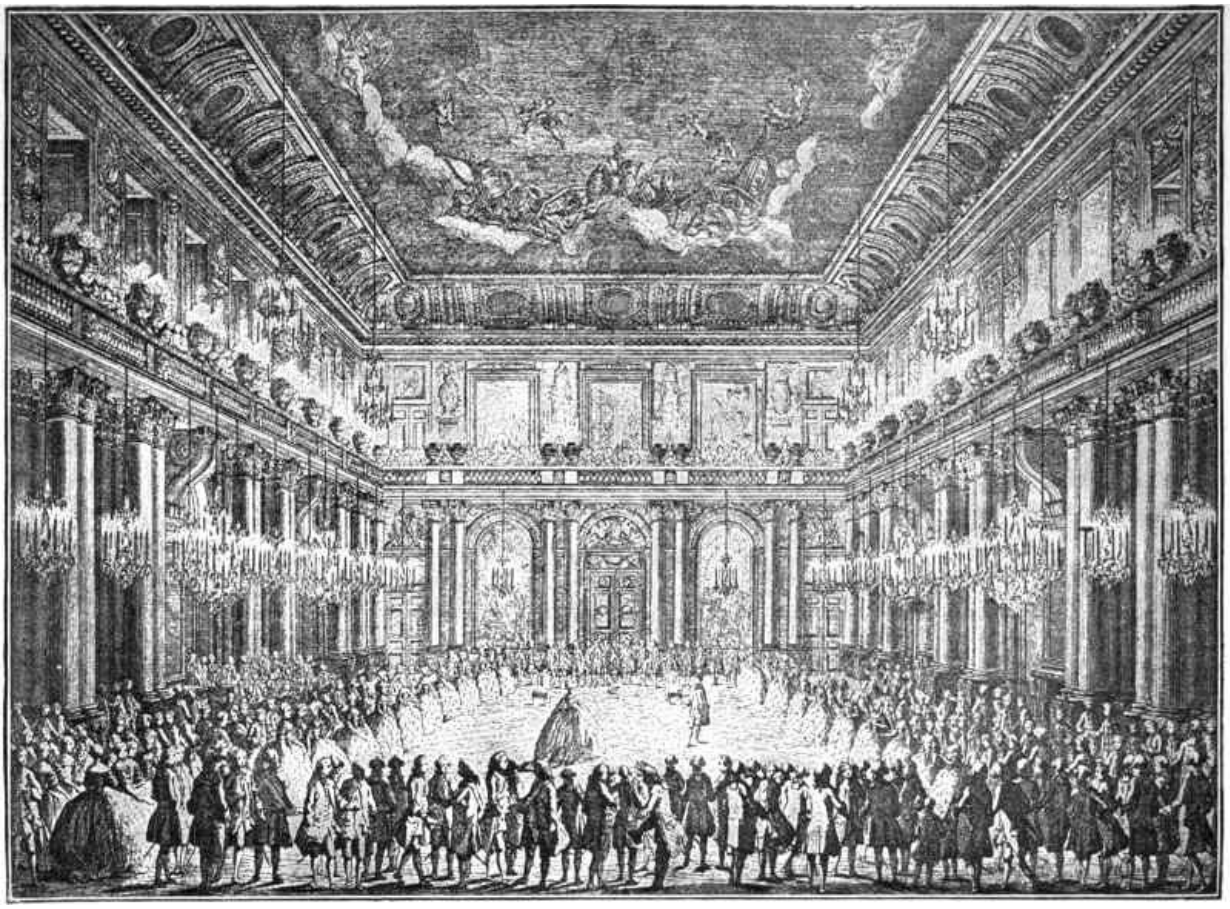
[72] This goblet is still preserved in the Rosenborg. It is a magnificent specimen of Danish art. The Danish and English arms are ground into the crystal, the crowned initials of the bridal pair are also inscribed, and underneath appears the legend "*Felici sidere juncti*, 1766". The elaborately chased lid is surmounted by a crown. The height of the goblet is eighteen inches.

After the banquet the Queen retired to her apartments to rest awhile, and then robed for her wedding. At seven o'clock in the evening all the ladies belonging to the two first ranks of the Danish nobility (namely, the countesses and baronesses), and the ladies who had taken part in the royal procession into Copenhagen, assembled in the ante-chamber of the Queen's [Pg 102] apartments. At half-past seven the Queen appeared, a beautiful vision wearing a robe of white silk brocaded with silver, a veil of priceless lace and a crown of pearls and diamonds. The ladies made a lane for her to pass, and curtsied their obeisance. The Queen, who, despite her tender years, bore herself with great dignity, proceeded to the knights' hall, where the wedding procession was marshalled. All the members of the royal family joined in this procession with the exception of the Queen-Dowager, Juliana Maria, who pleaded illness as an excuse for not appearing. The King and Queen came last of all, and walked under a canopy to the royal chapel of the Christiansborg, where the marriage ceremony was performed by Bishop Harboe of Zealand. The chapel was brilliantly illuminated, and thronged with the chief personages in Denmark, clad in rich attire, and covered with orders and jewels. During the ceremony the King and Queen stood, or knelt, on a *haut pas* before the altar, which was covered with cloth of gold and decked with silver candlesticks bearing large wax tapers. At the conclusion of the marriage service the procession was re-formed, and the King and Queen were conducted from the chapel to the ante-room of their apartments, where the company dispersed.

In honour of the marriage day a silver medal was struck, and numerous orders and titles were distributed. At night the city of Copenhagen was illuminated, and people paraded the streets all night shouting and singing for joy. The young Queen had won all hearts, and the popular [Pg 103] enthusiasm evoked by the marriage augured well for the future of the monarchy.

Copenhagen held high festival for a week after the royal wedding, and the populace as well as the court joined in the festivities. There was a gala performance at the theatre including a "Felicitation Ballet," in which there were many pretty allusions to the young Queen, who was styled Venus or "*la plus belle*". Two days after the marriage the knights' hall of the Christiansborg Palace was the scene of a wedding ball. Queen Matilda opened the ball by dancing a minuet with the King with much grace and spirit. She then honoured the English envoy, Gunning, by commanding him to dance with her—a very natural proceeding, for she wished to pay honour to her native country. But it gave offence to some of the other foreign envoys present, especially to the Spanish minister, who was the *doyen* of the *corps diplomatique* at Copenhagen, and he reported the circumstance to the Spanish court, who later demanded an explanation.[73] Nor was this the only unpleasantness at the ball. After supper the *kehraus*, a Danish country dance, was danced, and one figure was danced in procession. The *kehraus* was led by Prince Charles of Hesse and his wife, the Princess Louise—probably because they knew all the figures. The King came next with the Queen, and all the rest of the company followed, two [Pg 104] and two. The King, who had supped freely, was in boisterous spirits, and called out to Prince Charles: "Lead the *kehraus* through all the apartments". The Prince therefore led the procession through the rooms on the first floor of the palace, the band, presumably, going before. The procession of laughing and dancing men and women followed, until they came to the ante-chamber of the Queen's apartments. At the door of the Queen's bedchamber Prince Charles found Madame de Plessen standing like a dragon in his path. Imperiously she waved him back, and declared that his entrance would be an outrage, alike on etiquette and decency. But the King, whom any opposition goaded to anger, shouted: "Do not heed an old woman's nonsense! Go on! Go on!" Therefore Madame de Plessen, still expostulating, was thrust aside, and the procession danced through the Queen's bedchamber, and so back to the ballroom.

[73] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, November 18, 1766.



THE MARRIAGE BALL OF CHRISTIAN VII. AND QUEEN MATILDA IN THE CHRISTIANSBORG PALACE.
From a Contemporary Print.

These incidents, trivial though they were, revealed the rocks ahead in the way of the young Queen, and showed that no common care would be necessary to avoid them. As the English Secretary of State, Conway, wrote to Gunning not long after Matilda's arrival at Copenhagen:—

> "Her Majesty is entering upon the most important era of her life, and at a tender age is launched, as it were alone, into a strange and wide ocean, where it might require the utmost care and prudence to steer with that nice conduct which may at once conciliate the affections of her court and people, and support the dignity of that high station to which Providence has called her".[74]

[Pg 105]

[74] Conway's despatch to Gunning, St. James's, November 18, 1766.

[Pg 106]

CHAPTER VII.

MARIAGE À LA MODE.

1766-1767.

The court of Denmark over which Matilda was now the reigning Queen, though not the ruling spirit, was the last place in the world for a young and innocent girl to be sent alone. It was a hotbed of intrigue, a stye of vile epicurism, where even decency was disregarded. Cunning as foxes, and like foxes in their lust and greed, the majority of the courtiers thought only of advancing their personal interests at the expense of each other, or by vain and frivolous amusement to kill the passing hour. All things that made for purity of life, nobility of purpose, or singleness of heart, were mocked at and derided. Truth, honour and virtue were by-words. During the later years of Frederick V.'s reign the influence of the French court (at its worst) had not been confined in Denmark to politics alone, but extended to manners and morals as well. This influence became far more visible at the court of Christian VII. than at that of his father. The society which the young King collected around him within the walls of the Christiansborg Palace did its best to copy Versailles, and it succeeded in aping the vices, if not the superficial [Pg 107] refinement, of the court of France. At Christiansborg might be seen the same type of silly brainless persons as those who flitted about the ante-chambers of Versailles, who adopted the same frivolous tone, and the same loose morals. Their avowed object was to avoid *ennui*, but in their pursuit of pleasure they often caught boredom. The Danish courtiers, both men and women, were artificial to the core. They painted their faces, powdered their hair, and dressed extravagantly. They disguised every real sentiment, and sought always to seem what they were not. They expressed nothing but contempt for the language and customs of their native land. To be Danish was *bourgeois*, to be virtuous even more so.

The cheap cynicism which mocks at marriage, and all its privileges and duties, was much in vogue among the fashionable or "young party" at the Danish court. Christian VII. had heard too much of these views from the young rake-hells whom he chose for his companions not to be entirely at one with them, and he looked on marriage as the greatest burden. He had been extremely reluctant to take it upon himself and had only done so at the strongest representations of his ministers. Reverdil declares with a groan that to this epicene being "*une personne royale dans son lit lui semblait d'ailleurs plutôt un objet de respect que d'amour*," and adds that the King would have certainly refused to perform his connubial duties had it not been represented to him that the absence of an heir to the throne would give rise to all manner of evil gossip [Pg 108] respecting himself.

The young King had consented to marry with an ill grace, and after his marriage he lost no time in declaring to his boon companions that he intended to be in every respect a husband *à la mode*. The first sight of his consort's fresh and youthful beauty had seemed to awaken in him some dormant sense of manliness, and he treated her at first with a plausible imitation of lover-like ardour. He was flattered by the warmth of her reception and the praises of her beauty, which he interpreted as tributes to his own good taste. The ceremonies incident on the wedding gratified his love of display, and the festivities that followed delighted his pleasure-loving soul. He was like a child with a new toy, but he wearied of it even more quickly than a child. If his passion ever existed it was short-lived, for on the third day of his marriage he said to one of his intimate friends that he strongly advised him never to marry, as the unmarried state was far preferable. This speech might have been credited to the affectation of a very young husband who wished to pose as a cynic, but there was evidently something more behind it, for neither of the young couple appeared to be happy during the first days of their married life; Christian was restless and discontented, Matilda pensive and melancholy.

The Queen's depression was natural. The excitement and novelty of her journey and her enthusiastic welcome had buoyed her up at first, but now these were over she felt the reaction. [Pg 109] She was a stranger in a strange land, separated from every one she had ever known, and she suffered from homesickness. A closer acquaintance with her husband obliterated the favourable first impression she had formed of him. He was a disappointment. The flattering despatches which the English envoys had sent to London (some of which we have quoted) credited him with every physical and mental endowment, and portrayed him as a paragon among princes. These encomiums, duly communicated to the Princess-Dowager, had been dunned into Matilda's ears with such persistency that she thought she was marrying a prince who was almost a demi-god, and who gathered up into himself all the attributes of the legendary heroes of Scandinavian romance. What then must have been her disappointment when she found that her husband resembled a French *petit maître*, rather than a son of the Vikings. To add to her disillusion Christian made hardly any show of affection for his wife, and after the first few days treated her with open indifference. A week after their marriage the royal couple gave a banquet at the Christiansborg Palace, and it was noticed by the company that already the bloom had faded from the young Queen's cheeks, and she smiled with evident effort. Her sadness increased from day to day, and she often gazed at the ring her mother had given her, with its inscription, "May it bring thee happiness," and sighed heavily. The King, who wished for nothing but to be amused, was [Pg 110] piqued by his consort's despondency, and so far from making any attempt to comfort her, relieved his feelings by satirical remarks. One day when one of his favourites called his attention to the Queen's sadness, he said: "What does it matter? It is not my fault. I believe she has the spleen." The King's indifference to his Queen was quickly noticed by the courtiers, who took their cue accordingly, and treated her as a person of little account. Ogier, the French envoy at

Copenhagen, reported to Paris three weeks after the marriage: “The English Princess has produced hardly any impression on the King’s heart; but had she been even more amiable she would have experienced the same fate, for how could she please a man who seriously believes that it is not good form (*n’est pas du bon air*) for a husband to love his wife?”

The French envoy was exultant that the marriage, on which England had built such high hopes, should produce so little effect politically. The Queen had no influence with the King, and he would be more likely to oppose her wishes than to yield to them, if only for fear lest it should be thought that he was governed by his wife. The poor little Queen had no wish for political power, and was too much downcast by her own personal disappointments to be of any use in a diplomatic intrigue. But George III., and the English Government, who had no knowledge of the real state of affairs, persisted in their project of using the Queen for their own advantage; and Secretary Conway sent minute instructions to Gunning as to the best way in which this could be worked. [Pg 111]

“In regard to your applying to the young Queen,” he writes, “her affection to his Majesty [George III.], and love for her native country, cannot but incline her to preserve, as much as it can be in her power to do, the mind of the King of Denmark, permanently fixed upon the strictest union with his Majesty’s, who has no one view in his alliance inconsistent with the honour of the King of Denmark or the welfare of his kingdom. Both Mr. Titley and you will doubtless omit nothing that can mark your utmost attention and desire of serving her Majesty. There might seem an impropriety in endeavouring to engage her Majesty to interfere in business, especially in what has the air of court intrigue, but so far as informing her Majesty fully of the present state of the court, and apprising her who are the best friends of her native country, and consequently most inclined to promote the true honour and interests of their own, it will be your duty, and may be an essential service to her Majesty, whose good sense will make the properest use of the lights you furnish. The etiquette of the court of Denmark (I find by your letter of September 2) allows an easier access to family ministers than to others, and this privilege you will, I imagine, have no difficulty to preserve.... You may also be assured that the affection of his Majesty [George III.], and his care for the welfare and happiness of his sister, so deservedly the object of his love and esteem, cannot fail of having suggested every proper counsel and information more immediately necessary for her guidance in the delicate and important situation she is placed. Upon that foundation you may properly build, and in such further lights as it may be fit for you to give her Majesty, I think both the opportunities and the matter of the information itself should rather flow naturally than be too affectedly sought.”[75] [Pg 112]

[75] Sir H. S. Conway’s despatch to Gunning, St. James’s, October 24, 1766.

The English Government was soon disappointed of its hope of using the Danish Queen as a pawn in the political game. Gunning, in bitter disappointment, enlightened Conway as to the true state of affairs a few weeks after the marriage. “All access to either the King or Queen of Denmark,” he wrote, “is rendered so difficult that without being furnished with some pretext I can never expect to approach either of their Majesties but in public. The preference given me there has already occasioned some of the most unheard of and preposterous complaints.” [Here he refers to the protest of the Spanish minister already mentioned.] “Monsieur Reventlow[76] has lately made me some overtures to a better understanding; he speaks in raptures of the Queen whenever I see him, and I believe will constitute as much as depends upon him to promote her Majesty’s happiness. This is of itself a sufficient reason for my wishing to cultivate his good opinion, and if possible to bring him over to our interests. [The French Minister] encourages the carrying on intrigues against us; they (I need not tell you, sir) increase every day, and particularly since the arrival of her Majesty,—the principal people about her being our most inveterate enemies.”[77] [Pg 113]

[76] Reventlow had been appointed the Queen’s Chief Chamberlain.

[77] Gunning’s despatch to Conway, Copenhagen, November 18, 1766.

One of the “inveterate enemies” was the austere and haughty Madame de Plessen, who hedged the Queen round with iron etiquette, and permitted none to enter her presence without her permission. Especially did she throw difficulties in the way of the English envoy having frequent access of her Majesty, on the ground that his visits would be sure to cause jealousy and ill-will. The Queen, she urged, must overcome her natural preferences, she must forget that she was a Princess of Great Britain, and remember only that she was Queen of Denmark and Norway. This was perhaps sound advice so far as it went, but Madame de Plessen’s object in giving it was not altogether disinterested. She, like her former mistress, Queen Sophia Magdalena, was a sworn friend of France, and probably in its pay. Madame de Plessen had a genius for political intrigue, and her apartments in the palace formed a *rendez-vous* for the friends of France.

It is difficult to follow the cross-currents of politics at the Danish court during the early years of the reign of Christian VII., but so far as foreign affairs were concerned, the position may be briefly summarised thus: The main object of England was to check France; the main object of Sweden was to check Russia. Therefore, whatever was disagreeable to France at Copenhagen was agreeable to England. Whatever was disagreeable to Sweden was agreeable to Russia. Failing to see her own influence in the ascendant at the Danish court, England would prefer to see that of Russia. Bernstorff, the Prime Minister, was very friendly to Russia, and not ill-disposed to England. Therefore, the French envoy and Madame de Plessen intrigued against him. In domestic politics also the Queen’s chief lady was in opposition to Bernstorff, and to her chambers flocked malcontents, including many of the staider and more conservative among the Danish nobility, who shook their heads over the misgovernment of the Prime Minister, and the follies and extravagancies of the King and his friends. [Pg 114]

The advent of the young Queen was made an excuse for the King to gratify his passion for festivity and display. During the preceding reign the court had led a comparatively quiet life, but the winter following Christian VII.'s marriage was an unceasing round of gaiety. Balls, banquets, concerts, masques, operas and plays, hunting parties, sledge parties, circuses, and excursions to the different royal castles around Copenhagen—there were a good many—succeeded one another in quick succession. The King had a great love for the play, so he built a court theatre at the Christiansborg Palace and decorated it without regard to expense. A French company acted [Pg 115] there, and the King and his suite frequently took part in the performances. The King acted a part in Voltaire's *Zaire*, and his performance was received with great applause. He was so much impressed with his dramatic talents that he twice repeated his performance in the larger theatre of Copenhagen, and there the general public were permitted to attend. Acting, however, was but a passing phase with the King, and he soon tired of it, though he undoubtedly showed talent.

Madame de Plessen did all she could to prevent the Queen from taking part in the court festivities, but Matilda, who was young, and fond of pleasure, could not be prevailed upon to absent herself altogether, more especially as by doing so she would incur the displeasure of the King. But she never appeared unless attended by Madame de Plessen, and turned to her always for guidance. It was Madame de Plessen who chose the ladies to dance in the same quadrilles as the Queen, and she took care that none, however beautiful or fashionable they might be, should be admitted to this honour if there were the slightest blemish upon their reputation. With men the same care was not necessary, for, as a matter of etiquette, the Queen never danced with any but princes of the blood, ambassadors, ministers of state, or others it was deemed advisable to honour in an especial manner.

The introduction of masquerades was a still more startling innovation, and gave great offence to the two Dowager-Queens. Sophia Magdalena protested, but though her protests were supported [Pg 116] by several of the ministers, and the more prominent among the clergy, they were unheeded. The King and his friends anticipated too many gallant adventures to forego the opportunities which a masked ball offered, and they wished to imitate at Copenhagen those masquerades held at the opera in Paris. The first masked ball ever given in Denmark was held in December in the Christiansborg Palace. All the ladies and gentlemen belonging to the first three classes were admitted, besides all officers belonging to both services. They were allowed to appear in any fancy dress they chose, the only restriction being that they should not come "in the likeness of an animal or any unseemly disguise". The King appeared as a Sultan, and his immediate following were also in eastern dress. The point was fiercely debated whether the Queen should appear at the masquerades or not; the Dowager-Queens and Madame de Plessen being wholly against it, and the King insisting upon it. Finally a compromise was arrived at; Matilda showed herself to the company for a short time, and then retired to her apartments to play chess with court ladies chosen for her by Madame de Plessen, and the elderly wives of ministers. It was as well that the Queen retired early, for the tone of the masquerade became more and more free as the evening wore on, and degenerated at last into riotous licence.

The expense of these entertainments was very heavy, and the people, who were overburdened with taxes, began to murmur. There was great distress in Copenhagen during the winter of 1766- [Pg 117] 67, and the contrast between the want and misery in the poorer quarters of the city, and the festivity and extravagance in the palace, was very striking. The people, who loved the pomp and circumstance of royalty, might at another time have overlooked this lavish expenditure, on the ground of the youth and natural gaiety of the King. But sinister rumours were afloat concerning him and his pleasures, and he had already by his puerile amusements and dissipated conduct forfeited to a great extent the public respect. Moreover, the Puritan party in Denmark was very strong, and included the elder members of the royal family, and many of the most influential personages in church and state. These regarded many of the court festivities with disapproval, and the masquerades with horror. The clergy especially were violent in their denunciations, and did not hesitate to fan the flame of popular discontent. For instance, a building, belonging, and adjacent to, the Christiansborg Palace, in which there was a large wood store and brewery, caught fire about this time, and was burned to the ground; the conflagration was the biggest known in Copenhagen for years. Pastor Münter, a preacher of great power, seized upon the incident to preach a sermon against the sinful amusements of the court. He declared that the fire was a sign from heaven to warn the King and his following to refrain from their wicked ways, and if they did not profit by it they would be utterly consumed with fire, if not here, then most [Pg 118] certainly hereafter. The sermon made a great sensation in Copenhagen, and the preacher was reprimanded by the court, but he was regarded as an inspired prophet by many austere Puritans.

The worst of all this controversy was that the innocent young Queen was blamed unjustly. Rumours were spread abroad that Matilda was largely responsible for these extravagancies; and in proof of the assertion it was pointed out that the introduction of masquerades followed upon the arrival of the English princess. It was said that these rumours originated at the court of the Queen-Dowager. Juliana Maria had retired to the Fredensborg with her son, the Hereditary Prince Frederick, where she was surrounded by a little circle of malcontents. In due time these untruths reached Matilda's ears and caused her great annoyance. The young Queen's household, including Madame de Plessen, did everything they could to contradict the reports, but with indifferent success. The mischief was done, and it remained a fixed idea in the minds of many people that the Queen was almost as devoted as the King to frivolous amusements. Queen Matilda communicated her uneasiness to the English envoy, who wrote home:—

> "At a time when the Crown labours under the pressure of heavy debts, and the revenue, from mismanagement, is so much lessened, people naturally complain of the increase of

expenses, and the introduction of a number of entertainments, and amongst these, of masquerades. The Queen is under the greatest uneasiness, lest this should be imputed to her having any inclination for a diversion of this kind, from which, on the contrary, the goodness of her heart, and the purity of her sentiments, render her very averse. The sweetness of her disposition, and the uncommon degree of prudence and discretion she is endowed with, must ensure her a large share of happiness; but whatever my wishes may be, I cannot flatter myself this will ever bear any proportion to what her Majesty so justly deserves."[78] To which the Secretary of State replied: "Your attention to her Danish Majesty is most justly commendable, and certainly her Majesty's cautious conduct is most amiable and respectable".[79] [Pg 119]

[78] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, December 6, 1766.

[79] Conway's despatch, St. James's, December 29, 1766.

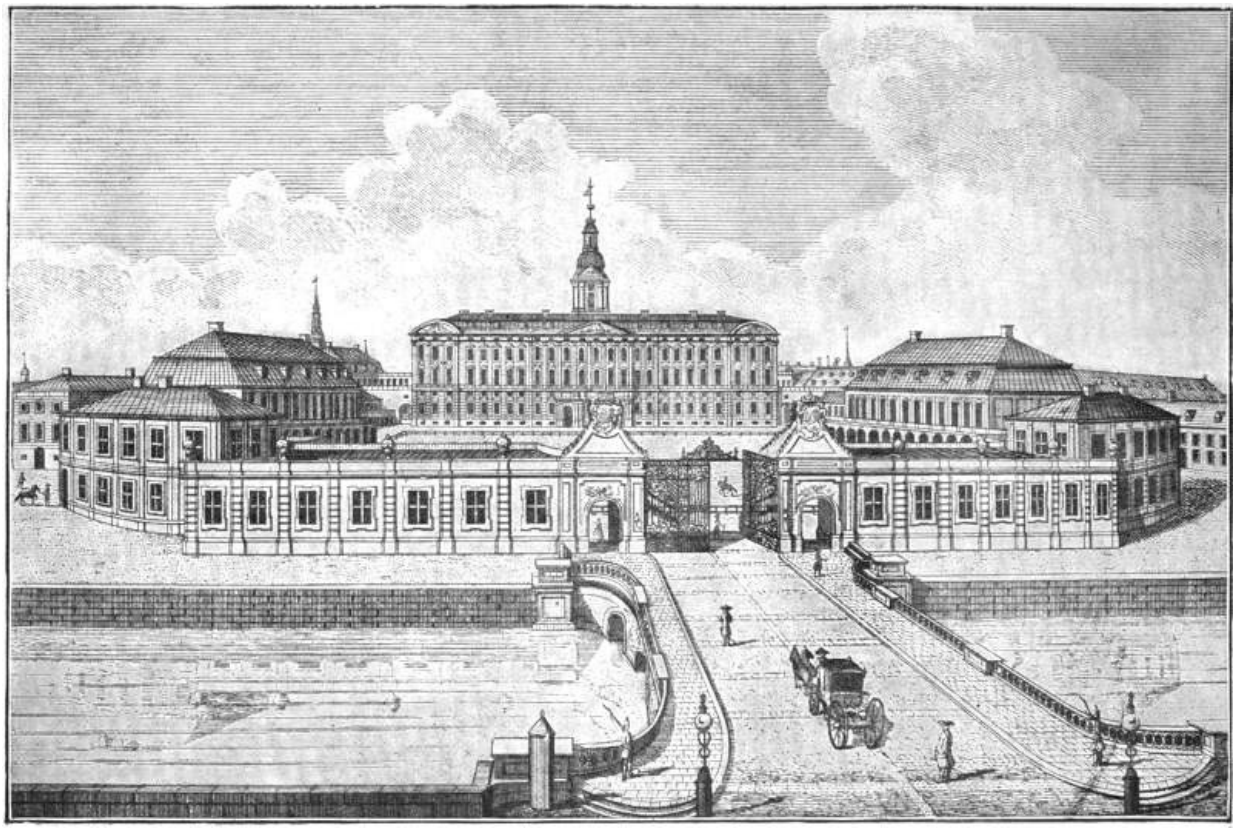
The festivities of the Danish court culminated in the coronation and anointing of the King and Queen, which took place on May 1, 1767.[80] The day dawned brilliantly fine, though the air was clear and cold. At an early hour the bells of the Vor-Frue-Kirke (the Church of Our Lady, the metropolitan church of Denmark) began to ring, and bells chimed merrily from other towers. At eleven o'clock all the gentlemen-in-waiting assembled in the King's ante-chamber, and all the ladies-in-waiting in the Queen's. The King donned the anointing robes: "A short jacket and breeches of gold brocade, pearl-coloured silk stockings, white gloves embroidered with gold, and white shoes with red heels; his buckles, garters and coat buttons were set with diamonds, and his cloak of royal ermine was embroidered with golden flowers". The King, thus arrayed, crowned himself with his own hands according to the *Lex Regia*, which ordained that "since the Kings of Denmark do not receive the crown from any hands but their own, the ceremony of coronation shall be performed by themselves". [Pg 120]

[80] The following description of the coronation is taken from official documents preserved in the Royal Archives, Copenhagen.

With the crown on his head the King, accompanied by the Grand Chamberlain, who carried the Queen's crown on a velvet cushion, went to the Queen's room and crowned her with his own hands.

This ceremony over, the King took the sceptre in his right hand and the orb in his left, and donned the collars of both the great Danish orders, the Elephant and the Dannebrog. Then he passed into his audience chamber, his train upborne by the Counts Reventlow and Danneskjold-Samsöe. There he held a court, and received the homage of the principal personages in the state.

The Queen, likewise attired in her anointing robes, to wit: "A robe of cloth of gold, and a royal mantle of red velvet lined with ermine and embroidered with gold crowns," and with the crown upon her head, passed into her audience chamber, her train upborne by Madame de Plessen and the Countess St. Germains. Here she held a court, and received the homage of the assembled ladies.



THE CHRISTIANSBORG PALACE, COPENHAGEN.
From an Old Print, temp. 1768.

The procession to the chapel of the Christiansborg was then marshalled, and as the bells rang out it passed down the marble stairs of the palace and across the quadrangle to the chapel. The King [Pg 121]

walked under a red velvet canopy, upborne by four privy councillors and four Knights of the Elephant. The Queen walked beneath a similar canopy, upborne by four privy councillors and four Knights of the Dannebrog.

The royal chapel was decorated with great splendour. Of this, as of the other arrangements connected with the coronation, it was recorded: “There was nothing lacking to make it beautiful. It was so splendid and superb that even the foreign envoys were forced to admire the beauty and lavish expenditure, to say nothing of the art in which these were turned to account.” The thrones of the King and Queen were placed upon a dais, under a gorgeous canopy, upborne by two figures of angels with drawn swords. On one side of the canopy was the King’s motto, “*Gloria ex amore patriae*,” and on the other were the initials of the King and Queen. The King’s throne was of solid ivory, surmounted by a huge amethyst nearly as large as a hen’s egg. The Queen’s throne was of silver, elaborately wrought, and polished until it shone like crystal. At the foot of the thrones lay three life-size lions in cast silver.

At the entrance to the royal chapel the King and Queen were received by the three Bishops, who were to officiate at the ceremony of the anointing, vested in copes of gold brocade. The Bishops [Pg 122] first conducted the King to his throne while the choir sang an anthem. They then returned and led the Queen to her throne in like manner. Bishop Harboe of Zealand preached a sermon, and then the ceremony of anointing took place; the coronation was considered as already performed. First the King was anointed with the holy oil, and then the Queen. The service concluded with a *Te Deum*.

As the royal procession returned to the palace, a salute from the ramparts was fired, and the heralds on the gate blew a loud blast on their silver trumpets. The King and Queen received the congratulations of their court, and then the coronation banquet took place. During the banquet a chorale was sung by the choir, of which a verse may be roughly translated as follows:—

> And long shall it be before the sons of the North weep,
> For while Christian lives, and Matilda,
> There shall be nothing but joy,
> And every man shall dwell in his tent in peace.

The coronation was a people’s holiday, and ample provision was made for every class to partake in the festivities. When the banquet was over the King and Queen passed on to the balcony of the palace to look down upon the general rejoicings. A free dinner was given to the populace, and wine ran like water from a fountain, “red wine on the right side and on the left white, five hogsheads of each, of which all drank who would”. In the courtyard an ox had been roasted [Pg 123] whole, and not an ox only, for it was stuffed with “three wethers, five lambs, eight pigs, ten geese, twenty brace of duck, and fifty-eight brace of old (*sic*) hens”. The roasted ox reposed upon a carriage painted red, and its horns were gilt.

“The moment their Majesties appeared on the balcony,” continues the chronicle, “the fountain of wine was set running, and the ox was wheeled forward, pulled by eighteen sailors in white breeches and jackets, with sashes of red, and wreaths upon their heads. On either side of the ox-carriage more sailors walked, similarly attired, and carried baskets of bread. The Quarter-master-Sergeant then ascended the ox-carriage and cried in a loud voice: ‘The roast ox will now be given away!’ and he threw to the crowd a number of silver pieces. With shouts of delight the people rushed forward and scrambled for money, food and wine. The feasting and revelry that followed occupied a countless number of the poor all that evening and the greater part of the night, so delighted were they. Their Majesties took great pleasure in watching the tumult from the balcony of the Christiansborg.”

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE COURT OF DENMARK.

1767-1768.

The relations between the King and Queen did not improve as time went on. Matilda was frightened by Christian's wildness and dissipation, piqued by his indifference, and wounded by his sarcasms. Though she was very young she had a high spirit, and did not submit quietly to insult. Her position at the court, of which she was nominally the reigning Queen, was very unsatisfactory—the King was autocrat and she was nothing—even in trifling questions concerning the royal household she was not consulted, and if she ventured to express an opinion it was ignored. She had no relative to whom she could look for guidance. The Queen-Mother, Sophia Magdalena, had retired to Hirschholm; she was nearly seventy years old, and since the fall of Moltke had abjured politics and given herself up to good works. The Queen-Dowager, Juliana Maria, was secretly hostile, and Matilda did not trust her, though the three Queens at this time, as Reverdil says, lived outwardly "*dans une grande intimité et dans un ennui paisible*". The King's sister, the Princess Louise, was too much absorbed in her husband and child to be of any use to [Pg 125] her sister-in-law, and the King's aunt, Charlotte Amelia, had never appeared at court since Matilda arrived in Denmark. So the young Queen had to seek the advice of her chief lady, Madame de Plessen, and she was guided by her in all things. It was the wish of this lady to bring back to the lax court of Christian VII. the stiff and wearisome etiquette that had prevailed in the reign of the King's grandfather, Christian VI. In her eyes Matilda was not only a young married woman, but the Queen of the land, whom the King himself might only approach according to the rules of etiquette. Christian must be made to understand that Queen Matilda was his honoured consort, and not his mistress.

It is possible that, had the young couple been left to themselves, they would in time have understood one another better, and learned to make allowances for each other. They were little more than children when they married, and quarrelled like children; they would probably have been reconciled afterwards like children, and become better friends. But they were not left to themselves. Madame de Plessen chose to stand between husband and wife in their most intimate relations, and with disastrous results. She was especially to blame in embittering the Queen's mind against the King by repeating every thoughtless utterance of his, and magnifying every foolish deed. In Madame de Plessen's opinion the Queen could only acquire an influence over her husband by treating him with coldness, and resisting his advances. The ladies of the court were [Pg 126] ready to throw themselves into the King's arms at the least provocation—not that he ever gave them any—and Madame de Plessen thought that he would value most what it was not easy to obtain. In pursuance of this policy she advised the Queen to treat him with coyness and reserve. For instance, the King came unannounced one morning into the Queen's room while she was dressing. A kerchief had just been placed around her neck; the King pushed it aside and pressed a kiss upon his wife's shoulder. Whereupon Madame de Plessen held up her hands in disgust, and the Queen, taking her cue from the duenna, feigned anger, and reproached her husband for disarranging her kerchief. The King snatched it off her bosom, tore it in pieces, and threw it on the floor. He did not come back for several days.

Again, Madame de Plessen was annoyed because the King sent in the evening to know if the Queen had retired to bed; she considered it wanting in respect to the Queen, and advised Matilda to put a stop to it. The next time the King sent to make his inquiry, the answer was returned that her Majesty was playing chess and would not retire until her game was finished. The King waited until twelve o'clock, and then he came into the Queen's apartments and found her still playing chess with Madame de Plessen. Very much annoyed he began to walk up and down the room without saying a word, and the game was not finished until the clock struck one. The Queen then [Pg 127] said she wished to have her revenge, and he saw Madame de Plessen give a triumphant smile. Then he understood what was meant. He left the room in a fury, and banged the door after him, and did not come near the Queen again for a fortnight. There were many such scenes as these, and each one left the relations between the King and Queen more strained than before, until within a year of their marriage they were thoroughly alienated from one another.

The immediate result of Madame de Plessen's interference was to drive the King still further into dissipation and folly. Prevented from enjoying his wife's society as he would, he spent his evenings with his friends, who included the wildest spirits of the court. The King's evening parties, which he held in his own rooms, had long ceased to bear even a superficial resemblance to the celebrated gatherings of Frederick the Great; they assumed by degrees a more and more noisy and riotous character. The young men indulged in sham fights and wrestling to develop the King's "smartness"—this was the word he used to denote his physical strength. These fights, indulged in after plentiful libations of wine, often proved destructive of the furniture, and sometimes ended in high words and bad temper. But the fighting was comparatively harmless. The King's evening gatherings unfortunately did not stop here, but degenerated into excesses which recalled the orgies described in the pages of Juvenal and Petronius. Even Sperling seems to have found these dissipations too much for him. At any rate he gradually lost the King's favour, [Pg 128] and was replaced by Brandt, a page of the chamber.

Enevold Brandt was a few years older than Christian VII. He came of an ancient Danish family: his father had been a privy councillor and private secretary to Queen Sophia Magdalena, but he died before his son's birth. His mother married again Baron Söhlenthal, and young Brandt was brought up in his stepfather's house. At an early age he went to Copenhagen to study law, and

passed his examinations with flying colours. In his vacations Brandt travelled widely: he was a polished man of the world and possessed brilliant social qualities. Christian VII., who was clever enough to appreciate cleverness in others, took a great fancy to him, for a time. Honours, both legal and courtly, were showered upon him. He was appointed an assessor of the Court of Chancery, a page of the chamber, and an assessor of the Supreme Court. Brandt was below the middle height, and though his face could not be described as handsome, he had an air of distinction. After Christian's accession he was a good deal about the person of the King, and was of great use in arranging the masquerades. It was thought that he would succeed Sperling as the King's first favourite, but Christian quickly tired of his friends, and as soon as the masquerades were over Brandt found himself eclipsed in the royal favour by Holck.

Conrad, Count Holck, despite his wildness and extravagancies, was the best of Christian VII.'s favourites (and bad was the best). Unlike Sperling and Brandt, he was neither an intriguer nor a self-seeker. He was a dare-devil youth, wealthy, handsome, and brimming over with boisterous good-humour and animal spirits. Christian VII. found Holck an excellent foil for the dark moods and the morbid humours that occasionally beset him, and the pair soon became fast friends. [Pg 129]

Brandt and Holck were always at the King's evening gatherings, and sought to outvie one another in their master's favour by proposing fresh extravagancies. There were many others; among them a young Englishman named Osborne, who held a commission in the Danish service, Count Danneskjold-Laurvig, and some older men, including Saldern the Russian envoy. By way of variety the King resumed his nocturnal expeditions, which he had abandoned since his marriage. Accompanied by his wild companions he roamed the streets of Copenhagen in disguise, visiting taverns and houses of ill-repute, molesting peaceable citizens, fighting with the watchmen, and breaking lamps and windows. Of course these freaks got abroad and set a fashion, and bands of disorderly youths prowled about the city at night in imitation of the King and his companions, thereby causing great difficulty to the superintendent of the police, for they pretended often to be the King's party, and for fear of mistake he hardly dared to make an arrest. Things came to such a pass at last that the watchmen lost patience, and determined not to let the rioters off easily, whether they belonged to the King's party or not. On one occasion, pretending not to know, they caught the King and belaboured him so unmercifully that he had to retire to bed for some days, and pretend that he was ill of the fever.[81] On another night, however, he achieved a triumph, and brought home a club as a trophy, which he had wrested from one of the watchmen. [Pg 130]

[81] The Saxon minister at Copenhagen in his despatch of April 12, 1768, states that the King's indisposition was due to a wound he received in one of these combats with the watchmen.

Details of these extravagancies came to the young Queen's ears from time to time, through the medium of Sperling, who, now that he was superseded in the King's favour, attached himself to the Queen's *entourage*, and, with his uncle, Reventlow, who was the Queen's chamberlain, was often to be seen in the apartments of Madame de Plessen. Prejudiced by Sperling the Queen took a violent dislike to Holck, whose evil influence over the King she believed to be the cause of all her troubles. Holck ascribed the Queen's dislike of him to Madame de Plessen, whom he regarded as his enemy, and he retaliated after the manner of his kind. Not only did he treat the Queen with scant respect, but he declared that she was piqued because he did not make love to her. He also behaved to Madame de Plessen with great rudeness, and instigated the coarse and mischievous jokes whereby the King sought to make the chief lady's position intolerable at court and so force her to resign. But these tactics proved unavailing, for the more rudely Madame de Plessen was treated by the King the more closely did she cling to her post. She determined to protect the Queen come what might, and Matilda, in return, identified herself with Madame de Plessen's friends, and regarded her chief lady's enemies as her own. On July 22, 1767, the Queen attained her sixteenth birthday, but to punish her the King would not celebrate it. [Pg 131]

In August, 1767, Christian VII. determined to make a tour through Holstein. The Queen, who was fond of travel, eagerly desired to accompany the King, and the royal tour was made the subject of many entreaties and negotiations on her part and the part of her household. But to further mark his displeasure the King refused to take her, and a serious quarrel took place between them. The Queen was to be pitied, because the indifference she had shown towards her husband had in great part been assumed at the suggestion of Madame de Plessen. She was now likely to become a mother, and, by a natural instinct, she had grown into an inclination for the father of her child. But she attributed the King's refusal not to Madame de Plessen but to Holck (who, it is very possible, had something to do with it), and insisted that if the King would not take her he should not take Holck either. After much difficulty she carried the point, but her victory only enraged the King, and gave her no satisfaction.

Reverdil, who was the Queen's friend, did his best to patch up the quarrel. He accompanied the King on his tour through Holstein, and urged him to write affectionate letters to his wife. He pointed out that, considering the state of the Queen's health, there was need to indulge her in her whims and fancies. Christian, who was still smarting from the interference of Madame de Plessen, consented with an ill grace, and only on condition that Reverdil composed the letters and he merely copied them. These letters pacified Matilda; she was ignorant of their real authorship, and replied with affection. The King did not distinguish himself during his tour or increase the loyalty of the duchy. He offended, by his frivolity and recklessness, the old Holstein nobility, who, if somewhat barbarous, were very strict in their ideas of what a King should be. [Pg 132]

EDWARD, DUKE OF YORK, BROTHER OF QUEEN MATILDA.
From the Painting by G. H. Every.

While Christian VII. was absent in Holstein Matilda heard of the death of her favourite brother, Edward Duke of York, a gallant, high-spirited youth. The Duke chose the navy as a profession, and if his promotion in it was rapid (he was promoted to be a rear-admiral at the age of twenty-three), he showed himself to be a brave sailor, and distinguished himself under Howe at the bombardment of Cherbourg. After the capture of the town the Duke gave the French ladies a ball. “He told them he was too young to know what was good breeding in France, and therefore he should behave as if meaning to please in England, and he kissed them all.”[82] The young Prince was a great favourite with the ladies. His first love was the beautiful and witty Charlotte, [Pg 133] Countess of Essex. He then transferred his affections to the even more beautiful Duchess of Richmond, sister-in-law of Lady Sarah Lennox. But the most serious of all his love affairs was his passion for Lady Mary Coke, a young widow, who found herself at an early age “the envy of her sex; in the possession of youth, health, wealth, wit, beauty and liberty”. The young and ardent Duke seems to have given her a promise of marriage, for during his lifetime she always spoke of him to her friends as her betrothed, and after his death displayed immoderate grief. The Duke’s numerous love affairs and his constant pursuit of pleasure naturally involved him in money difficulties. The Princess-Dowager of Wales declined to supplement her second son’s allowance, and often lamented his extravagance, but George III. was fond of his volatile brother, and occasionally helped him, though it was against his strict principles to do so. One day the Duke went to St. James’s in a state of the greatest dejection, and, when he saw the King, sighed heavily. The King asked him why he was so low-spirited. “How can I be otherwise,” said the Duke, “pressed as I am by creditors and without a penny to pay them?” The King, much affected, pressed a thousand pound note into his brother’s hand. The Duke gravely read every word of it aloud, then marched out of the room singing, “God save great George our King!”

[82] *The Georgian Era*, vol. i.

The Duke of York had kept up a constant correspondence with Queen Matilda since she had left [Pg 134] England; he wrote to her from Paris a few weeks before his death telling her that he was making a tour through France, and intended, before he returned to England, to travel northwards and pay her a visit at Copenhagen. But on his journey to the south of France the Duke caught a chill, and when he arrived at Monaco he was taken seriously ill. For fourteen days he lingered in great suffering, alleviated only by the affectionate offices of the gentlemen of his suite and the kindness of the Prince of Monaco. The Duke died on September 17, 1767, at the age of twenty eight. His body was removed on board the British ship-of-war *Montreal*, and conveyed home to be buried in Westminster Abbey.

The news of the Duke of York's death reached Copenhagen on October 10, and the English envoy was under some difficulty how best to break the news to the Queen, in her delicate state of health. He writes: "My apprehensions of the effect it might have had on her Danish Majesty in her present situation, whenever she became acquainted with it, made me communicate my first intelligence of it to Madame de Plessen, of whose caution and discretion in this instance I have no doubt, that she might take such methods of preparing the Queen for it as she judged most likely to lessen the shock, which otherwise so unexpected an event might be attended with. I have the pleasure to acquaint you that her Majesty has suffered as little as (considering the great [Pg 135] tenderness of her disposition) could well be expected."[83]

[83] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, October 13, 1767.

Queen Matilda felt her brother's death keenly, the more so as she had been looking forward to his visit to Copenhagen, when she hoped to confide to him her troubles, and ask his help and guidance. When Christian heard of his Queen's loss, he wrote her (through Reverdil) an affectionate letter of condolence. The Queen was touched by this consideration; she felt tenderly towards her husband, and was anxious to be friends. When the King returned from Holstein, the Queen drove out eight leagues from Copenhagen to meet him. But Christian's greeting was cold and formal, though he got into her coach and drove back with her into Copenhagen, so that the citizens might think that he was on good terms with his Queen.

After her husband's return Matilda made several efforts to win his love, and behaved to him with the utmost submission, but he did not respond. Her pathetic desire to please him, her extreme youth and loneliness, the fact that she was soon to become the mother of his child—these considerations had no weight with Christian VII. He repulsed his wife's advances, and treated her with rudeness and contempt, conduct which, under the circumstances, was peculiarly brutal. He made coarse jokes about her condition; he even tried to force Holck, whom she detested, upon her as master of her household. She refused with tears and agitation, so the King made him court [Pg 136] marshal, and gave him the management of all the festivities at court, where comedies, balls and masquerades succeeded one another without interruption.

In addition to Christian's cruelty to his Queen, he flaunted his infidelity before her eyes. He had no inclination for the ladies of the court (indeed the company of refined women seemed distasteful to him), but at Holck's suggestion he sought the society of women politely termed "actresses," and thereby derived no little amusement and distraction. Holck, however, was not responsible for a woman whose acquaintance the King made at this time, who went by the nickname of *Stovlep Katerine*, or "Catherine of the Gaiters". This woman, according to Reverdil, was brought before the King's notice by Count Danneskjold-Laurvig. Her real name appears to have been Anna Catherine Benthaken, and she was the natural daughter of an eminent officer in the Danish service. As a child she was brought up in the household of this officer, but after his death her mother married a retired soldier, who was by trade a tailor who made gaiters. As Catherine was penniless she accompanied her mother to her stepfather's poor house, where, in return for her board and lodging, she was obliged to sew gaiters—hence her nickname. But she could not brook this life long, and having a vivacious temperament and some natural gifts she sought other means of livelihood. Copenhagen in the eighteenth century offered few opportunities of honest work for unmarried women, so Catherine first became an opera dancer, [Pg 137] and then the mistress of an Englishman, Sir John Goodrich.[84] She lived with him for some time, and was generally known as "Milady". At the time Christian made her acquaintance, "Milady" was a good-looking young woman, with a fine figure, and an excellent taste in dress. She was amusing and witty, and equal to any wild scheme the King might conceive. It was her ambition to become *maîtresse en titre*, and to this end she lent herself to all kinds of extravagancies in order that she might gain greater influence over the King. Before long "Milady" achieved her ambition; she received the honour of an invitation to a masquerade at the palace, and the King showed his preference to the court by dancing with her nearly all the evening. Queen Matilda was spared the sight of this insult, for in consequence of her state of health she was unable to be present, but the incident was duly reported to her, and filled her with grief and resentment.

[84] Sir John Goodrich was nominated by the British Government Minister Plenipotentiary to Sweden, but, through the intrigues of the French Government, he never got nearer Stockholm than Copenhagen.

[Pg 138]

CHAPTER IX.

THE BIRTH OF A PRINCE.

1768.

Queen Matilda gave birth to a son and heir—the future King Frederick VI.—on January 28, 1768. Titley thus records the event: “Yesterday the Queen of Denmark fell in labour, and about ten o’clock at night was happily delivered of a prince, to the extreme satisfaction of her royal consort and the whole court. The Queen, God be praised, and the new-born prince are this morning both as well as can be expected. This very important and much desired event happened but an hour or two before the anniversary of the King of Denmark’s own birthday, and we are now celebrating the double festivity. The birth of an heir male to the Crown has completely fulfilled the ardent wishes and prayers of the public, and consequently spread a real joy through all ranks of the people here.”[85]

[85] Titley’s despatch, Copenhagen, January 29, 1768.

A few days later the infant prince was christened by the name of Frederick. The ceremony took place in the Queen’s bedchamber, and nobody was admitted except the ministers and council—the English envoy was not invited. Queen Juliana Maria, to whom the birth of this prince was the [Pg 139] death-blow of her hopes, and the Princess Charlotte Amelia (represented by proxy), were the godmothers, and Prince Frederick, the King’s brother, was the godfather. The King had wished for a public ceremonial, but the babe was sickly and ailing, and it was deemed necessary to baptise him as soon as possible. During her illness the Queen was fenced round by the most rigid etiquette by Madame de Plessen; she was attended in turn by Madame de Plessen, a lady-in-waiting, and the wife of a Knight of the Elephant. The infant was attended by two court ladies, who were changed according to rank, and this absurd formality continued until all the court ladies had shared the privilege. The Queen, a short time after her confinement, had also to undergo the ordeal of sitting up in bed (the royal infant in a bassinet by the side of the bed) and receiving the congratulations of the court ladies and gentlemen, who filed through the room in procession. The fatigue of this levee, or perhaps Madame de Plessen’s wearisome formalities, made the Queen seriously ill. Gunning, who never lost a chance of attacking his arch-enemy, wrote to Lord Weymouth:—

> “Her Danish Majesty has been very much indisposed for some days, but her physicians, who own that they were not without apprehensions, now assure me that all danger is over. It is with the greatest concern that I think myself obliged to acquaint your lordship with my fears that her Majesty’s indisposition has been occasioned, in some [Pg 140] measure, by the imprudent conduct of the lady who is her *grande maîtresse*. I thought it my duty to acquaint General Conway with the character of Madame de Plessen immediately after her nomination to a post that I could wish she had never filled, expressing at the same time my desire that her Majesty might be informed of it. And in some despatches subsequent to the Queen’s arrival here, I applied for instructions with regard to my explaining this matter to her Majesty, but not having had any orders to do so, I could not with propriety, and consistent with my duty, venture upon it, though I daily saw the fatal effects of the ascendant this lady acquired. Her Majesty’s sweetness of disposition and her natural vivacity could not but, as indeed it did, attract the esteem and affection of a young Prince who had so great a share of the latter. Had she been allowed to follow the bent of her own inclinations, it would have been so firmly established that nothing could have shaken it. But this would not have answered the end of those who advised a different conduct. The Queen’s influence and ascendant would then have been too great, and she herself would not have been subject to that of others.... An attention to the situation her Majesty has been in of late has prevented the King’s executing the resolution he has long taken of removing her *grande maîtresse*, but as soon as the Queen’s health is thoroughly established, I understand this is to take place.”[86]

[86] Gunning’s despatch, Copenhagen, February 17, 1768.

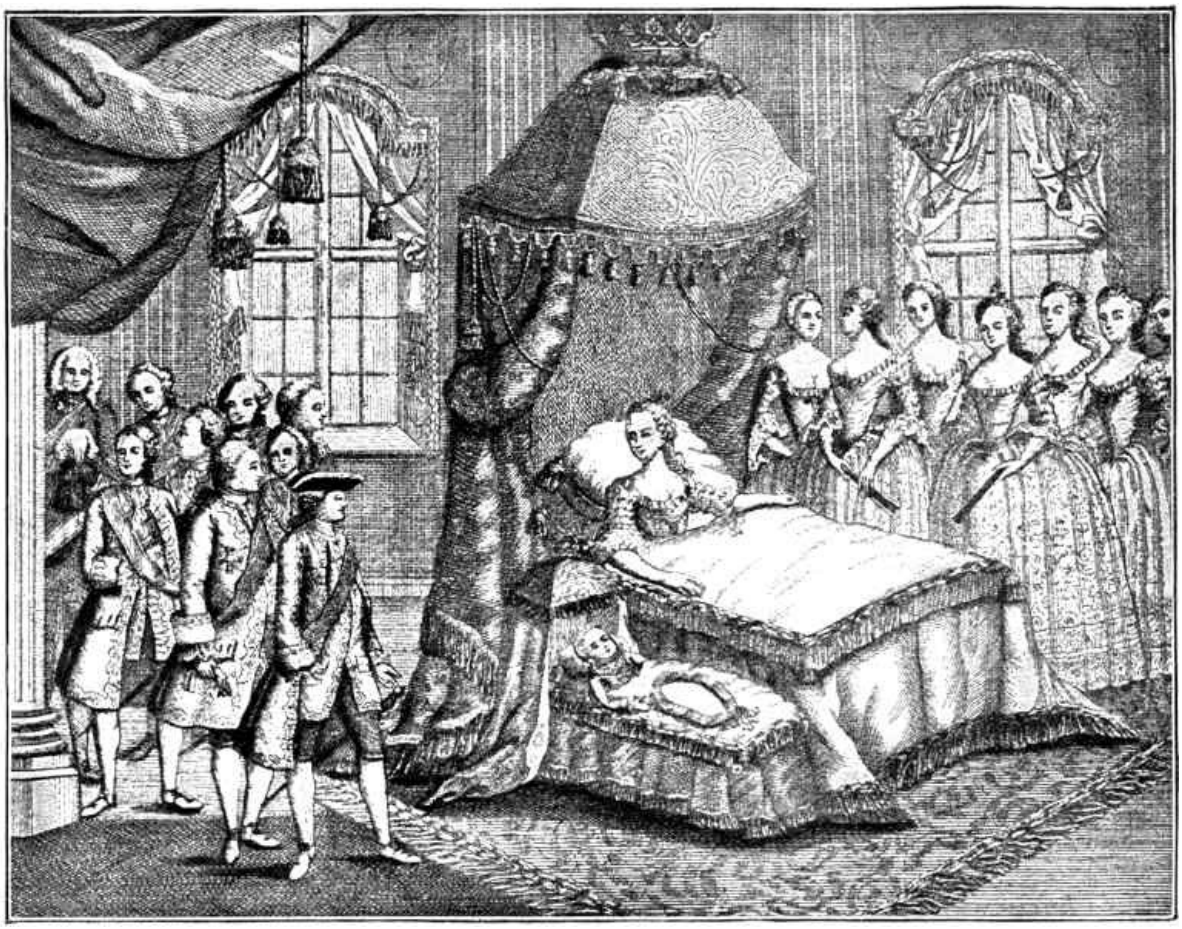
Gunning proved right in his conjecture, for a few weeks later Madame de Plessen was suddenly [Pg 141] dismissed. The King would hardly have dared to take this step if others had not come to his assistance. Madame de Plessen had made many enemies by her tactless conduct, but her political intrigues were the direct cause of her fall. So long as the French party was in the ascendant all went well with her, but during the last year Russia had grown in power and influence at the Danish court. Russia, through her two envoys, Saldern, the envoy in Holstein, and Filosofow, the envoy in Copenhagen, had gained the ear of the Prime Minister, Bernstorff, and other persons holding high office, notably of Baron Schimmelmann,[87] Grand Treasurer. Moreover, Saldern was a personal friend of the King, and joined him in many of his wildest dissipations; and it is probable that he won Christian over to Russia by giving him money to defray his extravagancies. Saldern was a terrible man, a semi-barbarian, with rough brutal strength and domineering will that bore down all opposition. He knew that Reventlow, the Queen’s chamberlain, and Madame de Plessen were on the side of France; he determined to get rid of them, and to this end used all his influence with the King. Reventlow was dismissed with ignominy, and Sperling, his nephew, [Pg 142] soon followed; but Madame de Plessen remained, and until she was gone Saldern could not feel safe against French intrigues. He regarded the Queen’s household as the centre of the French

party, and he hated Matilda because she supported Madame de Plessen. A letter of Saldern's, written about the end of January, 1768, gives an insight into the character of the man. "My great torment," he wrote, "comes from the Queen. She has lost her right arm in Reventlow, but she still has the left in Plessen, a mischievous woman, but I will deprive her of this arm also.... When the King goes to see the Queen she tells him he ought to be ashamed of himself, and that the whole city says he lets himself be governed by me. She only says this out of revenge, because I sent away her flea-catcher (*sa preneuse de puces*). The King tells me all this, and I show him *mon égide*, and we laugh together."[88]

[87] Schimmelmann was a German-Jew by birth, and a type of the rogue now called a "financier". After a career as a money-lender, during which he amassed a fortune, he arrived in Denmark. He possessed great financial ability, and made himself so useful to the Danish Government that he was given first the title of Baron, then the Order of the Elephant, and lastly appointed Grand Treasurer.

[88] *Mémoires de Reverdil*, pp. 122-23.

All the same it was some months before Saldern could screw up the King's courage to the point of dismissing Madame de Plessen, but at last he succeeded. As soon as the Queen was convalescent the King ran away with Saldern to Frederiksborg, and from the safe shelter of that retreat he despatched a signed order to Madame de Plessen commanding her to quit the palace immediately on its receipt, without taking leave of the Queen. As the King was all-powerful, there was nothing for Madame de Plessen to do but obey; indeed she feared for her life if she remained in Copenhagen. So she fled with all speed, the same day she received the order, to her estate of Kokkedal, on the Sound. [Pg 143]



QUEEN MATILDA RECEIVING THE CONGRATULATIONS OF THE COURT ON THE BIRTH OF THE CROWN PRINCE FREDERICK.
From a Contemporary Print.

Bernstorff was ordered to acquaint the Queen with the King's resolution and declare it to be irrevocable. When the Queen was told that her first lady had gone, there was a most painful scene—she burst into tears and refused to be comforted. Her anger and resentment against the King knew no bounds, and she declared she would never forgive him. The whole of the Queen's household was now changed; all her friends were sent away, and nominees of Holck and Saldern put in their places. The King wished to appoint as chief lady, Madame von Berkentin, who had intrigued against Madame de Plessen, but the Queen absolutely refused to admit her to her presence, and so, after much angry recrimination the vacant post was bestowed upon Madame von der Lühe, who was not any more pleasing to the Queen from the fact that she was the sister of Count Holck. But Madame von der Lühe proved more satisfactory than the Queen expected, and gradually won her confidence; the worst appointment was that of Fräulein von Eyben as maid-of-honour. This woman, who had by no means an unsullied reputation, was false and untruthful—a spy who sought opportunity to betray her mistress.

Madame de Plessen was pursued with relentless severity, and two days after her dismissal from the Danish court she was ordered to quit the kingdom. She withdrew to Hanoverian territory, and finally settled at Celle. She was forbidden to hold any communication with her former mistress, [Pg 144]

but it is probable that she managed to evade this order. The separation was a bitter grief both to the Queen and her chief lady. Despite her domineering disposition and want of tact, Madame de Plessen dearly loved her young mistress, and would have died, had it been necessary, for her sake. She was by nature hard and undemonstrative, but the helpless little Queen had found a tender spot in her heart, and the maternal love she felt for her mistress was all the more fierce because of its concentration; in shielding her from the contamination of the court she was like a tigress guarding her young. Perhaps it was the very fierceness of her devotion which led her into errors of judgment, but great though these were, if she had avoided political intrigue, she might have retained her place.

To Matilda the loss of this good woman, for she was a good woman despite her unamiable qualities, was irreparable. Surrounded as she was by spies and enemies, beset by perils and temptations, she knew that she had in her chief lady a disinterested friend, and she clung to her all the more because she had not strength of herself to stand alone. Had Madame de Plessen remained with the Queen, the errors and follies of after years would never have been committed. In the dangerous path Matilda had to tread, beset by pitfalls on every side, she needed some one who would guide her stumbling feet, and lead her in the way she should go. [Pg 145]

Queen Matilda was not allowed much time to indulge in her grief, for within ten days of Madame de Plessen's dismissal she had to hold a court, at which she received the congratulations of the foreign ministers and Danish nobility on the birth of her son. The day was observed as a general holiday, and in the evening there was a banquet and ball at the Christiansborg Palace. If she wrote to England to complain of the hard treatment she had suffered in thus being deprived of one in whom she placed confidence, she probably received little comfort from her brother. We find Lord Weymouth writing to Gunning before Madame de Plessen's dismissal: "The King would not be sorry to hear of her removal,"[89] and after it: "I assure you that the King is thoroughly sensible of the zealous and dutiful motives which engaged you to see with so much concern the dangerous tendency of that lady's influence".[90]

[89] Lord Weymouth's despatch to Gunning, March 18, 1768.

[90] *Ibid.*, May 4, 1768.

In the same despatch (May 4, 1768) Lord Weymouth announced the death of the Princess Louisa Anne, and enclosed a sealed letter from George III. to the Queen, whose sorrows now came upon her thick and fast, for her sister's death was the second bereavement she had sustained within a few months, in addition to the loss of her faithful Plessen. Louisa Anne, who had once been put [Pg 146] forward as a possible Queen of Denmark, had been always an invalid, and was so diminutive in stature that, though she completed her nineteenth year before she died, she looked like a sickly child of thirteen. There is nothing recorded of her beyond that she was a lover of literature, and of an amiable disposition.

The death of her sister furnished the Queen with an excuse for not appearing at court festivities, which became wilder and more dissolute, and were attended by many persons of ill-fame, both men and women. Prominent among them was "Catherine of the Gaiters," who had now gained great influence over the King, and led him (or he led her) into the wildest excesses. It was one of Christian's peculiarities that he liked to see women dressed as men, and to humour him "Milady" disguised herself in the uniform of a naval officer and accompanied the King and his friends on their night adventures. During her varied career "Milady" had made several enemies among women of her own walk in life: they were jealous of her prosperity and spoke ill of her. To revenge herself she induced the King and his party to enter the houses where these women lived, smash the windows and throw the furniture into the street. The watchmen had secret orders to take no notice of these proceedings, but they often found it difficult to prevent the populace from rising in indignation. Reverdil, who viewed the *liaison* between the King and "Milady" with disgust, once saw Christian returning to the palace, boasting loudly of his exploits, and he could [Pg 147] not refrain from uttering the sarcasm, "*Voilà un beau chemin à la gloire*". The King was exceedingly angry, and said, "Do not mock at me. Scold me if you will, but do not mock at me."

Reverdil did not heed the warning, and a few evenings later at the palace theatre he saw "Milady" sitting in a prominent box and covered with jewels; below her were the maids of honour, and facing her was the Queen. Reverdil was standing near Holck, who was responsible for this arrangement, and he thus gave vent to his indignation. "Sir," said he, "though a hundred times you have turned into ridicule what I have said, I say again that a man can be neither a good subject, nor a good servant, who does not weep to see such a creature thus defy the Queen, and the King make himself, to the great peril of the state, the *greluchon* of a foreign minister." Holck turned on his heel. The next morning Reverdil received a written order from the King commanding him to leave Copenhagen within twenty-four hours. The out-spoken Swiss lost no time in obeying the order, and left the country. When he returned to Copenhagen three years later the situation had changed.

Reverdil was not the only one who entered a protest against the ascendency of "Catherine of the Gaiters". She had induced the King to buy her a palace, create her a baroness, and promise her a pension, but in the hour of her triumph she fell as suddenly as she had risen. The shameful scenes in the streets had so moved the honest people of Copenhagen to indignation that they [Pg 148] threatened to rise in revolt unless the woman was dismissed. So threatening was their attitude and so loud were their murmurs that at last the ministers resolved to act. They sought the assistance of Schimmelmann and Saldern to convince the King that matters had reached danger-point. The latter then went with Bernstorff to the King, and by trading on his fears, persuaded him to sign an order commanding Catherine to quit the kingdom at once. The King signed

without much difficulty; perhaps he was frightened, perhaps he was already weary of her. Catherine was arrested at her house and conducted across the frontier to Hamburg, where the obsequious municipality put her into prison.[91]

[91] There she remained for some years. Eventually Struensee set her at liberty, but she never returned to Copenhagen.

Dismissal and banishment now formed the order of the day at Copenhagen. Prince Charles of Hesse had left the capital under the cloud of the King's displeasure, and though he was later given as a consolation the vice-royalty of the duchies, he was for a time in exile. Reventlow, by making friends with the Russian party, had managed to crawl back into office, but not to a place in the household of the Queen. Brandt soon followed Sperling into banishment. He became jealous of the reigning favourite Holck, and wrote the King a private letter containing severe reflections on Holck's conduct. As might have been expected the King showed the letter to Holck, [Pg 149] with the result that Brandt was commanded to quit the capital within twenty-four hours, and Danish territory within eight days. Holck was more in favour than before, and the Queen's position more unhappy.

The King, now that he was deprived of the society of "Milady," and a check put upon his follies, suffered from *ennui*, and determined to travel. He proposed to visit England and France, and to be absent from Denmark six months. His ministers, who at another time would have opposed the idea of the King being away from his dominions for so long, now thought it advisable that he should go. The situation had become intolerable. The King was most unpopular with his people, and if he travelled for a time it would not only give an opportunity for scandal and bitter feeling to die down, but it was possible that he would gain wisdom, and return a saner and better man. The question of expense was a considerable one, but in this matter Schimmelmann proved useful —he advanced a loan.

When Matilda heard of her husband's intended tour, she pleaded hard to accompany him, especially as he was going to England. The desire to see again her family and native country made her put aside her pride, and beg this favour of the King with all the eloquence in her power. But he refused on several grounds, the real reason being that he did not want her with him. She then prayed that Madame de Plessen might come back to her during the King's absence, and it [Pg 150] was said that Christian, before he started, promised to grant this, but when he had gone a little way on his journey he withdrew his promise. Under the circumstances the Queen came to the wise resolution of retiring from the capital altogether during the King's absence. It was necessary for her to be on her guard, for it was rumoured that an intrigue was set on foot to deprive her of the regency in the event of the King's demise.[92] No doubt Juliana Maria thought that the post of regent should be filled either by herself, or her son Frederick, whose chances of succession to the throne had been greatly lessened by the birth of Matilda's son. There had been some idea of appointing a regent during the King's absence from his dominions, but the claims of the rival Queens were too delicate to decide, and the difficulty was avoided by appointing a council of regency composed of Counts Thott and Moltke and Baron Rosenkrantz.

[92] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, May 14, 1768.

Christian VII. left Copenhagen in May, 1768, on his tour; his suite consisted of no less than fifty-six persons, chief among them being Bernstorff, the principal Secretary of State. The King travelled south through Schleswig, where he remained some little time; the two Russian envoys, Saldern and Filosofow, were there, and weighty diplomatic matters were discussed. The treaty by which Russia exchanged her claims on ducal Schleswig and Holstein for the counties of Oldenburg and Delmenhorst was arranged there—a treaty of great importance to Denmark.[93] [Pg 151]

[93] Peter III. of Russia had made a claim upon his hereditary states of Holstein-Gottorp in 1762, and was preparing to enforce it when he was deposed and assassinated. His consort and successor, Catherine the Great, agreed to an amicable settlement of the affair by exchange.

The King then proceeded through the southern part of his dominions *viâ* Kiel to Ahrensburg, near Hamburg. Here, without knowing it, he took one of the most important steps of his life. He appointed John Frederick Struensee, a doctor of Altona, his travelling physician, and Struensee joined the King's suite forthwith.

A few days later Christian quitted Denmark. After paying a visit of reconciliation to his brother-in-law, Prince Charles of Hesse, at Hanau, near Frankfort, he travelled down the Rhine to Cologne, and thence to Amsterdam and Brussels. From Brussels he journeyed to Calais, where his brother-in-law, George III., had sent the *Mary* yacht to convey him to England.

CHAPTER X.

[Pg 152]

CHRISTIAN VII. IN ENGLAND.

1768.

Christian VII. landed at Dover on August 9, 1768. He was received with especial marks of distinction, a salute was fired from the cannon of the castle, and the vessels in the harbour were dressed with flags. Royal coaches were in waiting, and Lord Hertford and Lord Falmouth received him on behalf of the King. The King of Denmark's suite consisted of Count Bernstorff, his principal Secretary of State, Count Moltke the younger, Grand Marshal, Count Holck, Master of the Wardrobe, Baron Schimmelmann, Treasurer, Baron Bülow, Lord-in-Waiting, Dr. Struensee, Physician, and several others.

Christian declined the royal coaches, and preferred to travel in a post-chaise to avoid ceremony. With the principal members of his suite he pushed on ahead, leaving the others to follow with the baggage. Lord Hertford told his Majesty that the clergy and the corporation of Canterbury, through which city he was to pass, had made great preparations to receive him. The King was annoyed, for he was travelling *incognito* as the Prince of Traventhal, and his object in coming to [Pg 153] England was to amuse himself, and not to be wearied by receiving addresses from mayors and Church dignitaries—for the clergy in particular he had a dislike. He said to Bernstorff: "The last King of Denmark who entered Canterbury laid it to ashes. I wish the citizens had remembered that, and then perhaps they would have let me pass unnoticed." But Bernstorff told Christian that he must at least receive the address, which he did with ill grace, but he declined the luncheon prepared in his honour.

The King of Denmark arrived in London at seven o'clock in the evening, and when his coach pulled up before St. James's Palace, Holck exclaimed, "By God, this will never do! This is not a fit place to lodge a *Christian* in!" In truth the somewhat dingy exterior of St. James's Palace was not, at first sight, likely to impress a foreigner, but when the King entered he pronounced his lodgings tolerable. George III. had spent £3,000 in refurnishing a suite of apartments for his brother-in-law. Moreover, he defrayed the cost of his royal guest's table during his stay in England, at the cost of £84 a day, without wine, and the wine bill, no doubt, was a heavy addition. He also decorated the King of Denmark's sideboard with the splendid gold plate of Henry VII., which was seldom used, except at coronation banquets, and was brought from the Tower especially for the occasion. These marks of respect, it may be supposed, George III. paid to the office of the King, for it is certain that he disliked the man, and heartily wished him anywhere but at St. James's. [Pg 154]

Christian VII. had invited himself to the English court, and came as a most unwelcome guest. His visit was singularly ill-timed, for the Wilkes riots had taken place recently, and the King was unpopular, and much worried and annoyed. Moreover, the court was in mourning for the Princess Louisa Anne, and the King wished to give none but the absolutely necessary receptions this year. He disliked festivities as much as the King of Denmark revelled in them, and he grudged the outlay which the visit of his self-invited guest entailed. Besides, George III., who was a model of the domestic virtues, had heard of the profligacy of the King of Denmark, and the cruelty and disrespect with which he treated his Queen. Matilda had written home piteous complaints of the sufferings she endured, and though George III. declined to interfere between man and wife, and advised his sister to make the best of her lot, he felt just resentment against her husband, who ill-treated her so grossly.[94]

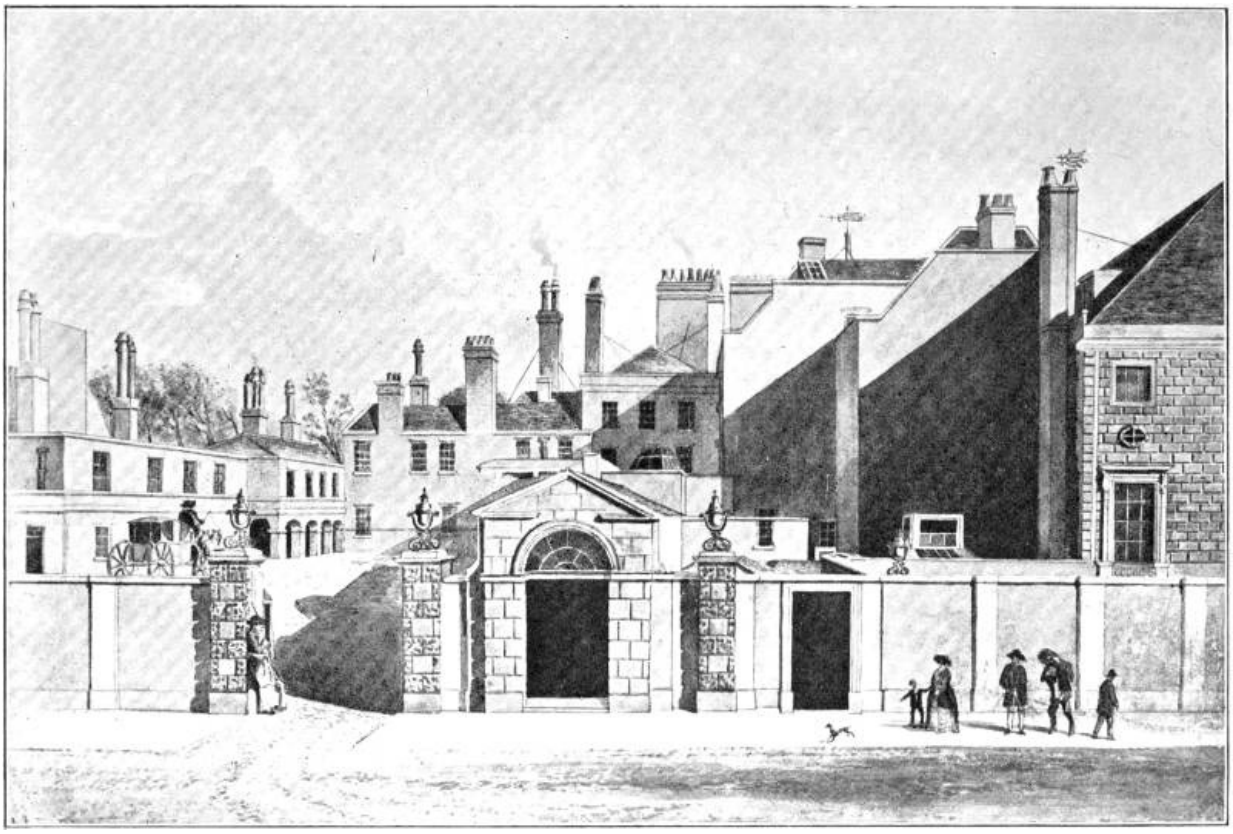
[94] George III.'s repugnance to the King of Denmark's visit is shown in the following note which he wrote to Lord Weymouth before he came: "As to-morrow is the day you receive foreign ministers, you will acquaint M. de Dieden (the Danish minister) that I desire he will assure the King, his master, that I am desirous of making his stay in this country as agreeable as possible. That I therefore wish to be thoroughly apprized of the mode in which he chooses to be treated, that I may exactly conform to it. This will throw whatever may displease the King of Denmark, during his stay here, on his shoulders, and consequently free me from that *désagrément*; but you know very well that the whole of *it is very disagreeable to me*." [Richmond Lodge, June 8, 1768.]

In pursuance of these sentiments George III., though he had every necessary preparation made [Pg 155] for the King of Denmark, showed no warmth in welcoming him. He was holding a levee in St. James's Palace the very hour that Christian arrived there, but instead of hastening to greet him, he sent a formal message to the effect that he would receive him at the Queen's House (now Buckingham Palace) at half-past five o'clock. To the Queen's House, therefore, at the appointed hour Christian repaired. George III.'s reception of his cousin and brother-in-law was cold and formal, and immediately it was over he left London for Richmond Lodge, where he remained in seclusion nearly the whole time of the King of Denmark's stay in England.

Christian then went to Carlton House to pay his respects to his mother-in-law. His reception there was less frigid, but far from satisfactory. The Princess-Dowager of Wales could not help showing him how anxious she was about her daughter. She overwhelmed her son-in-law with inquiries concerning his wife's health, which wearied him greatly, and he could not refrain from saying in an audible whisper to Holck, "*Cette chère maman m'embête terriblement*". The Princess-Dowager reopened the question of Madame de Plessen's dismissal, acting, no doubt, at the request of Queen Matilda, and prayed the King to reinstate her, as she was afraid for her daughter to be exposed to the temptations of the court without a strict duenna. Christian, who was visibly annoyed, said he would not oppose Madame de Plessen's return, if the Princess- [Pg 156] Dowager insisted upon it, but if she came back he and the Queen must occupy separate palaces,

as he was determined never to have Madame de Plessen under his roof again. As this would involve a virtual separation, the Princess-Dowager forebore to press the point further. She reported her ill-success to Matilda, and begged her to submit to the inevitable, and try to conciliate her husband. Now that she saw what manner of man her son-in-law was, the Princess-Dowager regretted the part she had played in bringing about this unhappy marriage.

Ill-health and many sorrows had softened this stern Princess's heart; life had not gone smoothly with her of late. The one friend in whom she trusted, Lord Bute, had been driven from England by her implacable enemies. Bute had taken office at the request of the Princess-Dowager, and for her sake he had laid it down. The ostensible ground he gave for his resignation was ill-health, the real one was a chivalrous desire to check the flood of cowardly insult aimed through him at the second lady in the land. The Princess-Dowager urged him not to make the sacrifice, for she well knew it would be in vain, and she proved to be right. Bute was still pursued with a relentless hatred, and his enemies were not satisfied until they had driven him first from London and then out of the country. Unable to withstand the storm any longer Bute went into exile, and at the time when Christian VII. visited England, he was wandering about Italy under the *incognito* of Sir John Stewart. The Princess-Dowager was much cast down by the loss of her friend, with whom she could hardly correspond, without fear of her letters being intercepted. Moreover, her sorrows were increased by the death of two of her children (the once numerous family of Frederick Prince of Wales was now reduced to five), and by the unsatisfactory conduct of her two younger sons, the Dukes of Gloucester and Cumberland, who showed tendencies (the latter especially) to folly and extravagance. [Pg 157]



CARLTON HOUSE, PALL MALL, THE RESIDENCE OF THE PRINCESS-DOWAGER OF WALES.
From a Print, temp. 1765.

The visit of her son-in-law, the King of Denmark, so far from comforting her, only increased her anxiety. The more she saw of him the more she disliked him. He was restive under her covert reproaches, and at last entirely lost her good graces by his impertinence. The Princess was telling fortunes by cards one evening with one of her ladies, to whom Christian had given a diamond star. The King said to her: "*Chère maman*, which King am I in your pasteboard court?" "Lady——," said the Princess-Dowager archly, "calls you the King of Diamonds." "What do you call Holck?" asked Christian. "Oh, by a more flattering title—the King of Hearts." This nettled the King, who retorted: "And pray, *chère maman*, what do you call Lord Bute—the Knave of Hearts?" This repartee greatly discomposed the Princess-Dowager. She flushed crimson, and gathered up the cards without a word.

Though Christian was so unwelcome at court, he was exceedingly well received by all classes of the nation, who made him the hero of the hour. The fact that the King disliked him rather increased his popularity than otherwise. The King and Queen, in consequence of the seclusion in which they lived, had little or no influence on society. George III. preferred a quiet domestic life with his wife and children, routs, balls and assemblies had no attractions for him. Therefore London society, which loves the presence of royalty, hailed the King of Denmark with delight. All the fine ladies were in love with him, all the fine gentlemen sought the honour of his acquaintance, imitated his dress and deportment, and even copied his eccentricities. The rumour of his vices lent an additional piquancy. He was nicknamed "the Northern Scamp," and the ladies invented a headdress in his honour, which was known as the "Danish fly". "The King of [Pg 158]

Denmark," writes Whately to George Grenville, "is the only topic of conversation. Wilkes himself is forgotten, even by the populace."[95] The people cheered him wherever he went, and the nobility vied with one another in giving him splendid entertainments. First to have the honour of entertaining "the royal Dane" was Lady Hertford, who gave a brilliant assembly at Hertford House. Horace Walpole, who was present, writes:—

> "I came to town to see the Danish King. He is as diminutive as if he came out of a kernel in the Fairy Tales. He is not ill made, nor weakly made, though so small; and, [Pg 159] though his face is pale and delicate, it is not at all ugly.... Still he has more royalty than folly in his air, and, considering he is not twenty, is as well as any one expects any king in a puppet show to be.... He only takes the title of *Altesse* (an absurd mezzo-termine), but acts king exceedingly; struts in the circle, like a cock-sparrow, and does the honours of himself very civilly."[96] And again: "He has the sublime strut of his grandfather (George II.), and the divine white eyes of all his family on the mother's side.... The mob adore and huzza him, and so they did at the first instant. They now begin to know why, for he flings money to them out of the window; and by the end of the week, I do not doubt they will want to choose him for Middlesex. His court is extremely well ordered, for they bow as low to him at every word as if his name were Sultan Amurath. You would take his first minister for only the first of his slaves.... There is indeed a pert young gentleman who a little discomposes this august ceremonial; his name is Count Holck, his age three-and-twenty; and his post answers to one that we had formerly in England ages ago, called, in our tongue, a royal favourite."[97]

[95] *Grenville Papers*, vol. iv.

[96] Walpole's *Letters*, vol. v., edition 1857.

[97] *Ibid.*

Lady Hertford's assembly was followed by a magnificent entertainment at Syon House, given by the Duke and Duchess of Northumberland. "An inexpressible variety of emblematical devices was [Pg 160] illuminated by more than fifteen thousand lamps, and the temple erected in the inner court was ornamented by transparent paintings, which had a very happy effect."[98] A gala performance was also given at the opera, which was attended by all the rank and fashion of the town, though the King and Queen were absent. After the opera the King went to Mrs. Cornelys' house in Soho Square (a sort of Assembly Rooms at that period). "Mrs. Cornelys had put the apartments in all the possible order that a few hours' notice would admit of, and the whole was splendidly illuminated with upwards of two thousand wax lights. The moment the King entered the grand room the music (consisting of French horns, clarinets, bassoons, etc.) began playing, and his Majesty seemed very much pleased at the agreeable manner of his reception. Dancing was proposed; the King opened the ball with the Duchess of Ancaster, and named the second minuet with the Countess of Harrington; the minuets were succeeded by English country dances, and those by the French cotillons."[99]

[98] *The Annual Register*, 1768.

[99] *Ibid.*

Christian's maternal aunt, the Princess Amelia, was indignant with George III. for the way he ignored his royal guest, and she gave a grand entertainment at Gunnersbury House in honour of her Danish nephew. "The entertainment was extremely magnificent. Invitations were given to upwards of 300 of the nobility. The supper consisted of 120 dishes; a grand fire-work was then [Pg 161] played off; and the ball, which was very splendid, ended about three o'clock on Saturday morning."[100] The Duke of Gloucester was present, but the King and Queen did not attend. The lovely Lady Talbot, who was much admired by Christian, was the belle of the ball, and wore a diamond coronet worth £80,000. The beautiful and lively Lady Bel Stanhope also created a sensation, and Holck fell in love with her. It is said that he proposed marriage, but Lady Bel, or her parents, would not hear of it. The Princess Amelia declared herself to be very fond of her nephew, who, she said, reminded her of her sister, Queen Louise, but she was distressed that he did not get on better with his wife, and asked him why. "*Pourquoi?*" replied Christian, "*Pourquoi? —elle est si blonde!*" Walpole has something to say on this head too, for he tells us, "At the play of *The Provoked Wife*, he (the King) clapped whenever there was a sentence against matrimony—a very civil proceeding when his wife was an English Princess".

[100] *The Annual Register*, 1768.

George III.'s neglect of the King of Denmark occasioned so much comment that he at last reluctantly gave a ball in Christian's honour at the Queen's House, at which the Princess-Dowager of Wales, the Duke of Gloucester, and a great number of the nobility were present. The Princess Amelia was not asked; the King owed her a grudge for the way in which she had forced his hand in giving an entertainment to her nephew—an example he was bound to follow. The King [Pg 162] of Denmark opened the ball with Queen Charlotte, and King George danced a minuet with the Duchess of Ancaster, who seems to have been the greatest lady of the day outside the royal family.

Christian VII. showed no hurry to quit a country where he was so well received, and in September, when London was empty, he made several tours in the provinces. It was a very wet summer, and the rains were heavier than had been known in the memory of man. "The Serpentine river in Hyde Park rose so high that it forced down a part of the wall, and poured with such violence upon Knightsbridge, that the inhabitants expected the whole town to be

overflowed; the canal in St. James's Park rose higher than ever was known; in short, no man living remembered so much rain-fall in so short a time."[101] Several parts of the country were flooded, and the high roads rendered impassable; travelling by coach always slow, became slower still, and in some places was attended with difficulty and even danger. But these things did not daunt Christian, who rushed about the country, from one end to another, stopping nowhere for any time, and apparently taking no interest in anything he saw. Even the polite writer in the *Annual Register*, who devoted pages to Christian's doings, was constrained to say: "His journeyings are so rapid, and his stay at places so short, that, if he is not a youth of more than [Pg 163] common talents, he must have a very confused idea of what he sees".

[101] *The Annual Register*, September 1, 1768.

Horace Walpole, who now pursued the King of Denmark with strange malignity, writes: "You know already about the King of Denmark, hurrying from one corner of England to the other, without seeing anything distinctly, fatiguing himself, breaking his chaise, going tired to bed in inns, and getting up to show himself to the mob at the window. I believe that he is a very silly lad, but the mob adore him, though he has neither done nor said anything worth repeating; but he gives them an opportunity of getting together, of staring and of making foolish observations."[102] Bernstorff excused the King's indifference on the ground that he was short-sighted. This also served to explain many apparent discourtesies, for Christian often ignored people to whom he had been most gracious a few days before. It is probable that Horace Walpole was one of the victims of this little peculiarity, and that accounts for the venom with which he writes of the King. Christian may also have ignored Walpole's niece, Lady Waldegrave, who had secretly married the Duke of Gloucester, and who, though the marriage was not declared, already gave herself the airs of a princess of the blood.

[102] Walpole's *Letters*, vol. v., edition 1857.

Christian's first excursion was to York. Attended by a retinue of a hundred and twenty persons he set out from London, and, in passing, visited Cambridge. The Vice-Chancellor, the heads of houses, the doctors, professors, proctors and other officials of the university, clad in their scarlet [Pg 164] robes, received the King at the entrance of the senate house, and conducted him to a chair of state, where an address was presented to him. The King was invited to a public luncheon, but he excused himself, and asked the Vice-Chancellor to supper with him at his inn. Christian shirked all ceremony, and saw the sights of Cambridge in his riding coat and boots. At York the Corporation made every preparation to entertain him in a splendid manner, but the King declined all formalities, saw the races, visited the Minster and other public buildings, and the next day set out on his return journey to London, going round by way of Liverpool and Manchester, "where he was particularly gratified by viewing the stupendous works of the Duke of Bridgewater, at which he expressed both astonishment and pleasure".

A few days after the Danish King's return to London he again set forth on a visit to Oxford. He was received in state by the Vice-Chancellor and officials of the university, and in full convocation had the degree of Doctor of Civil Law conferred upon him. Bernstorff, Holck and other members of the Danish suite also received honorary degrees, and Struensee had conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Medicine. After Oxford the King visited several places, and was perpetually on the road. When he was at Newmarket for the races the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge waited on him, and in the name of the university presented an address, and graces for conferring the [Pg 165] same degree upon the King and his nobles as they had received at Oxford.

The grandest entertainment provided for Christian was his state visit to the City of London. The Lord Mayor with the aldermen and sheriffs, all in their robes, set out in coaches from the Guildhall for the Three Cranes, where they embarked at eleven o'clock in the morning on board the city state barge, "the streamers flying, a select band of water-music playing, and the principal livery companies attending in their respective barges," to Westminster, where they awaited the arrival of Christian from St. James's Palace. The King came punctually, and as he set foot on the city barge a royal salute was fired, and loud cheers rent the air from the vast crowds of people who lined the banks on either side, thronged the bridges, and crowded the river on innumerable craft. The procession glided down the Thames to the Temple Stairs. "During the course of this grand passage on the water his Majesty frequently expressed himself highly pleased, and his admiration of the several great and beautiful objects round him; and sometimes condescended to come forward in order to gratify the curiosity of the people, who eagerly fought to get a sight of his royal person, though at the hazard of their lives."[103] Arrived at the Temple Stairs the King landed, took his seat in the Lord Mayor's coach, and proceeded to the Mansion House. The [Pg 166] streets through which he passed were gaily decorated, and crowded "with an innumerable populace, while the windows and tops of houses were equally crowded with spectators of both sexes, whose acclamations, together with the ringing of bells, and the shouts of the multitude, loudly expressed their joy at his Majesty's presence; his Majesty expressed his surprise at the populousness of this city, and his satisfaction at the kindness of the citizens".[104]

[103] *The Annual Register.*

[104] *Ibid.*

Arrived at the Mansion House an address was read to the King by the City Recorder. Curiously no direct mention was made of Queen Matilda, but we take from it one passage to show the gross and servile flattery which characterised the whole effusion. "The many endearing ties which happily connect you, Sir, with our most gracious Sovereign, justly entitle you to the respect and veneration of all his Majesty's faithful subjects; but your affability and other princely virtues, so

eminently displayed during the whole course of your residence among us, have in a particular manner charmed the citizens of London, who reflect with admiration on your early and uncommon thirst for knowledge, and your indefatigable pursuit of it by travel and observation, the happy fruits of which they doubt not will be long employed and acknowledged within the whole extent of your influence and command." Christian returned a suitable reply in Danish, and, "upon notice that the dinner was served, his Majesty was conducted into the Egyptian Hall, [Pg 167] where his Majesty condescended to proceed quite round, that the ladies (who made a most brilliant appearance in the galleries) might have a full view of his royal person". The banquet was a Gargantuan one, and took four hours to work through. Several toasts were drunk to the sound of a trumpet, but, at the King's request, without speeches. In addition to the usual loyal toasts, were added those of the King of Denmark and Norway and his Consort, Queen Matilda. The King himself proposed two toasts, "Prosperity to the British Nation," and "Prosperity to the City of London".[105]

[105] *The Annual Register.*

At eight o'clock his Majesty took his leave, the City Fathers going before him to his coach bearing wax lights. The King returned to St. James's Palace through crowded streets, brilliantly illuminated in his honour. The whole visit was a remarkable tribute to his undeserved popularity. Truly there must be some strange glamour around the name of king, when a prince like this, who had never said or done anything worth recording, and a great deal which was quite unfit to be recorded, received from the greatest city in the world an ovation which could not be surpassed if he had been one of the world's greatest heroes.

Moreover, the King of Denmark was pursuing in London the same scandalous amusements as those which had revolted his subjects in Copenhagen. Incredible though it may seem, night after night he and his favourite, Holck, disguised as sailors, would pass hours drinking and frolicking [Pg 168] in the stews and pot-houses of St. Giles'. These adventures generally began after midnight. Christian would leave some splendid entertainment given in his honour by the proudest of the English nobility, and hurrying back to St. James's would change his clothes, and start out again to seek distraction in the lowest forms of dissipation. These extraordinary predilections were perfectly well known to many people of rank and fashion, and the knowledge filtered down to the mob, who cheered the Danish King whithersoever he went. Perhaps they lent, such was the depravity of the age, an additional zest to the cheers. Even Queen Matilda, left behind in far-off Denmark, heard from London of her husband's transgressions. It is said that she wrote to her aunt, the Princess Amelia: "I wish the King's travels had the same laudable object as those of Cyrus, but I hear that his Majesty's chief companions are musicians, fiddlers, and persons designed for inglorious employments. What a wretched levee! And his evening amusements are said to be still more disgraceful. His delicacy and sentiment cannot be supposed to dignify these fleeting gratifications. If I had not experienced his fickleness and levity at home, I could not have heard, without emotion and disquietude, of his infidelities abroad."[106]

[106] *Memoirs of an Unfortunate Queen.*

Having said this much in condemnation of Christian VII. in England, it is only fair to turn the [Pg 169] other side of the shield, and record one or two anecdotes of him which may have accounted, to some extent, for his undoubted popularity. One day he saw a poor tradesman seized in his shop by two bailiffs, who thrust him into a hackney coach, despite the lamentations of his weeping wife and family, and drove off to the Marshalsea. The King commanded Count Moltke to follow the coach and find out all particulars. Moltke reported that the unlucky man had contracted a debt in the course of his business, and had been charged exorbitant interest. The King paid the debt, set the man free from prison, and gave him five hundred dollars to start anew. This was only one instance of several exhibitions of generosity, for he gave away considerable sums to liberate poor debtors from the Marshalsea and Fleet. Christian had also a habit of scattering money among the crowd, which would account for many cheers—though money was scarce in Denmark its King had always plenty to throw away on his travels.

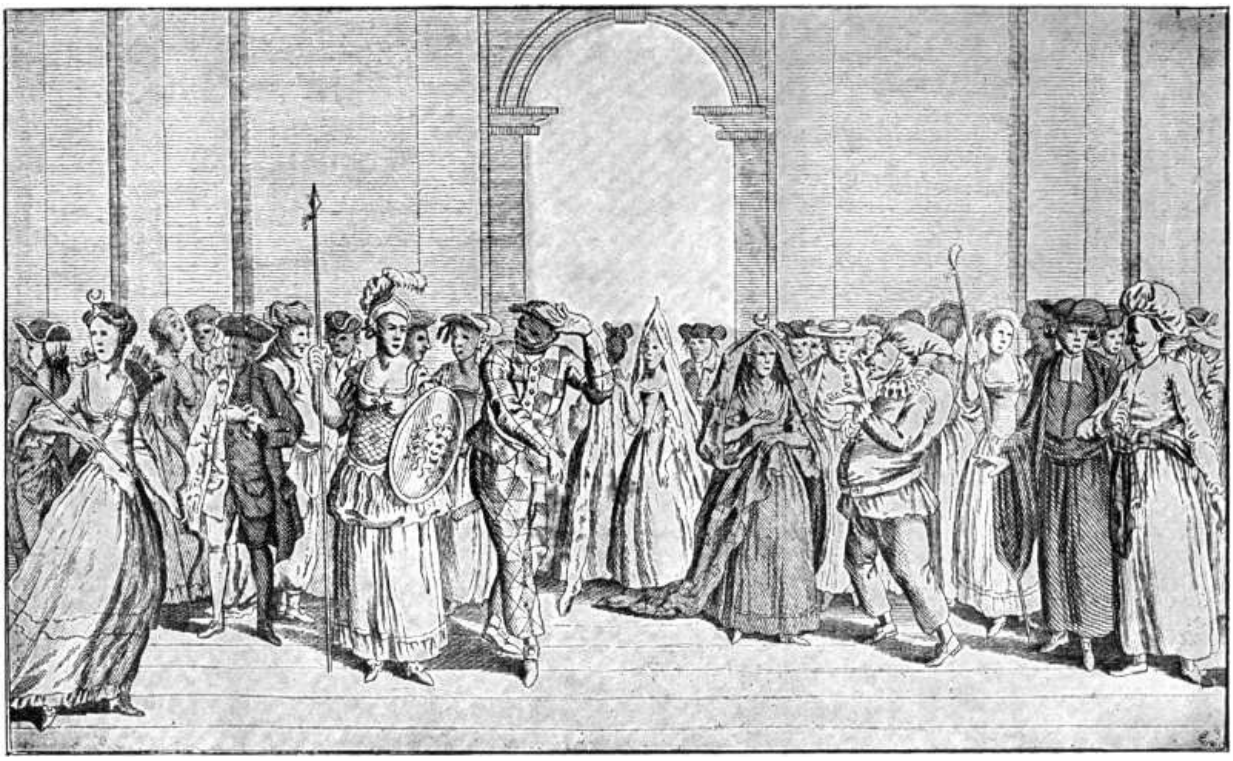
One day when Christian stepped out of his coach to enter St. James's Palace, a fine buxom girl, who formed one of the little crowd that always assembled to witness the King's goings out and comings in, burst through the line, caught the King in her arms, and, fairly lifting him off the ground, kissed him heartily. "Now," said she, "kill me if you like, I shall die happy, for I have kissed the prettiest fellow in the world." Christian, far from being offended, was delighted with [Pg 170] this tribute to his charms. He gave the girl a crown and ran laughing up the stairs. But after this incident it was necessary to have a double line of attendants, as other maidens might have been tempted to repeat the experiment, for the King, though so small, was much admired by the ladies of all classes. He was fond of dining in public at St. James's, that is to say, he sat at a table in the middle of the room, and the general public, chiefly women, were admitted to a space at one end, shut off by a rail, whence they could see "the Northern Scamp" eat his dinner. Powdered, painted, patched, perfumed, richly dressed in silk, velvet and lace, and besprinkled with jewels, Christian looked like a Dresden china figure. The men said he resembled a girl dressed in a man's clothes, but the women adored him.

Six weeks had passed since the King of Denmark's arrival in England, yet he showed no inclination to depart. But the King of England, who had to bear the cost of his maintenance, thought that it was high time for him to return to his Queen and country. Other hints proving vain, George III. invited his royal guest to what he pointedly called a "farewell entertainment" at Richmond Lodge, on September 26. "A most elegant structure," we read, "was erected, in the centre of which was a large triumphal arch, about forty feet high, of the Grecian order, decorated

with figures, trophies and other embellishments." The entertainment was equal to the magnificence of the structure, and the fireworks were the finest ever exhibited in England. The [Pg 171] road from St. James's Palace to Richmond Lodge, along which Christian passed, was illuminated by upwards of fifteen thousand Italian lamps.

The Danish King accepted this "farewell entertainment," but still showed no signs of saying farewell. The Princess-Dowager of Wales, therefore, by way of speeding the parting guest, gave a supper party on October 1, to bid him good-bye. It consisted of three tables, one for their Majesties and the Princess-Dowager, a second for the King of Denmark and fifty of the nobility, and a third for the Prince of Wales (afterwards George IV., then a boy of six years old) and his attendants. The supper party accomplished the object for which it was given, and Christian VII. named the much-wished-for day of his departure, which, however, was not for another fortnight.

On October 10 the King of Denmark gave a masquerade ball to his English friends, who had entertained him so lavishly. The ball took place at the Opera House in the Haymarket, and two thousand five hundred guests responded to the "royal Dane's" invitation. Queen Charlotte did not appear, she did not approve of masquerades; her virtuous husband also did not approve of them, but could not resist the temptation of being present, though he compromised with his conscience by peeping at the gay scene from a private box, behind transparent shutters. The Princess Amelia, who was old and infirm, witnessed the revels from another box, where she sat the whole [Pg 172] evening masked. The scene was one of great brilliancy, and the value of the jewels worn on this occasion was estimated at upwards of £2,000,000. The company must have been rather mixed, and a good many people lost articles of jewellery, which they never recovered. The following account of the ball is taken from the *Gentleman's Magazine*:—



THE MASKED BALL GIVEN BY CHRISTIAN VII. AT THE OPERA HOUSE, HAYMARKET.
From the "Gentleman's Magazine," 1768.

"His Danish Majesty came in, masked, between ten and eleven o'clock, dressed in a domino of gold and silver stuff, a black hat and white feather, walked about with great good nature and pleasantry until twelve, then withdrew with a select company to supper and appeared no more.... The Duke of Cumberland was in a crimson domino, trimmed with gold, black hat and white feather. The Duke of Gloucester in a purple domino, white hat and white feather. Her Grace the Duchess of Northumberland appeared in the character of Rembrandt's wife, in a close black gown trimmed with gold, a rounded coif, a short apron tucked up, and a painter's brush in her hand. Lady Bel Stanhope and her sister represented pilgrims in brown gowns with blue sashes trimmed with silver, and small hats laced round with diamonds. The Countess of Harrington and the two young ladies, her daughters, were extremely simple in their appearance, but at the same time extremely elegant.... His Grace the Duke of Northumberland was in a Persian habit, with a fine turban richly ornamented with diamonds. Lord Grosvenor was in a splendid suit of the Turkish fashion. The Duchess of [Pg 173] Ancaster, in the character of a Sultana, was universally admired; her robe was purple satin bordered with ermine, and fluttered on the ground so much in the style of Eastern magnificence that we were transported in fancy to the palaces of Constantinople.... Many of the most superb, as well as the best fancied dresses in the whole assembly were those of eminent citizens, or those who had acquired their fortunes by trade."

Another account says: "The principal grotesque characters were the conjurer, the black, and the old woman. There was also a Methodist preacher, a chimney sweeper,

with his bag, shovel and scraper, and a boar with a bull's head, all of which were supported with great good humour."[107]

[107] *The Annual Register.*

Two days after the masquerade the King of Denmark held a levee at St. James's Palace, at which a large company attended to take leave of him. The following day he went to Queen's House to say farewell to the King and Queen, and to Carlton House to wish the Princess-Dowager good-bye. Christian made several valuable presents before his departure, but the most notable was a gold box studded with diamonds which he gave to Garrick, the great actor, and begged him to receive it as a small token of the regard he had for his genius.

The King of Denmark posted to Dover on October 15, and on his way thither he broke the journey at Chatham and went up the Medway on H.M.S. *Victory*, and inspected the British fleet. It chanced that the young officer who commanded the *Victory* was Gambier, who forty years later, in 1807, was the Admiral commanding the English fleet that bombarded Copenhagen. The following day the King of Denmark left England, after a stay of more than two months, and sailed for France. [Pg 174]

Christian VII. went to Paris where he remained for some time as the guest of the French King, Louis XV. It would not be germane to this history to give a detailed account of the King of Denmark's experiences in Paris. He was splendidly entertained by the King and the French nobility, and welcomed on all his public appearances with enthusiasm. His private amusements were of the same nature as those he had followed in London. If it had been possible to corrupt Christian's morals more than they were corrupted his experiences in Paris would have done it. France was then slowly going down the steps that led to the revolution. The heartlessness, extravagance and immorality of the nobility stood in fearful contrast to the brutality, misery and ignorance of the people. Already could be heard the mutterings of the coming storm, but the Danish King had no eyes to see, nor ears to hear, nor mind to understand anything beyond the amusements of the passing hour.

CHAPTER XI.

[Pg 175]

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

1769.

On January 14 Christian VII. returned to Copenhagen after an absence of nearly eight months. Queen Matilda drove out to meet him, and husband and wife exchanged affectionate greetings. Together they entered Copenhagen, amid the firing of cannon, ringing of bells, and the joyful acclamations of the people. The English envoy gives the following account of the entry: "The Queen went as far as Röskilde to meet his Majesty, which strong mark of her affection and regard could not fail of affording him the highest satisfaction. Between six and seven o'clock their Majesties made a public entry into this capital, under a triple discharge of the cannon on the ramparts. The whole garrison, as well as the burghers, were under arms, and permission having been given a few days before to illuminate the houses, the inhabitants vied with each other in doing this, as well as the short notice would admit of, and in demonstrating their joy in every other manner they could. The foreign ministers, nobility, etc., attended at the palace of Christiansborg in order to pay their compliments upon this happy occasion, which the King was [Pg 176] pleased to receive, after he had made a short visit to the Dowager-Queens."[108]

[108] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, January 17, 1769.

Thus did Denmark welcome home her prodigal son.

Queen Matilda had spent the greater part of the time since the King left her at Frederiksborg, [109] some twenty miles from Copenhagen. Frederiksborg was the most magnificent of the country palaces of the Danish King, and has well been called the "Versailles of Denmark". It stands to this day, and the site is one of the most picturesque in Europe; the buildings cover three islands in a lake, connected by bridges, the palace proper occupying the third island. The exterior is rich in florid ornamentation, carried out in a warm sandstone, which admirably harmonises with the time-stained brick of which the palace is built. The windows look across the green water of the lake—a vivid green nowhere seen as at Frederiksborg—to the gardens, laid [Pg 177] out in the old French style, with straight walks and terraces, and clipped hedges of beech and hornbeam. The most magnificent room in Frederiksborg is the knights' hall, and below it is the church, where the Kings of the Oldenburg line were once wont to be crowned. This church is the most ornate of any in Denmark; everywhere is colour—in the traceried windows and frescoed walls, in the inlaid ivory work of the stalls, the pulpit of ebony and embossed silver, and the purple-vested altar with its golden crucifix. In short, Frederiksborg is a magnificent specimen of the Danish Renaissance, and brings vividly before us the life, the colour and richness which characterised the court life of mediæval Denmark.

[109] Frederiksborg was built early in the seventeenth century by Christian IV. on the site of an old building, and was used as a residence by the Kings of Denmark until 1859 (Frederick VII. usually resided there), when a large part of the building was destroyed by fire. Thanks to the munificence of the King, the Government and the public, and especially to Herr J. C. Jacobsen, a wealthy brewer, who contributed a large sum, the palace has been admirably restored, and the interior is now fitted up as a National Historical Museum. The contents, which include many works of art, illustrating events in Danish history, are not so interesting as one might suppose, but the visitor to Frederiksborg is well repaid by the beauty of its exterior, the magnificence of its chapel, where the work of restoration has been admirably done, and by the old-world charm of its gardens.

At Frederiksborg Matilda spent the summer and autumn months of 1768 alone. She occupied herself for the most part in works of charity, and strove to forget her own sorrows in relieving those of others. There was no philanthropic institution in the kingdom which she did not support, and in her immediate neighbourhood her name became a household word for many acts of kindness and benevolence. The young Queen went in and out among the poor of the adjacent village of Hilleröd, visiting the sick and helping the needy. The fame of her good deeds spread abroad, and the poor throughout Denmark, even thousands to whom she was only a name, came to look upon her as a protectress and a friend. They believed that the golden days of good Queen Louise had come back again. "The English," they said, "send us not Queens, but angels." [Pg 178]

For the rest, Matilda lived in great retirement. Occasionally she received visits of ceremony from the Dowager-Queens, from Sophia Magdalena, who lived at Hirschholm, or from Juliana Maria, who lived at Fredensborg. The masked hostility of Juliana Maria continued unabated, but the extreme circumspection of the young Queen's conduct gave no occasion for cavil. Except the Dowager-Queens she saw no one beyond her immediate household, and though most of these had been forced upon her against her will, yet after the first restraint wore off she showed to them no resentment. Her kindness and consideration won all their hearts, with one exception—that of Fräulein von Eyben, who, though pretending to be devoted to her mistress, was secretly working against her. Matilda took no part in state affairs during the King's absence, not even in ceremonial duties. Taking their cue from the King, the Ministers who had been left to conduct the business of the state while he was abroad, treated the Queen as a person of little importance, and even neglected to pay her the ordinary visits of ceremony.

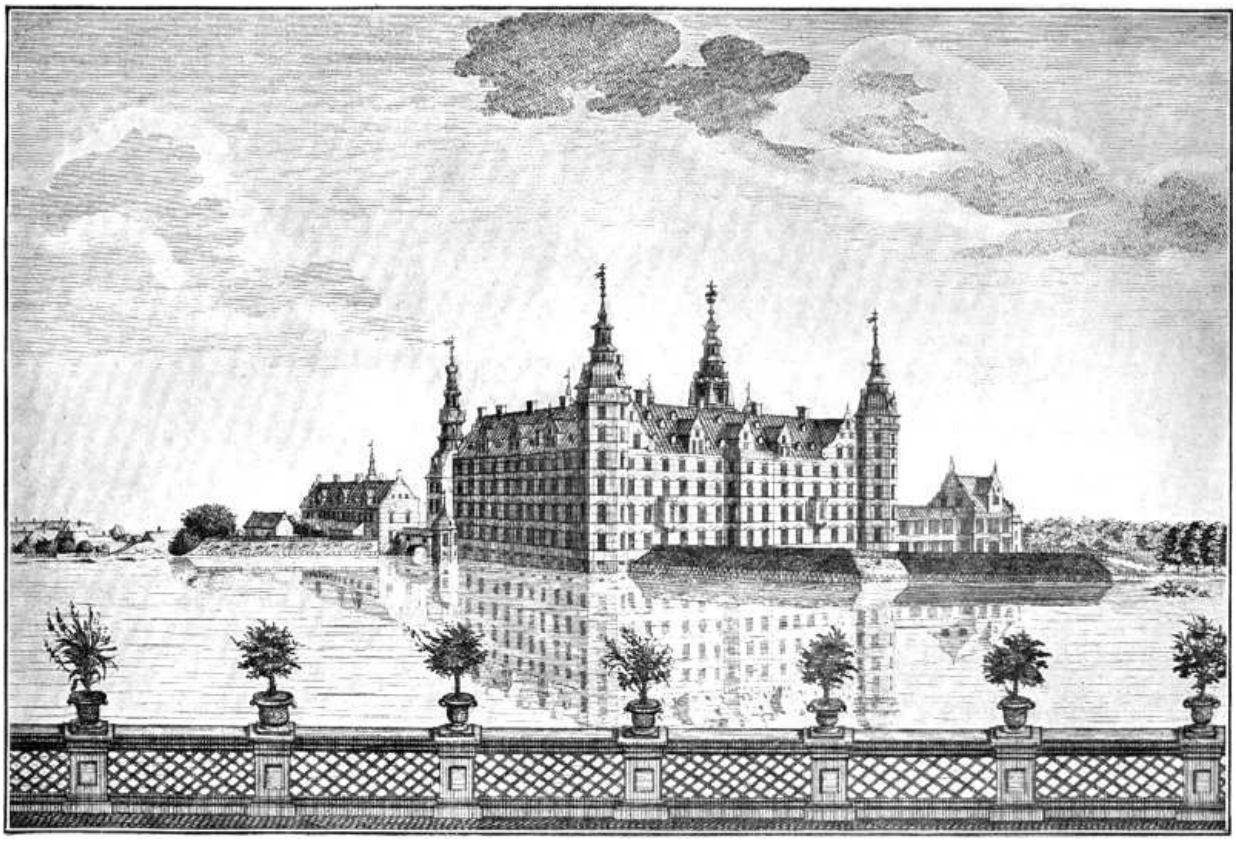
Since Madame de Plessen had left the court Matilda had no one to whom she could talk freely, nor, except her sister Augusta of Brunswick, had she any one to whom she could write without restraint. Augusta had her own troubles too, but she kept a warm corner in her heart for her youngest sister, and throughout life remained her truest and staunchest friend. But, at best, [Pg 179]

letter-writing is a poor substitute for personal converse, and at this time Matilda was much alone.

The young Queen must have often felt friendless and depressed as she paced the terraces of Frederiksborg or looked down from the windows of her apartments into the green water which lapped the castle walls, or gazed out on the clear northern night, and watched the moonlight play on the towers and pinnacles of the palace. Sometimes of a morning she would wander forth to the beech woods beyond the gardens. These beeches, mighty with age, are now, as they were then, one of the features of Frederiksborg. They are always beautiful—beautiful in spring, with their satin-smooth trunks, and branches still leafless, but tipped with brown spikes flushed with purple, and already bursting to disclose the woolly buds of silver within; beautiful in summer, when the pale green leaves form a shimmering canopy overhead; beautiful when the golden hues of autumn mingle with the russet-brown of the cones; beautiful even in winter, when the leafless branches stretch like lacework against the leaden hues of the sky, and the shrill winds from the Baltic whistle through them, and the ground beneath is carpeted with husks of their lavish fruit. Matilda grew to love these beech woods greatly, and even to-day they are associated with her name.

The Queen had one consolation in her loneliness which was not hers when she came to Denmark — she had her son, and found much happiness in him, for the maternal instinct was always strong [Pg 180] in her. She could no longer feel a stranger and an alien in a country over which her son would, under Providence, one day rule; she was not merely the King's wife, but the mother of the future King of Denmark. The Crown Prince was at first sickly and ailing, but when the Queen went to Frederiksborg, in defiance of court etiquette, she took the infant under her immediate care, and kept him with her as much as possible. During the summer, under his mother's watchful love, the little Prince, whose life was so precious to the Danish nation, grew much stronger. The English envoy mentions an audience he had with the Queen at Frederiksborg soon after her arrival there, and adds: "The Prince Royal, whom her Majesty was pleased to allow me to see, is greatly grown since his removal to the country. The resemblance between his Highness and the King's (our royal Master's) family is striking to all those who have had the honour of seeing him."[110]

[110] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, July 9, 1768.



THE PALACE OF FREDERIKSBORG, FROM THE GARDEN TERRACE.
From an Engraving, temp. 1768.

The only ceremonial the Queen attended, in the absence of Christian VII., was the inauguration of an equestrian statue of the late King Frederick V. at Copenhagen in the late autumn. Shortly after this function Matilda removed from the country to the Christiansborg Palace, and there awaited the King, who did not return until two months later than he at first intended. Matilda had now determined to make the best of her husband, notwithstanding the reports which had reached [Pg 181] her of his dissipation in London and Paris. He was the father of her child, and her interests were bound up with his. The future happiness of her son, and the prosperity of his kingdom, largely depended on Christian VII. It was clearly the Queen's duty to put aside her own grievances, however great they might be, and make an effort to guide the King in the right way. Therefore she welcomed him home as affectionately as if no cloud had dimmed their parting eight months before.

The King was surprised and delighted at the change which had taken place in his Queen's appearance and demeanour. The restful and healthy life she had led at Frederiksborg had added

greatly to her charm, her figure had developed and her spirits improved. Christian had left Matilda an unformed girl, he came back to find her a beautiful and self-possessed woman. His wayward fancy was pleased, and soon the *mot* ran round the palace that the King had actually fallen in love with his own wife. He might well have done so, for she was by far the most beautiful woman at his court. There is a portrait of Queen Matilda in the Rosenborg at Copenhagen, painted about this time, when she was in her eighteenth year. It represents her in the full bloom of her beauty. The face is a pure oval, the brow lofty and serene, the nose delicately chiselled, the lips full and red, the large eyes of a peculiar shade of light blue, the expression a combination of youthful dignity and sweet archness. Her hair is dressed high, and powdered after the fashion of [Pg 182] the time; she wears a blue robe, with a narrow edge of ermine to betoken her queenly rank, and round her finely-moulded throat is a close necklace of pearls. Even if we make allowance for courtly flattery, the picture remains that of a woman of rare loveliness and indescribable charm.

Though her heart was untouched, Matilda was no doubt flattered by her husband's attentions, and she honestly tried to meet his advances half way. Acting on the advice of her mother, her sister, and of all who wished her well, she strove to please him, and in her desire to hold his fickle favour, she even overlooked the fact that the hated Holck was still in the ascendant. Perhaps she thought, by fair words and guile, to undermine his ascendency. Her efforts, if they did not add to her own happiness, at least conduced to the outward harmony of the royal pair, and were coincident with a marked improvement in Christian's mode of life. For the first few months after the King's return this improvement was maintained; the nocturnal expeditions, which had so scandalised the citizens of Copenhagen, were now entirely given up; there were no masquerades, and the court became quite decorous. Formerly the dinner used to be rushed through for the King to hurry off to his apartments and occupy himself in unworthy pursuits. Now the King and Queen dined in public nearly every day, and with much ceremony. The leading ministers, the foreign envoys, and all who distinguished themselves in the service of church or [Pg 183] state, were in turn honoured with invitations, and the conversation at the dinner table became almost intellectual. Yet the court did not grow dull; cotillons and minuets were often danced in the palace, and the opening of the theatre for the season afforded much interest and amusement. The centre of all this pleasant society was the young Queen, the praises of whose beauty and amiability were on every tongue. Moreover, always accompanied by the Queen, the King reviewed the fleet, inspected the docks and fortifications of Copenhagen, and visited learned and scientific institutions with the object of comparing them with those he had seen abroad. The King also again endeavoured to interest himself in affairs of state, attended councils and criticised many details of administration. This remarkable change delighted alike the King's ministers and his subjects, and they ascribed the improvement quite as much to the influence of the Queen as to the result of his travels. The Queen, it seemed at this time, was likely to become a power in the state. The English envoy writes home:—

> "Your Lordship (the Earl of Rochford) has been already acquainted with the change that appeared in his Danish Majesty. Those amusements in which he used to take delight no longer afford him any. The society of the Queen seems alone to constitute his happiness. Her Majesty will now, no doubt, obtain that just and proper degree of influence, which her numberless amiable qualities entitle her to, and which she would [Pg 184] have much earlier enjoyed, had not the happy effect of it been too much apprehended by some who did not expect to find their account in it."[111]

[111] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, February 18, 1769.

Impressed, no doubt, by the warmth of his welcome in England, the King of Denmark was now strongly English in his sentiments. He talked much about his English mother, and delighted to honour anything which had to do, even remotely, with England. For instance, he sent the order of the Elephant to Prince George of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, the youngest brother of Queen Charlotte; he despatched a pressing invitation to the Duke of Gloucester to visit Copenhagen, and he resolved to celebrate Queen Matilda's birthday with all possible ceremony, not only as a mark of her new-found favour in his eyes, but also because he wished to pay a compliment, through her, to the royal house of England.

The Duke of Gloucester duly arrived at Copenhagen to take part in the celebration of his sister's birthday. He was the first of her family whom Matilda had seen since she left home, and she received him with demonstrations of joy. Gunning writes: "Their mutual joy and satisfaction on this occasion was greater than can be expressed".[112]

[112] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, July 11, 1769.

William Henry, Duke of Gloucester, was in his twenty-sixth year at the time of his visit to Copenhagen. He was the least intelligent of the numerous family of Frederick Prince of Wales, [Pg 185] but he had some sterling qualities, which made him resemble, more than the other sons, his eldest brother George III. If he lacked the wit and brilliancy of the Duke of York, he did not possess the vices and follies of the Duke of Cumberland. As a boy he was dull and heavy-witted, and the Princess-Dowager cared for him the least of all her children. According to Walpole she used to treat him with severity, and then accuse him of sulking. "No," said the Duke, on one occasion, "I am not sulking, I am only thinking." "And pray, of what are you thinking?" asked his mother with scorn. "I am thinking that if ever I have a son, I will not make him as unhappy as you make me." The Duke of Gloucester grew up a silent, reserved man, and shortly after attaining his majority, he became enamoured of Maria, Dowager-Countess Waldegrave. His passion was the more violent, because of the way his affections had been stunted in his youth, and the obstacles to the attainment of his desire only served to quicken his ardour. The obstacles were

considerable, for the Dowager-Countess Waldegrave, in consequence of a stain upon her birth, [113] was hardly a meet woman for the King's brother to take to wife, and, on the other hand, as [Pg 186] she told him, she was too considerable a person to become his mistress. She was a young, rich and beautiful widow of spotless reputation and boundless ambition. Many suitors were at her feet, among them the Duke of Portland, the best match in England, yet by some strange perversity Lady Waldegrave rejected them all, and engaged in a dalliance with the unattractive Duke of Gloucester. The Duke's wooing was long and unsatisfactory; the King and the Princess-Dowager did their utmost to break off the affair, the friends of Lady Waldegrave remonstrated, and counselled prudence. But threats, advice and warnings were all in vain, and at last the Duke of Gloucester and Lady Waldegrave were secretly married in September, 1766, in the drawing-room of Lady Waldegrave's town house, by her domestic chaplain. The secret was jealously guarded; some declared that the young couple were married, others, less charitable, that they ought to be, but the Duke and his Duchess let them gossip as they would. The Duke was always with Lady Waldegrave in public, and his manner to her was exactly the manner a man would treat his honoured wife. The livery worn by her servants was a compromise between that of the [Pg 187] royal family and her own. But the marriage was not declared, and at the time the Duke of Gloucester came to Copenhagen there seemed no probability that it ever would be.[114]

[113] The Dowager-Countess Waldegrave was the illegitimate daughter of Sir Edward Walpole (brother of Horace Walpole), by Mary Clement, a milliner's apprentice. She was the second and the most beautiful of three beautiful daughters, Laura, Maria and Charlotte. It was said that after the birth of her children, Edward Walpole intended to marry Mary Clement, but she died suddenly, and his honourable intentions were too late. He, however, took the children, acknowledged them, and gave them every advantage of wealth and education. When they grew up, though their birth prevented presentation at court, they were successfully launched into the best society. All three made brilliant marriages. Laura married the Rev. the Hon. Frederick Keppel, brother of the Earl of Albemarle, who subsequently became Bishop of Exeter; Charlotte, Lord Huntingtower, afterwards fifth Earl of Dysart, and Maria, Earl Waldegrave. Lord Waldegrave died a few years after the marriage, leaving his widow three daughters and a large fortune.

[114] The marriage was not declared until 1772, when, in consequence of a bill having been brought into Parliament to regulate royal marriages, the Duke publicly acknowledged Lady Waldegrave as his wife. The King was highly incensed, and Queen Charlotte even more so. They refused to receive the Duchess at court, though the King had to acknowledge the marriage as legal; consequently the Duke and Duchess went to Italy, where they remained for some time. In 1776 they returned to England with their two children, Prince William Henry and the Princess Sophia. Their conduct was so irreproachable that a reconciliation took place between the Duke and the King, and the Duchess of Gloucester and her children were duly acknowledged. Prince William Henry of Gloucester eventually married his cousin, Princess Mary, daughter of George III.

The Duke of Gloucester was received with every mark of respect, and his visit to Copenhagen was a continual round of festivity. There was a grand review of the troops in his honour, and a gala performance at the court theatre. One day the King and Queen and the Duke made an excursion to the ancient castle Kronborg at Elsinore, and were entertained by the commandant of the fortress. The Queen-Mother, Sophia Magdalena, gave a *déjeuner* to the English Prince at Hirschholm and Count Otto Moltke gave a ball. The Queen's birthday festivities are described by the English envoy:—

> "Saturday, July 22, was the anniversary of the Queen's birthday, which not having been observed since her Majesty's arrival in these dominions, by reason of the King of Denmark's absence, his Majesty was determined to celebrate it now with as much [Pg 188] magnificence as possible. The court testified its joy on this occasion by a very numerous and brilliant appearance.... In the evening followed a succession of new entertainments at the court theatre, designed and executed purposely in honour of her Majesty, and the day's festivity was closed with a great supper at the King's table. On Monday began the second act of this celebration. At six o'clock in the evening his Majesty and the noblemen who performed a part in the Carousal,[115] richly habited in Turkish dresses, and upon horses finely caparisoned, set out in grand procession through the city, attended by the Horse Guards and by a large band of martial music; at seven the procession returned to the great area of the palace, and as soon as the noblemen, appointed judges, had taken their seats, the exhibition began. One quadrille was led by the King, the other by Count Ahlfeld, governor of the city. The whole ceremony was very magnificent, and performed with the utmost address and good order, in the presence of her Danish Majesty, the Queen-Mother, Sophia Magdalena, his Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester, the whole court, and several thousand spectators. The performance concluded soon after nine, and was succeeded by an elegant supper and ball. The court returns this evening to Frederiksberg, where there is a grand [Pg 189] firework to be played off; the whole gardens are to be illuminated, and, after a magnificent supper in a large building erected for that purpose, a masquerade ball is intended, to which two thousand persons are to be admitted."[116]

[115] The Carousal was a musical ride which the King and the courtiers had been rehearsing in the riding school for weeks beforehand. *Vide* Gunning's despatch, April 15, 1769.

[116] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, July 25, 1769.

The Duke of Gloucester left Copenhagen a few days after the Queen's birthday, and returned to England. Though Christian had prepared all these festivities in his brother-in-law's honour, he

did not hesitate to exercise his wit at the expense of his guest. The Duke was silent and dull, and his lack of conversation was made a subject of ridicule by the garrulous King. One day Christian asked Holck what he thought of the Duke, and the favourite replied: “He reminds me of an English ox!” The Duke was very stout for his age, and had a broad red face and large ruminating eyes. The King laughed at Holck’s witticism, and maliciously repeated it to the Queen, who was incensed at the impertinence. If the truth must be told, the English Prince did not appear in the most favourable light at the Danish court. He stared and said little, and chiefly distinguished himself by his enormous appetite.

When her brother left Copenhagen the Queen found herself once more alone. His visit had been to a great extent a disappointment to her, for he had little in common with his sister, and not much sympathy for her in her troubles. These, as time went on, grew from bad to worse. Despite all her efforts Holck continued in the ascendant, and his influence was wholly against the Queen. [Pg 190] He was known throughout Denmark as the man whom the King delighted to honour, and even Matilda was forced to show public marks of favour to the man whom she considered her worst enemy. For instance, in September she was compelled by the King to attend Holck’s wedding to a daughter of Count Laurvig, “an honour,” to quote the English envoy, “never before conferred in this kingdom upon any subject when the ceremony was performed out of the palace; but indeed the whole of this had more the appearance of the nuptials of a prince of the blood than those of a private person, the King having conveyed Count Holck in his Majesty’s chariot, at the same time giving him the right hand from Frederiksberg to Copenhagen, the Queen and all the court following”.[117] Holck’s marriage made no difference to his mode of life, and Christian’s infatuation for his favourite continued as great as before. Mounted couriers tore along the road between the Blaagaard, where Holck lived, and the King’s palace at all hours of the day and night, and on one occasion two horses were killed in the wild haste with which the horseman rode to convey the King’s message to his favourite.

[117] Gunning’s despatch, Copenhagen, September 30, 1769.

WILLIAM HENRY, DUKE OF GLOUCESTER, BROTHER OF QUEEN MATILDA.
From the Painting by H. W. Hamilton, 1771.

Nine months had passed since Christian’s return from abroad, and it was at last seen by his subjects that the hopes they had formed of their King’s reformation were doomed to disappointment. The costly experiment of foreign travel had proved a failure. True, he no longer [Pg 191] scandalised his people with riots in the streets, or his court with shameless disregard of morality, for his strength was no longer equal to such exhibitions. The incessant round of dissipation in

London and Paris had shattered an already enfeebled constitution. The King's tendency to melancholia became more marked every day, and symptoms of the dread malady which before long overtook him began to make themselves apparent. His delusions as to his prowess became more frequent, and he showed strange aberrations of intellect. He was a mental and physical wreck.

In October, 1769, Queen Matilda fell ill. Her illness was the crowning indignity and proved the limit of her long-suffering endurance. With it also came to an end the efforts she had bravely made since the King's return to do her duty to her husband, and lead him to higher things. This was the turning-point of Matilda's life, and explains, if it does not excuse, much that followed after. She threw down her arms. Insulted and degraded, it is no wonder that the young wife of eighteen was filled with a disgust of life. The remonstrances of her physicians were unavailing, she turned her face to the wall and prayed for death. The Queen's condition was so serious that the English envoy thought it necessary to write home the following diplomatically worded despatch:—

> "I am extremely sorry to acquaint your Lordship that the state of the Queen of Denmark's health has lately presented some very unfavourable symptoms; which have given such apprehensions to her physicians, as to make them think that a perfect re-establishment may be attended with some difficulty, unless her Majesty can be persuaded to pay unusual attention to herself. I am so thoroughly sensible how deeply it would affect the King [George III.] to receive information of a still more alarming nature, and so anxious to prevent it, that I cannot help desiring your Lordship to represent to his Majesty that, though there appears no immediate danger, yet the situation the Queen of Denmark is at present in is too critical not to make it highly necessary to obviate worse symptoms, and as this happy effect depends very much upon her Majesty's own care, I believe she would be wrought upon by nothing more successfully than by some affectionate expostulations from the King, upon the very great importance of her life."[118]

[Pg 192]

[118] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, November 4, 1769.

It was at this critical moment, when her whole being was in passionate revolt, when she was disgusted with her environment, and weary of life, that Matilda's evil genius appeared upon the scene in the guise of a deliverer. This was the King's physician—John Frederick Struensee.

CHAPTER XII.

[Pg 193]

STRUENSEE.

1737-1769.

John Frederick Struensee was born at Halle, an old town in northern Germany, on August 5, 1737. His father, Adam Struensee, was a zealous Lutheran minister; his mother was the daughter of a doctor named Carl, a clever man, much given to mysticism, who had been physician-in-ordinary to King Christian VI. of Denmark. The Struensee family was of obscure origin. The first Struensee of whom anything is known began life under a different name. He was a pilot at Lubeck, and during a terrible storm, in which no other man dared venture out to sea, he brought into port a richly laden vessel. In honour of his courageous deed he received from the corporation of Lubeck the name of Strouvensee, which means a dark, stormy sea—a fit emblem of his descendant's troubled career.

John Frederick Struensee received his early education at the grammar school of his native town. It was not a good education, for the masters were imperfectly educated themselves, but the boy was so extraordinarily precocious, and had such a thirst for knowledge, that he soon absorbed all that his tutors could teach him, and began to educate himself. The wave of mysticism was then [Pg 194] passing over northern Germany, and Struensee's teachers were infected with it, and no doubt communicated their views to their pupil, for Struensee was all his life something of a mystic, or, to speak more correctly, a fatalist. Despite the orthodox Protestantism of his parents, the younger Struensee's eager and inquiring mind had always an inclination to scepticism, and before he had attained man's estate he was already a freethinker on most matters of religion. He seems always to have retained a belief in God, or a First Cause, but he never had the conviction that man enjoyed a future life: he held that his existence was bounded by this life, and always acted on that assumption. Side by side with the mysticism which was permeating northern Germany there existed a religious revival. The theory of conversion, whereby a man was suddenly and miraculously converted from his evil ways and made sure of future salvation, was peculiarly acceptable to many, and amongst Struensee's companions were youths of notoriously loose morals who declared that they had suddenly "found salvation". As this declaration was not always accompanied by a corresponding change of life, Struensee hastily and unjustly came to the conclusion that all religion was little more than an organised hypocrisy. His father's long sermons, to which he was compelled to listen Sunday after Sunday, left no impression on his heart, and his sire's private exhortations to his son to change his life, and flee from the wrath to [Pg 195] come, wearied him. His mother, who had inherited her father's mystical views, and supplemented them with her husband's hard and uncompromising evangelicalism, also lectured her son until the limits of his patience were exhausted, and he resolved as soon as possible to quit a home where he was unhappy.

Struensee exhibited remarkable abilities at an early age; he matriculated at the university of Halle in his fourteenth year, and he had not completed his twentieth when he received the degree of doctor. Notwithstanding these academic distinctions, he was unable at first to earn money, and his means were so limited that he was forced to remain, an unwilling dweller, in the house of his parents. Even at that early age his enterprising and restless mind and his unbridled ambition began to make themselves manifest; his academic successes he considered merely as steps towards further greatness. His father used to warn him against worldly ambition and intellectual pride, but his exhortations fell on deaf ears.

In 1757, when Struensee was twenty years old, his father received "a call" to become chief preacher of the principal church of Altona, a city situated on the northern bank of the Elbe, within the kingdom of Denmark. This change in the family fortunes was destined to exercise a material influence on Struensee's future. The young doctor accompanied his father to Altona, and in a few months was appointed town physician, and country physician of the adjacent lordship of [Pg 196] Pinneberg and the county of Rantzau. The elder Struensee did not remain long at Altona, for the fervour of his eloquence soon brought him preferment, and he was appointed by the Danish Government superintendent-general of the clergy of the duchy of Holstein, an office equivalent, in influence and importance, to that of bishop. Left to himself, the young doctor bought a house in Altona, and set up his own establishment. He entertained freely some of the principal people in Altona. Struensee was a pleasant host and clever conversationalist, and early gave evidence of those social qualities which afterwards proved useful to him. But his polish was superficial, and concealed his natural roughness and lack of refinement. He would do anything to gain notoriety, and to this end affected the bizarre; for instance, he had two skeletons with candles in their hands placed one on either side of his bed, and by the light of these weird candelabra he read himself to sleep.

As Struensee's establishment was expensive and his means limited, he invited a literary man named Penning to live with him and share expenses. In 1763 the two started a magazine called *The Monthly Journal of Instruction and Amusement*. The magazine was not a financial success, and at the end of six months ceased to exist. It did not contain anything very wonderful; perhaps the most remarkable article was one headed "Thoughts of a Surgeon about the Causes of Depopulation in a given country," which was written by Struensee, and contained ideas on [Pg 197] population which he afterwards put in practice. Struensee also published some medico-scientific treatises, but nothing of any great merit. He did not distinguish himself as a writer, but he was without doubt a widely read man; his favourite author was Voltaire, and next to him he placed Rousseau. He was also much influenced by the writings of Helvetius. Struensee was a deep, if not

always an original, thinker, and his ideas generally were in advance of his time.

In Altona Struensee soon won a reputation as a successful doctor, and his handsome person and agreeable manners made him very popular, especially with women. The good-looking young physician gained through his lady patients (and it was his boast that women were his best friends) access to the best houses in, and around, Altona. He made the acquaintance of Count Schack Karl Rantzau, the eldest son of Count Rantzau-Ascheberg, one of the most considerable noblemen in Holstein, the owner of vast estates, a Danish privy councillor, and a Count of the Holy Roman Empire. Of Count Schack Karl Rantzau we shall have occasion to write at length later; suffice it here to say that he was already middle-aged when Struensee met him, and had led a wild and disreputable life. Struensee was useful to him in no creditable way, and before long the two became very intimate. They made an informal covenant that if either attained power he should help the other. But at present nothing seemed more unlikely, and Rantzau gave Struensee [Pg 198] only promises and flattery, which, however, were enough, for the young doctor was very vain, and moreover exceedingly fond of the society of titled and highly placed personages.

Struensee also visited the house of the Baron Söhlenthal, who was the stepfather of Enevold Brandt, and thus became acquainted with Christian VII.'s one-time favourite. Struensee had also attended, in a professional capacity, Madame von Berkentin, who was later appointed chief lady to the Crown Prince Frederick; and it was at her house that he said, half in jest and half in earnest: "If my lady patronesses will only contrive to get me to Copenhagen, then I will carry all before me".

But for a long time he remained at Altona and all these fine acquaintances had no other effect than making his scale of living much higher than his circumstances warranted. He became considerably in debt, and this, added to dislike of his calling, for his ambition soared high above the position of a country doctor, made him restless and discontented. He was on the point of resigning his post, and taking a voyage to Malaga and the East Indies, partly to escape his difficulties, partly on account of his health, when a very different prospect revealed itself to him. The night is darkest before the dawn, and dark though Struensee's fortunes were at this moment, the gloom soon vanished in the dawn of a golden future.

Christian VII., with a numerous suite, was then passing through Holstein, preparatory to starting on his prolonged tour in England and France. The King's health was far from strong, and it was [Pg 199] necessary that he should have a physician to accompany him on his travels; for this purpose a young and active man who could adapt himself readily to the King's eccentricities was preferable to the older and staider court physicians, who indeed showed no inclination to undertake the task. Struensee strained every nerve to obtain the post, and was strongly recommended by Rantzau and Madame von Berkentin. The King had heard of the young physician of Altona through Brandt, before the latter had fallen into disgrace. Holck also knew something of him, and said that he would serve. As Holck's slightest recommendation carried weight with the King, Struensee obtained the coveted post, and was appointed travelling physician. On June 6, 1768, he joined the King's suite near Hamburg, and entered at once upon his duties.

Struensee at first did not occupy a prominent place in the King's suite. His profession of itself did not entitle him to be a member of the first three classes who were received at court. His position was a middle one, between the lackeys and those members of the King's suite who ranked as gentlemen, and it must have been uncomfortable. Some little difficulty arose as to with whom he should travel, but he was finally given a seat in the coach of Bernstorff's secretary. Struensee was not a man to be content to remain long in an anomalous position, and he proceeded, very cautiously at first, to make his situation better. As the King's physician he had unique [Pg 200] opportunities, and made the most of them. Christian was a hypochondriac, who imagined himself ill when he was not, and often made himself really ill from his excesses; he loved to talk about his ailments, and Struensee listened with sympathetic deference. The King, who was always wanting to be amused, found the doctor a pleasant companion. He discovered that he could talk on a great many matters besides his profession, that he was widely read, and had a considerable knowledge of philosophy and French literature, in which Christian was genuinely interested. He supplied a void which could not be filled by Holck, who cared nothing for literature or abstruse speculations, and whose tastes were purely material.

The King's suite soon began to remark the pleasure which the King took in conversing with his doctor, but Struensee was so modest, so anxious to please every one, that he did not arouse feelings of jealousy. He was especially careful to avoid political discussions, and never made the slightest allusion to affairs at home. He was also very discreet, and never spoke about his royal master, or his ailments, or made any allusion to the escapades in which the King and his favourites indulged. So far did Struensee carry this caution, that during the King's tour he rarely wrote home to his parents and friends, and when he did, he restricted himself to indifferent topics. His father thought this apparent forgetfulness was because his son had lost his head in [Pg 201] consequence of his good fortune. "I knew," he said to a friend, "that John would not be able to bear the favour of his monarch." But Struensee had intuitively learned the lesson that the word written over the gateway of all kings' palaces is "silence!" His position, though pleasant, was precarious; he was only the travelling physician, and his appointment would come to an end when the King returned home. It was Struensee's object to change this temporary appointment into a permanent one, and from the first moment he entered the King's service he kept this end steadily in view. Struensee had another characteristic, which in the end proved fatal to him, but which at first helped him with both the King and Holck. Side by side with his undoubted brain power, there existed a strong vein of sensuality, and he readily lent himself to pandering to the King's weaknesses in this respect. Struensee had no sense of morality; he was a law unto himself,

and his freethinking views on this and other questions were peculiarly acceptable to his royal master.

Struensee had a certain measure of success in England, and through the King of Denmark's favour, he was invited to many entertainments to which his position would not otherwise have entitled him. His reputation for gallantry was hardly inferior to that of Holck. It is stated that Struensee fell violently in love with an English lady of beauty and fortune, and his passion was returned. He wore her miniature next his heart, and it was found upon him after his death—but [Pg 202] this rests on hearsay. What is certain, during his sojourn in England, is that he received honorary degrees, from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge; and he took riding lessons at Astley's, and became an expert horseman.

Struensee accompanied the King to Paris, and took part in the pleasures of that gay capital. Struensee visited the gallery at Fontainebleau where Queen Christina of Sweden, after her abdication, had her secretary and favourite Monaldeschi murdered, or, as she regarded it, executed. Soon after he returned to Denmark Struensee told his brother that he had been induced to visit the gallery by a dream, in which there appeared before him the vision of an exalted lady whose name he hardly dared to mention. He meant, of course, Queen Matilda. His brother heard him in ominous silence, and Struensee, after waiting some time for an answer, quoted his favourite maxim: "Everything is possible".

In January, 1769, Struensee returned to Altona in the King's suite. The place and time had now come for him to take leave of his royal master, and retire once more into the obscurity of a country doctor—a prospect which, after his sojourn at glittering courts, filled him with dismay. But Bernstorff and Schimmelmann, whose good offices he had assiduously courted during the tour, spoke on his behalf to the King, and Christian appointed Struensee his surgeon-in-ordinary, with a salary of a thousand dollars a year, and as a mark of his royal esteem gave him a further [Pg 203] five hundred dollars. Struensee remained at Altona for a few weeks after the King had left for Copenhagen to sell his house, pay his debts and wind up his affairs. He visited his parents at Schleswig to receive their congratulations and take leave of them. His father shook his head doubtfully over his godless son's rapid rise in the world, and his mother warned him against the perils and temptations of the wicked court. But Struensee, flushed with his success, was in no mood to listen to their croakings. He believed in himself, and he believed in his destiny. "Everything is possible," he said. The desire of his youth was gratified before he had arrived at middle age. He was going to Copenhagen, and what was more, to court; the future was in his own hands.

Struensee arrived at Copenhagen in February, 1769, and at first seemed to occupy himself only with his duties as the King's surgeon-in-ordinary. But all the while he was feeling his way, and every week he strengthened his position with the King. It was not long before Struensee set himself to undermine the influence of Holck. He first frightened the King about the state of his health, and then diplomatically represented to him that the immoderate dissipation, in which he had been in the habit of indulging with Holck, was bad for him, and should be avoided. Struensee did not take a high moral ground; on the contrary, he pointed out that greater pleasure might be [Pg 204] obtained by moderation than by excess. He also counselled the King to occupy himself with public affairs, and so keep his mind from brooding upon his ailments, and to take outdoor exercise. All this advice was good, and the King followed it with manifest benefit to his health. He stayed less indoors, and drove out frequently, accompanied by the Queen, to the chase, until one day the horses got restive and the carriage was overturned, and threw both the King and the Queen on the ground. Fortunately, they both escaped unhurt, but after this incident Christian became nervous and would not hunt any more.

In May, 1769, the King was pleased to show his appreciation of Struensee by making him an actual councillor of state, which admitted the doctor to the third class, or order of rank,[119] and thus permitted him to attend the court festivities. During the summer Christian's health became more feeble, in consequence of his epileptic seizures, and Struensee became resident physician. He made use of this privilege to observe more closely the state of affairs in the royal household, seeking always to turn things to his own benefit. He formed the acquaintance of every member of the household, not despising even the valets, and studied their character and peculiarities. [Pg 205]

[119] To the first class belonged the privy councillors of state, the generals and lieutenant-generals, admirals and vice-admirals, and the Counts of Danneskjold-Samsöe (by reason of birth); to the second class the councillors of conference, major-generals and rear-admirals; and to the third, actual councillors of state, colonels and commanders. These three classes only had the right to attend court.

Struensee found that the conflicting elements at the Danish court might be roughly divided into two parties. The party in the ascendant was that of Holck, or rather of Bernstorff, for Holck took no part in politics. But he was supported by the ministers in power, with Bernstorff at their head, who made use of his influence with the King. Behind Bernstorff again was the power and favour of Russia. The other party was nominally that of the Queen-Dowager, Juliana Maria, and Prince Frederick, the King's brother. This, owing to the unpopularity of the Queen-Dowager, was small, and included chiefly malcontents, who were opposed, either to the policy of the Government, or to the new order of things at court. It was supported, however, by many of the Danish nobility, men of considerable weight and influence in their provinces, and the great body of the clergy, who were a power in the state. In short, it represented the forces of reaction, which had gathered around the Queen-Mother, Sophia Magdalena, before she retired from public affairs. It was also supported by French influence which, since the rise of Bernstorff, had declined in Copenhagen.

Between these two factions stood the reigning Queen. She was neglected by both of them, but, during the spring of 1769, after the King's return, she asserted herself in a way which showed to a shrewd observer like Struensee that she would not always submit to be treated as a nonentity. [Pg 206] The Queen had not yet realised the inherent strength of her position as the wife of the reigning King and the mother of the future one. It was a position which would grow stronger as her husband grew weaker.

Struensee grasped the situation a few months after his arrival in Copenhagen, and with sublime audacity resolved to turn it to his advantage. Neither of the existing parties in the state would ever be likely to give him what he most desired—political power. The party of Bernstorff would help him in little things. If the doctor proved useful to them with the King, he would be rewarded with money, a higher place at court, a decoration, possibly a title. But that would be all. The reactionary party of Juliana Maria would not do so much; they might employ him in their intrigues, but the haughty Danish nobility, who formed its backbone, would never admit a German doctor of obscure birth to terms of equality. But Struensee's soaring ambition knew no bounds. He determined to win both place and power, and to do this he realised that it was necessary to form a new party—that of the Queen.

STRUENSEE.
From an Engraving, 1771.

The material was ready for the moulding. The Queen was opposed to the party in power; she hated Holck and disliked Bernstorff; nor was she any more well-disposed towards the party of Juliana Maria. Matilda was young, beautiful and beloved by the people, who sympathised with her wrongs, and would gladly see her take a more prominent position in the state. [Pg 207] No one knew better than Struensee, the confidential doctor, that Christian VII. would never again be able to exercise direct power. He was a mental and physical wreck, and it was only a question of a year, perhaps only of a few months, before he drifted into imbecility. But in theory, at least, he would still reign, though the government would have to be carried on by others. On whom, then, would the regal authority so properly devolve as upon the Queen, the mother of the future King? The ball was at her feet if she would stoop to pick it up. Matilda had only to assert herself to be invested with the King's absolute power—power which, since she was a young and inexperienced woman, she would surely delegate to other hands. And here the ambitious adventurer saw his opportunity.

There was at first a drawback to Struensee's schemes; the Queen would have nothing to do with him. Matilda was prejudiced against the doctor; he was the King's favourite, and she imagined he was of the same calibre as Holck and the rest of Christian's favourites—a mere panderer to his vicious follies. Shortly after his arrival at Copenhagen, before he grasped the situation at court, Struensee had made a false step. He had sought to intrigue the King with one Madame Gabel, a beautiful and clever woman, who was to play the part of his Egeria—for the benefit of the doctor. But Madame Gabel died suddenly and the plot was foiled. The Queen had heard of this episode [Pg 208] and disliked Struensee accordingly. She ignored him, and for nine months after his arrival at court (from February to October, 1769), he had not the honour of a word with her. But Struensee was by no means daunted by the Queen's dislike of him; he regarded it as an obstacle in the path of his ambition, which like other obstacles would have to be overcome. He waited for an opportunity to dispel her prejudice, and it came with the Queen's illness.

Matilda had reached the point of despair. The court physicians could do nothing with her, she rejected their remedies and turned a deaf ear to all remonstrances. Matters went from bad to worse until the Queen's life was thought to be in danger. As we have seen, the English envoy suggested that George III. should write a private letter of remonstrance to his sister. Whether the suggestion was acted upon or not there is no record to tell, but remonstrance came from another quarter. Christian VII., who had grown into a liking for his wife, became very much alarmed, and at last, perhaps at Struensee's suggestion, commanded that the Queen should see his own private physician, in whom he had great confidence. Matilda refused; all that she knew of the doctor filled her with suspicion and dislike. But the King insisted, and at last she yielded to his commands, and admitted Struensee to her presence. It was the crisis in her destiny.

CHAPTER XIII.

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THE TEMPTER.

1769-1770.

A single interview sufficed to break down the Queen's prejudice against Struensee. His manner was so tactful and deferential; he seemed to be so grieved at her condition, and so anxious to serve her that before he withdrew she was convinced she had misjudged him. He was as skilful as he was sympathetic; the remedies he prescribed took effect almost immediately, and when the doctor again waited on his royal patient he found her better. Struensee's visits were repeated daily, and as Matilda improved in health she was naturally grateful to the physician who wrought this change. She also became attracted by his tact and courtesy, so different from the treatment she met with from Holck and his party. She began to talk to the doctor on general subjects, and discovered that he was an extremely intelligent and well-read man. Struensee flattered himself that he had even more knowledge of the human heart—and especially of the heart of woman—than of medicine. He sought to amuse and distract the Queen, until she looked forward to his visits with pleasure, and every day gave him longer audience than before.

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Struensee was one of those doctors who find out what their patients like to do, and then advise them to do it, and after several conversations with the Queen, he arrived at most of her likes and dislikes. The Queen, having been bred in England, was fond of an outdoor life. In Denmark at that time ladies of rank never went outside their gates except in a carriage, and for them to ride or walk about the streets was unknown. Struensee advised that the Queen should set a precedent, and walk and ride when, and where, she pleased. In pursuance of this advice the Queen, a few days later, to the astonishment of many, was seen walking briskly about the streets of Copenhagen, attended by her ladies. She also rode a great deal, and, though she did not at first appear in public on horseback, she spent hours riding about the park and woods of Frederiksborg. Matilda much enjoyed her new-found freedom, which made a great flutter in all grades of society in Copenhagen. The Danish *Mercury* wrote a poem on the subject of the Queen walking in the town ending with the lines:—

> Thanks, Matilda, thanks for the discovery,
> You've taught healthy women to use their legs.

Struensee also advised the Queen that it was bad for her to remain so much alone. She must have amusement, surround herself with cheerful people and join in the court festivities. He hinted that it was advisable for her to take a more prominent part in these ceremonials, not only because of her health, but because it was incumbent upon her position as the reigning Queen, which, he added discreetly, some people about the court did not seem to respect as they should do. Matilda, who was not very wise, rose to the bait, and before long confided to her physician the mortification and annoyance she suffered from Holck and his following. Struensee listened sympathetically, and told the Queen that though he had not ventured to mention the matter before, he had noticed with amazement and indignation the scant consideration paid to her at her own court. The desire of his heart, he said, was to serve her, and if she would only listen to him, he would improve this state of affairs as surely as he had improved her health. Here the doctor obviously stepped outside his province, but the Queen, far from rebuking him, encouraged him to proceed. Struensee then said deferentially that, since all power and authority came from the King, the Queen would be well advised to court his favour. This advice was not so palatable to Matilda as the other he had given her, especially at this juncture. She could not forget in a moment how cruelly she had been wronged, and she hesitated. Then Struensee changed his note and urged the Queen's own interest. He spoke to her plainly of the King's failing mental powers, and declared that henceforth he must always be ruled by some one. It were better, therefore, that the Queen should rule him than another, for by doing so she would gather the regal power into her own hands and so confound her enemies. The King was anxious to repair the past; it was for the Queen to meet him half-way.

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The Queen suspiciously asked the doctor what was his object in striving to mediate between her and the King. Struensee replied, with every appearance of frankness, that he was studying his own interests quite as much as those of the King and Queen. The King had been pleased to show him especial marks of his favour, and he wished to remain in his present position. He had noticed that all the preceding favourites of the King had striven to promote disunion between Christian and his consort, and they had, one after another, fallen out of favour and been banished from court. Their fate was a warning to him, and an instinct of self-preservation prompted him to bring about a union between the King and Queen, because by so doing he was convinced that he would inevitably strengthen his own position.

After some hesitation Matilda proceeded to act on this advice also, and, short of admitting the King to intimacy, she sought in every way to please him. The King, also prompted by Struensee, responded with alacrity to his wife's overtures, and came to lean upon the Queen more and more. Before long Matilda's influence over her husband became obvious to all. The young Queen delighted in the deference and homage which the time-serving courtiers now rendered to her. Holck's star was on the wane; he still filled the post of Master of the Ceremonies, but it was the Queen who commanded the revels, and changed, or countermanded, Holck's programme as she pleased.

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Struensee was now surely gaining ground. Both the King and the Queen placed their confidence

in him, with the result, as he predicted, that he stood on a firmer footing than any former favourite. The Queen gave him audience every day, and the conversations between them became more intimate and more prolonged. There was nothing, however, at first to show that the Queen had anything more than a liking for the clever doctor, whose society amused and interested her, and whose zeal in her service was apparently heart-whole. Everything so far had succeeded exactly as Struensee foretold, and the vision of future happiness and power, which he portrayed in eloquent terms, dazzled the young Queen's imagination, while his homage and devotion flattered her vanity.

Struensee's appearance and manner were such as to impress any woman. He was thirty-two years of age, tall and broad shouldered, and in the full strength of manhood. Though not really handsome, he appeared to be so in a dashing way, and he made the most of all his points and dressed with consummate taste. He had light brown hair, flashing eyes, an aquiline nose and a high forehead. He carried himself well, and there was about him a suggestion of reserved strength, both mental and physical. His manner to the Queen was a combination of deference and easy assurance, which pleased her mightily. By the end of January, 1770, the Queen no longer [Pg 214] needed medical advice, but she required Struensee's services in other ways, and the more she saw of him the more she became attracted to him. Soon a further mark of the royal favour was shown to the doctor, and a handsome suite of rooms was given him in the Christiansborg Palace.

Holck was the first to take alarm at the growing influence of the new favourite, and came to regard him as a rival who would ultimately drive him from court. Struensee looked upon Holck with contempt, and was indifferent whether he went or stayed. But the Queen insisted that he must go at the first opportunity, and Struensee promised that her wishes should be obeyed in this, as in all things—in a little time. Holck confided his fears to Bernstorff, warned him that the doctor was playing for high stakes, and advised him to remove Struensee from the King's person before it was too late. To the aristocratic Bernstorff, however, it seemed impossible that a man of the doctor's birth and antecedents could be any real danger, and he laughed at Holck's warning. This is the more surprising, as both the Russian and English envoys spoke to the Prime Minister about the sudden rise of Struensee, and advised him to watch it well. The Russian minister, Filosofow, went further, and presumed to make some remarks to the King on the subject, which Christian ignored at the time, but afterwards repeated to Struensee and the Queen.

This interference on the part of Filosofow was no new thing. For some years the Russian envoy [Pg 215] had practically dictated to the Danish King whom he should appoint and whom he should dismiss from his service. He even presumed to meddle in the private affairs of the Danish court, no doubt at the instigation of his mistress, Catherine the Great. The Danish King and Government submitted to this bondage until the treaty was signed, by which Russia exchanged her claims on Schleswig-Holstein for the counties of Oldenburg and Delmenhorst. As this exchange was eagerly desired by Denmark, the mere threat of stopping it threw the King and his ministers into alarm, and made Russia mistress of the situation. Curiously enough Filosofow, who was a very astute diplomatist, did not realise the changed state of affairs, and continued to dictate to the King as before. The haughty Russian did not consider Struensee to be of any account from a political point of view, but personally he objected to meeting him on terms of equality. He had also, it was said, a grievance against Struensee, because he had outrivalled him in the affections of a beautiful lady of the Danish court. For some time he fretted at the royal favour shown to the upstart doctor, and at last he showed his contempt for him by a public act of insolence.

It chanced in this wise. Wishing to conciliate the Danish monarch, Filosofow gave a splendid entertainment to the King and Queen at the Russian embassy. It consisted of an Italian opera, composed for the occasion, and performed by persons of fashion about the court,[120] [Pg 216] and was followed by a banquet. Struensee, who was now invited to the court entertainments, as a member of the third class, was present, and so marked was the favour shown him by the King and Queen that he was admitted to the box where the royal personages were. Filosofow, in his capacity of host, was also in the box, and he was so much irritated at the presence of the doctor that he showed his disgust by spitting on his coat. Struensee, with great self-control, treated the insult as though it were an accident, wiped his coat, and said nothing. Filosofow immediately insulted him again in the same way. This time the action was so unmistakable that Struensee withdrew from the royal box, and later demanded satisfaction of Filosofow. The Russian treated the challenge with contempt. He said that in his country an ambassador did not fight a duel with a common doctor, but he would take his revenge in another way, and give him a sound thrashing with his cane. Whether he carried out his threat is uncertain, but it is certain that Struensee never forgave the insult. The Queen also resented the flouting of her favourite, and, despite the attempted mediation of Bernstorff, she ignored Filosofow at court, and spoke with dislike of him and his mistress, the Empress Catherine, who, she thought, was responsible for her envoy's meddlesome policy. A few months before it would have mattered little what the Queen thought, [Pg 217] or did not think, but now her influence with the King was growing every day.

[120] *Vide* Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, March 31, 1770. *Ibid.*, April 24, 1770.

Eventually Filosofow had to retire from Copenhagen and give place to another, but that was not yet. At this time he again warned Bernstorff that his days of power were numbered, unless he forthwith took steps to get Struensee removed from court. In this the envoy proved more far-sighted than the minister, for Bernstorff still considered it an incredible thing that his position could be seriously threatened. Yet within a month of the Russian's warning the extraordinary favour which Struensee enjoyed with the King and Queen was further demonstrated.

The small-pox raged in Denmark in the spring of this year, 1770, and in Copenhagen alone twelve

hundred children died of it. Struensee advised that the Crown Prince should be inoculated as a prevention. Inoculation had lately been introduced into Denmark, and Struensee's suggestion was met with a storm of protest from some of the nobility, all the clergy and many of the doctors. Despite this Struensee carried his point; he inoculated the Crown Prince and watched over him in the brief illness that followed. Matilda herself nursed her son, and would not leave his bedside day or night. Her presence in the sick-room threw the Queen and the doctor continually together. Struensee was justified of his wisdom, for the Crown Prince not only escaped the small-pox, but soon rallied from the inoculation which it had been freely prophesied would cause his death. The [Pg 218] doctor was rewarded with signal marks of the royal favour; he was given the title of Conferenzrath, or Councillor of Conference, which elevated him to the second class, and was appointed reader to the King, *lecteur du roi*, and private secretary to the Queen, with a salary of three thousand dollars. Ministers were amazed at the sudden elevation of the favourite, and began to ask themselves whither all this was tending.

Step by step as Struensee rose in honour Matilda gained in power. It was now apparent to all about the court that the Queen, and not the King, was the real ruler of Denmark. The Queen's ascendency over her consort was so great that he did nothing without her approval. She in turn was guided by Struensee; but, whereas the Queen's authority was seen by all, Struensee's power at this time was only guessed at. His plans were not matured. The prize was within his grasp, but he was careful not to snatch at it too soon lest he should lose it altogether. Struensee now accompanied the King and Queen wherever they went, and, since his elevation to the second rank, dined at the royal table. Bernstorff seems to have thought that these privileges were all that Struensee cared about, and given money, a title and social position the doctor would be content, like Holck, with the royal favour, and leave politics alone. He little knew that Struensee in his heart despised these things; they were to him merely the means to an end, and that end was power. In his pursuit of power Struensee swept every consideration aside. Honour, duty and [Pg 219] gratitude were nothing to him provided he gained his desire. In his belief in his destiny, his great abilities, his soaring ambition and complete heedlessness of every one save himself, this extraordinary man was a type of the *uebermensch*.

Struensee's treatment of the Queen was an example of his utter unscrupulousness. Her condition when he came to court would have moved any man to pity. Her youth, her beauty and her friendlessness appealed to every sentiment of chivalry. The conditions under which Struensee made her acquaintance were the most intimate and delicate. He quickly gained her confidence; she trusted him from the first, and showed her gratitude by heaping favours upon him. Everything that came to Struensee in the next few years—honour, place and power—he owed to the Queen, and to her alone. Common gratitude, apart from any other consideration, should have led him to treat her honourably, but from the beginning he was false to her. He who came in the guise of a deliverer was really her evil genius. The young Queen was never anything to him but a means to an end. Adventurer and intriguer as he was, Struensee had marked Matilda down as his prey before he was admitted to her presence, and she fell an easy victim to his wiles. He made use of her as a shield, behind which he could work in safety. She was to be the buffer between him and his enemies; she was to be the ladder by which he would rise in power. To this end he [Pg 220] tempted her with consummate art. He was first her confidential physician, then her devoted servant, then her friend and counsellor, and then her lover. This last phase was necessary to the success of his plans, and he deliberately lured his victim to her ruin in order that he might gain absolute mastery over her. Struensee gradually acquired over the Queen an almost mesmeric power, and she became so completely under his influence that she obeyed his wishes like an automaton. But it did not need hypnotism to cause a woman so tempted, so beset on every side as Matilda was, to fall. She had inherited from her father an amorous, pleasure-loving nature; she was of a warm, affectionate disposition, which had been driven back on itself by her husband's cruelty and infidelities. Now, it was true, the King was anxious to make amends, but it was too late. Christian had greatly changed in appearance during the last year. Though little over twenty, he already looked like an old man, very thin, with sharp, drawn features and dead-looking eyes. Matilda, on the contrary, was in the full flood of womanhood; her blood flowed warmly in her veins, yet she was tied to a husband who, from his excesses, was ruined mentally and physically, and she was tempted by a lover in the full strength of his manhood, a lover who was both ardent and masterful, and whose strength of will broke down all her defences as though they had been built of cards. Moreover, her environment was bad—as bad as it could be. The atmosphere of the [Pg 221] court was one of undisguised immorality; the marriage tie was openly mocked at and derided. The King had often told her to go her own way and let him go his, and now so far from showing any signs of jealousy, he seemed to take a delight in watching the growth of the intimacy between his wife and the confidential physician. He was always sending Struensee to the Queen's chamber on some pretext or another, and the more Matilda showed her liking for Struensee's society the more the King seemed to be pleased. That clever devil, opportunity, was all on Struensee's side.

The Queen had no safeguards against temptation but those which arose from the promptings of her own conscience. That she did not yield without a struggle, that the inward conflict was sharp and bitter, there is evidence to prove.

O keep me innocent, make others great!

was the pathetic prayer she wrote on the window of the chapel of Frederiksborg[121] at a time, when in the corridors and ante-chambers of the palace Struensee was plotting his tortuous intrigues, all of which started from the central point of his relations with the Queen. It was he

who wished to be great, she who was to make him great, and to this end he demanded the sacrifice of her innocence. The poor young Queen knew her peril, but she was like a bird [Pg 222] fascinated by a snake. She fluttered a little, helplessly, and then fell.

[121] This window, with the Queen's writing cut with a diamond on a pane of glass, was destroyed by the great fire at Frederiksborg in 1859.

The struggle was prolonged for some months, but the end was certain from the first. It was probably during the spring of 1770 that the flood of passion broke the Queen's last barriers down. Her enemies afterwards declared that she entered on this fatal dalliance about the time of the Crown Prince's illness. Certain it is that after Struensee had been appointed her private secretary, a marked change took place in Matilda's manner and bearing. She is no longer a pathetic figure of wronged and youthful innocence, but appears as a beautiful and self-willed woman who is dominated by a great passion. There were no half measures about Matilda; her love for Struensee was the one supreme love of her life; it was a love so unselfish and all-absorbing, so complete in its abandonment, that it wrung reluctant admiration even from those who blamed it most.

Once the Rubicon crossed, reserve, discretion, even ordinary prudence, were thrown to the winds. Struensee's object seems to have been to compromise the Queen as much as possible, so that she could not draw back. He was always with her, and she granted him privileges which, as Reverdil says, "would have ruined the reputation of any ordinary woman," though it has been pleaded, on the other hand, that her indifference to appearances was a proof of her innocence. The Queen and her favourite were inseparable; he was admitted to her apartments at all hours; [Pg 223] she took solitary walks with him in the gardens and woods, and she frequently drove and rode out alone with him; at balls and masquerades, at the theatre and the opera, he was always by her side; and in public and at court she followed him with her eyes, and did not attempt to disguise the predilection she had for him.

The Queen had no one to remonstrate with her, or guard her from the consequences of her imprudence. It was thought by some that the first use Matilda would make of her new-found power would be to recall Madame de Plessen, whose dismissal against her will she had bitterly lamented. It would have been well for her if she had done so, for Madame de Plessen would have saved her from herself. But if the idea crossed her mind, Struensee would not permit it, for he well knew that the presence of this strict duenna would be fatal to his plans. Madame von der Lühe, Madame de Plessen's successor, though she shook her head in private, did not venture to remonstrate with her mistress; her position, she felt, was insecure, and she thought to strengthen it by compliance with the Queen's whims. The maid of honour, Fräulein von Eyben, and some of the inferior women of the Queen's household, secretly spied on their mistress, set traps for her, and generally sought occasion to harm her. But their opportunity was not yet, for the Queen was all-powerful. Matilda had always found the stiff etiquette of the Danish court wearisome; at Struensee's advice she abolished it altogether in private, and dispensed with the attendance of [Pg 224] her ladies, except in public. This enabled her to see the doctor for hours alone—not that she made any secret of these interviews. On the contrary, she talked quite freely to her ladies about her friendship with Struensee, and accounted for her preference by declaring that she owed him a debt of gratitude for all he had done, and was doing, for her. He always took her part; she said, "he had much sense and a good heart". And it must be admitted he had apparently rendered her service; her health was re-established, and her life was fuller and happier. No longer was she slighted and set aside; she reigned supreme at her court, and all, even her former enemies, sought to win her smiles.

The Queen's relations with the King were now uniformly friendly, and he seemed quite content to leave authority in her hands. In return she strove to humour him, and even stooped to gratify some of his most absurd whims. It has already been stated that the imbecile Christian had a weakness for seeing women in men's attire; "Catherine of the Gaiters" captivated him most when she donned the uniform of an officer in his service, and the complaisance of the former mistress on this point was at least explicable. But Matilda was his wife and not his mistress, his Queen and not his fancy of an hour, yet she did not hesitate to array herself in male attire to please her husband, at the suggestion of her lover. It may be, too, that she wished to imitate in this, as in other things, the Empress of Russia, Catherine the Great, who frequently wore uniforms and rode [Pg 225] *en homme*. However this may be, Matilda adopted a riding-habit made like that of a man, and rode astride. The Queen often went out hunting with Struensee, or rode by his side through the city, in this extraordinary attire. She wore a dove-colour beaver hat with a deep gold band and tassels, a long scarlet coat, faced with gold, a buff, gold-laced waistcoat, a frilled shirt with a lace kerchief, buckskin small-clothes and spurs. She had other riding-habits of different designs, but this was the one in which she most frequently appeared in public. She was always splendidly mounted and rode fearlessly. On horseback she looked a Diana, but when she dismounted she did not appear to the same advantage, for the riding-habit made her seem shorter than she really was, and she already showed a tendency to stoutness, which the small-clothes did not minimise. The Queen, however, was so enamoured of her male attire that she frequently walked about the palace all day in it, to the offence of many and the derision of others.[122]

[122] The Queen set the fashion to ride in male attire, and it soon became the custom among the ladies of Copenhagen. Keith wrote a year later: "An abominable riding-habit, with black slouched hat, has been almost universally introduced here, which gives every woman an air of an awkward postilion, and all the time I have been in Denmark I have never seen the Queen out in any other garb".—*Memoirs.*

The adoption of this riding-habit greatly tended to lessen the Queen's popularity, while her

intimacy with Struensee before long caused it to disappear altogether. The staider and more respectable portion of the community were ready to believe any evil of a woman who went out riding like a man, and the clergy in particular were horrified; but acting on Struensee's advice, the Queen never troubled to conciliate the clergy. This was a great mistake in a puritanical country like Denmark, where the Church had great power, if not in the immediate circle of the court, at least among the upper and middle classes. Even the semi-barbarous Danish nobility were disgusted. That the young and beautiful Queen should have a favourite was perhaps, under the circumstances, only to be expected; if he had been one of their own order, the weakness would have been excused. But that she should stoop to a man of *bourgeois* origin, a mere doctor, who was regarded by the haughty nobles as little above the level of a menial, was a thing which admitted of no palliation.[123] But the Queen, blinded by her passion, was indifferent to praise or blame, and Struensee took a delight in demonstrating his power over her under their very eyes. It was the favourite's mean revenge for the insults he had suffered from these nobles.

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[123] Even Frederick the Great (who was very broad-minded) wrote: "L'acces que le médecin eut à la cour lui fit gagner imperceptiblement plus d'ascendant sur l'esprit de la reine qu'il n'etoit convenable à un homme de cette extraction".

QUEEN SOPHIA MAGDALENA, GRANDMOTHER OF CHRISTIAN VII.

At the end of May, 1770, the old Queen Sophia Magdalena died at the palace of Christiansborg. For the last few years of her life she had lived in strict retirement, and had long ceased to exercise any influence over her grandson, the King, in political affairs. The aged widow of Christian VI. was much reverenced by the conservative party in Denmark, and they complained that the court treated her memory with disrespect. One incident in particular moved them to deep indignation, and, if true, it showed how greatly Matilda had deteriorated under the influence of her favourite. The body of Sophia Magdalena was embalmed, and lay in state for some days in the palace of Christiansborg. The public was admitted, and a great number of people of all classes and ages, clad in mourning, availed themselves of this opportunity of paying honour to the dead Queen. It was stated in Copenhagen by Matilda's enemies that she showed her lack of good-feeling by passing through the mourners in the room where the Queen-Mother lay in state, leaning on the arm of Struensee, and clad in the riding-habit which had excited the reprobation of Sophia Magdalena's adherents. This story was probably a malicious invention,[124]

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but it is certain that the court mourning for the venerable Queen-Mother was limited to the shortest possible period, and the King and Queen a few days after her death removed to Frederiksborg, where they lived in the same manner as before. Neither the King nor the Queen attended the public funeral at Röskilde, where the kings and queens of Denmark were buried, and Prince Frederick went as chief mourner. Rightly or wrongly, the reigning Queen was blamed for all this.

[124] It rests on the authority of Wittich (*Struensee*, by K. Wittich, 1879), who is bitterly hostile to Queen Matilda.

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CHAPTER XIV.

THE QUEEN'S FOLLY.

1770.

Struensee, who was now sure of his position with the King and Queen, resolved to carry out his plans, and obtain the object of his ambition—political power. In order to gain this it was necessary that the ministers holding office should one by one be removed, and the back of the Russian party in Copenhagen be broken. The Queen was quite agreeable to every change that Struensee suggested; she only stipulated that her detested enemy, Holck, should go first, and his friends at court follow. Struensee agreed, but in these matters it was necessary to move with great caution, and await a favourable opportunity to strike. Quite unwittingly Holck played into his enemies' hands; the great thing, as either party knew well, was to gain possession of the King, who would sign any paper laid before him. A page, named Warnstedt, who was always about the person of the King, was Struensee's friend, and Holck therefore resolved to get rid of him and appoint a creature of his own. He thought he could best effect this by taking the King away from his present surroundings, and he therefore proposed to Christian that he should make [Pg 229] another tour through the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. The King agreed, and Holck was jubilant, for he knew that if he could only get the King to himself the power of Struensee would be shaken. To his dismay, the Queen announced that she intended to accompany her husband. She was anxious, she said, to see the duchies, and had no intention of being left behind again. Notwithstanding the difficulties which Holck raised, the King offered no objection, and even expressed pleasure that his Queen would accompany him. The Queen's going meant, of course, that her favourite would go too. Struensee hailed the prospect of the tour; he had long been wishing to get the King and Queen away from the capital in order that he might better effect the changes he had in contemplation.

The preparations for the tour were pushed on apace. The King and Queen were to be attended by a numerous suite. Holck, Struensee and Warnstedt were to be in attendance, and all the ladies of the Queen's household. Of ministers only Bernstorff, the Prime Minister, was to accompany them, and the same council of three, Thott, Moltke and Rosenkrantz, who had managed public business at Copenhagen during the King's former tour, were to conduct it again, but under limitations. They received express orders from the King not to have any transactions with foreign envoys during his absence, and if any matter of urgency occurred they were to communicate with him in [Pg 230] writing before deciding on any plan of action. These instructions were, of course, dictated to the King by Struensee. Bernstorff was astonished and indignant when he heard of them, for he guessed the quarter whence they came. He began to fear that his position was threatened, and, too late, regretted that he had not taken the repeated advice of his friends and removed Struensee while there was time. He knew, though the English influence was on his side, that he had nothing to hope from the Queen; he had offended her past forgiveness by insisting on the dismissal of Madame de Plessen, and by wishing to exclude her from the regency. He started on the tour with great misgivings. But he had been in office so long that even now he could not imagine the government of the kingdom going on without him, forgetting that no man is indispensable.

On June 20, 1770, the royal party arrived at Gottorp Castle in Schleswig, an ancient and unpretending edifice on the edge of a lake, which was then occupied by Prince Charles of Hesse, whom the King had appointed Viceroy of the Duchies. The Viceroy and his wife, Princess Louise, drove out a league from Gottorp to meet the King and Queen, and their greetings were most cordial, especially those between Matilda and her sister-in-law. The King, too, was very friendly, though Prince Charles saw a great change in him. He seemed to rally his failing powers a little at Gottorp.

Prince Charles noticed with amazement how great a power Struensee had acquired; it was the [Pg 231] first time he had seen the favourite, and he took a strong dislike to him, which, perhaps, coloured the description he gave of the visit. "After an hour's conversation," writes Prince Charles [on arriving at Gottorp], "in which we recalled past times, the Queen took me by the arm and said: 'Now, escort me to Princess Louise's apartments, but do not take me through the ante-chamber'—where the suite were assembled. We almost ran along the corridor to the side door by the staircase, and then we saw some of the suite coming downstairs. The Queen espied Struensee among them, and said hastily: 'I must go back; do not keep me!' I replied that I could not well leave her Majesty alone in the passage. 'No! no!' she cried, 'go to the Princess,' and she fled down the corridor." [Struensee had probably forbidden the Queen to talk to the Princess alone.] "I was much astonished, but I obeyed her commands. She was always ill at ease with me when Struensee was present; at table he invariably seated himself opposite to her."[125]

[125] *Mémoires de mon Temps.*

Prince Charles and his wife noted with great regret the change in the Queen; they remembered that she was only eighteen, they made allowance for her good heart and her lively spirits, but even so they grieved to see her forget her self-respect, and indulge in amusements which hurt her reputation. They ascribed this change to the pernicious influence of Struensee. She seemed [Pg 232] frightened of him, and trembled, when he spoke to her, like a bird, ensnared. Frequently he so far forgot himself as to treat her with scant respect. For instance, Prince Charles writes: "The King's dinner was dull. The Queen afterwards played at cards. I was placed on her right, Struensee on her left; Brandt, a new arrival, and Warnstedt, a chamberlain, completed the party.

I hardly like to describe Struensee's behaviour to the Queen, or repeat the remarks he dared address to her openly, while he leant his arm on the table close to her. 'Well, why don't you play?' 'Can't you hear?' and so forth. I confess my heart was grieved to see this Princess, endowed with so much sense and so many good qualities, fallen to such a point and into hands so bad."[126]

[126] *Mémoires de mon Temps.*

While the King and Queen were at Gottorp Struensee carried out the first of his changes, and recalled Brandt to court. Brandt, it will be remembered, had been banished from Copenhagen, and even from the country, at the suggestion of Holck. He had sought to regain the King's favour when he was in Paris, but again Holck intervened, and he failed. He was formerly a friend of the Queen, which was one of the reasons why Holck got rid of him, and he was also a friend of Struensee, who had often, in his obscure days, visited at the house of Brandt's stepfather. Struensee had, moreover, helped him in Paris. Brandt had recently been so far restored to favour [Pg 233] as to be given a small appointment in Oldenburg, but no one expected that he would be recalled to court, and Holck was astonished and dismayed when Brandt suddenly appeared at Gottorp and was nominated a chamberlain by the King. Brandt noticed his enemy's dismay, and said: "*Monsieur le Comte*, you look as if you had seen a spectre. Are you afraid?" To which Holck bitterly replied: "Oh no, *Monsieur le Chambellan*, it is not the spectre I fear, but his return".

Matilda was unwell during her stay at Gottorp, and her indisposition caused the court to remain there longer than had been intended. Struensee saw Prince Charles's dislike of him, and was uneasy lest he should gain an influence over the King. The silent condemnation of the Viceroy made him impatient to be gone, and directly the Queen was sufficiently recovered to travel she and the King set out for Traventhal, a small royal castle in Holstein. This move furnished the opportunity of getting rid of Holck and his following. The excuse put forward was that Traventhal was not large enough to accommodate so numerous a suite, and therefore Count Holck and his wife, his sister, Madame von der Lühe, and her husband, Councillor Holstein, Chamberlain Luttichau, Gustavus Holck, a page, Fräulein von Eyben, and two more of the Queen's maids of honour, were ordered to go back to Copenhagen. All these people were either related to Holck, or appointed through his influence, and on their return to the capital they learned that they were [Pg 234] dismissed from office. Holck, perhaps in consideration of the fact that he had once befriended Struensee, was granted a pension of two thousand dollars, the others received nothing.

Bernstorff, who went with the King and Queen to Traventhal, as minister in attendance, was not consulted concerning these dismissals, or in anything about the court. Woodford, the English minister of Lower Saxony, then at Hamburg, writes: "Mr. Bernstorff and the ministers appear to be entirely ignorant of these little arrangements, the royal confidence running in quite another direction".[127] And again: "With regard to the court's movements at Traventhal, nothing is known, for everything is kept a secret from those who, by their employments, ought to be informed".[128] The Prime Minister, Bernstorff, was rarely allowed to see the King, for Brandt, who had now stepped into Holck's vacant place, was always with his master, and made it his business to guard him against any influence that might be hostile to Struensee's plans. Holck's sudden dismissal filled Bernstorff with apprehension, which was increased by an important move which Struensee took soon after the arrival of the court at Traventhal—a move destined to exercise great influence on the future of both the favourite and the Queen. This was the recall to court of the notorious anti-Russian, Count Rantzau Ascheberg.

[127] Woodford's despatch to Lord Rochford, Hamburg, July 13, 1770.

[128] *Ibid.*, July 17, 1770.

Schack Karl, Count zu Rantzau Ascheberg, whom for short we shall call Count Rantzau, had [Pg 235] succeeded (on his father's death in 1769) to vast estates in Holstein. Gunning, the English envoy, thus wrote of him:—

> "Count Rantzau is a son of the minister of that name who formerly spent some years at our court. He received some part of his education at Westminster School. His family is the first in Denmark. He is a man of ruined fortunes. It would be difficult to exhibit a character more profligate and abandoned. There are said to be few enormities of which he has not been guilty, and scarcely any place where he has not acted a vicious part. Rashness and revenge form very striking features in his character. With these qualities he possesses great imagination, vivacity and wit. He is most abundantly fertile in schemes and projects, which he forms one day and either forgets or ridicules the next. He would be a very dangerous man did not his great indiscretion put it into the power of his enemies to render many of his most mischievous designs abortive."[129]

[129] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, April 4, 1771.

Rantzau had led an adventurous and dishonourable career. In his youth he had been a chamberlain at the Danish court, and had served in the army, eventually rising to the rank of major-general. In consequence of a court plot, he was banished from Copenhagen in 1752. He then entered the French army, but in Paris he became enamoured of an opera singer and [Pg 236] resigned his commission to follow her about Europe. This part of his career, which occupied nearly ten years, was shrouded in mystery, but it was known that during it Rantzau had many scandalous adventures. Sometimes he travelled with all the luxury befitting his rank and station, at others he was at his wits' end for money. At one time he lived at Rome, habited as a monk, and at another he travelled *incognito* with a troupe of actors. He had absolutely no scruples, and seemed to be a criminal by nature. He was tried in Sicily for swindling, and only escaped

imprisonment through the influence brought to bear on his judges. At Naples there was an ugly scandal of another nature, but the French envoy intervened, and saved him from punishment, in consideration of his birth and rank. In Genoa he got into trouble through drawing a bill on his father, whom he falsely described as the “Viceroy of Norway,” but his father repudiated the bill, as he had already repudiated his son, and again Rantzau narrowly escaped gaol. With such a record Keith was certainly justified in saying of him: “Count Rantzau would, ... if he had lived within reach of Justice Fielding, have furnished matter for an Old Bailey trial any one year of the last twenty of his life”.[130]

[130] *Memoirs and Correspondence of Sir R. Murray Keith.*

In 1761, after the death of the Empress Elizabeth, when a war seemed imminent between Russia and Denmark, Rantzau, who wished to be on the stronger side, went to St. Petersburg and offered his services to Peter III., as a Holstein nobleman who owed allegiance to Russia rather [Pg 237] than to Denmark. But even the sottish Tsar knew what manner of man the Holsteiner was, and rejected his offer with contumely. In revenge, Rantzau went over to Catherine and the Orloffs, and was involved in the conspiracy which resulted in the deposition and assassination of Peter III. When Catherine the Great was firmly seated upon the Russian throne she had no further need of Rantzau, and instead of rewarding him, ignored him. Rantzau therefore left St. Petersburg and returned to Holstein, a sworn foe of the Empress and eager for revenge on her. It was during this sojourn in Holstein that his acquaintance with Struensee began, and, as at this time Rantzau could get no help from his father, Struensee is said to have lent him money to go to Copenhagen, whither he went to regain his lost favour at the Danish court. In this he was foiled by the influence of the Russian envoy Filosofow, who was then all-powerful, and Rantzau was forced to return again to Holstein, where he remained until his father’s death in 1769—the year before the King and Queen came to Holstein on their tour.

Rantzau should now have been a rich man, for in addition to the property he inherited from his father, he had married an heiress, the daughter of his uncle, Count Rantzau Oppendorft, by which marriage the estates of the two branches of the family were united. But Rantzau was crippled with debt, and on succeeding to his inheritance he continued to live a reckless, dissipated life, and indulged in great extravagance. On the other hand, he was a good landlord to [Pg 238] his people, and they did whatever he wished. On account of his ancient name, vast estates and the devotion of his peasantry, Rantzau had much influence in Holstein, which he persistently used against Russia.

Rantzau and Struensee had not forgotten their covenant of years ago, that if either attained power he should help the other. Even if Struensee had been inclined to forget it, Rantzau would have reminded him, but Filosofow’s public insult made Struensee determined to break the power of Russia in Denmark, and in Rantzau he found a weapon ready to his hand. He determined to recall Rantzau to court, because he knew that he, of all others, was most disliked by the Empress of Russia. Therefore, when the King and Queen arrived at Traventhal, Struensee wrote to Rantzau and asked him to come and pay his respects to their Majesties. Rantzau was admitted to audience of the King and Queen, who both received him very graciously. Rantzau was the most considerable noble in Holstein, and moreover, any favour shown to him would demonstrate that the Danish court would no longer brook the dictation of Russia in domestic matters. Therefore, when Rantzau, prompted by Struensee, prayed the King and Queen to honour him with a visit to his castle at Ascheberg, they at once consented. Attended by Struensee and Brandt they drove over from Traventhal and spent several days at Ascheberg.

Rantzau entertained his royal guests with lavish magnificence, and, favoured by brilliant [Pg 239] weather, the visit was a great success. There was a masque of flowers one day, there were rustic sports another, there was a hunting party on a third, and banquets every evening. The Queen took the first place at all the festivities (the King had ceased to be of account), and the splendour of her entertainment at Ascheberg recalled Elizabeth’s famous visit to Leicester at Kenilworth. Though Rantzau was fifty-three years of age, he was still a very handsome man, a born courtier, an exquisite beau, and skilled in all the arts of pleasing women. Had he been ten years younger he might have tried to eclipse Struensee in the Queen’s favour, but he was a cynical and shrewd observer, and saw that any such attempt was foredoomed to failure, so he contented himself with offering the most flattering homage to the young Queen. As a return for his sumptuous hospitality, Matilda gave Rantzau her husband’s gold snuff-box set with diamonds, which Christian had bought in London for one thousand guineas, and as a further mark of her favour, the Queen presented colours to the regiment at Glückstadt, commanded by Rantzau, of which she became honorary colonel. The presentation of these colours was made the occasion of a military pageant, and the court painter, Als, received commands to paint the Queen in her uniform as colonel. This picture was presented to Rantzau as a souvenir.

The royal favours heaped upon Rantzau filled the Russian party with dismay. The visit to [Pg 240] Ascheberg had a political significance, which was emphasised by the Queen’s known resentment of Russian dictation. One of the Russian envoys, Saldern, had brought about the dismissal of her chief lady-in-waiting; another, Filosofow, had publicly affronted her favourite. The Queen neither forgot nor forgave. Woodford writes at this time: “Her Danish Majesty, formerly piqued at M. de Saldern’s conduct, and condescending at present to show little management for the Russian party, they are using every indirect influence to keep themselves in place”.[131]

[131] Woodford’s despatch to Lord Rochford, Hamburg, July 20, 1770.

The defeat of the Russian party would involve necessarily the fall of Bernstorff, who, more than any other Danish minister, had identified himself with Russia. He was greatly perturbed at the

visit to Ascheberg, which had been undertaken without consulting him. After the King and Queen returned to Traventhal the Prime Minister was treated even more rudely than before; he was no longer honoured with the royal invitation to dinner, but had to eat his meals in his own room, while Struensee and his creatures revelled below. The object of these slights was to force Bernstorff to resign, but he still clung to office, and strove by all possible means to mitigate the anti-Russian policy of the Queen and her advisers. To obtain private audience of the King was impossible, though he was living under the same roof. Bernstorff therefore drew up a [Pg 241] memorandum, addressed to the King, in which he forcibly pointed out the displeasure with which Russia would view Rantzau's appointment to any office, not only because of his well-known opposition to the territorial exchange, but because he was personally objectionable to the Empress, who would resent his promotion as an insult. Bernstorff's memorandum was read by Struensee and the Queen, and though it made no difference to their policy, yet, as Struensee did not wish to imperil the exchange, he made Rantzau promise not to meddle further in this matter. [132] Rantzau gave the required promise, which was duly communicated to Bernstorff, and with this negative assurance he had to be content.

[132] Though the treaty was signed in 1768, the actual exchange of territory between Russia and Denmark was not carried out until some years later. The original understanding was that it should wait until the Grand Duke Paul attained his majority and gave it his sanction.

The King and Queen remained at Traventhal nearly a month in seclusion. The Queen was left without any of her ladies, and nearly the whole of the King's suite had gone too. Except for Bernstorff, who was kept that Struensee might have an eye on him, the King and Queen were surrounded only by the favourite and his creatures. At Traventhal Struensee was very busy maturing his plans. In concert with Rantzau and General Gahler, an officer of some eminence who had been given a post in the royal household, Struensee discussed the steps that were to be [Pg 242] taken for overthrowing Bernstorff and the other ministers, and reforming the administration. There is nothing to show that the Queen took a leading part in these discussions, though she was of course consulted as a matter of form. Unlike her mother, the Princess-Dowager of Wales, or her grandmother, the illustrious Caroline, Matilda cared nothing for politics for their own sake, but she liked to have the semblance of power, and was jealous of her privileges as the reigning Queen. When she had a personal grievance against a minister, as against Bernstorff, she wished him removed, and when she was thwarted by a foreign influence, as in the case of Russia, she wished that influence broken; but otherwise it was a matter of indifference to her who filled the chief offices of state, or whether France or Russia reigned supreme at Copenhagen. Her good heart made her keenly solicitous for the welfare of her people, and some of the social reforms carried out by Struensee may have had their origin with the Queen; but for affairs of state in the larger sense Matilda cared nothing, and she lent herself blindly to abetting Struensee's policy in all things. In complete abandonment she placed her hands beneath his feet and let him do with her as he would. Her birth as Princess of Great Britain, her rank as Queen of Denmark and Norway, her beauty, her talents, her popularity, were valued by her only as means whereby she might advance Struensee and his schemes.

Rumours of the amazing state of affairs at the Danish court reached England in the spring of [Pg 243] 1770, and before long George III. and the Princess-Dowager of Wales were acquainted with the sudden rise of Struensee, and the extraordinary favour shown to him by the Queen. They also heard of the check which Russia had received at Copenhagen, and the probability of Bernstorff (who was regarded as the friend of England) being hurled from power to make room for the ambitious adventurer. Too late George III. may have felt a twinge of remorse for having married his sister against her will to a profligate and foolish prince, and sent her, without a friend in the world, to encounter the perils and temptations of a strange court in a far-off land. Moreover, the political object for which Matilda had been sacrificed had signally failed. The marriage had in no way advanced English interests in the north. Russia and France had benefited by it, but England not at all. Now there seemed a probability that, with the fall of the Russian influence at Copenhagen, France, the enemy of England, would again be in the ascendant there. Both personal and political reasons therefore made it desirable that some remonstrance should be addressed to the Queen of Denmark by her brother of England. The matter was of too delicate and difficult a nature to be dealt with satisfactorily by letter, and there was the fear that Struensee might intercept the King's letter to the Queen. Even if he did not venture thus far, he would be sure to learn its contents and seek to counteract its influence. In this difficulty George [Pg 244] III. took counsel with his mother, with the result that on June 9, 1770, the Dowager-Princess of Wales set out from Carlton House for the Continent. It was announced that she was going to pay a visit to her daughter Augusta, Hereditary Princess of Brunswick.

Royal journeys were not very frequent in these days, and as this was the first time the Princess-Dowager had quitted England since her marriage many years ago, her sudden departure gave rise to the wildest conjectures. It was generally believed that she was going to meet Lord Bute, who was still wandering in exile about Europe; some said that she was going to bring him back to England for the purpose of fresh intrigue; others that she was not returning to England at all, but meant to spend the rest of her life with Bute in an Italian palace. Against these absurd rumours was to be set the fact that the Duke of Gloucester accompanied his mother, and more charitable persons supposed that she was trying to break off his *liaison* with Lady Waldegrave, for their secret marriage had not yet been published. Some declared that the Princess-Dowager and Queen Charlotte had had a battle royal, in which the mother-in-law had been signally routed, and was leaving the country to cover her confusion. Others, and this seemed the most probable conjecture, thought that she was going abroad for a little time to escape the scandal which had

been brought upon the royal family by her youngest son, Henry Frederick, Duke of Cumberland. [Pg 245]

AUGUSTA, PRINCESS OF WALES, MOTHER OF QUEEN MATILDA.
After a Painting by J. B. Vanloo.

The Duke of Cumberland was the least amiable of the sons of Frederick Prince of Wales. Physically and mentally he was a degenerate. Walpole pictures him as a garrulous, dissipated and impudent youth, vulgarly boasting his rank, yet with a marked predilection for low society. Unfortunately he did not confine himself to it, but betrayed to her ruin a young and beautiful woman of rank, the Countess Grosvenor, daughter of Henry Vernon and wife of Richard, first Earl Grosvenor. Lord Grosvenor discovered the intrigue, and brought an action of divorce in which the Duke of Cumberland figured as co-respondent. For the first time in England a prince of the blood appeared in the divorce court, and, what was worse, cut a supremely ridiculous and contemptible figure in it. Several of the Duke's letters to the Lady Grosvenor were read in court, and were so grossly ill-spelt and illiterate that they were greeted with shouts of derision, and furnished eloquent comment upon the education of the King's brother.[133]

[133] Lord Grosvenor got his divorce, and the jury awarded him £10,000 damages, which the Duke had great difficulty in paying, and George III., much to his disgust, had to arrange for settlement to avoid a further scandal. So base a creature was this royal Lothario that he abandoned to her shame the woman whom he had betrayed, and scarcely had the verdict been pronounced than he began another disreputable intrigue.

It was easy to imagine, had there been no other reason, that the Princess-Dowager of Wales would be glad to be out of England while these proceedings were being made public. The King, [Pg 246] who lived a virtuous and sober life, and his intensely respectable Queen Charlotte, were scandalised beyond measure at these revelations, and the possibility of another, and even worse, scandal maturing in Denmark filled them with dismay. At present the secret was well kept in England. Whatever the English envoy might write in private despatches, or Prince Charles of Hesse retail through his mother, or the Princess Augusta transmit from Brunswick respecting the indiscretions of Matilda, no whisper was heard in England at this time, outside the inner circle of the royal family. Therefore all the conjectures as to the reason of the Princess-Dowager's visit to the Continent were wide of the mark. The real motive of her journey was not even hinted.

The Princess-Dowager was hooted as she drove through the streets of Canterbury on her way to Dover, and so great was her unpopularity that it was rumoured that London would be illuminated in honour of her departure. The Princess, as announced, travelled first to Brunswick, where she

was received by her daughter Augusta and the rest of the ducal family with honour and affection. It was arranged that the King and Queen of Denmark, who were then at Traventhal, should also journey to Brunswick and join the family circle. Everything was prepared for their coming, the town was decorated and a programme of festivities drawn up, when suddenly the Grand Marshal of the King of Denmark arrived at Brunswick with the news that the Queen was ill, and unable to [Pg 247] travel so far. That Matilda's illness was feigned there can be little doubt, for she was well enough the next day to go out hunting as usual with Struensee by her side, and in the evening she played cards until midnight. The incident showed how greatly the Queen had changed, for Matilda's family affections were strong, and under other circumstances she would have been overjoyed at the prospect of meeting her mother after years of separation, and seeing again her favourite sister Augusta. But Struensee knew that the journey of the Princess-Dowager boded no good to his plans, and persuaded the Queen to offer this affront to her mother.

The Princess-Dowager, who had a shrewd idea of the nature of her daughter's illness, was not to be outwitted in this way, and she proposed a meeting at Lüneburg, a town situated between Celle and Hamburg, in the electorate of Hanover. Lüneburg was much nearer Traventhal than Brunswick, and Matilda could not excuse herself on the ground of the length of the journey. If she made that pretext, the Princess-Dowager proposed to come to Traventhal, where she might have seen more than it was desirable for her to see. So Struensee made the Queen choose what he thought was the lesser evil, and write to her mother that she would meet her at Lüneburg; but he was careful to deprive the visit of every mark of ceremony, and to make it as brief as possible.

The King and Queen of Denmark arrived at Lüneburg late in the evening, attended only by [Pg 248] Struensee and Warnstedt, who were seated in the coach with them. Matilda did not bring with her a lady-in-waiting, and one coach only followed with a couple of servants and some luggage. There was no palace at Lüneburg, and the King and Queen lodged for the night in one of the fine Renaissance houses in the main street of the old town. The interview between the Princess-Dowager and her daughter took place that same evening, late though it was. Struensee was present in the room the whole time, though the Princess-Dowager pointedly ignored him. She addressed her daughter in English, of which she knew Struensee was ignorant, but to her anger and surprise Matilda pretended to have forgotten it, and she answered always in German that Struensee might understand. Under these circumstances the conversation was necessarily constrained and formal; the Princess-Dowager did not conceal her displeasure, and retired to bed discomfited.

The next morning at eleven o'clock she sent for her daughter again, and this time succeeded in having a talk with her alone. What passed between them cannot certainly be known, but its import was generally guessed. The Princess-Dowager was said to have told her daughter that the dismissal of Bernstorff would be much regretted by George III., as he had always been a friend of England and its royal family, and it would, moreover, be disastrous to Denmark. Whereupon the Queen haughtily rejoined: "Pray, madam, allow me to govern my kingdom as I please". The [Pg 249] Princess, annoyed by this want of respect, unmasked her batteries forthwith, and roundly scolded her daughter for the extraordinary favours she gave to Struensee. Matilda at first would not listen, but when her mother persisted, and declared that her conduct would end in disgrace and ruin, she retorted with an allusion to the supposed *liaison* between her mother and Lord Bute, which wounded the Princess past forgiveness. The interview only widened the breach. As a matter of form the King had invited his mother-in-law to Copenhagen, but the invitation was now curtly refused. The Princess saw that she could do no good, and she did not care to countenance by her presence a state of affairs of which she did not approve. The King and Queen of Denmark left Lüneburg in the afternoon, the Princess a few hours later; mother and daughter parted in anger, and they never met again.

Struensee must have felt a great sense of relief when the King of Denmark's coach rolled out of Lüneburg on the way back to Altona. He had dreaded the meeting between the Queen and her mother, and had striven to prevent it by every means in his power. But when that was no longer possible, he had long and anxious consultations with the Queen, and prompted her how she was to act and what she was to say. Even so he could not be quite sure of the line the Princess-Dowager might take. If she had spoken to her daughter gently, reasoned with her, pleaded with [Pg 250] her in love, and appealed to her with tears, she might have had some effect, for Matilda was very warm-hearted and impressionable. But these were not the stern Princess's methods; she had been accustomed to command her children, and her haughty, overbearing tone and contemptuous reproaches stung the spirited young Queen to the quick, and made her resent what she called her mother's unjust suspicions and unwarrantable interference. So the result was all that Struensee wished. Woodford, who had been commanded by George III. to attend the Princess-Dowager during her stay in Lüneburg, writes in a despatch of "the agitation that was visible in Mr. Struensee upon his arrival first at Lüneburg, and the joy that could be seen in his countenance as the moment of departure approached".[134]

[134] Woodford's despatch to Lord Rochford, marked "private," Hamburg, August 21, 1770.

Struensee now felt that the time was ripe for him to come forward as the exponent of a new foreign policy for Denmark, and as the reformer of internal abuses. He was no longer the doctor, but the councillor and adviser of the Crown. He had flouted Russia and prevailed against the influence of England. What power was there to withstand him?

CHAPTER XV.

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THE FALL OF BERNSTORFF.

1770.

The King and Queen of Denmark travelled from Lüneburg direct to Copenhagen. During the short stay of the court in the capital the Queen showed herself much in public, and sought in all ways to impress her personality upon the people. She drove every day about the streets in a state coach, attended by an escort of guards; the King was always by her side, and his presence was intended to give the lie to many sinister rumours. Apparently the royal couple were living together in the utmost harmony and the King had complete confidence in his Queen. Together they attended the Copenhagen shooting festival, an honour which had not been bestowed on the citizens for a hundred years, and were most gracious in their demeanour, especially the Queen, who was all bows and smiles. Matilda further gratified the assembly by firing a shot herself, and inducing the King to follow her example. The Queen hit the popinjay, but Christian missed it badly. Matilda gained considerable popularity from the crowd by this exhibition of her skill, but the more sober-minded citizens were scandalised because she rode on to the ground sitting her [Pg 252] horse like a man, and clad in her masculine riding-habit. The King rode by her side, but it was jocularly said that the Queen was "by far the better man of the two," which was what exactly she wished to convey. Certainly the diminutive and feeble Christian looked a poor creature beside his dashing and Amazonian wife.

From Copenhagen the King and Queen went to Hirschholm, the country palace of the late Queen Sophia Magdalena, which, since her death, had been prepared for their use, and henceforth eclipsed Frederiksborg in the royal favour. Hirschholm was not so far from the capital as Frederiksborg, and was situated amid beautiful surroundings. The palace had been built by Sophia Magdalena on an island in the middle of a lake. It was very ornate externally, and one of the most striking features was a huge gate-tower, which terminated in a pyramid supported by four lions, couchant and surmounted by a crown. This gateway gave entrance to a quadrangular court, round three sides of which the palace was built. The interior was gorgeous, and the decorations were so florid as to be almost grotesque; a profusion of silver, mother-of-pearl and rock crystal embellished the walls, and the ceilings and doors were elaborately painted. The south aspect of the palace looked over the lake to the beautiful gardens beyond, which were freely adorned with marble fountains and statuary. In the gardens was a summer-house, which was used as a temporary theatre for the amusement of the Queen and her court. Beyond the park [Pg 253] were shady avenues and noble forests of beech and pine. In fine weather Hirschholm was a paradise.[135]

[135] Hirschholm became the favourite palace of Queen Matilda, and usurped even Frederiksborg in her favour. It was more associated than any other palace in Denmark with her love for Struensee. Perhaps because of this her son, Frederick VI., when he came to the throne, razed the palace to the ground. Not a trace of it now remains, but the beautiful woods and surroundings of Hirschholm still exist, and even to-day is pointed out the "Lovers' walk," where the Queen and Struensee used to pace side by side, and the summer-house where they sat, and spoke of all their hopes and fears.

At Hirschholm the Queen made appointments in her household to fill the places of Madame von der Lühe, Fräulein von Eyben and others dismissed at Traventhal. The Queen's chief ladies were now Madame Gahler, Baroness Bülow and Countess Holstein. They were three young, beautiful and lively women, not too strict in their conduct, and the husbands of all, needless to say, were friends of Struensee. Madame Gahler was the wife of General Gahler, who held high place in the councils of Traventhal. Baron Bülow was the Master of Horse, and Count Holstein held a post about the King. The Queen had always fretted under the stiff etiquette of the Danish court; now, at the suggestion of Struensee, she dispensed with it altogether, except on public occasions. The result was that the manners of the court at Hirschholm became so lax and unceremonious that it hardly seemed to be a court at all. Some show of deference was kept up towards the King, but the Queen was treated with great familiarity, evidently at her own wish, and in Struensee's case [Pg 254] this familiarity sometimes degenerated into positive rudeness. The ladies and gentlemen of the royal household laughed and joked and flirted as they pleased, without any restraint, in the presence of the Queen, scrambled for places at her table, and quarrelled violently over cards. Even Rantzau was surprised at the conduct at Hirschholm. "When I was a wild young man," he said, "everybody at court was apparently respectable, except myself. Now that I am old, and obliged to be more careful, every one about the court has gone mad."

The court at Hirschholm was conducted on a scale of luxury, and on occasion with ceremonial magnificence. The King and Queen dined frequently in public in the grand saloon, and were served on bended knee by pages; the marshal of the palace sat at one end of the table, the Queen's chief lady at the other, their Majesties in the middle on one side, and the guests honoured with the royal command opposite them. The King was a poor and insignificant figure, and rarely uttered a word; but the Queen, who dressed beautifully, made a grand appearance, and delighted everybody with her lively conversation. Matilda had wit and vivacity, though during her early years in Denmark she had perforce to curb her social qualities; now she gave them full play, and the King gazed at her in silent astonishment and admiration. A table of eighty covers was also laid every day in the adjoining "Chamber of the Rose" for the foreign envoys and great [Pg 255] officers of state (if any happened to be present) and the court officials. At this table Struensee, Brandt and the other ladies and gentlemen of the household generally dined, though the favourite was frequently commanded to the King's table, and might have dined there every day if

he had wished. But he generally preferred to hold a little court of his own in the "Chamber of the Rose," and most of those present paid him far more homage than they paid the King. Struensee accepted it all as a matter of course; his head was already turned by his success, and indeed it was enough to turn any man's head. Only two years before he had been in an obscure position, crippled with debt, and seriously thinking of quitting the country to repair his fortunes; now he was the all-powerful favourite of a Queen, and could make and unmake ministers as he would. Nothing was done without his consent, and the removal of the court from the capital to Hirschholm was dictated by him from reasons which the English envoy shrewdly guessed at the time:—

> "Among other reasons assigned for this retreat," writes Gunning, "one is said to be the desire of eluding the scrutiny of the public eye, which affects to penetrate somewhat further than is imagined to be [desirable]. Another cause of this retirement is supposed to be their Danish Majesties' resolution of continuing inaccessible (which they have been for some time) to everybody except M^r^ Rantzau and the Favourite. And that, if certain dismissions are resolved upon, they may be effected with greater secrecy. M^r^ Bernstorff tells me that M^r^ Rantzau has frequent conferences with the French minister. He [Bernstorff] is more alarmed than he has ever yet appeared to be, but nevertheless seems willing to fortify himself with the favourable conclusions afforded by the levity and dissipation which mark the character of his adversaries, and builds upon the unanimity of the Council, which I hope is firmly grounded. He thinks, however, that while the influence prevails, irreparable mischief may be done, and he is at length convinced of a truth I wished him long since to have believed, namely—that which has been transacting is more than a court intrigue, and that [the Favourite] was the cause of all its movements."[136]

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[136] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, September 8, 1770.

Bernstorff was not long left in suspense as to his future. Struensee had now matured his plans and was ready to strike. Bernstorff was the first to go. Soon after the court arrived at Hirschholm the King was prevailed upon, without much difficulty, to write his Prime Minister an autograph letter in which he informed him that, as he intended to make changes in his system of government, he no longer required his services. He therefore dismissed him with a pension of 6,000 dollars a year, but gave him leave to retain his seat on the council. Bernstorff was seated at his desk in the foreign office when this letter was brought to him by a King's messenger from Hirschholm; he read its contents in silence, and then turned to one of his secretaries and said: "I am dismissed from office. May the Almighty guide this country and its King."

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Bernstorff fell with great dignity. He replied to the King saying "that he accepted his pleasure with all submission, but begged leave to join the resignation of his seat on the council to that of his other employments".[137] He accepted the pension, but how beggarly a reward it was for his long years of service was shown by comparison with that assigned to Count St. Germains, a friend of Struensee and Rantzau, who had been granted 14,000 dollars annually after only three years of office. Count Bernstorff had grown grey in the service of the state, and had sacrificed a large portion of his private fortune in the cause of his adopted country. His great achievement as Prime Minister was the treaty effecting the territorial exchange with Russia; for that alone he deserved the gratitude of Denmark. He had his faults, but he was a man of honourable and upright character, virtuous in private life, and in public matters earnestly desirous of the welfare of the state. Bernstorff's fall called forth loud expressions of regret, not only from the most considerable people in Denmark, but from many foreign courts. Especially was this the case with the court of St. James's.

[137] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, September 18, 1770.

On the return of the Princess-Dowager to England with the news of her fruitless mission, and on receipt of Gunning's despatches, specifying the changes likely to take place in the Danish Government, George III. resolved to write a private letter to his sister, appealing to her directly, and urging her, whatever she did, not to part with Bernstorff, who had shown himself zealous of his country's welfare, and who was, moreover, a friend of England and its royal house. But this letter arrived too late; it reached Copenhagen a week after Bernstorff's dismissal. It was enclosed in a private despatch from Lord Rochford to the English envoy, with orders that he was to deliver it into the Queen's own hand. Gunning thereupon set out at once for Hirschholm "to force the entrenchments," to quote his own phrase; but the Queen, who probably guessed his errand, would not see him. "On my arrival there," writes Gunning, "I had the mortification to find that her Majesty was so much indisposed by a fresh attack of cholick as to render my admission to her impracticable. It not being, therefore, in my power to present the King's letter myself, I took care to have it safely conveyed to her Danish Majesty, who commanded her Grand Master to tell me that I should be informed when she had any orders for me."[138] But Matilda had no orders for the English envoy, and when she wrote to her brother of England, it was to tell him that Bernstorff had already been dismissed, and if he wished to write to her in future about political matters in Denmark, she would be obliged if he would send his communications to her through her ministers. How George III. received this rebuff is not related.

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[138] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, September 22, 1770.

Bernstorff's dismissal was followed by that of several other ministers. Men who had grown old in the service of the state were suddenly deprived of their portfolios, and sweeping changes took

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place in the *personnel* of the Government. Several important political appointments were made while the court was at Hirschholm. General Gahler, who was avowedly the friend of France, and had spent many years of his life in the French service, was appointed head of the War Department. He did not possess any great military knowledge, and owed his promotion largely to his wife, who was a friend of the Queen. Gunning described him as "a smooth, designing, self-interested man, submissive, cool, deliberate and timid,"[139] and Keith wrote of him later as "dark, intriguing and ungrateful".[140]

[139] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, April 4, 1771.

[140] Keith's despatch, Copenhagen, November 18, 1771.

Bernstorff had united the office of Prime Minister with that of Foreign Secretary. The first of these posts, with amplified powers, Struensee reserved for himself, but he did not at once formally assume it. Rantzau was understood to desire the Foreign Office, and his ambition placed Struensee and the Queen in a position of great difficulty. Rantzau's violent hostility to Russia, and his rash and mercurial temperament, made this appointment impossible. Denmark would probably be embroiled in war in a week. On the other hand, he had rendered great services to Struensee; he was powerful in Holstein, and dangerous to offend. Struensee compromised the [Pg 260] matter by giving Rantzau the second place in the War Department. Rantzau took it under protest, and never forgave the affront. From that time he was the secret enemy of Struensee and the Queen, and only waited for an opportunity to wreck them. It would have been a mistake to send him to the Foreign Office, but it was a greater one to place him in a subordinate post, and showed a strange lack of judgment on the part of the Queen and Struensee. It did not satisfy him, and it gave him opportunity to betray the secrets of the Government.

Struensee sought to conciliate Rantzau by paying the most flattering attention to his opinions, and it was at Rantzau's suggestion that Colonel Falckenskjold was recalled from the Russian service and entrusted with the reform of the Danish army. Falckenskjold was a Dane of noble family, and had fought with distinction in the French service during the Seven Years' War; subsequently he entered the service of Russia. He was a man of upright character, but poor and ambitious. It was the prospect of power that induced him, in an evil hour, to accept an appointment at Struensee's hands. "His views of aggrandisement are said to be boundless," wrote Gunning.[141]

[141] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, April 4, 1771.

Brandt was given several lucrative court appointments, but he neither asked nor received any post in the Government. Gunning thus summed him up: "M^{r} Brandt, the King of Denmark's [Pg 261] favourite, seems to be too light and insignificant to deserve mention in a political light; he is considered by the others as a sort of dragon which they have planted within the precincts of the court to stop the avenues to the throne".[142] Keith declared him to be "naturally rash, turbulent and waspish".[143]

[142] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, April 4, 1771.

[143] Keith's despatch, Copenhagen, November 18, 1771.

These were the principal men Struensee chose to help him in governing the internal affairs of the kingdom, in place of the experienced statesmen whom he had evicted to make room for them. They were none of them first-class men, but they were the best available. Statesmen of credit and renown held aloof from Struensee, and would not have accepted office at his hands. Neither did he seek them, for the men he wanted were not colleagues but creatures, who would carry out his bidding. He had now complete control of the situation, and was already in fact invested with autocratic power. Although nominally only *lecteur du roi*, he read all letters that came to the King, and answered them in the King's name as he thought best, the King doing whatever the Queen advised him, and signing all the documents laid before him by Struensee. In order to gather power still more into his hands, Struensee caused Christian to issue a rescript to the heads of departments of the state requesting them henceforth to send all communications to the King in writing, and the King would answer them in the same way. Audiences between the King [Pg 262] and his ministers were hereby abolished.

Struensee followed up this rescript by an attack upon the Council of State, still nominally the governing body. Soon after Bernstorff's dismissal a royal decree was issued, limiting the power of the council and increasing the King's prerogative. The King wished—so the message ran—to have the Council of State organised in the best manner. He therefore requested that the councillors, at their meetings in future, should duly weigh and consider all the business laid before them, but leave the final decision to the King. Their object was not to govern, but to afford the King assistance in governing. The King, therefore, would have them remember that there must be no encroachment on the sovereign power, which was vested wholly in the King.

These changes caused great excitement among the official classes and the nobility. The government of the kingdom had hitherto been in the hands of an oligarchy, which was recruited solely from the nobility and their dependents. By this last decree the King intended to strip the nobility of their privileges and power. But the King was known to be a figurehead, and therefore the resentment aroused by these changes was directed, not against him but against the Queen. Struensee was still working behind the Queen, and therefore, though he was known to have great influence, the malcontents made the Queen the first object of their resentment. The hostility felt against Matilda for the revolutionary policy now inaugurated was especially bitter amongst the [Pg 263] old nobility, many of whom, notably Count Reventlow, had formerly been her friends. Reventlow

communicated his anger to Gunning, who wrote in haste to Lord Rochford. He saw in the present confusion an opportunity for English influence to be re-established in Copenhagen, and, ignorant of the rebuff the King had received from his sister a few weeks before, he urged his old expedient that George III. should write a private letter to Queen Matilda.

> "Both Count Reventlow and everybody ascribe [these new measures] without scruple to the Queen of Denmark," he writes, "*whose power is affirmed to be unlimited, and on whose will all depends*. If these assertions are not made without reason, your Lordship will judge how much those persons who are honoured with her Danish Majesty's confidence have misrepresented the state of affairs to her, in order to make her consent to what is so evidently against the system this court has some time adopted. Should the preservation of it be thought worthy of the King's (George III.'s) attention, your Lordship will, I am sure, think it necessary that the Queen of Denmark should be made acquainted with his Majesty's sentiments on this important point as soon as possible, and before the Prince Royal of Sweden comes here, which under the present circumstances will be most effectually done (if I may humbly presume to offer my opinion) by a private letter from his Majesty to the Queen his sister. It is not to be [Pg 264] doubted but that this would have great weight; and should it either procure the reinstatement of Count Bernstorff (whose indubitable attachment to the King's person and family gives him a claim on his Majesty's protection), or till such time as this could be more easily effected, prevent any extension of the present influence, it would soon give his Majesty (George III.) as great an ascendency here as the court of Petersburg has had, and which, were it conducted in a more moderate and judicious manner, would not be liable to the same reverse. It is not, however, impracticable for the latter [the court of Petersburg] still to prevent the defection of this court, but it must be by different and harsher methods than those (it is hoped) his Majesty has occasion to take."[144]

[144] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, October 6, 1770.

It is unlikely that George III., who was still smarting under the affront Queen Matilda offered to his last communication, acted on his envoy's suggestion. Neither his brotherly remonstrances nor "the different and harsher methods" of the court of St. Petersburg would have had any effect on the Queen of Denmark. She was entirely under Struensee's influence, and did whatever he wished, and in this case their wishes were identical. Nothing would have induced her to recall Bernstorff, against whom she had a grievance, and she had suffered so much from the meddlesome interference of the Russian envoys that she was determined to stop it at all hazards.

GEORGE III., BROTHER OF QUEEN MATILDA.
From a Painting by Allan Ramsay (1767) in the National Portrait Gallery.

CHAPTER XVI.

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QUEEN AND EMPRESS.

1770-1771.

The keynote of Struensee's foreign policy was to free Denmark from outside interference, and the greatest offender in this respect was Russia. The inauguration of the new regime, therefore, was the occasion of a violent quarrel with the Russian court, to which a personal element gave additional bitterness. Russia at this time meant Catherine the Great, for the imperious Empress gathered all the reins of government, both foreign and domestic, in her hands. She had come to regard the King of Denmark as almost her vassal, and her first instinct was to crush any signs of revolt against her influence. The Empress was minutely informed of the changes at the Danish court and the causes which had led to them. She knew all about the intrigue between Matilda and Struensee. But she had no sympathy with the young Queen of Denmark, whose career, in some respects, offered a curious parallel to her own. Like Matilda, Catherine had been brought from a foreign country, when little more than a child, and married to a weak and vicious prince, in whose character there was a strain of madness; like Matilda, she had been left alone in a [Pg 266] strange and dissolute court, outraged and neglected by her husband, ignored and set aside, and exposed to every temptation. Catherine had found consolation in a lover, and plotted with him and others. The outcome of her intrigues was the deposition and subsequent murder of her husband, and the Empress's elevation to the sovereign power. Rumour said that she was privy to the assassination, but that must always remain a mystery. Of course, before this point had been reached the parallel between the two women ended, for Matilda, though she had undoubtedly intrigued with Struensee to get the power into her own hands, was not of the same calibre as Catherine. She was incapable of either her crimes or her vices; she had neither her soaring ambitions nor her consummate powers of statecraft. Though a woman of more than average ability, she had none of the genius of the Russian Empress; and her heart would always hinder her from playing a great part upon the world's stage.

The weakness of Matilda's position was her love for Struensee. At first she wished him to take no part in politics. "If Struensee had taken my advice, and had not become a minister, it would have been much better," she said, two years later in bitter retrospect, but he overruled her in this as in all else. Everything he did was right in her eyes, and though she sometimes trembled at the perilous path he was treading, when he talked to her of his future policy and his sweeping reforms she believed that he would be hailed as the saviour of the country. She could not see that [Pg 267] he was ignorant of statecraft, and made mistakes which a little forethought would have avoided, for she worshipped his commanding talents, and believed him to be a king among men. The Danish Queen's all-absorbing passion for one man was regarded with contempt by the Empress Catherine. It is needless to say she did not condemn it from a moral point of view, for she was a very Messalina in her passions, but because she considered it a fatal weakness in a Queen who apparently aspired to reign over her husband's kingdom and to inaugurate a new system of policy. So far from the similarity between the trials of Catherine's early married life and the Queen of Denmark's sorrows enlisting her sympathy, the Empress regarded Matilda with dislike, mingled with contempt. "I have had the opportunity of seeing the Empress of Russia's sentiments expressed in her own handwriting relative to what is passing in Denmark," wrote Woodford. "The Empress, in a letter to her correspondent, of September 24, says upon the changes in Denmark, 'that allowances are always to be made for the follies of youth, but accompanied with the marks of *a bad heart* they excite even a public indignation'."[145]

[145] Woodford's despatch, Hamburg, October 16, 1770.

There was undoubtedly some jealousy mingled with this dislike of the Empress Catherine for a woman she had never seen. "The Semiramis of the North" regarded herself as one to whom the [Pg 268] ordinary rules of life and conduct did not apply, nor even the immutable laws of right and wrong. She was a woman of destiny, a sublime figure, above, beyond and apart from all meaner mortals. Yet this foolish Matilda with her *bourgeois* favourite and paltry intrigues had presumed to challenge comparison with one who was incomparable, and even to imitate her idiosyncrasies. Like Catherine, Matilda rode astride in masculine attire; like Catherine, she donned the uniform of a colonel, marched at the head of her regiment, and fired a musket with unerring aim. True, Matilda had only one favourite where Catherine had many, but he was one who gathered up (in her estimation and his own) the charm of a Poniatowski, the bravery of an Orloff, the genius of a Panteomkine, the ardour of a Korssakof, and the beauty of a Lansköi.[146] Struensee was responsible for this somewhat burlesque imitation of the Empress; he held before the Queen's dazzled eyes the vision of another woman ruling her people with consummate ability to the admiration of Europe, and Matilda was weak enough to listen to his flattery.

[146] Favourites of Catherine the Great.

Catherine regarded the attempts of the Queen of Denmark to follow in her steps as preposterous, and the anti-Russian policy as impertinent. The Empress did not at first treat it seriously, but the limit of this presumptuous folly (in her opinion) was reached when the news came to St. Petersburg that her former co-conspirator and later her declared enemy, Count Rantzau, had [Pg 269] been taken into favour by the Danish court, and given an appointment in the Government. Then the anger of Catherine, as Bernstorff predicted, knew no bounds. She regarded the appointment of Rantzau as an insult, and sent instructions to Filosofow to represent her displeasure in the strongest terms to the court of Copenhagen. Filosofow, who was already goaded to the point of madness by the humiliations heaped on him by Struensee, performed his mistress's behest with

such violence and so many expletives that the Queen strongly resented his bullying tone, and his further residence at Copenhagen became impossible. For this, as the English envoy wrote, “they [the court of St. Petersburg] will be in a great measure indebted to their own conduct—disgusting this court by an open attack on Monsieur Rantzau, whose character, let his intentions be what they will, ought to have been too well known to them to give rise to any great apprehensions”.[147] Filosofow demanded his recall, which was granted, and before leaving requested a private audience of the King. But this was refused by Struensee, who had made up his mind that henceforth foreign envoys should have no more private audiences with the King behind his back. Filosofow was told that he could only see the King at an ordinary court, when he could take leave of his Majesty. The haughty Russian replied that his health would not allow him to be present, and he left Copenhagen without taking leave of any of the royal family. Thus was Struensee avenged upon his enemy. [Pg 270]

[147] Gunning’s despatch, Copenhagen, February 12, 1771.

Gunning rightly regarded the Russian envoy’s withdrawal from the Danish court as the result of an intrigue, which had its origin in the insult offered to Struensee a year before.

> “This intrigue,” he wrote, “sprang originally from an insuperable disgust her Danish Majesty conceived against the person of M^{r} Saldern and latterly against that of M^{r} Filosofow.... The latter, though a man of great honour and worth, from a want of sufficient knowledge of the world, and from being perhaps too sensible of the splendour and power of the Empress, his mistress, studied not enough that refinement of behaviour which was to be expected in a public character, and through absence and inattention committed a piece of rudeness on a certain occasion to the Favourite which his self-love (as indeed the self-love of any other man might have done) induced him to impute to design. The wound rankled in his heart, and I will venture to say the sense of it was not confined to his own feelings. Her Danish Majesty was pleased to think much the worse of M^{r} Filosofow for it. In short the affront was never forgiven, and the second Russian minister became equally, nay, more, obnoxious to the Queen than the first.”[148]

[148] Gunning’s despatch, Copenhagen, April 4, 1771.

Struensee, now that he had gratified his personal animosity, had no wish to become embroiled in a war with Russia. He thought that the dispute had gone far enough, and it would be better to [Pg 271] build for the Empress Catherine a golden bridge, over which she might retreat with dignity from a position which had become untenable. But unfortunately for his plans he resolved to conduct the negotiations himself, for he had not yet appointed a Foreign Secretary to take the place of Bernstorff. It was only in the department of foreign affairs that Struensee found himself at sea, not in regard to his policy, for his mind was clear as to that, but with regard to the forms and phrases usually observed in communications between courts and monarchs. He had no training for this kind of work, and until the last two years had no communication, direct or indirect, with princes and potentates. His ignorance of forms and etiquette was equalled by his contempt for them. But it could not be supposed that the King, his master, was ignorant of these forms, and since communications with foreign sovereigns had to be made nominally through him, errors of this nature revealed either that the King had not been consulted, or he had not written the letters issued with his name. Christian VII. perhaps took a malicious pleasure in Struensee’s ignorance, or he was too indifferent to correct the glaring errors in letters signed by him, for many absurd mistakes occurred.

Struensee thought that a personal letter from the King of Denmark would appease the anger of Catherine, and he therefore drew up one of these strange documents which purported to come from Christian. But he was so ignorant of the ordinary usage that he began it “Madame” instead [Pg 272] of “Madame my sister,” and ended as though it had come from a subject, “I have the honour to be, Madame, your Imperial Majesty’s very humble and obedient servant,” a preposterous ending to a letter from one sovereign to another. The letter contained a good deal of irrelevant matter, but the gist of it was an apology for the King’s refusal of a private audience to the Empress’s minister, “under the pretext,” writes Gunning, “that one having been already denied to the Swedish minister, it could not have been consistently granted to the Russian minister, and further, that the audiences which have been so often given, and were now almost claimed by the Russian minister, ought to have been considered more as a matter of courtesy than that of right. But had Monsieur Filosofow appeared in the court circle, his Majesty would probably have called him into the closet.” The English envoy adds: “Though perhaps this apology will not bear the test of a too strict examination, yet as it shows an earnest desire of acceding on his Danish Majesty’s part, it may be wished the Empress may suffer herself to be appeased by it”.[149]

[149] Gunning’s despatch, Copenhagen, January 10, 1771.

So far from the Empress being appeased by the King of Denmark’s letter, she received it with derision. The form, the manner, the style, the contents, all showed her that it was not composed by her royal brother of Denmark, but, as she coarsely said to her whole court, by the Queen’s [Pg 273] *cicisbeo*. The relations between the courts of Copenhagen and St. Petersburg were strained to breaking-point and Struensee was at a loss what to do next. It was at this juncture that he appointed Count Osten to the foreign office at Copenhagen.

Osten was a Dane of noble family, but poor. He was educated at court as a page in the household of Christian VII.’s father. As the youth showed much ability, Count Moltke, who was then Prime

Minister, sent him to Leipsic to study languages, with the view of making use of him in the diplomatic service. During his residence at Leipsic, Osten made the acquaintance of Count Stanislaus Poniatowski (afterwards King of Poland), and the two became great friends. On returning to Copenhagen Osten became involved in some petty palace intrigue, which was directed against the men who had benefited him, Moltke and Bernstorff. They overlooked his ingratitude in consideration of his talents, but, thinking it advisable that he should leave Copenhagen, they sent him to St. Petersburg, as an *attaché* to Malzahn, at that time Danish minister in Russia. Malzahn died suddenly, and the secretary to the legation being ill at the same time, Osten seized the opportunity to receive and answer despatches, and to confer with the Russian ministers. So well did he acquit himself that Bernstorff appointed him Danish envoy at St. Petersburg, and told him that he must humour the Grand-Duchess (later the Empress) Catherine, whose favour, as he was a handsome and a brilliant youth, he had already won. [Pg 274] Bernstorff already foresaw the elevation of the Grand-Duchess to a prominent position in councils of state. Osten paid his court assiduously to Catherine, and during his residence at St. Petersburg Poniatowski came there. The friendship between the two young men was renewed, and when there sprang up an intrigue between Poniatowski and Catherine, Osten acted as a go-between, and the lovers used to meet at his house.

Perhaps because of the part he had played in this matter, the Danish court found it necessary to remove Osten from St. Petersburg to Dresden, so that he had nothing to do with the plots which led to the assassination of the Emperor Peter, and the elevation of Catherine to the throne. But as soon as the Empress found her position assured, she asked the King of Denmark to send Osten back to St. Petersburg as Danish envoy, and her request was at once complied with. The handsome young diplomatist returned, and for two years enjoyed the friendship of the Empress, who not only admitted him to her confidence, but even allowed him sometimes to be present at the councils which she held with her ministers and her generals. Suddenly, without warning, Osten fell out of favour. The Empress wrote to the King of Denmark to request his instant recall, and the Russian minister for foreign affairs informed all the foreign envoys at St. Petersburg by a circular note that the Empress had withdrawn her favour from Count Osten, and regarded him as [Pg 275] “a vile and odious person”. The cause of Osten’s disgrace was not a political one, but referred to some secret infamy.

Bernstorff did not wish to bring Osten back to Copenhagen, as his talent for intrigue was so great that he might prove dangerous, nor did he wish to lose his services altogether, for he had proved himself a very able diplomatist; he therefore sent him as Danish envoy to Naples. Osten went there for a time, but he never ceased to agitate for his promotion from a post which he considered to be exile. Eventually Bernstorff promised Osten the post of minister at The Hague; but before his promise could be fulfilled, the once-powerful minister was himself dismissed from office by Struensee and the Queen.

The office of minister of foreign affairs rendered vacant by the dismissal of Bernstorff, whose knowledge of the tangled threads of European diplomacy was very great, was no easy one to fill—at least, from such material as Struensee was able to command. Rantzau, who wanted it, was impossible, and Struensee at first thought of keeping it in his own hands; but after the ridicule poured upon his letter by Catherine, which threatened to make the Danish court the laughing-stock of Europe, Struensee came to the conclusion that there were some things he did not know, and he must find some one who was, at any rate, conversant with forms. No statesman of repute in Denmark would accept the post on Struensee’s terms, so he went through the list of Danish envoys at foreign courts, and finding in Osten a man whose record was unscrupulous enough for [Pg 276] his purpose, he recalled him from Naples and placed him at the foreign office in the hope that he would bring the Empress Catherine to reason.

Osten’s appointment was regarded as a notable accession of strength to Struensee’s administration. His knowledge of Russian affairs was unrivalled—a great advantage at this juncture—and Gunning, the English envoy, who had a high opinion of the new foreign minister’s abilities, seems to have thought that he would not only restore friendly relations with Russia, but would aid him in bringing about an alliance between England and Denmark. “I think him well qualified for the post he is in,” he wrote, “and the only one here capable of retrieving the affairs of this unhappy country.”[150] Osten, who had to take office on Struensee’s terms, was really desirous of establishing good relations with Russia, and one of his first acts was to write a statesmanlike despatch to St. Petersburg, “with such representations as he hoped would dispel the Empress’s scruples regarding the late transactions of this court, would explain all suspicious appearances, and satisfy her Imperial Majesty”.[151]

[150] Gunning’s despatch, Copenhagen, April 4, 1771.

[151] *Ibid.*, January 1, 1771.

Though Osten’s despatch was treated with more respect by the court of St. Petersburg than the King of Denmark’s [so-called] letter, the Empress refused to be mollified. Her pride had been wounded by the flouting of her representative at Copenhagen, but as her interference in the [Pg 277] internal affairs of the Danish court had been quite unwarranted, she could not well ascribe her resentment to the fact that it was no longer permitted. She therefore seized upon Osten’s appointment as an excuse for maintaining her irreconcilable attitude, and declared that if the conduct of foreign affairs continued in the hands of that “vile and odious person,” she would break the treaty of 1768, and end all negotiations with Denmark. Osten did not heed the Empress’s abuse; he knew from experience that her outbursts of passion did not last long, and believed that in time she would take a more reasonable view. But Rantzau and Gahler urged

Struensee to anticipate Russia by a declaration of war, and Struensee was half-persuaded, for he knew that at the moment Russia was unprepared. Osten used all his eloquence to convince Struensee of the folly of such a proceeding, which would give offence to England as well, and probably bring the King of Prussia into the quarrel. In this he was ably supported by Falckenskjold, who had great knowledge of Russian affairs, but for a time it seemed that Osten would not succeed. As Gunning wrote: "The hopes I for some time entertained of M^{r} Osten gaining a proper ascendency over the Favourite are not greatly raised by the manner in which I see the former is obliged to act. It seems to manifest M^{r} Struensee's aim, whom every circumstance deigns to favour, to grasp the whole power of the administration into his own hands, and as his experience in business is of a very short date, so long as Count Osten's [Pg 278] knowledge and abilities shall be found necessary for his information and assistance, so long this gentleman may have some appearance of power."[152]

[152] Gunning's despatch, February 12, 1771.

In the end Osten and Falckenskjold won, and Rantzau and Gahler were defeated. But matters remained in an *impasse*: on the one hand, the Empress Catherine refused to receive any communications through Osten; on the other, the King of Denmark refused to remove him, as that would be to submit to an arbitrary interference on the part of Russia in the internal affairs of Denmark. It was at last resolved that Falckenskjold, who was *persona grata* at the Russian court, should be sent to St. Petersburg to patch up the quarrel. Falckenskjold's mission was not very successful, for the Empress declared she would only carry out the treaty of 1768, the territorial exchange, if Bernstorff were recalled to the Danish foreign office, and Osten and Rantzau were dismissed from the Government. An open breach however with Russia was for the moment avoided. Falckenskjold returned to Copenhagen, and when he told Struensee that the Empress insisted on the dismissal of the two ministers, Struensee, on Osten's advice, said, and did, nothing. The Empress, on learning that her demands had not been complied with, tried the effect of threats, and alarming rumours reached Copenhagen that she had determined to bombard the city, and for this purpose was equipping six ships of the line and four frigates, which would [Pg 279] immediately set sail from Kronstadt. In this crisis Struensee came out well. He knew that, though Russia might have the ships, she could not at the time furnish a sufficient number of sailors to equip a fleet. He therefore betrayed no panic and uttered no threats, but without ado fitted out three ships of the line and two frigates, and gave orders to build several others as a counter-demonstration. The ships were manned with great rapidity, and Copenhagen was soon defended from every point. Catherine, seeing that her threats were of no avail, forebore from provoking Denmark to the point of open hostilities. Her hands were at that moment full of more important matters, and so she declared "if the present rascally advisers of the King of Denmark had rope enough they would hang themselves". In the end her foresight was justified, but at the time the victory was with Struensee. By his firmness he freed Denmark from the intolerable interference of foreign ministers, which had been going on for the last twenty years, and the fact stands to the credit of his administration.

CHAPTER XVII.

[Pg 280]

THE REFORMER.

1770-1771.

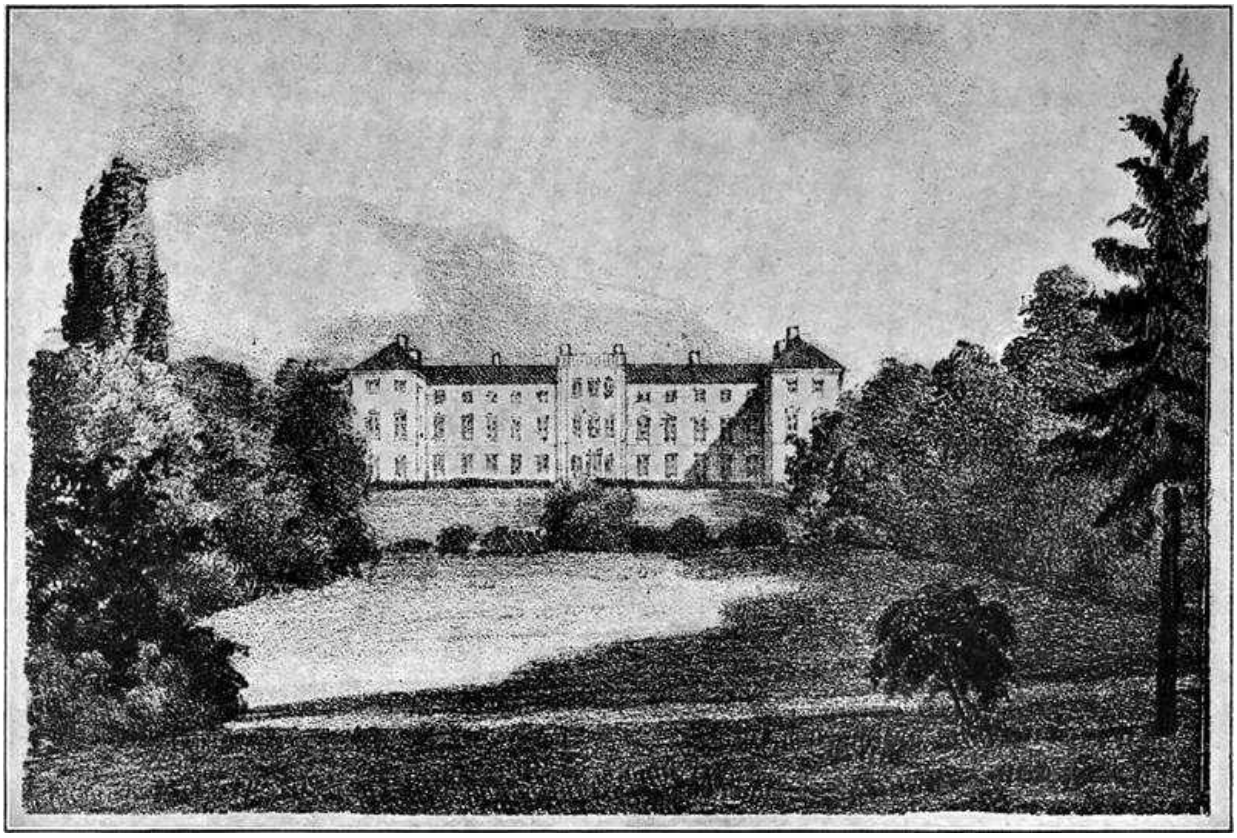
A short time after Bernstorff's fall and Osten's promotion, Struensee was appointed (or rather appointed himself) Master of Requests, a new office which, as the English envoy said, "might mean anything or everything". It was an office invented by Struensee, and in practice seemed to combine the authority of Prime Minister with power to interfere in every department of government. The only obstacle which now stood between the imperious minister and absolute power was the Council of State, which had lost enormously in prestige since the dismissal of Bernstorff and the royal rescript limiting its powers. This council was a committee of nobles with conservative tendencies, and though it was no longer able to decide anything, it still had the power to delay new measures. Struensee, who determined to break the power of the nobility in the same way as he had broken the yoke of the foreign envoys, therefore resolved on a daring step. He would abolish the Council of State, and place all authority in the hands of the King.

After going through the farce of appointing a committee, who reported exactly as it was ordered to report, Struensee swept away the Council of State by the following decree which, though drawn up by the Minister, was written throughout and signed by the King:— [Pg 281]

> "We, Christian VII., by the Grace of God King of Denmark, Norway, of the Goths and Wends, Duke of Schleswig-Holstein, Stormarn and the Dittmarsches, Count of Oldenburg and Delmenhorst, etc., etc., decree and announce herewith:
>
> "As the affairs of state in an absolute government are only confused and delayed when many of the nobility take part in them, owing to the power and honour which they acquire from time and custom, and the despatch of business is thereby retarded,
>
> "We, who have nothing so much at heart as zealous promotion of the public weal, hereby declare that We will not let Ourselves henceforth be checked or hindered in those measures and arrangements that are for the national good.
>
> "We therefore think fit to abolish and absolutely suppress Our former Council of State. In doing this Our object is to restore to the constitution its original purity, and maintain the same. Thus, then, the form of government will henceforth be, and remain exactly, as it was handed to Our ancestors of glorious memory by the nation, and nothing will remain to make it seem that We wish in any way to depart from the sense and intention [Pg 282] with which the nation transmitted it to Our ancestors. In further confirmation of this We have had the present decree drawn up in duplicate both in Danish and German, and command that the copies shall be preserved for ever in the archives of the chanceries.
>
> "Given under Our royal hand and seal at Our palace of Frederiksberg this December 27, 1770.
>
> (Signed) "CHRISTIAN."[153]

[153] Translated from the original document in the royal archives of Copenhagen.

The constitution which the King in this decree stated that his ancestors received from the nation was the *Lex Regia*, or royal law of Denmark and Norway, promulgated in 1660 by Frederick III. It had its origin in a revolution against the power of the nobles, who had reduced the King to a mere puppet of sovereignty, and formed an oligarchy which governed the country entirely in their interests. Frederick III. freed himself from this thraldom by a *coup d'état*, and with the consent of the burghers and people, and the enforced sanction of the nobles, he established the *Lex Regia*. It was therefore a most convenient weapon for Struensee to refurbish and use against the nobles again, for with a half-imbecile monarch, the whole of its tremendous powers would pass to the Minister. Some description of this law may be given to show the power which Christian VII., or rather Struensee the reformer, proposed to gather into his own hands.



THE FREDERIKSBERG PALACE, NEAR COPENHAGEN.
From a Print, temp. 1770.

The *Lex Regia* consisted of forty articles, which declared, *inter alia*, that “the hereditary kings of Denmark and Norway shall, and must, be regarded by their subjects as the only supreme chiefs on earth. They shall be above all human laws, and whether in matters spiritual or matters temporal shall recognise no other superior than God.” That “the King only has the supreme right of making and interpreting laws, of abrogating, amending, or superseding them”. That “the King only has the power of conferring office, or removing from office, according to his mere pleasure”. That “all dignities and offices of whatsoever kind are derived from the King, and held at his will”. That “the King alone has the right of disposing of the fortresses and troops of the realm; he alone can declare war, with whom, and when, he pleases; he alone can make treaties, impose taxes, or raise contributions of any kind”. That “the King alone has supreme jurisdiction over all the ecclesiastics of his dominions; he alone can regulate the rites and ceremonies of public worship, convoke councils and synods, terminate their sessions, etc.”. That “all the affairs of the kingdom, all letters and public acts, can only be expedited in the royal name—sealed with his seal and signed by his hand”. That “the King shall not be required to take any oath or form any engagement, whether verbal or written, since in quality of free and absolute monarch, his [Pg 283] subjects can neither impose an oath upon him nor prescribe any conditions to limit his authority”. [Pg 284] That “the whole realm of Denmark and Norway, its provinces, dependencies, islands, fortresses, rights, jewels, money of every kind, its army, navy, everything now enjoyed, everything that may be acquired hereafter, are the inalienable property of the sovereign alone, and can never be divided or separated from the crown”.

These few quotations from the *Lex Regia* will serve to show that Christian VII. arrogated to himself by this decree a power which no other monarch in Europe claimed. Not even that most mighty empress, Catherine of Russia, was so great an autocrat as this. In the *Lex Regia* of Denmark we find the most boundless, irresponsible, unmitigated despotism, without a single provision in favour of the life, substance, or liberty of any subject, high or low. The re-establishment of this despotism in all its nakedness was the essence of Struensee’s policy, for, since the reign of the monarch who promulgated it a century before, it had gradually fallen into disuse.

Frederick III., the author of the *Lex Regia*, was an absolute monarch in practice as well as theory; he broke the power of the nobles, and nothing stood between him and his imperious will. His successor, Christian V., began his reign on the same principles, but he found it necessary before long to conciliate the nobles, and one of his first acts was to create an order of titled nobility. Previously, all of noble birth had been merely styled nobles, but now they were given the titles of counts and barons—as if to console them for the loss of their authority. Certain other privileges [Pg 285] were granted to them, but they still had no share in the government of the country, which the King kept in his own hands. Gradually, however, there was formed a Council of State, or Privy Council, which consisted of the heads of the different departments in the state—such as the minister of foreign affairs, the minister who was responsible for the army, the head of the naval department, and the head of the finance department. These posts at first were filled by the King’s creatures, who relieved him of detail business, but were unable to come to any decision apart from him; but as time went on the nobles gradually crept back into office, and were nominated one by one as heads of departments, until the Council of State assumed more importance. Under the reign of Christian VI. the Council of State was practically a committee of nobles, through

whom the King governed; and during the latter part of the reign of Frederick V. (Christian VII.'s father) it usurped the sovereign power, and the King became a puppet in the hands of his ministers. Once more, despite the *Lex Regia*, the nobles became the rulers of Denmark. Had they used their power wisely, they might have remained so; but great abuses grew up. They filled every post with their creatures; they betrayed the interests of Denmark to foreign countries; the departments of state were badly administered, the national defences neglected, and the people heavily taxed. This was the state of affairs which Struensee was determined to remedy.

Christian VII., who had fretted under the yoke of the Council of State, especially when he first [Pg 286] came to the throne (when the ministers who composed it strove by every means to prevent him from governing and to keep the power in their own hands), was quite ready to carry out the daring policy of its abolition, though that policy was dictated to him by Struensee. The King did not see that he was exchanging the tyranny of King Log for that of King Stork. He always wearied of those who dictated to him, whether ministers or favourites. He had wearied of Moltke, he wearied of Bernstorff, and in the same way he wearied of Sperling and Holck; and the time was coming when he would weary most of all of Struensee and Brandt. But at present he was indifferent to everything; he had long since ceased to take the initiative, and only asked to be relieved of the burden of state. Sunk into premature dotage—a listless gazer at the drama of life—so long as he was left in peace to enjoy the few things he still cared about, he recked nothing of his government, his kingdom, or the world. By the abolition of the council he had become in theory the most absolute autocrat in Europe. He had only to speak the word, or sign a paper, for the word and the writing to immediately become law; but in fact he was an imbecile, who let his whole power and authority drift into the hands of another—nominally, into those of the Queen, in reality of Struensee, who greedily snatched at every atom of power. In his muddled brain [Pg 287] Christian VII. still clung to the belief that he was rendering himself equal to his great exemplar, Frederick the Great. The King of Prussia had found a way of diminishing the power of his ministers by becoming his own minister, and by signing the decree abolishing his Council of State Christian VII. imagined that he was acting on a similar plan. But, needless to say, there was no resemblance between the two monarchs; Frederick the Great did everything himself, but the Danish King did nothing, and the stereotyped answer he made to everyone at this time was: "Apply to Struensee". Struensee had become a sort of Grand Vizier.

The day after the suppression of the Council of State a new body was established, called the Council of Conferences, but it had no real power. The members, who were the heads of the different departments of the state, and all Struensee's nominees, met when commanded to do so by the King, and expressed their views on such business as was laid before them, advised on matters of form, and sent in their reports in writing. As these reports all passed through Struensee's hands in his new office of Master of Requests, they were very useful to him; they set him right in matters of detail, and gave him the information he required without his seeming to seek it. As that shrewd observer, Gunning, wrote: "This is no ill-timed political scheme for those at the helm, who will, by this method, be able to gain considerable lights without suffering any [Pg 288] one to have access to the King, their master, but themselves".[154]

[154] Gunning's despatch, January 1, 1771.

The abolition of the Council of State, though it was so drastic a measure, was greeted with applause by the people—the burghers and the peasants—who had long groaned under the tyranny of the nobility, and had come to look upon them as the cause of all their ills. The royal decree of course called forth a tremendous uproar from the privileged classes, and if the nobles could have conferred together the situation might have become dangerous. But Struensee hit on a very ingenious plan for driving them out of Copenhagen. Most of them were heavily in debt, and under the old order of things had set their creditors at defiance. Struensee, therefore, obtained an order from the King, decreeing that any creditor could arrest his debtor, if unable to pay at the time of demand, and keep him in prison until the debt was discharged. In a very short time nearly all the nobility were hurrying from the capital to their country seats. Having scattered them, Struensee took a further step to prevent them from returning to Copenhagen. He issued a decree, signed by the King, to the effect that it was undesirable to encourage the flocking to court of persons who hoped to make their fortunes there, for it only tended to ruin and impoverish the country districts, and entail great expense on the King. It would be much better for the nobility, who did not desire official employment, to remain on their estates and spend [Pg 289] their money there instead of coming so much to the capital; and those nobles who desired employment in the future must first qualify themselves for it in subordinate posts. In giving these appointments the King, henceforth, would be guided entirely by service and merit, and pay no regard to favour or backstairs influence.

From the enforced retirement of their country seats the Danish nobility cursed Struensee with impotent wrath; he gave them more to curse him for before long. Having got rid of them he next abolished their placemen and parasites, who might have acted as their agents in the capital. He issued a circular to all the Government departments, informing them that in future no lackey who waited on a master would be eligible for a public office; and thus the hateful system of lackeydom was abolished. Formerly the nobles at the head of the departments had given minor offices to their coachmen and their footmen in lieu of payment, and with the result that a great number of ignorant and incapable men were foisted upon the state, and the administration of the Government departments was hopelessly mismanaged. Struensee sought to break down all privileges of caste. Formerly only the nobility were allowed to use torches at night when they drove out in their carriages, but now an order was promulgated giving leave to all persons, of whatever rank, whether in hired carriages or their own, to use torches at night. But the

permission was not generally availed of—probably because the good burghers of Copenhagen found that if they and their wives encroached upon the privileges of the nobility, they did so at the risk of losing their custom. [Pg 290]

Having clipped the claws of the nobility, Struensee next aimed a series of blows at his other enemies, the clergy. During the two previous reigns the clergy had gained great influence in Denmark, and now encroached in matters outside their sphere. Not content with their spiritual sway, they expressed their opinion on political matters with great frankness from their pulpits, and even the court did not escape censure. Struensee, though the son of an eminent divine, was a freethinker, and hostile to clerical influence, and both the King and Queen disliked being preached at. Therefore it was not long before the clergy were made to feel the weight of their displeasure. A great number of religious festivals were still kept in Denmark as public holidays, to the hindrance of business, and the encouragement of idleness and extravagance on the part of the people; the clergy cherished these festivals, and hitherto the Government had not dared to abolish them, for fear of giving offence to the Church. But the new order of things had scant reverence for old abuses, and a royal decree was promulgated, which abolished, henceforth and for ever, the public holidays at Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide, the Epiphany, St. John's Day, Michaelmas Day, All Saints, the Purification, Visitation and Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin, and the annual *Te Deums* in celebration of the deliverance of Copenhagen from Charles X.'s [Pg 291] attack on February 11, 1659, and of the great fire. By another decree liberty of conscience was granted to all, and universal toleration in matters of religion. Henceforth every man would be allowed to follow his own belief without let or hindrance, to choose his own form of worship, or not to worship, as he pleased. These decrees gave great offence to the established clergy, who considered the first to be unwarrantable interference with the vested rights of the Church, and the second, an encouragement of godlessness and infidelity.

Struensee was a great believer not only in new measures but new men. Some of his appointments were good ones—notably that of Professor Oeder (an able man who had hitherto been a member of the agricultural commission) as head of the financial department. Oeder helped Struensee materially in his gigantic labours, and often warned him against precipitate and violent measures. Struensee also summoned his brother, Charles Augustus Struensee, to Copenhagen, and appointed him one of the deputies in the College of Finances. Charles Augustus was a clever and hard-working man, without his brother's genius, but with a great deal more ballast, and no objection could be taken to his appointment except on the score of nepotism—a charge which could not fairly be brought against Struensee, for his brother was the only member of his family whom he appointed to any important office. Dismissals were the order of the day in every [Pg 292] department of the state; the imperious minister brooked no opposition to his will even in the most trifling details. Count Moltke, court marshal, son of the former Prime Minister, was dismissed because he demurred to some change in ceremonial, on which he was a much better authority than Struensee; a page of the chamber, who was so imprudent as to speak disrespectfully of Struensee, was sent away without warning, and the young chamberlain Warnstedt, who was a favourite of both the King and the Queen, and had stood in confidential relations with Struensee, was banished from court in consequence of having made a single incautious remark about him. The aged and respected Viceroy of Norway, Benzon, was dismissed from office without any explanation; the Burgomaster of Bergen was discharged in the same way; the bailiff and under-bailiff of Copenhagen were displaced at an hour's notice. In fact, no official considered himself safe any longer, but was liable at any moment to be dismissed without warning, explanation or pension. As the disgraced official generally had his discharge handed to him by a groom of the royal stables mounted on a yellow horse, it became a saying in Copenhagen: "Whom did the yellow horse visit last?" or, "If you are not careful, you will see the yellow horse to-morrow".

Struensee's idea of government was absolute despotism, combined, oddly enough, with a liberal [Pg 293] and enlightened policy. He was a despot, but he was also a *doctrinaire*, and his ideas generally were in advance of his time. He had read widely German philosophy, notably that of Leibniz, and was a firm believer in the so-called eudæmonistic utilitarianism—the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number. He believed also in perfectionism—the inherent right of the individual man to work out his own perfection in every respect. Leibniz was an exponent of this school, so was Goethe, who called his Faust a "Beyond-man".[155] Struensee was a pioneer who sought to reduce these views to practice. He grafted on his German philosophy certain Pagan ideals, he affected a benevolent despotism, and he believed himself to be an *uebermensch*, a "Beyond-man," a man of destiny. So thoroughly did he believe in himself, that he forced the same conviction on others for a time—even his enemies, who saw in him something superhuman and dreaded him accordingly. He bore down all outside opposition by the sheer force of his will, and so long as he was sure of himself his power was assured.

[155] So too in our day has been Nietsche, who elaborated these views in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and other works.

Struensee was a great reformer, and the intrepidity with which he carried out his theories compels admiration, but like many other reformers he neglected to temper his zeal with discretion. Perhaps he had an instinct that his day would not be long, for he was a reformer in a hurry. Within a few months after the abolition of the Council of State he revolutionised the [Pg 294] government of the kingdom. By a series of royal decrees, nominally issued by the King, he reformed every department of the state. He rearranged the finance department, he overhauled the admiralty and the war office, he cut down the expenses of the Danish legations abroad, he abolished the method under which titles, places and pensions had been granted, and revised the collection of taxation. Efficiency and economy were his watchwords; and had his system been

given time to work, there is every reason to believe that he would have achieved both in the great spending departments of the state.

This is not the place to write a detailed account of Struensee's administration,[156] but a brief summary may be given of some of his principal reforms, because they throw a light upon the character and career of this extraordinary man. They were planned on the broad principle of "the greatest possible good for the greatest possible number," and nearly all of them aimed at benefiting the people at the expense of vested interests. To appreciate his reforms we have to remember that the government of Denmark was honeycombed with abuses, and the peasants were ground down to the level of beasts of burden. Only drastic measures could remedy this state of things, and those which Struensee proposed were so sweeping as to amount to a revolution.

[156] Professor E. Holm of Copenhagen has dealt with it most admirably in his recent work, *Danmark-Norges Historie*, 1720-1814.

Perhaps the most important reform he effected was in the administration of justice. It was decreed that henceforth all men, whatever their rank, were equal before the law; judges who had shown themselves corrupt or negligent in the performance of their duties were removed from their posts, and the delay in hearing trials was censured. A multiplicity of law courts existed in Copenhagen and the provinces, which caused great confusion and hindered the course of justice; these were all abolished, and in their stead a single jurisdiction was instituted. This reform gave great offence to lawyers, who lost many fees thereby, but it proved most effectual for the better administration of justice. [Pg 295]

The civic government of Copenhagen was reformed with a view to bettering the management of the city revenues and the carrying out of improvements. The streets were named and lighted, and the houses were numbered. These changes gave almost as much offence to the burghers as the abolition of festivals had given to the clergy, for they were regarded as encroachments on the rights and liberties which the city had obtained at various times from the Kings of Denmark. But Struensee did not heed, and routed the forces of bumbledom in the same way as he had routed those of bigotry. He even aimed a blow at Sabbatarianism, and forbade the police of Copenhagen to enter private houses without a warrant, and meddle with what might, or might not, be done by the inhabitants on Sundays. Heretofore if found working or indulging in "unseemly merriment" in their houses on Sundays, citizens were liable to fine or imprisonment—a system which led to gross abuses of the power of the police, but which was tenaciously upheld by the magistrates and clergy. [Pg 296]

Other reforms included the abolition of the censorship of the press, leaving it perfectly free; a regulation aimed at the fraudulence of trustees; and another to check the extravagant expense of funerals, which were often so costly as to entail ruin on the family of the deceased. No abuse seemed too small to escape the eagle eye of the reformer.

A royal decree was issued which benefited the serfs. Hitherto they had been helpless slaves in the hands of their tyrannical masters—the nobles and landowners; but now they were only required to render compulsory service on certain days and hours of the week, and the remaining time was their own. The peasants were also placed under the protection of the law, and all the privileges that belonged to ordinary citizens were granted to them. The peasant question was a very difficult one in Denmark, and it was Struensee's intention one day to abolish serfdom altogether. But in this reform even he was compelled to proceed by degrees.

Another royal decree abolished the salt tax, which had lain very heavily on the poorer classes, and had caused an outbreak among the peasantry. The abolition of this tax was most popular, though the reform was resisted by the nobility. A similar measure was an order forbidding the exportation of corn to foreign countries, while the importation from the duchies of Schleswig-Holstein and from one inland province to another was encouraged. The large landowners had been in the habit of selling their corn for export abroad at high prices, while their peasantry were starving for bread. This was effectually checked by this edict; many thousand loads of grain of every description were prevented from leaving the kingdom; and, during the severe winter which followed, were brought from the provincial granaries to Copenhagen, with the result that flour was sold at half the ordinary price to the inhabitants. It was also decreed that bread should be sold at the same low rate to the poor. [Pg 297]

Queen Matilda had probably something to do with the measures for improving the condition of the poor, for she had great sympathy with toiling and suffering humanity. A few weeks after the regulations enforcing the sale of cheap bread, a hospital for six hundred poor children was established in Copenhagen. In this institution the Queen took a keen interest, and to cover the cost of founding and maintaining it a tax was levied on all carriage and saddle horses in the capital—another device by which the rich were taxed for the benefit of the poor, a complete reversal of the former order of things, whereby the poor were ground down for the benefit of the rich.

Against these beneficial reforms no objection could reasonably be taken, and whatever the private character and motives of the man responsible for them, they reflected great honour on his public administration. But when he came forward as a moral reformer, his views were more open to cavil. Copenhagen in the eighteenth century was a very immoral city despite severe penalties on immorality, and a system of police supervision that interfered with the liberty of the subject—if the subject were poor. Struensee would have done well to correct the abuses of the existing system for the suppression of vice, but he chose rather to abolish it altogether. "Improved morals," wrote this eminent moralist, in one of his virtuous monarch's royal decrees, "cannot be brought about by police regulations, which are also an encroachment on human liberty; for [Pg 298]

immoral conduct, if it have no directly injurious influence on the quiet and safety of society, must be left to the conscience to condemn. The secret vices which enforced constraint entail are frequently much greater offences against morality, and constraint only generates hypocrisy." There was no doubt something to be urged from Struensee's point of view. He had theories about racial perfectionism, and like many before and since, believed that artificial selection would produce a higher breed of men. With these ideas the conventional views of morality seemed to him superfluous, and his reforms were aimed quite as much against them as against social abuses.

For instance, the Danish penal laws directed against illegitimacy were barbarous; they called for reform, but Struensee swept them away altogether. He decreed that henceforth illegitimate [Pg 299] children should not rest under any stigma; they were in future to be christened in precisely the same way as if they were legitimate, and irregular birth should no longer prevent a man from learning a trade, or carrying on a business. Mothers of illegitimate children were no more to be punished—the fathers had always got off scot free. For a long time, in consequence of these same cruel laws, secret births, child murder, and the desertion and exposure of new-born infants to the cold had been common in Copenhagen. To remedy this evil Struensee and the Queen imitated Catherine of Russia, and established a Foundling Hospital in Copenhagen,[157] but apparently without any safeguards to prevent its abuse. It began in a small way. A drawer containing a mattress was placed outside a window of the lying-in hospital; a notice was affixed that unfortunate mothers who were unable to maintain, from any cause, their children, could leave them there, to be taken care of by the state. This *crêche* was so eagerly availed of that no less than twenty-four children were found in it during the first four days, and the number increased rapidly. The following Sunday, from almost every pulpit in Copenhagen, came denunciation of the new institution for foundlings. The clergy denounced it root and branch, as putting a premium on [Pg 300] illegitimacy and immorality, and as throwing an unjust burden on the virtuous and industrious classes, by compelling them to rear and maintain the deserted offspring of the immoral and the idle. But Struensee did not heed. The old order of things, he maintained, had resulted in infanticide, and wicked waste of human life. And he held that these children, who had no fault but their illegitimacy, which was not their fault, might with proper care be reared into useful citizens. That he might thereby be going against his pet theory of racial perfectionism, and encouraging the multiplication of the unfit, apparently did not occur to him.

[157] Catherine the Great established a Foundling Hospital in St. Petersburg in 1763, with the aid of the philanthropist Demidoff. The Empress gave 50,000 roubles towards its maintenance, and granted it privileges and favours such as no benevolent institution had ever received before, including exemption from taxation and the monopoly of the state lottery.

Struensee followed up this by an attack upon the marriage laws. It was decreed that henceforth none but the injured party should bring a charge of adultery. The custom by which persons convicted of adultery were put in the pillory and preached at publicly by the clergyman of the parish was also abolished, and all penalties beyond the dissolution of the marriage tie were forbidden. The table of kindred and affinity was rearranged, and marriages within certain prohibited degrees were allowed. The Church disapproved of the marriage of first cousins (though both Frederick V. and Christian VII. had contracted these alliances); they were not forbidden, but a dispensation was always required. This dispensation was now declared to be unnecessary by royal decree, and the same authority henceforth gave a man permission to marry [Pg 301] his deceased wife's niece, or his deceased wife's sister. This aroused furious protests from the clergy, but Struensee did not heed, and further aggrieved the Church by converting two disused chapels into hospitals for the sick poor.

Thus it will be seen that, in his zeal for reform, Struensee aroused against himself the antagonism of nearly every class. The court officials, the nobles, the clergy, the lawyers, the burghers were attacked in turn, and all saw their ancient privileges torn away from them. Under the circumstances, their hostility to the new order of things was natural, but the unpopularity of Struensee among the people, whom he sought so greatly to benefit, is not so easy to understand. That he was unpopular there is no doubt. A good deal of this was due to the prejudice among the Danes against the German and the foreigner. Nearly all the advisers who now surrounded the King were of German extraction, and were dubbed "the German Junto". All grace was taken from the royal decrees in the eyes of the Danes by the fact that they were issued in German. It is true the court had been for centuries the centre of Germanism in Denmark; but the people knew that Christian VII. spoke and wrote Danish very well, and until the advent of Struensee all royal decrees and government regulations (except those addressed to the duchies of Schleswig-Holstein) had been written in the Danish language. Now, in disregard of the national prejudice, they were issued in German; and the Danish people regarded this as an insult offered to them by [Pg 302] a German minister. Moreover, it gave colour to the rumour that the King was for the most part ignorant of the decrees which appeared in his name, for it was said that otherwise he would most certainly have framed them in his own language when addressing his own people. Struensee, who had a contempt for forms and prejudices, and looked at everything from the broad point of view, excused himself on the ground that he had no time to learn the Danish language; but even so it would have been easy for him to have had these decrees translated into the Danish. As it was he threw away all the popularity he might have gained from his beneficial measures by wantonly affronting the national sentiment.

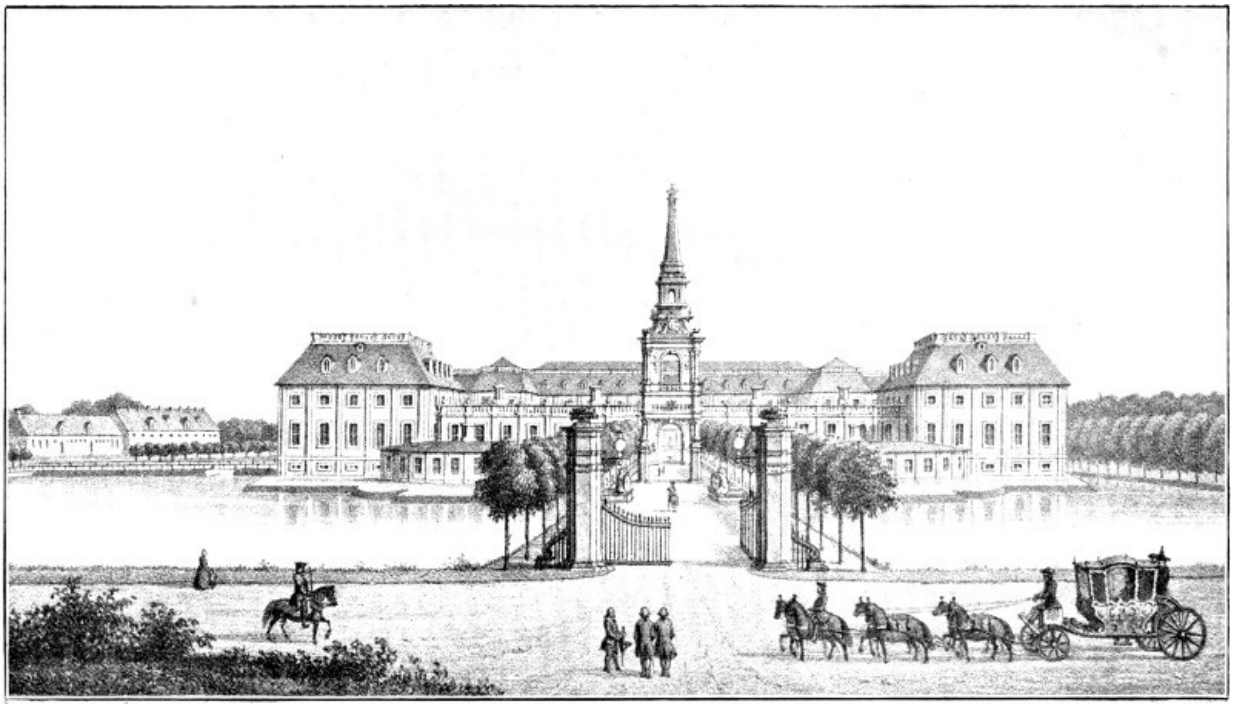
CHAPTER XVIII.

[Pg 303]

THE ORDER OF MATILDA.

1770-1771.

A curious commentary on the social reforms of the new regime was furnished by the proceedings of the court. Extraordinary rumours were circulated concerning the conduct of the Queen and her favourite, and though these rumours were grossly exaggerated, still it must be confessed that Matilda showed at this time a recklessness of public opinion which was, to say the least of it, unwise. Having regard to the difficult and delicate situation in which she found herself placed, a young and beautiful woman, tied to a semi-imbecile husband, and with a handsome and ambitious man as her adviser and intimate friend, it surely behoved the Queen to regulate her conduct with the nicest discretion, and to have in her household only those ladies whose character was beyond reproach. This was the more necessary as the sweeping, and on the whole beneficial, reforms which the Queen and her adviser were introducing were bound to raise up against her a host of enemies whose interests were more or less attacked—enemies who would be sure to note any false step she might make to arouse public opinion against her. Her duty to herself, her duty to [Pg 304] her child, and her duty to her high position all combined to make it imperative that in her private life she should give not the slightest occasion for enemies to blaspheme. But acting under the spell of Struensee Matilda threw discretion to the winds, and even went out of her way in affronting the prejudices of the staider part of the community. The clergy, already enraged against the Queen and Struensee for their attacks upon the Church, were now able to point to the conduct of the Queen and her favourite as a proof that their strictures were just.



THE PALACE OF HIRSCHHOLM,
Temp. 1770.

Hitherto the Danish court, outwardly at any rate, had respected Sunday, and the King and Queen had been regular in attendance at public worship. Now, though the King and Queen went to church sometimes to keep up appearances, Sunday was purposely selected as a day of pleasure. For instance, one Sunday at Hirschholm there was a steeple-chase in the royal park, and the King gave prizes to the winners. The races attracted a large and disreputable crowd. Nor was it enough to slight religious convictions; they were openly mocked at and derided. On another Sunday Brandt was guilty of the folly and bad taste of delivering a mock sermon from the pulpit in the private chapel at Hirschholm before the King and an assembled court, who laughed and applauded. At this exhibition it is only fair to say the Queen was not present. Naturally these things were repeated at Copenhagen, and the “revels of Hirschholm” formed a favourite subject [Pg 305] of conversation and reprobation. The clergy fanned the flame of indignation, and many a covert allusion to Jezebel was heard from the pulpits. Moreover, by abolishing the censorship of the press Struensee had put a sword into the hands of his enemies, and before long many scurrilous pamphlets were sold in the streets, containing the coarsest abuse of the Queen and her “minion”. Caricatures in which the Queen and Struensee were grossly depicted, and satires after the manner of Juvenal, purporting to describe the orgies of the court at Hirschholm, were circulated in Copenhagen, and not only posted on the walls of houses, but even in the passages of the royal palaces.

All this popular discontent played into the hands of the Queen-Dowager, Juliana Maria, who, with her son, Prince Frederick, lived in comparative retirement at Fredensborg, and sought, by the decorum of her household and by her regular attendance at public worship, to draw a contrast between her court and that of the reigning Queen. Juliana Maria had always been unpopular, but now, though she was not loved, she was respected, and became generally recognised as the representative of the old regime, which offered in so many ways a favourable contrast to the new.

She took the place of the Queen-Mother, Sophia Magdalena, and her palace of Fredensborg became the rallying-place of those who were discontented with Struensee and his methods. It is quite possible that intrigues were set on foot at Fredensborg with the object of overthrowing the [Pg 306] favourite, and it is probable that Struensee, who had spies everywhere, came to hear of them, and in revenge advised the reigning Queen to treat her brother-in-law and his mother with discourtesy, which was not only unworthy but unwise. Juliana Maria and her son were rarely invited to court, and when they attended they were often kept waiting for some time before the King and Queen received them, treated with little ceremony, and made to feel that their presence was unwelcome. Moreover, on the birthday of the Queen-Dowager, Juliana Maria held her usual court at Fredensborg, but neither the King nor the Queen attended or sent congratulations, an omission which, under the circumstances, was very marked. Prince Frederick had been in the habit of attending the riding-school at Christiansborg, and had had free access to the royal stables. One morning on presenting himself there he was curtly informed that no horses could be placed at his disposal in future, and the riding-school was closed to him, as the Queen had reserved it for her own use.

A great deal of this Juliana Maria had brought upon herself by the scant consideration she had shown to the young Queen when she seemed a person of no importance, and by the malignant and unjust rumours she had circulated against her when she first came to Denmark. But Matilda would have done well to be magnanimous, for these slights provoked a reaction in favour of the Queen-Dowager. Juliana Maria behaved with great circumspection. She did not publicly resent [Pg 307] the affronts put upon herself and her son, though she lamented them in private, and she was careful always to say that she in no way censured the King, but laid all the blame on the Queen and her favourite. Her hatred of Matilda deepened, and the most injurious reports which were circulated concerning the Queen had their origin in the salons of Fredensborg. The invalid King was represented as living in a state of terror under the dominion of his Queen and her imperious favourite. He was treated, it was said, with positive disrespect, if not with cruelty, by the minions with whom he was surrounded, and Matilda forgot not only her duty as a Queen and wife but also as a mother.

This last indictment had reference to the treatment of the Crown Prince. So far the heir to the throne had come little before the public, but suddenly there spread throughout the kingdom alarming rumours of the treatment which he suffered at the hands of his mother and her adviser, and such was the universal prejudice that these rumours were generally credited. It was said that the Crown Prince was neglected in a scandalous manner; he was left to run about the gardens of Hirschholm in all weathers, insufficiently clothed, with no one to look after him, and no companions but a boy of low rank; and his education had not yet begun. He was frequently beaten by his mother and Struensee, and shut up in an iron cage for hours together as a harsh punishment; his food was of the coarsest kind, and served in a wooden bowl, which was placed on [Pg 308] the ground. Altogether he was treated more like an animal than a human being, especially one who would some day be called upon to fill a high destiny. Even the foreign envoys heard of this treatment of the Crown Prince, and commented upon it in their despatches. Gunning, who considered the matter not only from a political but also from a domestic point of view (seeing that the King of England was the uncle of the Crown Prince), wrote home in bitter sarcasm:—

> “As no step taken in the education of a prince is without its importance, his nursery may sometimes present a scene not unworthy of attention. The philosopher of Geneva would hail the dawn of more enlightened days could he behold (as he might here) the scene of a monarch left from his cradle to crawl unassisted upon his hands and knees (like the nursling of a Norwegian peasant) and condemned to lose his meals, most philosophically concealed, unless he could discover them by the sagacity of his nose. Such are the maxims which obtain in the royal nursery of Denmark. The latter instance is no doubt calculated to sharpen the talent of investigation, a talent very requisite where the labyrinth of intrigue requires some such guide.”[158]

[158] Gunning’s despatch, Copenhagen, October 6, 1770.

Notwithstanding Gunning’s authority, these rumours were shamefully exaggerated, and if they may be taken as a sample of the others circulated about the Queen, it is very difficult to say of any of them where fact ends and imagination begins. In this case they were not only untrue but [Pg 309] cruel, for the maternal instinct was always strong in Queen Matilda, and she was never so happy as when with her child. Moreover, it was in her interest that the Crown Prince should have his health guarded in every way, for her position would be seriously affected if she were no longer the mother of the heir to the throne. The Spartan treatment, therefore, which the Crown Prince undoubtedly underwent, was sanctioned by his mother from the highest motives, for Struensee had persuaded her that it was the training of all others most conducive to the child’s well-being. From his birth the young Prince had been of a weakly constitution, and had shown a tendency to consumption; he had been pampered and spoiled by his attendants, with the result that he would not take the slightest exercise; he was fractious and peevish, and wanted always to be petted and amused.

Struensee, who was a believer in the famous treatment of Emile, changed all this, and urged the Queen to bring up her son as simply as possible, so that he would grow up to be a strong and a self-reliant man. The Crown Prince’s former attendants were sent away, and he was given the simplest fare, consisting of vegetables, rice boiled in water, bread and water, and milk and potatoes; no meat was allowed him. He wore light silk clothes, and went about bare-footed. He was bathed twice a day in cold water, and soon became so fond of it that he would go into the [Pg 310]

bath of his own accord. He was forced to take exercise, kept as much as possible in the open air, and made to run about the gardens in all weathers. His room at Hirschholm was a large one on the ground floor, some forty feet in length, and on the garden side it was closed in by an iron trellis-work, which accounted for the story that the heir to the throne was shut up in a cage. The little Prince had only one playmate, a boy who was the natural son of one of the court surgeons, and known as “little Karl”. These boys were always together, and no difference was made between them. They played, quarrelled and fought as they would, and no one was allowed to interfere with them, nor were any of the servants about the court suffered to speak to, or play with, the Crown Prince. This rule was kept very strictly. For instance, one day, when the little Prince fell in the garden and hurt himself, Struensee’s valet, who was passing, picked him up and tried to comfort him. For this breach of rule the servant was sent to the Blue Tower in Copenhagen and imprisoned for some time. The boy was not allowed on any pretext to take advantage on the ground of his rank. One day when he and his companion had some quarrel, Frederick asked Karl how he dared to strike a prince. “I am as much a prince as you,” the other boy answered. “Yes, but I am a Crown Prince,” Frederick retorted. Thereupon the two boys fought till Frederick won the victory. Struensee heard of this battle royal, and told the Queen, who, when she knew the cause, insisted on the Crown Prince begging the other boy’s pardon. As [Pg 311] Frederick refused to do so, the Queen gave him a whipping. From this arose the rumour that he was frequently severely beaten. The charge that he was neglected rests on more foundation. One day during the autumn of 1770, at Hirschholm, the King and Queen and all the court went out hunting, and on their return very late the Crown Prince could nowhere be found. A search was made for him, and he was at last found lying insensible in the garden half-dead with cold. He was put to bed with a nurse, who took him in her arms and gradually restored him. The negligence in this case was due to the servants who had been left in charge of him, but the blame was laid upon the Queen.

The incident became known, and so loud and insistent was the popular clamour that the court physician, Berger, became frightened, and insisted on some modification of the Crown Prince’s treatment. Henceforth the boy was allowed to wear shoes and stockings, given warmer clothing, and his room was slightly heated in the winter. His diet was also made a little fuller; his rice was boiled in mutton-broth, and he was given meat-soup for dinner. His education, however, was still left severely alone, and at the age of four he could not speak any language properly, but only a jargon of Danish and German, which he had learnt from his playmate. The excuse put forward for this retarded education was that the boy was far from strong, and it was the Queen’s object to [Pg 312] see his health thoroughly established before she burdened his strength with studies.

The Queen, as a rule, was indifferent to public criticism, but she was much hurt at the strictures passed on her for her treatment of her son, especially those made by foreign courts. It is possible that some remonstrance may have reached her from England, either from her mother or her brother, for she had drawings made of the Crown Prince, showing him with his little rake and spade and watering-can, playing in the garden, or leaning against his mother, all designed to show how healthy and happy he was. These were given to the foreign envoys for transmission to their respective courts.[159]

[159] Some rough sketches of these little pictures—in water-colours—are preserved in the royal archives at Copenhagen.

The best answer to this charge against the Queen is to be found in the fact that the Crown Prince threw off his early weakness, grew up a strong and healthy boy, and developed into a vigorous man, who lived to a sound old age. All through his life the Crown Prince Frederick (who afterwards became Frederick VI.) was able to endure much more fatigue than an ordinary man, and he always adhered to the simple and frugal habits to which he had been inured when a child.

The King and Queen remained at Hirschholm until late in the autumn, and then removed to the castle of Frederiksberg, near Copenhagen. Struensee and Brandt accompanied them in close attendance. Struensee now was a permanent inmate of the royal palaces, and wherever the court [Pg 313] went he went too—a special suite of rooms adjacent to, or communicating with, the Queen’s apartments were set apart for him.[160]

[160] The castle of Frederiksberg is not much changed to this day, and a secret door is still shown which, tradition says, led from Struensee’s apartments to those of the Queen.

At Frederiksberg the King and Queen lived in comparative retirement, but as unpleasant rumours were persistently promulgated about the King’s health, Struensee thought it well that Christian should occasionally show himself in public, and it was announced that the King and Queen would drive into Copenhagen every week to hold a court at the Christiansborg Palace. There was a general curiosity to see the King; but when the court was held he only appeared for a few minutes and spoke to nobody; the Queen then took his place and received the company alone. She was much mortified to see how the nobility and their wives held aloof from the court. But on reflection she could hardly have been surprised, for not only had recent legislation been directed against them, but the King had published a decree a few months before recommending the nobility to spend less time in the capital and more on their estates. Those who attended court now, outside the foreign envoys and the ministers and officials whose duties compelled them to be present, were chiefly the lesser and newer nobility, the professional classes and even the [Pg 314] *bourgeoisie*. It was Matilda’s ambition to have a brilliant court. It was undoubtedly brilliant in the sense of display, and was largely attended, but the company who came could scarcely be said to add to its distinction.

The Crown Prince of Sweden (who afterwards ascended the throne as Gustavus III.) and his

younger brother, the Hereditary Prince Frederick Adolphus, paid a visit to the King and Queen of Denmark at this time. The Crown Prince of Sweden had married Christian VII.'s elder sister, and this was his first visit to Copenhagen since his marriage. As Struensee's foreign policy was to cultivate good relations with Sweden as against Russia, every effort was made to receive the princes with honour. A masquerade ball was arranged for their entertainment, plays and operas were performed at the theatre, and banquets, concerts and levees were held every day. Despite these efforts the Crown Prince of Sweden did not appear to be pleased with his reception, and he made audible comments on the strange company he met at the court of Copenhagen. At the masquerade, in particular, almost any one came who would. He pointedly asked the Queen what had become of the Danish nobility, several of whom he inquired for by name, and scarcely concealed his annoyance that they were not present to do him honour. One day, at the royal table, when he found that two or three of the wives of the principal merchants of Copenhagen were dining there, he sarcastically exclaimed, "And are there no Jews and Jewesses here too?" [Pg 315] On another occasion a beautiful lady of the *bourgeoisie* rallied the Prince politely for not having acknowledged her obeisance, and he answered elaborately (in the hearing of the Queen) that he could not understand how the Swedish envoy had made such an oversight, for he had strictly ordered him to present every lady of noble rank who attended the Danish court, and he could only suppose the minister had forgotten as he had presented so few. These sarcasms were very wounding to the Queen, and her pride was much hurt. The Crown Prince of Sweden and his brother treated the King and Queen with studied deference, but they declined to regard Struensee in any other light than that of a man of almost menial birth, who might be useful to them politically. Struensee, who had arrogated to himself a foremost place at the Danish court, was incensed at thus being put outside the charmed circle, and vented his ill-humour on the Queen, who was sufficiently mortified on her own account. It was a relief to every one when the visit ended, and the Swedish princes betook themselves to Gottorp to stay with Prince Charles of Hesse, and amaze him and his wife with an account of the extraordinary proceedings of the court of Copenhagen. This was the only royal visit paid to the Danish court during Matilda's regime, and it gave her no taste for others.

The state of the King's mind made any repetition of this experience impossible, for Christian VII. was no longer able to play the host to royal guests. One of the current rumours was that [Pg 316] Struensee and the court physician, Berger, who was his creature, tampered with the King's health, and gave him drugs which dulled his understanding. Certainly, when the King appeared in public his dejected air and extreme indifference to everything that was going on around him gave colour to the report—which was not true. The fact was that the condition of Christian by this time had become hopeless; his mind had partly given way, and the greatest care was taken by the Queen and Struensee lest this should be discovered. For if the King were proved to be incapable of governing, what force had the decrees issued in his name? But the King was declared to be in perfect health, and the fiction of his absolutism was rigidly maintained. On the strength of this, sometimes, impudent demands were made upon him, when Brandt was out of the way.

For instance, one of the King's pages drove his master into a corner, and said to him, "Your Majesty, make me a groom of the chamber". Nor would he let the King out until he had granted his request, and the royal word once spoken could not be recalled. Occasionally the King aired his authority in a way which his keepers did not approve, and now and then a ray of intelligence crossed his brain which found expression in satire, and made Struensee fear that perhaps the King was not quite so imbecile as he looked. One day Christian, who wished for nothing but to amuse himself, had been worried to sign commissions appointing several new conference [Pg 317] councillors, creatures of Struensee, who had little or no qualification for their posts. The King that evening at dinner kicked his favourite dog "Gourmand," who was lying at his feet, and asked, "Can you bark?" and when the dog began yelping, the King said, "As you can bark, you shall be a conference councillor too". He thereupon rose and proposed the health of "Councillor Gourmand," to which all present had to drink. He also gave the dog a salary, which had to be paid regularly from the treasury. Struensee's enemies regarded the incident as a bitter joke on the part of the King, and nicknamed the Minister "Gourmand".

On another occasion when Christian had been forced to appoint a man, whom he disliked, a chamberlain, he revenged himself by making one of the palace menials a chamberlain too. The man, whose duty it was to light the stoves, came into the royal apartment just after Christian had been worried into signing the paper. "Hullo, my good fellow, would you like to be a chamberlain?" cried the King. The man grinned sheepishly, and, to humour his master, answered that he would not mind. "Very well," said the King, "you shall be one: come with me." He took the servant by the hand, and led him just as he was, in his yellow blouse, into the great hall, where the Queen, Struensee and all the court were assembled, walked him to the middle of the room, and shouted in a loud voice: "I appoint this man my chamberlain". As the theory that the King was absolute had to be kept up at all hazards, the man became a chamberlain forthwith. [Pg 318] Struensee, however, hit on a device next day for getting out of the difficulty, and bought the title back from the man for the price of a small farm some distance from the capital, whither he was despatched as soon as possible.

It was difficult to guard against these *contretemps*, for the King's condition varied considerably; some days he was quite sane and lucid in his conversation, so that no one would imagine that there was anything the matter with him; on others he was to all intents and purposes a madman. But his keepers never knew when the mania would break out, and it sometimes showed itself at most inconvenient seasons. One day when the Queen was holding a levee (it having been announced that the King did not feel well enough to be present), the door suddenly opened, and the King, who had managed to evade the vigilance of Brandt, walked into the room, and waving

his hand to the assembled court, peremptorily commanded silence. The conversation was at once hushed, and the Queen, pale and trembling, wondered what was coming next. The King, with great earnestness, recited *The Warning Ode to Princes*, by the famous poet, Klopstock, a poem peculiarly suitable under the circumstances. When it was finished, he again waved his hand to the company, burst into a laugh, and walked out of the room. It was probably after this incident that Gunning wrote:—

> "I am very sorry to communicate so disagreeable an article of news as that alarming reports have been circulated on the subject of his Danish Majesty's health. Notwithstanding infinite pains have been taken to conceal or explain away some very unpromising symptoms, I am apprehensive they have but too much foundation."[161]

[Pg 319]

[161] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, February 12, 1771.

The court had by this time returned to Copenhagen and taken up residence at the Christiansborg Palace. Struensee now strove in every way to win popularity for his administration. He was a great believer in *panem et circenses*, and in pursuance of this policy seized upon the King's birthday (January 29, 1771) as an opportunity for bribing the populace. The celebrations rivalled in magnificence those of the coronation, and were also intended to dispel the idea that the King was ignored in his own court. A fountain was erected in the palace yard whence flowed red and white wine, and all who would were allowed to drink from it the King's health. Sheep and oxen were roasted whole, and distributed to the crowd; gold and silver medals were struck, and money thrown to the people. The King and Queen looked down upon the scene from a balcony, while the galleries which ran round the quadrangle were crowded with spectators.

The King's birthday was also made the occasion of glorifying the reigning Queen, and of rewarding her adherents. Struensee gave Matilda all the semblance of power, and himself grasped the substance. In order to identify the young Queen with the revolutionary changes that had recently taken place, and impressing upon the nation the prominent position which she now held in the councils of the state, a new order was established, which was called the Order of Matilda. The Queen was founder of the order, and the statutes were as follows:—

[Pg 320]

> "I. The order shall be called the Order of Matilda.
> "II. It shall be conferred on both women and men. The number shall never exceed twenty-four, the Queen, its founder, included.
> "III. It shall only be conferred on those persons who deserve particular attention of the Queen, independently of merit or services rendered.
> "IV. It is forbidden to ask for the order, and those who act contrary to this rule will deprive themselves for ever of the hope of obtaining it.
> "V. Those women or men who, on receiving the Order of Matilda, already possess the 'Order of the Perfect Union' of the late Queen-Mother, Sophia Magdalena, shall deliver the insignia of the latter to the Queen.
> "VI. The order shall be worn with a pink ribbon striped with silver. The men shall wear it round the neck, and the ladies fasten it in the shape of a bow on the left breast.
> "VII. On the death of any person decorated with the Order of Matilda, the heirs are expected to return the insignia to the Queen."

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The badge of the order was a medallion with the letters "C. M." set in diamonds, with a royal crown over it and a laurel wreath round it. The Queen was pleased to confer it on the King, the Queen-Dowager, and Prince Frederick. The others to whom it was given on the day of its institution were Struensee, Rantzau, Osten, Brandt, General and Madame Gahler, Madame de Plessen, who still lived at Celle, and Baroness Schimmelmann, and Countess Holstein, the Queen's ladies-in-waiting. The Queen only decorated those who were her avowed supporters, and the establishment of this order gave her the opportunity of honouring them in a special and personal manner. But Struensee's enemies declared that he had invented the order for his own special benefit, inasmuch as he despised the Order of the Dannebrog, and did not yet dare to take for himself the Order of the Elephant—the highest order in Denmark. This, however, was a malicious invention, for Struensee could have had any order and title he wished, and if he did not take them all at once, it was because he liked to prolong the pleasure of anticipation.

The court remained at Christiansborg throughout the winter, and Brandt, who was now established as a sort of master of the revels, had the arrangement of all the festivities. His first step was to alter and redecorate the royal theatre in Copenhagen at great cost, and arrange a series of operas. For the first time in Denmark, since the Reformation, performances were given on Sunday, and Sunday came to be regarded as the gala night at the opera, when the King and Queen would attend. This gave fresh offence to the puritan party in Copenhagen. The rearranging of the royal theatre was used as an occasion for offering a further slight to the Queen-Dowager and her son. They had hitherto been accustomed to share the King's box, but now they were allotted one of their own. The Queen-Dowager rarely attended operas, but Prince Frederick did, and the excuse put forward was that there was no room for the Prince in the royal box; but when, after protest, he yielded the point, Struensee and Brandt appeared in the box, and seated themselves immediately behind the King and Queen.

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Struensee turned his attention to the court, and soon the new brooms were busily sweeping out this Augean stable of privilege and corruption. The expenditure of the court was carefully revised, a great many useless offices, chiefly held by the younger sons of the nobility, were abolished, and pensions and salaries greatly reduced. The King of Denmark was burdened with a

great number of costly palaces, which were always in need of repair. None of these palaces was closed, but the embellishment of them, which was always going on, was commanded to cease. By order of the late King Frederick V. the building of a marble church, to be named after him [Pg 323] Frederiks-Kirke, had been begun in Copenhagen, after magnificent designs by Jardin, the French architect. The building of this church, which had now been going on for twenty years at enormous cost, crippled the treasury. Struensee, who considered the building of churches as useless waste, put a stop to the works, and broke the contracts with the builders. The church remained half-finished.[162] This occasioned much discontent; the contractors declared that they were ruined, the architect was loud in his complaints, artists protested against the vandalism of abandoning so magnificent an undertaking, and the clergy were scandalised that the house of the Lord should be left in this condition while large sums were squandered upon masquerades and play-houses. It is true that Struensee's changes in the court did not effect much economy, for the perpetual round of entertainments and festivities organised by Brandt more than ate up anything that might be saved in another direction.

[162] It so remained until 1878 for lack of funds, when Tietgen, a wealthy banker of Copenhagen, undertook the cost, and it was finally completed in 1894. The handsome copper-sheathed dome is a conspicuous object in Copenhagen, especially when the city is approached from the sea.

To bring money into the depleted treasury, Struensee established a royal Danish lottery, and it became a most profitable institution, not only to the court but to the Government. Its establishment was regarded by many as state encouragement of gambling, which would not fail to bring ruin upon thousands; but protest was unavailing, for a mania for gambling seized the [Pg 324] citizens of Copenhagen and the people in the provinces, and nothing was talked of but the lottery, to the hindrance of regular and honest occupation. Struensee's defence to his critics was that he did not establish gambling, which already existed in Denmark; he merely sought to regulate it, and turn the craze to the benefit of the state. In this, as in many other things, he was imitating Catherine the Great, who raised money in the same way.

Struensee closed his programme of court reform by what was in effect an indirect attack upon the army, though it was really aimed at the nobility. He abolished by royal decree the two squadrons of Household Cavalry or King's Bodyguard, who, composed of picked handsome men, were the flower of the Danish army. Struensee considered them to be useless, and justified their abolition on the ground of economy; but it was said that a personal grievance had something to do with it. The officers of the Household Cavalry were all men of noble birth, and had the right of coming to court when they liked. Many of them held ornamental posts which Struensee had swept away. Naturally the officers did not view these reforms with favour, and they revenged themselves by making slighting remarks about the mixed company which now formed the court circle, and ridiculing the more prominent members of it, including the favourite himself. Struensee stopped this annoyance by abolishing the Household Cavalry by a stroke of his pen, [Pg 325] and gave directions that the officers, who could not at once be attached to other cavalry regiments, were to be placed on half-pay; but the non-commissioned officers and privates received no compensation beyond the option of joining the Foot Guards, whom they looked down upon and despised.

A terrific uproar followed the promulgation of this order. The army declared that it was an attack on the King's majesty and prestige, he could not be properly guarded without his cavalry. The protests of the nobles, the clergy, the lawyers, the magistracy had been nothing to this. The officers at whom Struensee really aimed belonged of course to a class, but the troopers were from the people, whom he desired to conciliate. They were very popular among the citizens of Copenhagen, who were proud of them. Even the Queen was frightened at the din, and feared that in this measure Struensee had gone too far. Some of her fear must have communicated itself to him; for when the Horse Guards were returning to their barracks from the parade, where the King's order had been read to them, Struensee, who was driving, met them face to face. The aspect of the soldiers and the populace was so threatening that, believing a mutiny to be imminent, he fled back to the palace and hastily summoned the heads of the war department—Gahler, Rantzau and Falckenskjold. The result was a complete capitulation so far as the rank and file were concerned. A cabinet order was issued declaring that the disbandment of the Household [Pg 326] Cavalry was only a prelude to the establishment of a model corps which was to be called "The Flying Bodyguard". This corps was to be composed of the non-commissioned officers and men of the two squadrons disbanded, and picked men from other cavalry regiments. Struensee declared that his only object was to provide really efficient cavalry, and this he had intended all the time. Now that the danger had passed he sought to conceal that it was a concession forced from him by fear. But the rumour of his panic spread about the city, and it was even said that he had been frightened into offering his resignation. The rumour was not generally believed, for it was thought incredible that a man who had shown himself so daring and indomitable should thus show signs of weakness.

Struensee recognised that, from the popularity point of view, he had made a false move, and sought to retrieve it by popularising the court. Everything now was done for the masses and nothing for the classes. When, in 1771, spring came (and it comes with a rush in Denmark) the beautiful gardens of the Rosenborg[163] Castle in Copenhagen, and the park and gardens of Frederiksberg, outside the walls of the city, were thrown open to the people, and on Sundays and [Pg 327] holidays military bands performed for their benefit. The King and Queen frequently honoured the concerts with their presence. They would dine in the palace, and then mingle freely with the crowd in the gardens, which was composed of all classes. The grounds of the Rosenborg were

especially beautiful and varied, with shady groves and shrubberies. Often of an evening the gardens were illuminated with coloured lamps, and refreshment buffets were erected. Struensee gave permission to the proprietor of the buffets to open a faro-bank which was much frequented, and the rent paid for the tables was given to the foundling hospital. Catherine the Great had done the same thing at St. Petersburg. The clergy again cursed Struensee from their pulpits; they declared that he turned the King's gardens into haunts of libertinism, gambling and drunkenness, and the shady groves and dark alleys into scenes of iniquity. These charges were greatly exaggerated and fell wide of the mark. Most of the amusement was quite innocent, and despite the anathema of the Church, the opening of the royal gardens was the most popular measure of Struensee's administration.

[163] Rosenborg, a handsome Renaissance palace with pediments and towers, was erected by that splendour-loving monarch, Christian IV., in 1610. It was his favourite residence, and from his death until the reign of Christian VII. was used as an occasional residence of the Danish monarchs, who here deposited their jewels, coronation robes and other treasures. Christian VII. and Matilda never used the Rosenborg as a residence. It is now converted into a Danish historical museum, and is full of relics and beautiful things. A visit to it is a most instructive lesson in Danish history.

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE DICTATOR.

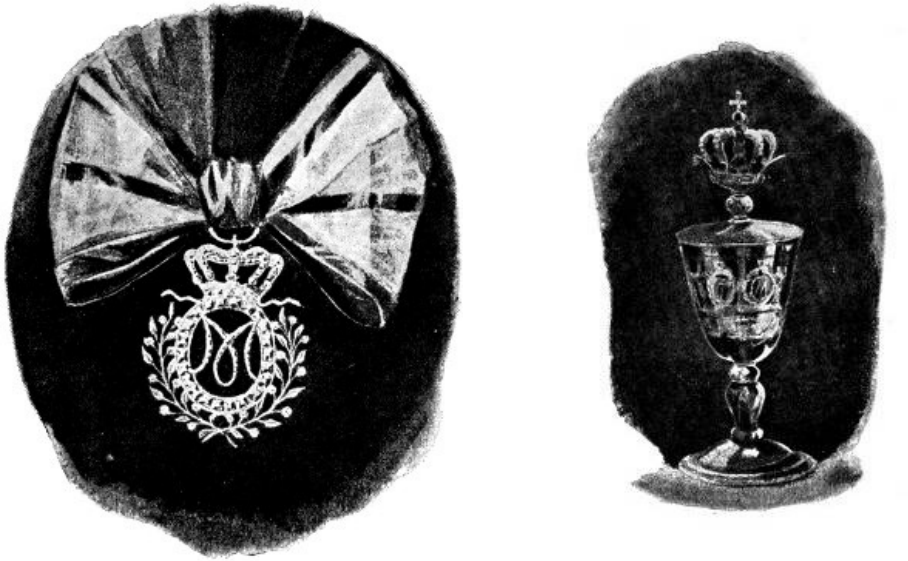
1771.

When the court removed from Copenhagen to Hirschholm for the summer, it was officially announced that the Queen was likely again to become a mother. The fact had long been known to people about the court, but the publication of it was unduly delayed. Some months before its announcement Gunning wrote to England: “As no declaration has yet been made of her Danish Majesty’s pregnancy, I have long entertained scruples with regard to the propriety of mentioning it; but as nobody seems to make the least doubt of its truth, I am at length convinced I ought no longer to suppress so important a piece of intelligence”.[164] Extraordinary mystery was observed. The Saxon minister informed his court that at the last drawing-room held before the Queen’s confinement, no one ventured to inquire after her Majesty’s health, though it was the usual custom.

[164] Gunning’s despatch, Copenhagen, February 12, 1771.

The news was ill-received by the Danish people, who had hitherto not been disposed to judge the young Queen too harshly. Except by the clergy, and some women, Matilda was more pitied than [Pg 329] blamed, and spoken of with sorrow rather than with anger. But when her pregnancy was at last declared, and an order issued for prayers to be offered for her in the churches, many people (even those who had tried to believe the best) regarded the announcement as a confirmation of their worst suspicions. The clergy in many instances did not obey the order to pray for the Queen, and in some of the principal churches in Copenhagen half the congregation rose up and left the church when the prayer was read. The Danes, though accustomed to the profligacy of their kings, had hitherto regarded their queens as above suspicion. The old Queen-Mother, Sophia Magdalena, had been a model of respectability: Queen Louise was almost worshipped on account of her domestic virtues: even Juliana Maria, the Queen-Dowager, unpopular though she was, on account of her intriguing and vindictive disposition, had never given occasion for the slightest whisper against her fair fame. When, therefore, Matilda, who had come to Denmark little more than four years before, a child-bride with golden hair and blue eyes, the incarnation of innocence, and who (during the early years of her married life) had won all hearts by the way she had borne her sorrows, suddenly put aside her modesty and dignity, surrounded herself with ladies of easy virtue, and compromised herself with a man of inferior position, she alienated the sympathies of the people.

It is true that, even admitting the worst, of which there was no positive proof, the young Queen of [Pg 330] Denmark was only imitating the conduct of the Empress Catherine of Russia and her predecessors, the Empresses Ann and Elizabeth. But Russia was a more barbarous country than Denmark, and the priests of the Eastern Church took a more tolerant view of breaches of the seventh commandment than the puritanical clergy of Denmark. Moreover, Catherine conducted her amours with more discretion than Matilda; her conduct in public was a model of decorum, however shameless it might be in private; she was careful always to conciliate the clergy, to respect the rights and privileges of the national Church, and to be regular in her attendance at public worship. But Matilda, urged by Struensee, had attacked the rights of the established Church, and had needlessly shocked the conventions. And whereas the favourites of the Empress of Russia were puppets in her hands, the Queen of Denmark was a puppet in the hands of her favourite.



(1) **(2)**

TWO RELICS OF QUEEN MATILDA IN THE ROSENBORG CASTLE, COPENHAGEN.
(1) THE INSIGNIA OF THE ORDER OF MATILDA; (2) THE

It must be repeated that much would have been forgiven the young and beautiful Queen had her favourite been other than he was—had he been a Dane of good birth, who respected the proprieties sufficiently to keep himself in the background. Had the young Queen been first, and her favourite second, she might have gathered as much power in her hands as she would, and have aroused little opposition except at the court of the Queen-Dowager, and those whose [Pg 331] interests she attacked. She would certainly have reigned still in the hearts of the people, who were willing to make great allowance because of her wrongs. But when her favourite was a German, an upstart, who flaunted his power over the Queen in the face of the public, and made her do a hundred things which were not in keeping with her rank as a queen, or her dignity as a woman, when every one knew that it was he who dictated the new policy of the King, and used the Queen as a buffer between him and the popular indignation, when he attacked the national institutions and flouted the national sentiment at every turn—it is no wonder that a cry of indignation went up, not only against the minister, but also against the Queen.

This indignation deepened when it was announced on July 7, 1771, that the Queen was delivered of a daughter. Mounted messengers at once conveyed the tidings from Hirschholm, whither the court had gone three weeks before, to Copenhagen, and the birth of the princess was proclaimed in the usual manner from the balcony of the Christiansborg Palace. Royal salutes were discharged from the cannon on the ramparts and at the arsenal, and heralds in gorgeous tabards blew a blast of trumpets from the town hall and the principal church towers. But so far from the event arousing any public rejoicing, ominous murmurs were heard among the people, and the free press did not hesitate to abuse its freedom by more scurrilous articles and gross caricatures. [Pg 332] Though there was no proof, the newborn infant was generally believed to be the child of Struensee, “who,” said his enemies, “had shamelessly dishonoured the King’s bed, and introduced his vile posterity in the place of the pure blood of Oldenburg”. It must be stated here, however, that even if the Queen’s indiscretion with Struensee were admitted, it was not impossible that the Princess should have been the King’s child, and this was the view taken later by the Queen’s most inveterate enemies. Unfortunately, colour was given to this damaging report by Struensee assisting with Berger at the accouchement of the Queen; no other physicians were called in, and all the etiquette usual on these occasions was abolished.

With incredible recklessness Struensee chose this time, when his unpopularity was at its height, and the air full of evil rumours, to put the crown upon his audacity by seizing the kingly power in a way no subject had ever dared to attempt before. Struensee’s nominal office hitherto had been that of Master of Requests; in reality he had been dictator, and governed both the state and the court. But this was not enough for his boundless ambition; he was no longer content to work behind the King and Queen, and through his creatures Rantzau, Gahler and Osten. He therefore induced the King to appoint him (or rather he appointed himself) “Privy Cabinet Minister,” and to invest him with absolute authority.

An extraordinary order, signed by the King, and counter-signed by Struensee, was published [Pg 333] from Hirschholm, July 15, 1771, a week after the birth of the Princess, and copies were sent to every department of the Government, and the ministers of foreign courts. Briefly, this document ordained that henceforth all orders or directions issued by Struensee and signed by him would have the same force and validity as if they were given under the royal sign manual; and whether the orders of the Privy Cabinet Minister came addressed to the heads of departments, or to their subordinates in office, they were to be instantly and implicitly obeyed. “The cabinet orders issued in this way,” wrote the King, “shall have the same validity as those drawn up by Our hand. They shall be immediately obeyed.”

This decree, which amounted to a virtual abdication on the part of Christian VII. in favour of Struensee, was received with consternation and indignation from one end of the kingdom to the other. At first it seemed impossible that the King could thus vest any subject with unlimited power, but, since no other meaning could be attached to the document, the people declared that it could only have been wrested from the King by force or undue influence. It was now realised that from the beginning Struensee had aimed at absolute power. He first persuaded the King to abolish the Council of State and proclaim himself an absolute monarch, and then forced him to delegate the whole power to him as Privy Cabinet Minister. The Danish nation were, in fact, no [Pg 334] longer ruled by their hereditary monarch but by a foreign adventurer, who had usurped the kingly functions, and, having abolished all ministers and councils, gathered up into himself every branch of power and prerogative. The unscrupulousness of the man was only equalled by his audacity. It was the last straw on the back of the long-suffering Danes. Hitherto, the agitation against Struensee had been confined to certain classes; now it represented the whole nation, and not all the laws he had passed for the benefit of the people, nor all the doles he had meted out to them, could avail to quell the tempest of indignation aroused by the publication of this royal decree. Its promulgation at such a time, within a week of the Queen’s delivery, gave credence to the rumour that the infant Princess was not the King’s child but Struensee’s, and it was said that this insolent tyrant, who stopped at nothing, had already formed a plan of getting the King out of the way, of marrying the Queen, of assassinating the Crown Prince, and establishing himself and his posterity upon the throne of Denmark.

The Princess was christened on the Queen’s birthday, July 22, 1771, under the names of Louise Augusta—the first name having been that of the King’s mother, the second that of the Princess-Dowager of Wales. The King, himself, stood as principal sponsor to the child, the others being his brother Prince Frederick, and the Queen-Dowager, Juliana Maria. Whispers of the current scandal had reached the ears of the Queen and Struensee, and the choice of these sponsors was [Pg 335]

a way of contradicting them. The Queen-Dowager and Prince Frederick were present at the express command of the King, and dared not disobey. They must have come very unwillingly, for Juliana Maria had already stated in private what she afterwards proclaimed in public—that the legitimacy of the Princess was open to grave suspicion. The child was generally spoken of by the courtiers as “the Ma’amselle”.

The Queen’s birthday and the royal christening formed the occasion of a further elevation of the all-powerful Minister. With reckless effrontery, Struensee chose this day of all others for the King to confer upon him and his colleague, Brandt, the title of Count, the highest title in the kingdom. [165] No estates were granted to the recipients of these honours; it was announced that the King had offered large domains, but Struensee’s modesty would now not allow him to accept this further mark of the royal favour. Both Struensee and Brandt had received large sums from the treasury, and since Struensee could take practically what he liked, he probably thought it would look better to waive any claim to estates for the present. So he made a parade of his disinterestedness, and contented himself with a brand new coat of arms, and other outward signs of his new dignity. The coat of arms must have cost him much thought, for its composition [Pg 336] showed remarkable ingenuity. He symbolised in it every department of the state, which he now governed as absolute minister.

[165] Keith’s despatch, Copenhagen, July 23, 1771.

> “The escutcheon (symbolical of the state) was divided into five fields, the centre one of which represented a sailing vessel (the symbol of commerce) with a crown over it, typical of the monarch and the persons representing him. The first and fourth quarters displayed four rivers (exports and imports idealised) on a field *or*, which was the symbol of Denmark, rich in corn, and Norway, abounding in metal, wood and fish. In the third and second quarters was a crown surrounded with palm leaves (the symbol of peace and victory) and two crossed keys (the image of authority and might) on a field *azure*, which allegorically typified fidelity and constancy. Below the coat of arms was the royal crown with the badge of the Matilda Order, surrounded by a laurel wreath (the symbol of fortune, joy and honour), from which flowed two rivers running round the chief escutcheon (the state), supported by two beavers (the representatives of architecture and industry) guarded by *bourgeois* helmets (emblems of national armament), counts’ crowns (the symbol of the servant of the state), and an owl holding a key in its mouth (as allegories of thought and wisdom). Above the whole was displayed, between two eagle wings (the symbols of power, strength and victory), a man-of-war in full sail (typical of the navy), and above this, again, a suspended crown, [Pg 337] surrounded by palm branches (the type of peace).”[166]

[166] Wraxall’s *Life and Times of Caroline Matilda*.

Struensee had all his life professed the most radical ideas. He had begun his political career as one who despised rank, titles and display—and yet he crowned it by framing this heraldic absurdity. He had the preposterous coat of arms engraved on the seal which he affixed to cabinet orders; he built himself a magnificent coach, resplendent with crimson and gold, and blazoned it on the panels. He vested his servants and running footmen in gaudy liveries of scarlet and white, and decked them with diamond badges. When Struensee’s valet appeared for the first time in his new livery he fell down the palace stairs, and in his fall broke his badge and his nose, and the blood spoiled his finery. On Struensee being told of this ill-omened mishap, he gave his usual answer to any unpleasant news: “As God wills”. This fatalistic answer also gives the measure of his arrogance, for he had come to consider himself an instrument chosen by God. Certainly, from his rapid rise to power, and the way in which he moulded everything to his will, Struensee may well have believed, with many others, that there was something supernatural about him, though his enemies declared that his power came from the devil. At this time, notwithstanding the universal hatred which he inspired, the Privy Cabinet Minister seemed omnipotent and his tenure of power assured. So much was this the case that Gunning, a very keen observer, thought it [Pg 338] would be best to accept the peculiar relations which existed between the Queen and her favourite, and turn them to the advantage of England. In a long and important despatch, written nominally for the guidance of the English Secretary of State, Lord Halifax, in reality for George III., he described at length the situation at the Danish court, and gave a detailed description of the principal personages then in power. As his general view is the one taken in these pages, it is not necessary to go over the ground again, but the following word-portrait of Struensee may be quoted; the more so as it is studiously dispassionate:—

> “M^{r} Struensee, the Favourite, ... was bred a physician, and till within these ten months continued the practice of his profession. He is supposed not to be destitute of some knowledge, acquired at a German university, but with respect to any political attainments, either as they may concern the state of Europe in general, or this country in particular, he has them almost wholly to make. He is said to have carried the freedom of thinking as far as any man, but as his conversation discovers nothing of that vivacity and grace by which other men in a disadvantageous situation have won their way to royal favour, it is universal matter of wonder how he has managed to gain so entire an ascendency over their Danish Majesties. His manner of treating business is dry and ungraceful. He, however, possesses a clear and ready conception of things. A [Pg 339] great share of natural confidence, and indifference with regard to the ideas others may form of his principles or abilities, brings him at once without ambiguity or affectation to

the point in question, so that he is always intelligible though he may not be agreeable. He appears to have no vanity, but it is supplied by no small share of insolence. A stronger or juster idea of this gentleman's character cannot be conveyed than by contrasting it (the article only of understanding excepted) with that of Count Bernstorff. The latter was characteristically timid, cautious and irresolute; the former is bold, enterprising and firm. The Minister possessed great extent of political knowledge; the Favourite is uncommonly circumscribed in what relates to this kind of acquisition. Count Bernstorff displayed great refinement of manners with an easy flow of eloquence; M^{r} Struensee's address is simple, and his way of speaking inelegant and embarrassed. The Minister's conduct exhibited a conspicuous example of morality and religion; that of the Favourite is said to be deficient in both."

After drawing character-sketches of Rantzau, Gahler and others, and reviewing the quarrel with Russia, Gunning went on to show how Struensee might be used to the advantage of England:—

"As the Queen of Denmark *is now in full possession of the most absolute power*, and free from all imaginable control, it were to be wished that some means dictated by the wisdom of our Royal Master [George III.] were made use of to give her Danish Majesty [Pg 340] a true and just idea of the importance of a close and permanent alliance between Great Britain, Denmark and Russia, and prevent her any longer from seeing a connection with the latter through the medium of personal resentment, so that the views of this court might be brought back into their natural channel. M^{r} Struensee, in whom her Majesty places the most unreserved confidence, and whose vast influence with her is unquestioned, as he is attached to no particular system, might, with proper management, be induced to forget his personal prejudice, and heartily to concur in, and recommend, such measures as the court of Great Britain would wish her Majesty to pursue. This would (if I may presume to offer my opinion) be more advisable than to attempt his removal, which, considering the ascendency he has, could not but be attended with danger. If he was secured, he might easily be made instrumental to the views of the two courts. But as there can be little hopes of gaining the other two [Rantzau and Gahler], or if there were, of any reliance being placed on them, their dismission ought to be effected. The critical state of the King of Denmark's health makes it of the last importance, both to the Queen's happiness and the tranquillity of this kingdom, that she should not, in case of the regency devolving on her, be surrounded and advised by men so extremely unpopular and so justly detested as these are universally. I must not conceal from your Lordship that there is scarcely a single family or person in these dominions of any considerable rank, property or influence, [Pg 341] who has not been disobliged, disgusted and (as they think) injured; and whose disaffection, there is reason to apprehend, only waits for a favourable opportunity of manifesting itself."[167]

[167] Gunning's despatch, Copenhagen, April 4, 1771.

Gunning's view did not appeal to the King of England. George III., a model of the domestic virtues, would under no circumstances enter into negotiations with Struensee. To do so would be to condone, or recognise, the position the favourite held with his sister. The official answer to Gunning's despatch was a note informing him of his promotion as ambassador to Berlin. George III. recognised his minister's diplomatic abilities, but it seemed to him that what was wanted at Copenhagen at the present juncture was a man of action rather than a diplomatist. He regarded the state of affairs at the Danish court as impossible to last, and therefore replaced Gunning by a man personally known to him, who could be trusted to intervene when matters came to a crisis on behalf of the Queen. The new envoy was Lieutenant-General (afterwards Sir Robert) Murray Keith.[168]

[168] Keith's *Memoirs* have been published, but they do not include his despatches, now published in these volumes for the first time.

Keith was a Scotsman. Born in Ayrshire, in 1730, he was the son of a British Ambassador at Vienna. He was a man of all-round ability, though he was perhaps more of a soldier than a diplomatist. In early life he wrote some poems of considerable merit, and on arriving at man's [Pg 342] estate entered the army. He fought at the battle of Minden, and later was appointed major-commandant of three new companies of Highlanders, known as "Keith's Highlanders," who distinguished themselves in many a hard-fought fight. Eventually they were disbanded, and then some employment had to be found for their distinguished commander. In 1769 he was appointed British Minister at the court of Saxony, and he remained at Dresden until 1771, when George III., looking round for some one whom he could trust, and whose fidelity to his royal house was undoubted, chose Keith to succeed Gunning at Copenhagen.

Keith arrived at the Danish capital in June, 1771, shortly before the birth of the Princess Louise Augusta. He did not take up his new duties with any zest. "Climate, comfort and society are all against me," he wrote to his father shortly after his arrival at Copenhagen. But he found the place "by far a finer city than I had figured to myself, or had a right to expect from the other Danish towns I had seen upon the road. The streets are broad, the openings and the squares spacious, and the palace, as well as several of the public buildings, magnificent."[169]

[169] *Memoirs of Sir Robert Murray Keith*, vol. i.

Keith found the situation dominated by Struensee, and like Gunning (who had now gone to

Berlin) thought that his tenure in power was assured: "While I am in expectation of his Majesty's orders on this head," he wrote, "I shall be equally cautious not to court too far or to disgust this [Pg 343] gentleman.... From all I have heard of his character, it seems assiduous to the greatest degree, enterprising and active.... It may not be judging too rapidly of M^r^ Struensee to suppose that having laboured so hard to get on the pinnacle of power his chief care may for some time be to secure his situation."[170] And again: "I shall only add that if the general opinion here is to be trusted—for hitherto I have been able to form few opinions of my own—the new Count and Minister will show himself at any risk, and by all means whatever, as tenacious of the power he has grasped as he has been daring and active in attaining to it".[171]

[170] Keith's despatch, July 10, 1771.

[171] *Ibid.*, July 27, 1771.

Keith quickly found that it did not depend on the King of England's orders for him "to court or to disgust" Struensee as he pleased. The precise degree of intimacy which was permitted him at court, or with the affairs of the government, was regulated by Struensee himself, and a line was laid down beyond which Keith could not pass. The Minister, who probably guessed the motive which prompted George III. to send Keith to Copenhagen, treated the English envoy with marked coldness, and would not permit him to have private audience either with the King or with the Queen. Keith thus found himself checked on the very threshold of his mission; he sent home a bitter complaint of his reception at the court of Denmark. He writes:—

[Pg 344]

> "Count Struensee, after removing from the court every person of this country who could give him umbrage, has at last been prompted by his jealousy of the foreign ministers to make an entire change in the forms of the audiences granted to them." ... [Here follows an account of how the Russian envoy had been refused audience.]
>
> "When I presented copies of my credentials to Count Osten, he was so civil as to offer to conduct me himself to the audiences at Hirschholm, *as there was no Master of the Ceremonies*, and I cannot suppose that the Count foresaw a repetition of the above innovation in my case, as, on the contrary, he talked with pleasure of the gracious and even distinguished reception I might expect, being the bearer of the strongest assurances of the friendship and affection of the King for both his Sovereigns. For my part, I had no suspicion of such intention, not being able to figure to myself that any court could pretend to establish *by surprise* a regulation subversive of the very nature of private audiences.
>
> "When I was ushered into the room, where his Danish Majesty stood alone, I imagined that the folding doors, which had been opened only at my entrance, were again shut after me; but during the audience I found that one, or both, of the doors *behind me* had been left ajar, or pushed open, after I had begun to deliver the compliment with which I was charged to the King of Denmark.
>
> "I was afterwards carried through several rooms of the palace into one where, *unexpectedly*, I found her Danish Majesty alone, and the doors on each side of that [Pg 345] apartment stood wide open. But, as the Queen was supposed to be within a few hours of her lying-in, I did not judge it proper to make any difficulty with regard to that circumstance, and therefore delivered the King's letter, accompanied with the expressions contained in my instructions. It had occurred to me from the beginning that to retire in the midst of the audience from the King, or to refuse that of her Majesty *in the apparent situation of her health*, might be interpreted as disrespectful to one or other of their Danish Majesties.... When I spoke upon this matter to M^r^ Osten, he was so far from vindicating the innovation that he assured me in positive terms that none such had been intended, and that the door of the King's room being open must have been owing to accident. I have since had good reason to believe that M^r^ Osten was either misinformed in this affair, or not sincere in what he advanced.... About a fortnight ago Baron Hamilton was sent by the King of Sweden upon his accession with a compliment to this court, and the audiences granted to him upon this occasion were *with open doors*.... The affair now came to a crisis, and, as I was sensible how much my court was averse from a dispute of this nature, I not only said all in my power to Count Osten, but, in order to prevent any harsh step being taken, I offered to wait upon Count Struensee at Hirschholm, to lay before him in the most dispassionate manner the forms observed by all the great courts of Europe upon this head, and the impropriety, not to [Pg 346] say impracticability, of excluding all private audiences whatever, which was evidently the object of the intended regulation. Count Osten was waiting to see the event of a representation in writing he had just made to the same effect, but if that should fail he accepted my offer of visiting the Cabinet Minister.
>
> "This happened on Wednesday last, prior to our going to pay our court at Hirschholm, and I cannot tell your Lordship how much I was surprised at Count Osten's acquainting me the same evening that his endeavours were unsuccessful, and my intended conference needless, as it had been declared to him *positively* that the King of Denmark would abide by the resolution of granting hereafter no audiences to foreign ministers with shut doors."[172]

[172] Keith's despatch, Copenhagen, July 29, 1771.

Keith soon found that nothing remained for him but to play the waiting game at the court of

Denmark. He was subjected to a form of boycott, and both at court and the foreign office he was kept at arm's length. "At the court," he writes, "where everything is carried on with an affection of mystery, where the Sovereign and the Prime Minister are equally inaccessible, a foreign envoy is obliged to watch ... the slightest indications to form a judgment of the system of politics likely to be adopted."[173] And again he writes to his father privately: "An intercourse of an hour for once a week with the court, a formal supper once a fortnight with the fashionable people—make [Pg 347] the whole of my public appearances. And what may form a sure prognostic of the future society, I can safely assure you that in a residence of two months I have not been admitted to any one visit that I have made to man or woman, Dane or *diplomatique*."[174]

[173] Keith's despatch, Copenhagen, August 31, 1771.

[174] *Memoirs of Sir Robert Murray Keith*, vol. i.

> In October he writes again to his father: "I am sorry to say that the climate, society and politics of this kingdom are equally uncomfortable.... The little of summer I saw was sultry and languid, August and almost all September rotten and rainy, and the few clear days we have had lately too chilly to be abroad with pleasure. Five months of a dismal and variable winter are now awaiting us, with as little defence against the cold, both of body and spirit, as can well be imagined. After looking round me with an anxious yet a benevolent eye for anything that may be called 'society,' or even a single friend, male or female, I am forced to own to myself that there is not any hope of succeeding."[175]

[175] *Memoirs of Sir Robert Murray Keith*, vol. i.

Shortly after the arrival of Keith at Copenhagen another person reappeared upon the scene. Reverdil, the Swiss, was recalled to the Danish court, after an absence of three years. His return was due to the fact that Brandt had become tired of his position as sole guardian of the King. Christian VII. was a troublesome charge; he was often morose and sometimes quarrelsome, and a [Pg 348] good deal of friction arose between him and Brandt, until the latter found his post exceedingly wearisome. He often left the King in charge of Moranti, a black boy, whom Christian dressed in uniform and made an inseparable companion. Meanwhile Brandt amused himself with the beautiful Countess Holstein, one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting, with whom he had an amour. Gallantry, music and the dance were much more congenial to him than the society of the semi-imbecile King. He therefore told Struensee that he must find some one else to take his place, or at least relieve him in part of his duties. Struensee was reluctant that Brandt should resign his position as permanent attendant to the King, for it was necessary to keep him closely guarded from outside influence. But as Brandt insisted, after some reflection, Struensee resolved to recall Reverdil, who, if not his friend, was at least free from any intrigue against his authority.

QUEEN MATILDA AND HER SON, THE CROWN PRINCE OF DENMARK.
From the Painting at the Rosenborg, Copenhagen.

Reverdil was much astonished when he received a letter from Struensee saying that the King of Denmark desired his return to court, and wished to resume with him the scheme for enfranchising the serfs, and asked him to name his own terms. Reverdil demurred a little at first, and pleaded for time to consider the offer. He communicated with a trusted friend in Copenhagen, and also asked the advice of Count Bernstorff, who was living in retirement at Grabow, near Borstel. Reverdil's friend at Copenhagen sent him a list of persons who had been [Pg 349] appointed and dismissed during Struensee's administration, and gave him to understand that if he accepted the office he would hold it on a very precarious tenure. Bernstorff, though greatly prejudiced against Struensee, urged Reverdil to go, for the King had need of him, and it was his duty to succour the unfortunate Sovereign. He wrote him a long letter, the gist of which may be summed up in the following quotation:—

> "Go to Copenhagen, appear at court, but do not enter into engagements until you have reconnoitred the ground for yourself. If you can do good, do not refuse to do it for a country that needs it. May Heaven grant you merit and glory; but if you see that the means are refused you, do not allow yourself to be drawn into any subordinate, doubtful and odious employment, dictated by harsh, dishonest evil-doers. Do not allow your name to be associated with the names of men about whom the nation is already weeping and posterity will weep for a long time."[176]

[176] Letter of Bernstorff to Reverdil, June 9, 1771. *Mémoires de Reverdil.*

Reverdil determined to follow Bernstorff's advice, and wrote to Struensee accepting the post on the conditions that he might return home when he thought proper, and the King should pay his travelling expenses both ways. On his journey to Copenhagen, especially in the duchies, Reverdil was struck with the hatred and odium which the name of Struensee inspired among all classes. At Schleswig he met the Princess-Dowager of Culmbach, the great-aunt by marriage of the King, [Pg 350] and the Prince and Princess Charles of Hesse. They all lamented the terrible state of things at the Danish court, the insolence of the favourite, and the infatuation of the Queen, and agreed that

such an intolerable state of affairs could not long be allowed to continue. The thought appears to have crossed Reverdil's mind to turn back, but upon reflection he dismissed it, and proceeded on his journey.

Reverdil reported himself at Hirschholm in July (1771). He relates in his *Memoirs* that he was received by Brandt, who welcomed him with effusion, and told him of the King's wretched mental condition, of the necessity he had of a constant companion, and his desire that Reverdil should fill the place, since both he and the King had grown weary of one another. Reverdil listened in silence and without enthusiasm. He was then presented to the King and the Queen, who received him with great cordiality. The Queen spoke to him kindly, as, indeed, had always been her wont, and the King was very civil, nothing in what he said revealing his malady. Reverdil was invited to dine at the royal table, and after dinner was admitted to private audience of the King. Christian made some sort of apology for his abrupt dismissal of Reverdil three years ago, and threw the blame of it on Holck. The King's manner and speech were those of a perfectly sane man, and he [Pg 351] appeared to talk quite freely and without constraint. Reverdil had been told in the provinces that every word the King said was dictated to him beforehand by the favourites, but no sign of this was visible in his conversation. The next day Reverdil took a drive with the King and Brandt. Brandt treated the King with scant respect; he occupied the whole of the back of the carriage, and lounged out of the window, that all might see him who passed by. The poor King crouched up in a corner of the other seat with a sad and frightened air, and seemed glad when the drive was over.

Reverdil now entered upon his duties, and remained alone with the King in his apartments. Before long Christian's mania manifested itself, despite his efforts to conceal it. His mind began to wander, and he broke out into rapid and incoherent speech. Occasionally he would recite lines from *Zaire*, in which he had acted years before; often he would address Reverdil as "Brandt," sometimes as "Denize" or "Latour"—two French actors who had been in his service—sometimes by his right name. Now and then he would vaunt himself, and recall the fact that he had been greeted like a god by the English nation, and declare that his glory and magnificence were above those of all other kings on earth. On other occasions he would become depressed and melancholy, and belittle himself, saying that no matter what he did he would never be more than a "little man" of no reputation. He talked much about his infirmities, and sometimes threatened [Pg 352] to commit suicide. "Shall I drown myself?" he would say. "Shall I throw myself out of the window, or dash out my brains against the wall?" But this was only talk, for the King feared death greatly. For instance, one day when they were in a boat on the small lake round the palace of Hirschholm, the King said to Reverdil with a look of despair: "I should like to throw myself into the lake"; but he added as a quick after-thought: "and be pulled out again directly". He was aware of his mania, and strove hard to overcome it, but in vain. There were three marked degrees which he indicated by three German expressions. The first was: "*Ich bin confus*" (I am confused); the second: "*Es rappelt bei mir*" (There is a noise in my head); and the third: "*Er ist ganz übergeschnappt*" (I am quite beside myself). And often he would declare: "I can bear it no longer".

The King now talked to Reverdil in German, which, in deference to Struensee, had become the court language, though, formerly, Christian had made it a rule that Danish only should be spoken, except to foreigners, whom he addressed in French. German was never heard at the Danish court during his reign until the advent of Struensee. Though the King said little, he had a shrewd idea of what was going on between the Queen and Struensee. Once Reverdil took up one of the King's books, and found it marked at the history of Rizzio, the favourite of Mary Stuart. But the King never showed the slightest symptoms of jealousy or resentment at the relations between [Pg 353] Struensee and the Queen, and, when he alluded to them, it was to treat the affair as a matter of course. Sometimes he spoke of Struensee as the Queen's *cicisbeo*, and on another occasion he asked Reverdil whether he thought that the King of Prussia had an amour with the Queen of Denmark. "The King of Prussia!" exclaimed Reverdil. "I mean Struensee, of course," said the King, thereby showing the mastery which Struensee had acquired over him; for the King of Prussia, Frederick the Great, had always been Christian's ideal of a great ruler.

Reverdil found that the rumours which had been spread abroad of the revels of Hirschholm were much exaggerated. The conversation and conduct of the court were quite decent, and, whatever might be going on beneath, little or no hint of it appeared on the surface. But despite the extravagance and luxury everywhere visible, the tone was *bourgeois*. Reverdil says that "the conversation of the company resembled nothing so much as that of the servants of a large house who sat down to table in the absence of their master".[177] The *corps diplomatique* noticed this peculiarity also, and had a hundred good stories to tell their several courts of the ridiculous incidents which came under their notice. As Keith wrote to his father: "This court has not the most distant resemblance to any other under the sun".[178]

[177] *Mémoires de Reverdil.*

[178] *Memoirs of Sir Robert Murray Keith*, October 30, 1771.

Reverdil gives a curious sketch of the daily life of the court at Hirschholm. When there was no [Pg 354] hunting, the King, the Queen, Struensee and Brandt, and some of the ladies and gentlemen-in-waiting assembled at *déjeuner* between eleven and twelve o'clock, and, if the weather were fine, the *déjeuner* was followed by a walk in the gardens and woods. Struensee gave his arm to the Queen as a matter of course, the King to some lady-in-waiting whom he elected to honour, Brandt to the Countess Holstein, and each of the other gentlemen to the lady allotted him. In procession they paraded the grounds, and frequently would dine in a summer-house some distance from the palace. On these occasions etiquette was wholly banished from the royal table. The King and

Queen and the company were waited on by pages, who only entered when a bell was rung and left immediately they had changed the courses. The Queen placed herself at table between the King and Struensee, and if the King’s mania asserted itself, as it was apt to do at awkward times, the Queen would command Brandt to lead him out of the room. Sometimes instead of the promenade the King would drive out in the same carriage as the Queen and Struensee. They generally managed to drop the King at some point where his attendant was waiting for him, and often returned late at night together, quite unattended.

Reverdil noticed a great change in the Queen. Formerly her manners were courteous, affable and winning, and she exerted herself to say pleasant things, and place every one at his ease. Now she talked only to Struensee, and ignored the rest of the company. If by chance she addressed a few remarks to any one else, Struensee was always close by, and listened to what was said. The Queen was devoted to her children, especially to the infant Princess. Reverdil had heard rumours of the Crown Prince’s ill-treatment, but he acquitted the Queen of any blame or neglect; she spent as much time with her children as her position allowed, and thoroughly enjoyed the happiness of being a mother. On rainy days, when the court was obliged to remain indoors, the Queen often appeared in the circle, carrying her daughter and leading her son, who clung affectionately to her dress. She always loved children. They were her joy in the hour of her prosperity and her consolation in the day of her adversity. [Pg 355]

END OF VOL. I.

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TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

Archaic, inconsistent and unusual spellings from the original book have been preserved in this ebook. Obvious typos have been fixed. Changes are indicated below and in the text with a mouse-over like this.The spelling of many family names in this book varies from the spelling used in historical documents today.

In the original book, "Ibid." was used in the footnotes only when the same source was cited in adjacent footnotes on the same page. In this ebook, the use of "Ibid." has been changed to appearing only when adjacent footnotes on the same paragraph cite the same source. This change is not noted in the details below.

The quality of the illustrations in the original book were generally acceptable, however the illustration of Frederiksberg Palace was definitely the worst in terms of clarity and detail—that is the way it appeared in the original book. Also, a little research has led me to question whether that illustration is representative of the way the Ferderiksberg Palace appeared during the events of this book (1751-1771), or if it is the way the Palace appeared after the gardens in front were redesigned 1795-1804.

Details of the changes:

Table of Contents:

The Preface, Contents, List of Illustrations and the Transcriber's Note were added. Only Chapters I-XIX were in the original Table of Contents.

List of Illustrations and the caption of the illus. facing page 304:

Originally:	THE PALACE OF HIRSCHHOLM, TEMP. 1770
In this ebook:	THE PALACE OF HIRSCHHOLM. *Temp. 1770.*

Page 46:

Originally:	love of out-door exercise seemed to show
In this ebook:	love of outdoor exercise seemed to show

Page 221:

Originally:	in the corridors and antechambers of the palace
In this ebook:	in the corridors and ante-chambers of the palace

Page 347:

Originally:	another person re-appeared upon the scene
In this ebook:	another person reappeared upon the scene

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