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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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Queen Matilda in the uniform of Colonel of the Holstein Regiment of Guards.
After the painting by Als, 1770.

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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CONTENTS

[Pg v]

[Pg vi]

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER I.

[Pg 1]

THE TURN OF THE TIDE.

1771.

Struensee had now reached the highest pinnacle of power, but no sooner did he gain it than the whole edifice, which he had reared with consummate care, began to tremble and to rock; it threatened to collapse into ruins and involve in destruction not only the man who built it, but those who had aided him in the task. The winter of 1770-1771 had been a very severe one in Denmark, and the harvest of the summer that followed was very bad. In the country there was great distress, and in Copenhagen trade languished, largely in consequence of the new order of things at court, which had caused so many of the nobles to shut up their town houses and retire to their estates. The clergy did not hesitate to say that the bad harvest and the stagnation of trade were judgments of heaven upon the wickedness in high places. The nobles declared that until the kingdom were rid of Struensee and his minions, things would inevitably go from bad to worse. In every class there was discontent; the people were sullen and ripe for revolt; the navy [Pg 2] was disaffected, and the army was on the verge of mutiny. All around were heard mutterings of a coming storm. But Struensee, intoxicated by success, would not heed, and so long as he was sure of himself no one dared to dispossess him.

The rats were already leaving the sinking ship. Rantzau was the first to break away; he had never forgiven either Struensee or the Queen for having so inadequately (as he considered) rewarded his services. He had expected a more prominent post in the Government, and failing this had demanded that his debts, which were very heavy, should be paid. But to his amazement and anger, Struensee had refused. Rantzau was jealous of the Privy Cabinet Minister for having arrogated to himself all power and all authority. He could not forget that this upstart favourite, this ex-doctor, had been a creature of his own making, employed by him not so long ago for base purposes, and he hated and despised him with a bitterness proverbial when thieves fall out. Rantzau had often traversed the dark and slippery paths of intrigue, and, finding that nothing more was to be got from the party in power, he resolved to traverse them once again. Not being burdened with consistency, this time they led him in the direction of the exiled Bernstorff, whom he had been instrumental in overthrowing. It seemed to him that if Bernstorff would but return to Copenhagen, supported as he was by the powerful influence of Russia and England, and the whole body of the Danish nobility, Struensee would surely be overthrown. But Bernstorff, though [Pg 3] he lamented the evil days that had fallen upon Denmark, refused to have anything to do with a scheme in which Rantzau was concerned. “He knows,” said Bernstorff, “that I cannot trust him, and I would rather remain here in exile than return to office through his means.”

Rantzau then determined on another plan; he shook the dust of the Struensee administration off his feet; he took formal leave of the King and Queen while they were at Hirschholm, and ostentatiously went to live in retirement. This was only a preparatory move, for he now determined to gain the confidence of the Queen-Dowager and her party, to which he felt he naturally belonged. After all he was the inheritor of a great and an ancient name, and his family was one of the most considerable in the kingdom. His place was rather with the nobles, who were his equals, than in filling a subordinate position in the councils of a mountebank minister. The Queen-Dowager, like Bernstorff, listened to all that Rantzau had to say, but, unlike Bernstorff, she did not repulse him. On the other hand, she refused to commit herself to any definite plan, for she knew well the character of Rantzau as a liar and traitor. He was the very man to carry out some desperate attempt, but Juliana Maria had not yet made up her mind whether her cause would be better won by waiting or by a *coup d’état*. At present she was inclined to agree with Catherine of Russia, who repeatedly said that if Struensee had rope enough he would hang [Pg 4] himself before long, and so save others the trouble.

Osten also had differences with Struensee, which at one time he carried to the point of sending in his resignation.[1] But he was “told that his services in the post he now filled could not be dispensed with, that he was not only useful but necessary, and that he might be assured his remonstrances would always have their weight”.[2] So Osten, though he hated and despised Struensee quite as much as Rantzau did, consented to remain, and, wily diplomatist that he was, performed the difficult task of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. For he saw more clearly than any one that the present administration could not last long, and he therefore determined, while taking all he could get from Struensee, to put himself in the right with the other side, so that when Struensee’s ship went down in the tempest, he would ride on the crest of the wave. To this end he paid assiduous court to the English and Russian envoys, though careful to keep on good terms with those of France and Sweden. He also managed to convey to the Queen-Dowager and her party the idea that he wished them well, and that he only remained in his present post under protest, for the good of the country.

[1] Gunning’s despatch, Copenhagen, June 15, 1771.

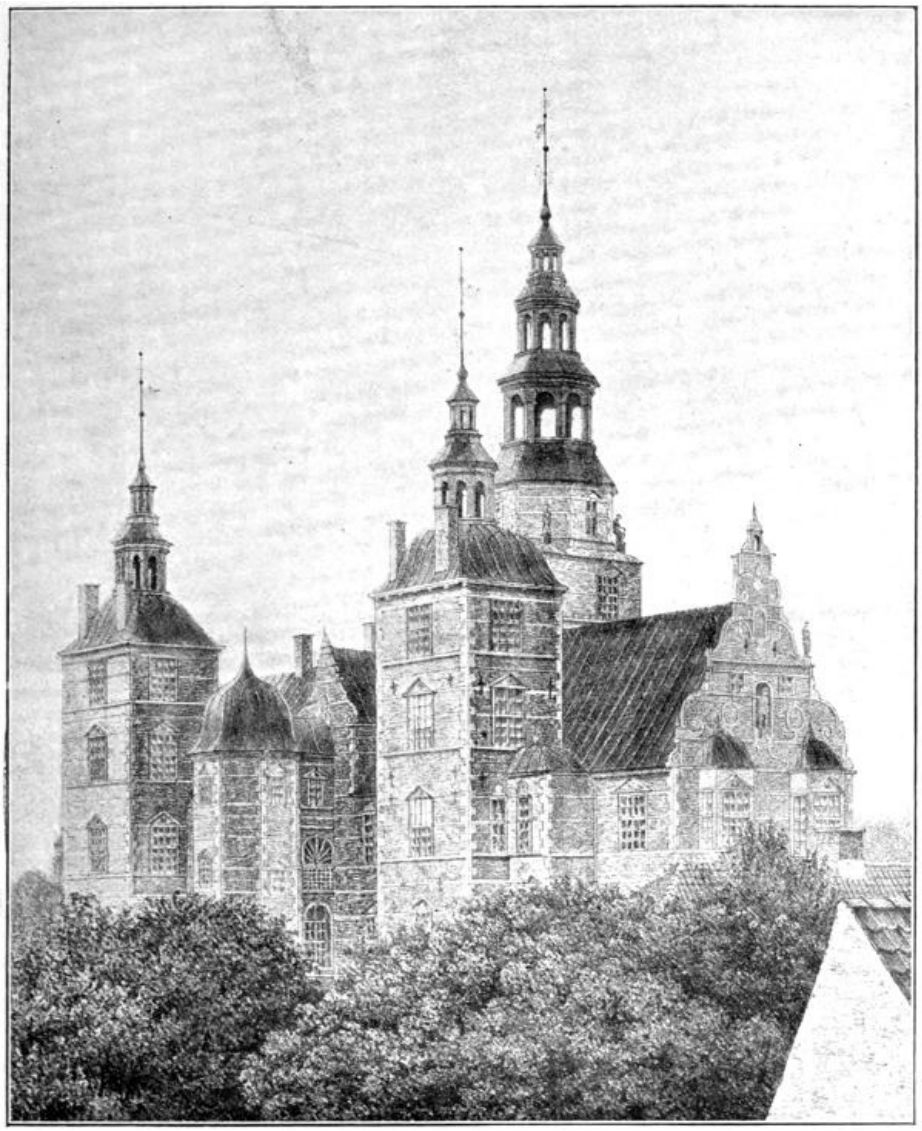
[2] *Ibid.*

General Gahler, the minister for war, was also disaffected, and had frequent quarrels with Struensee on matters connected with the army. But Gahler was too deeply committed to [Pg 5] Struensee’s policy to make any course possible to him except that of resignation. And Gahler was reluctant to resign, not only because he was a poor man and loved the emoluments of office, but also because his wife was a great friend of the Queen, and one of the ladies of her household. Both Osten and Gahler from time to time remonstrated with the arbitrary minister on the wanton

way in which he stirred up public feeling against his administration, and counselled more conciliatory policy; but Struensee would not hear.

Even Brandt, whom Struensee trusted absolutely, and whom he had loaded with benefits, was jealous and discontented, and ready at any moment to betray his friend if thereby he could benefit himself. Brandt was greatly dissatisfied with his position, though Reverdil had relieved him of his most onerous duties, and said with regard to some reproaches he had received from the Queen, “that alone is hell”. He made so many complaints to Struensee that the Minister requested him to formulate them in writing. Brandt then addressed him a lengthy letter in which he complained bitterly of Struensee’s interference in his department at the court, which, he declared, rendered him contemptible in the eyes of all. He told Struensee that his was a reign of terror. “No despot ever arrogated such power as yourself, or exercised it in such a way. The King’s pages and domestics tremble at the slightest occurrence: all are seized with terror; they talk, they eat, they drink, but tremble as they do so. Fear has seized on all who surround the [Pg 6] Minister, even on the Queen, who no longer has a will of her own, not even in the choice of her dresses and their colour.” He also complained that Struensee compelled him to play cards with the King and Queen, with the result that he lost heavily, and his salary was thereby quite insufficient. He therefore requested permission to leave the Danish court, and resign all his offices in consideration of the yearly pension of five thousand dollars a year. With this handsome annuity he proposed to live in Paris and enjoy himself. He also asked for estates in Denmark to sustain his dignity as count. His letter ended with a covert threat that if his requests were not granted it was possible that he might be drawn into a plot against Struensee, or put an end to an intolerable position by “poison or steel”.[3]

[3] This letter is still preserved in the archives of Copenhagen. It is not worth while quoting it in full.



THE ROSENBORG CASTLE, COPENHAGEN.

This letter was not only very insolent, but also incoherent, and showed every sign of an unbalanced mind. Yet Struensee, who apparently cherished a peculiar tenderness for Brandt, treated the epistle quite seriously, and instead of dismissing him from court, as he might well have done, he replied in a lengthy document which almost assumed the importance of a state paper. He traced the whole of Brandt’s discontent to his amour with Countess Holstein, whom he disliked and distrusted. He justified his interference in court matters on the ground that Countess Holstein and Brandt together had introduced changes which were displeasing to the Queen, and [Pg 7] with respect to the Queen’s dresses he wrote: “The Queen, though a lady, is not angry with me when I recommend retrenchment in respect to her wardrobe.” With regard to Brandt’s losses at

cards, he replied that loo was the only game the King and Queen liked, and therefore it was impossible to change it, and if Brandt and Countess Holstein did not understand the game and consequently lost, he recommended them either to learn it better or put on more moderate stakes. He took no notice of Brandt's demand for a pension, but he declared that neither for him, nor for himself, would he ask the King to grant estates to maintain their new dignities. Brandt received Struensee's letter with secret anger and disgust. The minister's evident wish to conciliate him he regarded as a sign of weakness, and he immediately began to plot against his friend.

Thus it will be seen that Struensee's colleagues were all false to him, and were only waiting an opportunity to betray him. The Queen still clung to him with blind infatuation, and lived in a fool's paradise, though her court was honeycombed with intrigues and she was surrounded with spies and enemies. Even her waiting women were leagued against her. They sanded the floor of the passage from Struensee's chamber to the Queen's at night, that they might see the traces of his footsteps in the morning; they put wax in the lock, and listened at the keyhole; they laid traps at every turn, and the unconscious Queen fell readily into them. All these evidences of her [Pg 8] indiscretion were carefully noted, and communicated to the Queen-Dowager at Fredensborg. In Copenhagen and in the country the discontent daily grew greater, and the boldness of Struensee's enemies more and more manifest. In giving freedom to the press he had forged a terrible weapon for his own undoing, and papers and pamphlets continually teemed with attacks on the hated minister. Threatening and abusive letters reached him daily, coarse and scurrilous attacks were placarded on the walls of the royal palaces, and even thrown into the gardens at Hirschholm, that the Queen and Struensee might see them on their daily walks.

When such efforts were made to fan the embers of popular discontent, it is no wonder that they soon burst into a flame. The first outbreak came in this wise. An inglorious and expensive naval war against the Dey of Algiers, inherited from the Bernstorff administration, was still being prosecuted, and Struensee had ordered new ships to be constructed, and sent to Norway for sailors to man them. Such was the maladministration of the navy department that the work proceeded very slowly, and the Norwegian sailors who had been brought to Copenhagen wandered about in idleness, waiting for the vessels to be finished. The Government, with manifest injustice, would neither give these sailors their pay nor allow them to return to their homes. The only effect of their remonstrances was that the dockyard men were ordered to work on Sundays so that the vessels might be finished sooner. The dockyard men asked for double pay [Pg 9] if they worked on Sundays, and this being refused, they struck off work altogether, and joined the ranks of the unemployed sailors, who had been waiting eight weeks for their pay, and were almost starving. The Norwegians had always taken kindly to the theory of the absolute power of the King. Their political creed was very simple: first, that the King could do no wrong, and secondly, that he must be blindly obeyed. It therefore followed naturally that, if an act of injustice like the present one were committed, it must be committed by the King's subordinates, and not by himself, and he had only to know to set matters right. Having petitioned the Government repeatedly without receiving any redress, they determined to take matters in their own hands. Early in September a body of Norwegian sailors, to the number of two hundred, set out from Copenhagen for Hirschholm with the resolution of laying their grievance before the King in person, in the confident hope that they would thus obtain redress.

When the sailors drew near to Hirschholm the wildest rumours spread through the court, and the greatest panic prevailed. It was thought to be an insurrection, and the mutineers were reported to be swarming out from Copenhagen to seize the King and Queen, loot the palace, and murder the Minister. The guard was called out and the gates were barred, and a courier despatched to Copenhagen for a troop of dragoons. At the first sound of alarm the King and Queen, Struensee, [Pg 10] Brandt, and the whole court, fled by a back door across the gardens to Sophienburg, about two miles distant. Here they halted for a space, while the Queen and Struensee seriously debated whether they should continue their flight to Elsinore, and seek refuge behind the stout walls of the ancient fortress of Kronborg. Eventually they resolved first to despatch an aide-de-camp back to Hirschholm to reconnoitre, and to parley with the supposed insurgents. The aide-de-camp, who was a naval officer, met the malcontents outside the palace gates, and was surprised to see no mutineers, but only a body of Norwegian sailors, whose sufferings and deprivations were clearly marked upon their countenances. He asked them what they wanted. "We wish to speak with our little father, the King," was the reply; "he will hear us and help us." The aide-de-camp galloped back with this message to Sophienburg, but Struensee thought it was a trap, and made the officer return and say that the King was out hunting.

The sailors replied that they did not believe it, and prepared to force their way into the palace that they might see the King face to face; the guard, which had now been reinforced by a troop of dragoons, tried to drive them back. The sailors, whose intentions had been quite peaceful, now laid hands on their knives, and declared that they would defend themselves if the soldiers attacked them. Fortunately the aide-de-camp was a man of resource, and resolved to act on his own initiative and avoid bloodshed; he saw that the men were not insurgents. He made a feint to [Pg 11] go back and presently came out of the palace again and announced that he had a message to them from the King. His Majesty commanded him to say that if his loyal sailors would return quietly, he would see justice done to them. With this the sailors professed themselves to be content, and they walked back to Copenhagen as peacefully as they had come. The promise was kept, and more than kept, for the sailors, on their return to Copenhagen, were treated with spirits, temporarily appeased by a payment on account, and all their arrears were settled a few days later. The aide-de-camp had gone again to Sophienburg and told Struensee that this was the only way to pacify them, and a courier had been sent in haste from Hirschholm to the admiralty

at Copenhagen to order these things to be done, for Struensee was by this time frightened into promising anything and everything.

When the sailors had gone and quiet was restored, Struensee was persuaded to return to Hirschholm, but only after great difficulty; the guard round the palace was doubled, and the dragoons patrolled all night, for Struensee greatly feared that the sailors would shortly return more furious and better armed. The Queen, who was determined, whatever happened, not to abandon her favourite, ordered that her horses should be kept saddled and in readiness, so that at the first sign of tumult she might fly with him and the King to Kronborg. She went to bed in disorder, had her riding-habit laid in readiness by the side of the bed, and in the middle of the [Pg 12] night rose to have her jewellery packed up. Struensee was in abject terror all night, and would not go to bed at all. With the morning light came reflection and renewed courage, and then the court was ashamed of the panic it had shown, and did the best to conceal it; but the news travelled to Copenhagen.

The way in which Struensee had capitulated to the demand of the Norwegian sailors on the first hint of tumult led other bodies of men, whose claims were less just, to have their demands redressed in a similar way. Therefore, a fortnight later a body of some hundred and twenty silk-weavers proceeded on foot from Copenhagen to Hirschholm to complain that they were starving because the royal silk factories had been closed. Again the alarmed minister yielded, and orders were given that work in the factories should be continued, at least until the silk-weavers could obtain other employment. These demonstrations roused the fear that others would follow, and the guard at Hirschholm was increased, and soldiers were now posted round the palace and the gardens day and night. For the first time in the history of the nation the King of Denmark lived in a state of siege for fear of his own people.

> Keith wrote home on the subject of the recent disturbances: “The general discontent here seems to gain strength daily, and the impunity which attended the tumultuous appearances of the Norwegian sailors at Hirschholm has encouraged the popular [Pg 13] clamours (which are no more restrained by the nature of this Government) to break out in such indecent representations and publications as even threaten rebellion....
>
> “I pray Heaven that all lawless attempts may meet with the punishment they deserve, and I sincerely trust they will. But if, unfortunately, it should happen that the populace is ever stirred up to signalise their resentment against its principal objects, the Counts Struensee and Brandt, your Lordship will not be surprised if the vengeance of a Danish mob should become cruel and sanguinary.”[4]
>
> [4] Keith’s despatch, Copenhagen, September 25, 1771.

The “indecent representations and publications” became so bad that Struensee was provoked into revoking his former edict and issuing a rescript to the effect that, as the press had so grossly abused the liberty granted to it by foul and unjustifiable attacks on the Government, it would again be placed under strict censorship. This edict had the effect of stopping the direct attacks upon Struensee in the papers; but the scribblers soon found a way of evading the censorship by attacking their foe indirectly, and bitter pasquinades were issued, of which, though no names were mentioned, every one understood the drift. For instance, one of the leading publications, *The Magazine of Periodical Literature*, propounded the following questions for solution: “Is it possible that a woman’s lover can be her husband’s sincere friend and faithful adviser?” and again: “If the husband accepts him as his confidant, what consequences will result for all three, [Pg 14] and for the children?” The answers to these questions contained the fiercest and most scurrilous attacks on the Queen and Struensee, under the cover of general and abstract statements.

The alarm which the Norwegian sailors had caused Struensee was followed by the discovery of a plot against his life which increased his terror. There were about five thousand men employed in the Government dockyards at Copenhagen as ship-builders and labourers of every description. These men were also dissatisfied at the changes which had lately been introduced into the naval department, and their attitude for some time had been sullen and mutinous. To punish them for their discontent Struensee had excluded them from the festivities on the King’s last birthday, but now, fearing another outbreak, more formidable than that of the Norwegian sailors, he swung round to the other extreme, and determined to give these dockyard men a feast of conciliation in the grounds of Frederiksberg to compensate them for the loss of their perquisites on the King’s birthday. September 29 was the day chosen for the *fête*, and it was announced that the King and Queen, the Privy Cabinet Minister and all the court would drive over from Hirschholm to honour the gathering with their presence. The *corps diplomatique* were invited to meet their Majesties, and a detachment of the new Flying Body Guard was told off to form the royal escort.

The *fête* was favoured with fine weather, and the day was observed as a day of gala; the dockyard [Pg 15] men, with their wives and children, and drums beating and banners flying, went in procession to the gardens of Frederiksberg, where they were lavishly regaled. Oxen were roasted whole, and sheep, pigs, geese, ducks and fowls were also roasted and distributed. Thirty tuns of beer were broached, a quart of rum was given to each man, a pipe of tobacco and a day’s wages. After dinner there were games, dancing and music. All day long the revellers waited for the coming of the King and Queen, but they waited in vain.

In the morning, at Hirschholm, the King and Queen made themselves ready and were about to start, when a rumour reached the palace that a plot had been formed to assassinate Struensee at the festival. Immediately all was confusion. The King and Queen retired to their apartments, and Struensee summoned Brandt and Falckenskjold to a hurried conference. Falckenskjold urged

Struensee to treat the rumour as baseless, go to the festival and present an unmoved front to the people. This display of personal courage would do more than anything else to give the lie to the rumours of his cowardice at Hirschholm, and now that he was forewarned he could be safely guarded. Nothing would induce Struensee to go; he shuddered at the slightest hint of assassination. Falckenskjold then advised him cynically, as he was so much afraid, to be more careful in the future how he stirred up his enemies, or he might find himself not only dismissed from office and disgraced, but dragged to the scaffold on a charge of high treason. Struensee [Pg 16] said such a charge was impossible, as he had done nothing without the consent of the King. "Well, at any rate see that your papers are in order," said Falckenskjold significantly. "My papers are arranged," Struensee replied; "on that account I have nothing to fear, if my enemies will only behave fairly in other respects." Brandt also joined in urging Struensee to modify some of his more objectionable measures, and attempt to conciliate his enemies. But Struensee, though he trembled at the mere hint of personal violence, was obstinate as to this. "No," he said emphatically; "I will withdraw nothing which in my belief promotes the welfare of the state." "The time will come," said Brandt emphatically, "when you will *have* to yield." Struensee went to see the Queen, and shortly after a message came countermanding all orders, as neither the King nor the Queen would attend the festival.

The dockyard men were much disappointed at the non-appearance of their Majesties, and their disappointment was changed to indignation when they learned that it was fear which kept them at Hirschholm. It seemed incredible that the King of Denmark should distrust his own people. The King, in point of fact, did not distrust them; he showed himself quite indifferent whether he went to Frederiksberg or stayed at home; it was Struensee who feared for himself, and the Queen who feared for her favourite. The proceedings at Frederiksberg passed off without any [Pg 17] disturbance, though the dockyard men jestingly remarked that the ox sacrificed for them was not the ox they had been promised—an allusion to Struensee's corpulence. Struensee probably showed discretion in keeping away from the festival, for there was a deep-laid plot to capture him, alive or dead, when he mingled with the crowd.[5]

[5] In 1774 Baron Bülow gave Mr. Wraxall a detailed account of the plot to murder Struensee and his partisans on this occasion.—Wraxall's *Posthumous Memoirs*.

The terror and irresolution displayed by Struensee were quite foreign to the character before conceived of him both by friends and foes. "I have begun to see his character in a different light from that in which it appeared formerly,"[6] writes Keith; and again: "It has been whispered about that, upon the late disturbances, he betrayed some unexpected signs of personal fear, and the natural result of this suspicion is to loosen the attachment of the persons whom he has trusted, and to diminish that awe which is necessary for the maintenance of his unbounded authority."[7]

[6] Keith's despatch, Copenhagen, September, 1771.

[7] *Ibid.*

Struensee's cowardice, now twice proved, dealt a fatal blow to his prestige: the man of iron had feet of clay; the despotic minister, "the man mountain," whose reign, according to Brandt, was based on the terror he inspired, was himself stricken with craven fears. It seemed inconceivable that a man who had dared everything, and braved every risk to gain power, should, the moment [Pg 18] he reached the goal of his ambition, reveal himself a poltroon. For two years Struensee had shown an unmoved front to the threats of his enemies; for two years he had carried his life in his hand; but now the mere hint of insurrection, or assassination, made him tremble and cower behind the skirts of the Queen. This inconsistency has never been satisfactorily explained in any of the books written on Struensee and his administration. His admirers pass it over as lightly as possible. His enemies say that it reveals the man in his true colours as a sorry rogue; but this theory will not hold, for the courage and resource which Struensee showed all through his career until the last few months give it the lie. The key to the mystery is probably to be found in physical causes.

Struensee was still a young man as statesmen go; he was only thirty-four years of age—an age when most men are entering upon the prime and full vigour of their manhood—and he came of a healthy stock; but the herculean labours of the last two years had told upon him. No man could overthrow ministers, reform public offices, formulate a new code of laws, and change the whole policy of a kingdom without feeling the strain. For two years Struensee had been working at high pressure, toiling early and late. He left little or nothing to subordinates; his eagle eye was everywhere, and not a detail escaped him, either in the Government or in the court. He was a glutton for work, and gathered to himself every department of the administration. No step could [Pg 19] be taken without his approval; no change, however slight, effected until it had first been submitted to him. We have seen how Osten complained that Struensee meddled in his department; we have seen how Brandt complained that even the comedies and dances, the colour and shape of the Queen's dresses, had to receive the dictator's approval. It was not humanly possible that any man, even though he were a "beyond-man," could work at this pitch for any length of time. He could not do justice to matters of high policy and government, and supervise every petty detail of a court; either one or the other must suffer, and with Struensee the more important, in the long run, went to the wall. He lost his sense of the proportion of things, and became burdened with a mass of detail. It was not only the work which suffered, but the man himself; overstrained, he lost his balance, overwrought, he lost his nerve. To this must be ascribed the fatal errors which characterised the last few months of his administration. To this and his self-indulgence.

It was almost impossible that a man could work at so high a pressure without injury; it could only be possible if he took the greatest heed of himself, carefully guarded his bodily health, and led a regular and abstemious life. Two of Struensee's greatest contemporaries, who achieved most in the world, Frederick the Great and Catherine the Great, were careful to lead simple, abstemious lives;[8] but Struensee was by nature a voluptuary, and he lived the life of the senses as well as [Pg 20] the life of the intellect. In early years he had to check this tendency to some extent, for he lacked the means to purchase his pleasures; but when, by an extraordinary turn of fortune's wheel, he found himself raised from obscurity to power, from poverty to affluence, with the exchequer of a kingdom at his disposal, and unlimited means whereby to gratify every wish, he gave full rein to his appetites. He was a gourmand; the dishes which came to the royal table were made to tickle his palate, and what he did not like was not served, for this mighty minister even superintended the cuisine, and took a pleasure therein. Rich food called for rare vintages, and the choicest wines in the royal cellar were at Struensee's disposal. He did not stint himself either with food or drink; he was a wine-bibber as well as a glutton, and habitually ate and drank more than was good for him. All his life he had been a scoffer at morality, and now he deliberately made use of his opportunities to practise what he preached. In fine, when he was not at work, his time was spent in the gratification of carnal pleasures. He never took any real rest; a few hours' sleep, generally not begun until long after midnight, were all he allowed himself, and the moment his eyes opened he was at work again. The result of this excess, both in work and pleasure, was a nervous breakdown; he became corpulent and flabby, his physical and mental health was shattered, and he was no longer able to keep that firm grasp upon affairs which the position he [Pg 21] had arrogated to himself demanded from the man at the helm. He relaxed his hold, and the ship of state, which he had built with so much care, began to drift rapidly and surely towards destruction. In the royal archives at Copenhagen may be seen many specimens of Struensee's signature which he inscribed upon documents during his brief rule, and in the last months of his administration this signature is no longer bold and firm, but wavering and disjointed, as though written with a trembling hand. This was accounted for at the time by the statement that Struensee had hurt his wrist in a heavy fall from his horse, while riding with the Queen at Hirschholm towards the end of September. But the cause probably lay deeper than that, and the trembling signature was an evidence of the rapidly failing powers of the man, who, until he showed fear at the arrival of the handful of sailors at Hirschholm, had been considered almost superhuman.

[8] Catherine the Great, of course, broke her rule in one respect, but then she was an exception of all rules.

STRUENSEE.
From the Painting by Jens Juel, 1771, now in the possession of Count Bille-Brahe.

This theory of physical collapse also explains much that is otherwise inexplicable in the closing days of Struensee's career. When, by royal decree, he had arrogated to himself the kingly authority, and wielded without let or hindrance absolute power, it was thought that he would use this power to complete the work he had begun, and to revolutionise the whole political government of the kingdoms. But, to the astonishment of all, Struensee did nothing; the power lay idle in hands that seemed half-paralysed, or only showed intermittent signs that it existed by some feeble revocation of previous acts, as, for instance, the re-imposition of the censorship of the press. [Pg 22]

As Keith wrote: "It would seem as if the genius of the Prime Minister had wasted itself by the hasty strides he made to gain the summit of power. Daily experience shows us that he has formed no steady plan either with regard to the interior affairs of Denmark or her foreign connections. From such a man it was natural to expect that the most decisive and even headlong acts would distinguish an administration of which he had the sole direction; instead of which, the business accumulates in every department of the state, and only a few desultory steps have been taken, which lead to no important or permanent consequences."[9]

[9] Keith's despatch, Copenhagen, September 20, 1771.

To the same cause must be attributed the apathy with which Struensee regarded the treachery of his followers, and the increased activity of his enemies. Though beset by dangers on every side, he disregarded alike warnings and entreaties, and drifted on to his doom. It is true that this indifference was broken by spasms of unreasoning panic; but the moment the threatened peril had passed he fell back into apathy again.

CHAPTER II.

[Pg 23]

THE GATHERING STORM.

1771.

The Queen's love for Struensee was not lessened by the discovery that her idol had feet of clay, but she lost some of her blind faith in his power to mould all things to his will. She once told her ladies that "If a woman truly loved a man, she ought to follow him, even though it were to hell"; it seemed likely that her words would before long be put to the test. During those autumn days at Hirschholm, when the popular discontent seethed to the very doors of the palace, the Queen came out of her fool's paradise and realised that she and her favourite were living on a volcano that might at any moment erupt and overwhelm them. She frequently discussed with her court, half in jest and half in earnest, what they should do when the catastrophe came. Once at the royal table the Queen laughingly suggested to her friends the advisability of all taking flight together, and each began to consider what he, or she, would do to gain a livelihood in exile. The Queen, who had a very sweet voice, and played on the harpsichord, said she would turn singer, for she was sure by that means she would never starve. Struensee said he would take a lonely farm, and [Pg 24] devote himself to agriculture and the consolations of philosophy. Brandt said he should turn his dramatic talents to use, and become the acting manager of a theatre. "And as for you, my fair lady," he said to one of the Queen's ladies, probably Madame Gahler, "with your peerless form, you need do nothing, but simply sit as a model for artists." The lady winced, and the rest of the company laughed, for it was known, though she was very beautiful, that she had a defect in her figure, which she was at great pains to conceal. Despite this levity in public, they were all secretly uneasy, and brooded much over the situation in private. Except the Queen, who thought only of Struensee, each one sought how he might save himself—if necessary at the expense of his fellows.

Struensee was thrown into a fresh panic by the appearance of a placard setting a price upon his head, which was posted up by night in the principal street of Copenhagen, and ran:—

> "As the traitor Struensee continues to ill-treat our beloved King, to mock his faithful subjects, and to seize with force and injustice more and more of the royal authority, which the Danish people have entrusted to their King alone, this Struensee and his adherents are hereby declared outlawed. The man who puts an end to this traitor's life shall receive five hundred dollars reward, his name kept secret, and a royal pardon granted him."[10]

[10] Translated from the original document now preserved in the royal archives at Copenhagen.

[Pg 25] According to Keith this placard was probably a hoax, but it had a dire effect upon Struensee. "A paper," Keith writes, "was fixed up in the public squares of this city, setting a price upon his head, and this stratagem—for I can only look upon it as such—had like to have produced a very strange effect, as I am assured for some days he was preparing to leave Denmark, and that the appearance of fifty men in a threatening manner would have decided his flight."[11] But Keith was far more prejudiced against Struensee than Gunning was, and he may have exaggerated.

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

Struensee at this time certainly considered the possibility of flight; he spoke to Reverdil on the subject, and declared that he was only prevented by his devotion to the Queen, who, if he deserted her, would again become the victim of intrigue. But probably Brandt's reasoning weighed more with him. "Whither would you go," said Brandt, "where you would be Prime Minister and favourite of a Queen?" Whither indeed? Struensee's enemies sought to frighten him into resignation. But they little knew their man. He would cling to office and power until they were wrenched from his grasp. Thinking himself secure behind the shelter of the Queen he did not heed the plots of the Queen-Dowager and the nobles against his authority. What he dreaded was assassination, or an insurrection of the people. Keith, a foreigner, took something of the same view: "The persons who are most incensed against this Ministry," he wrote, "seem both by [Pg 26] their principles and their timidity inclined to pursue their ends by dark and secret methods, and if they are to succeed at all, it must be by seizing a moment of popular frenzy and striking their blow all at once."[12] Brandt, though he counselled Struensee to stay, was really very uneasy at the aspect of affairs: "I wish all this would come to an end," he said one day to Falckenskjold, "for I have a foreboding that this regime will soon be overthrown." "You will fare badly if it is," replied Falckenskjold. "Oh," said Brandt, "I have studied law, and shall be able to take care of myself."

[12] Keith's despatch, Copenhagen, September, 1771.

It was a pity that Brandt's knowledge of law did not prevent him from committing an act which the law of Denmark punished with death, and which, in any case, was cowardly and brutal. Allusion has been made to the fact that the King and Brandt frequently quarrelled, and, though, since the arrival of Reverdil, Brandt was relieved of some of his more onerous duties, he was still on bad terms with the King. One morning at the Queen's *déjeuner*, the King, who rarely joined in the conversation, suddenly, without provocation, shouted across the table to Brandt: "You deserve a good thrashing, and I will give you one. I am speaking to you, Count. Do you hear?" The incident created an unpleasant sensation among the company, but Brandt, with his usual presence of mind, ignored the affront, and turned the conversation to other channels. After [Pg 27]

breakfast Struensee and the Queen took the King aside, and rebuked him sharply, but the King only said: “Brandt is a coward if he refuses to fight with me.” He also told Brandt he was a cur, and afraid to accept his challenge. It had always been one of the King’s manias, even in his comparatively sane years, to try his strength with his attendants. He had frequently fought with Holck and Warnstedt, and also with Moranti, the negro boy, and they had consented to act on the defensive at his request, with the result that he was always permitted to come off conqueror. The game was a perilous one for the other combatant, for the King sometimes hit hard; on the other hand, the law of Denmark made it an offence punishable with death for any man to strike the King’s sacred person.

Brandt had never yet fought with the King, for he had a love of a whole skin, and shirked this disagreeable pastime; but now, goaded by the King’s insults, he determined to give him a lesson in manners. Apart from his dislike of the King, his self-esteem was wounded by having been insulted before the Queen, Countess Holstein and the other ladies, and he resolved to be avenged. That he acted on a set plan is shown by the fact that he hid a whip in a piano in the ante-chamber of the King’s room the day before he carried his design into execution. In the evening of the following day, when Reverdil was absent, Brandt took the whip from the piano, hid it under his coat, and went into the King’s apartment, where he found the semi-imbecile monarch [Pg 28] playing with the two boys who were his constant companions. Having turned Moranti and the other boy out, Brandt locked the door, and then told the King, who by this time was somewhat frightened, that he had come to fight with him according to his wish, and asked him to take his choice of pistols or swords. The King, who had not contemplated a duel, but a scramble, said he would fight with his fists. Brandt agreed, and the struggle began; but the King soon found that this particular adversary had not come to act on the defensive, but the offensive. Brandt, who was much the stronger of the two, for the King was weak and ailing, made use of his strength without stint, and, rage urging him on, he first beat his royal master unmercifully with his fists, and then thrashed him with the whip until Christian cried for quarter. Brandt, when he had beaten him until he could beat no longer, granted the request, and then left the room, leaving the King much bruised and frightened.

After he had put his dress in order, Brandt proceeded to the Queen’s apartments, and joined the company at the card tables as if nothing had happened. When the game was over, he told Struensee what he had done. The Minister said he was glad to hear it; it would give them peace from the King in future; but he cautioned Brandt to say nothing about it. But the next day rumours of what had taken place were all over the palace. The King’s valet had found his master [Pg 29] bruised and weeping, and Moranti and the other boy had heard sounds of the scuffle. Reports of the affray travelled to Copenhagen, and aroused general indignation. Apart from the cowardly brutality of the attack, it was deemed a monstrous thing that a man should raise his hand against the Lord’s anointed. Juliana Maria affected to find in it a confirmation of her worst fears, and colour was given to the reports that the King was systematically ill-treated, and his life was in danger. It was said that the Queen and Struensee not only approved, but encouraged this attack upon the King, and Brandt’s appointment shortly after as master of the wardrobe to the King, conferring on him the title of “Excellency,” was regarded as a proof of this. Without doubt, Brandt’s promotion was ill-timed, but the Queen had nothing to do with it. Struensee granted these favours to Brandt in order to bind him more closely to the court which he desired to leave.

Struensee, under panic from recent disturbances, had shown himself more conciliatory, and promised to consider the possibility of re-appointing the Council of State. He had also been induced, by Falckenskjold’s advice, to make the court pay more civility to the Queen-Dowager and Prince Frederick, and occasionally the King and Queen invited them to Hirschholm. But when the threatened danger seemed to pass away, and nothing more happened, he regained his confidence, and became as unyielding and overbearing as before. The Queen-Dowager and Prince [Pg 30] Frederick received fresh affronts; the idea of reviving the council was dropped, and the dictator already considered the advisability of new and more aggressive measures. Several more officials of high rank were dismissed, and Struensee’s favourites put in their places. He learned nothing from the past; although he was told that the Queen-Dowager and Prince Frederick would put themselves at the head of a party with a view of overthrowing him, he took no heed, and merely replied: “The purity of my views is my protection.”[13] The man was drunk with self-conceit.

[13] *Mémoires de Falckenskjold.*

Meanwhile alarming rumours reached the Court of St. James’s of the state of affairs in Denmark, and grave fears were entertained for the safety of the King’s sister, who seemed blindly rushing to her ruin. Keith’s despatches with reference to the late disturbances were laid before the King, who took serious counsel with his mother as to what could be done to save Matilda from the peril that threatened her, and to preserve the honour of his house. George III. had remonstrated with his sister in vain; of late he had heard nothing from her, and the last communication he received from her was to the effect that, if he wrote again, his letters must be sent through Struensee, which, under the circumstances, was little short of an insult. The King, at least, so regarded it, and for some time could not bring himself to write to his sister, if his letters were delivered [Pg 31] through such a medium. In the meantime Lord Suffolk was commanded to send Keith the following despatch:—

> “Your own delicacy and sentiment must have suggested the wish that the critical state of things at the court where you reside may affect the Queen of Denmark as little as possible. Your desire, therefore, to mark your regard for her Majesty will be gratified by the instructions I now give you, to endeavour most assiduously to prevent the

disagreeable incidents, which, if I am rightly informed, her Majesty is exposed to in the present moment. You are already directed upon large public considerations to promote upon all proper occasions of interference the return of M^r^ Bernstorff to lead in the administration, and I am happy to understand that, at the same time, no minister is more inclined to support the united interests of Great Britain and Russia, and there is none more likely than M^r^ Bernstorff to preserve that respect for the King's sister, which, amidst the revenge and violence of party rage, might, on a change of ministers, be too little attended to, or perhaps even violated. If, therefore, M^r^ Bernstorff should meet with success, and owe it, as probably would be the case, in great measure to your good offices and interposition, he cannot but be gratefully disposed to acknowledge so important a service, and he cannot acknowledge it more essentially than by giving full scope to his well-known attachment to the King's (George III.'s) person and family, and [Pg 32] by providing for the honour and security of his royal mistress, in case they are liable to danger from the unhappy condition of the country."[14]

[14] Lord Suffolk's despatch to Keith, London, November 1, 1771.

But the return of Bernstorff was of all things the most difficult to effect at that juncture. He was living in exile, he was not in the secret councils of the Queen-Dowager, who alone could head, with any hope of success, a revolution against Struensee, and he had already refused Rantzau's overtures. All this, of course, was unknown to the court of St. James's, though most of it was known to Keith. The King of England had not realised that his envoy had absolutely no influence in the affairs of Denmark. All this, and much more, Keith strove to explain in a despatch which he wrote in reply to Lord Suffolk's. He reviewed the situation in much the same way as Gunning had done before him:—

"I found, upon my arrival in this country," he wrote, "that the whole weight of government had, with the King's consent, devolved upon his Royal Consort. M^r^ Struensee was already (I must add, unhappily) in possession of that unlimited confidence on the part of her Danish Majesty which has given him a dictatorial sway in every department of government.... The genius of Count Struensee, though active, enterprising and extensive, appears to be deficient in point of judgment and resolution. His temper is fiery, suspicious and unfeeling; his cunning and address have been conspicuous in the attainment of power; his discernment and fairness in the exercise of [Pg 33] it have fallen short of the expectation of those who were least partial to him. His morals are founded upon this single principle—that a man's duties begin and end with himself, and in this life. The wickedness of avowing openly a tenet so profligate and dangerous can only be equalled by the ingratitude with which he has acted up to it, in his haughty and imperious behaviour to the Person (the Queen) who, with unwearied perseverance, continues to heap upon him all possible obligations. It is almost unnecessary to add that he is arrogant in prosperity and timid in danger."

Keith described again in detail the disturbances of the autumn, and went on to say:—

"During that period, my most anxious attention was continually turned to the painful situation of the Queen of Denmark, whose partiality for Count Struensee seemed to gather strength from opposition. The circumstances were truly alarming; yet, after weighing them maturely, I had the heartfelt comfort to think that the removal of the Minister, by whatever means effected, would soon restore her Majesty to the affection of the nation, and re-establish her legal authority. If any dangerous crisis had taken place, I was firmly determined to offer my services to her Majesty in the best manner they could be employed for the security of her person and dignity, and I trusted to my conscience and to the humanity of my gracious Sovereign (George III.) for the justification of the steps which my dutiful attachment to the Royal Family might in such [Pg 34] a moment have suggested. But, my Lord, it was indispensably necessary that I should wait for the approach of such a crisis before I declared to her Majesty my earnest intentions, as the Prime Minister had from the first day excluded me (together with all my colleagues) from the possibility of access to her Majesty.... It may appear extraordinary that in the five months I have passed in Denmark I have not had the honour of exchanging ten sentences with the Queen."

Keith then referred again to the terrors of Struensee, and the precautions which had been taken to guard the palace of Hirschholm. He related how for a short time Struensee appeared to be more amenable to advice, but, on the passing of danger, he had again resumed his overbearing manner; and added: "I am now fully persuaded that he must again be driven to extremity before he yields any share of power to those ministers who were formerly accustomed to treat him as a mean inferior, and whose late expulsion had been a result of all his efforts." With reference to the return of Bernstorff, he pointed out that the Queen had a prejudice against the ex-minister on account of his supposed wish to exclude her from the regency; but he did not consider this objection insuperable, and wrote: "If M^r^ Struensee can ever be brought to recall Count Bernstorff, the Queen will not oppose it. If M^r^ Struensee quits the helm, or is forced from it, there is but one set of men to whom her Majesty can have recourse (the nobility), and, amongst them, [Pg 35] almost every voice is in favour of Count Bernstorff.... I shall endeavour most assiduously to prevent every disagreeable incident, to which her Danish Majesty may be exposed by the violence of party rage. This seems at present (November 18) much abated, and I have had the

satisfaction to observe that its greatest fury has at all times been principally levelled at the person of the Prime Minister.... How sorry am I, my Lord, that I dare not look for a nearer and more pleasing hope for his dismission than the prospect of his wearing out the patience and generosity of his powerful protectress!”[15]

[15] Keith’s despatch, Copenhagen, November 18, 1771.

So matters stood up to the end of November. A truce seemed to be declared. The court remained at Hirschholm (it was said because Struensee dared not enter the capital), and, his fears being now to a great extent allayed, the days passed as before in a round of amusement.

Hirschholm in the late autumn was damp and unhealthy, but still the court lingered, and it was not until the end of November that a move was made. Even then the King and Queen did not proceed to the Christiansborg Palace, but went to Frederiksberg. At Frederiksberg there was a court every Monday, but these courts were very sparsely attended; the King, it was noticed, spoke to no one, and moved like an automaton; the Queen looked anxious and ill. Sometimes Struensee and the Queen went a-hawking; sometimes the King and Queen drove into [Pg 36] Copenhagen to attend the French plays or the opera; but the citizens saw with astonishment that their Majesties now never drove into their capital city without their coach being guarded by forty dragoons with drawn sabres. At Frederiksberg, too, most elaborate military arrangements were made for the security of the court. A squadron of dragoons was quartered in an out-building, and there was not only a mounted guard day and night round the palace, but the surrounding country was patrolled by soldiers. The dread of assassination was ever present with Struensee, and though he would not alter his methods of government, he took the most elaborate precautions for his personal safety, and all these precautions were on his behalf.

In addition to the guarding of Frederiksberg, he gave orders to the commandant of the troops in Copenhagen, an officer whom he had himself appointed, to have everything in readiness to maintain order by force in the event of a rising or tumult. Copenhagen looked like a city in a state of siege. The heaviest guns in the arsenal were planted on the walls in front of the guard-house, and at the town gates. The guns on the walls were turned round, and pointed at the city every evening after sunset; the soldiers had their cartridges served out to them, and patrolled the streets at all hours; even loaded cannon were placed in front of the palace, and any one who wished to enter to transact business was escorted in and out by two soldiers. [Pg 37] All these extraordinary precautions were carried out with the knowledge and consent of the Queen; but the King was not consulted; he was surprised to find himself living in a state of siege, and asked Struensee, in alarm, what was the meaning of it all. Struensee, who knew well how to trade on the fears of the King, replied that it was done for the better protection of the King’s royal person, for his subjects were rebellious and disaffected, and it was feared that, if not checked, there would be a revolution, like that which took place in Russia a few years before. He even hinted that the King might meet with the same fate as the unhappy Emperor Peter III., who was assassinated. Christian was greatly frightened on hearing this. “My God!” he exclaimed, “what harm have I done, that my dear and faithful subjects should hate me so?”

This display of armed force still more enraged the populace against the favourite. The pointing of loaded cannon was regarded as an attempt to over-awe the people by force, and a report was spread abroad that Struensee intended to disarm the corps of burghers, or citizen soldiers, who were charged with the keeping of the city. The colonel commanding the burghers declared that if his men were deprived of their muskets, they would defend their King, if need be, with paving stones. Without doubt, these military preparations hastened the impending crisis, for the Queen-Dowager and her adherents imagined they were really directed against them. The whole kingdom was seething with rebellion, and tumults sooner or later were inevitable. Yet, even now, at the [Pg 38] eleventh hour, the worst might have been averted, had it not been for the incredible foolhardiness of Struensee. He had offended every class and every interest; he could only hope to maintain his rule by force. For this the army was absolutely necessary; but, by a wanton act of provocation, Struensee aroused the army against him.

The ill-feeling which had been stirred up by the disbandment of the Horse Guards in the summer had to some extent subsided. The officers of the Household Cavalry, who were most of them wealthy and of noble birth, had been extremely arrogant, and the other officers, both of the army and navy, were not ill-pleased to see their pride humbled by their privileges being taken away. But Struensee, who cherished a hatred against all the guards, now resolved to disband even the battalion of Foot Guards, and merge the officers and men into other regiments, on the pretext that the existence of any favoured regiment was injurious to the discipline of the rest of the army. Falckenskjold first opposed this design, but, as Struensee was determined, he reluctantly yielded the point, and the Privy Cabinet Minister sent an order, signed with his own hand, to the war department for the regiment to be disbanded forthwith. But General Gahler, who was the head of this department, called his colleagues together, and they declared they could not act without an order signed by the King in person, as they considered Struensee’s decree extremely dangerous, [Pg 39] and likely to lead to mutiny. Struensee was at first very indignant at this demur, but, finding Gahler resolute, he had to give way, and he obtained an order signed by the King. This he forwarded to the war department, who, in duty bound, immediately yielded.

ENEVOLD BRANDT.
From a Miniature at Frederiksborg.

The next day, December 24, Christmas Eve, when the guards were drawn up in line, the King's order for their disbandment and incorporation was read to them, and they were commanded to hand their colours over to the officers who were present from other regiments. The men refused, and when they saw their colours being taken away, they rushed forward in a body, and dragged them back by force, shouting: "They are our colours; we will part from them only with our lives." The men were now in a state of mutiny. Their officers had withdrawn, unwilling to risk a contest with the authorities; so a non-commissioned officer assumed the command, and led the insurgents. They marched to the Christiansborg Palace, broke the gate open, drove away the guard stationed there, and took their places. Some of them were hindered from entering the palace by the other troops, who attempted to take them prisoners. The result was a free fight, and in the course of it one of the guardsmen was killed, and several soldiers were wounded. Copenhagen was in a state of riot. Meanwhile Falckenskjold hurried to Frederiksberg with the news of the mutiny. Once more Struensee was thrown into unreasoning panic, and quite unable [Pg 40] to act. Brandt and Bülow, the Queen's Master of the Horse, hurried to the Christiansborg, and endeavoured to appease the rebellious guards, but without success. The categorical reply was: "We must remain guards, or have our discharge. We will not be merged into other regiments." It should be mentioned that they were picked men, and drawn from a superior class; they ranked with non-commissioned officers in other regiments, and such punishments as flogging could not be inflicted on them. The envoys returned to Frederiksberg with the news of their ill-success, and the terror of Struensee increased.

The guards now had a council of war, and it was resolved that a party of them should march to Frederiksberg, and request an interview with the King in person, as the Norwegian sailors had done. When the party set out, they found the western gate of the city closed and held against them; but at the northern gate the officer of the guard allowed them to pass. On the road to Frederiksberg they met the King driving, a postilion and an equerry formed his only escort, and Reverdil was alone with him in the carriage. The soldiers, who had no grievance against the King, formed into line and saluted him, and Christian, from whom the knowledge of the mutiny had been carefully kept, returned the salute. When the guards reached Frederiksberg, Struensee's fears deepened into panic. As at Hirschholm, hurried preparations were made for flight, and [Pg 41] orders were given to reinforce the palace guard. The whole of the army sympathised with the guards, and it may be doubted whether the soldiers would have resisted their comrades by force of arms. Fortunately, one of the officers of the guards had hurried before them to Frederiksberg to protest against extremities; he was now sent out by Struensee to parley with them in the King's name. The men repeated their demand: they must remain guards, or receive their

discharge. The officer went back to the palace, and pretended to see the King, in reality, he saw only Struensee. Presently he returned to inform the mutineers that the King did not wish to keep any men in his service against their will, and they were therefore discharged, and were at liberty to go where they pleased. The detachment thereupon returned to Christiansborg to report to their comrades, but these refused to trust a verbal statement, and requested that a written discharge should be handed to each man before they surrendered the palace.

General Gahler, who had disapproved of Struensee's action throughout, and now feared there would be bloodshed, on hearing this went to Frederiksberg, and insisted that a written discharge for the whole body must be made out, duly signed and sealed by Struensee himself. This he brought back to the guards; but the men, imagining there was some deception, took exception to the form of the order, and the fact that the King had not signed it. When this was reported to him, Struensee lost patience, and threatened to storm the Christiansborg if the mutineers were [Pg 42] not removed before midnight—a most imprudent threat, and one practically impossible to carry out, for the Queen-Dowager and Prince Frederick were occupying their apartments in the Christiansborg at the time, and no doubt secretly abetting the mutineers. Moreover, the whole of Copenhagen sided with the guards. Citizens sent in provisions, wines and spirits, in order that they might keep their Christmas in a festive manner; the sailors sent word that they would help the mutineers if the matter came to a crisis, and the gunners secretly conveyed to them the news that they would receive them into the arsenal and join them. Midnight struck, and still the mutineers held the palace. Struensee, finding his threat had no weight, then veered round to the other extreme, and was soon hastily filling up the required number of printed discharges, which were taken to the King to be signed one by one.

In the morning—Christmas morning—glad news came to the mutinous guards. All their demands were complied with, and more than complied with; a separate discharge, signed by the King, was presented to every guardsman, and a promise that three dollars would be paid him, and any advance he owed would be wiped off. So on Christmas morning the disbanded guards marched out of the Christiansborg, which they had occupied for twenty-four hours, and the danger was averted. The city continued in a great state of excitement all day, and some street fights took [Pg 43] place, but nothing of importance. The King and Queen drove into Copenhagen to attend divine service at the royal chapel, as this was Christmas Day, and the fact was considered significant, for now they rarely went to church. Another concession was made to public opinion, for the following Sunday evening they were not present at the French play, as was usually the case.

Unfortunately, these attempts at conciliation, trifling though they were, came too late. The people had now made up their minds about Struensee; he was a coward and a bully, who would yield everything to violence, and nothing to reason. They had found him out; he was a lath painted to look like iron. His wanton attack upon the guards and subsequent capitulation filled the cup of his transgressions to the brim. It was said that at this time Keith thought fit to intervene. Hoping to shield his Sovereign's sister from the danger which threatened her, he saw Struensee privately, and offered him a sum of money to quit the country. If this be true (and no hint of it appears in Keith's despatches), it had no result, for Struensee still clung to his post. Rantzau, also, who had not quite settled his terms with the Queen-Dowager, and, true to his character, was ready to sell either side for the higher price, also saw Struensee, through the medium of the Swedish minister, and urged him to resign, or at least to reverse his whole system of policy; but Struensee would not listen, probably because Rantzau wanted money, and he did [Pg 44] not wish to give it him. Still Rantzau did not desist; he went to Falckenskjold, and told him as much as he dared of a conspiracy against Struensee, and offered to help to detect it for a pecuniary consideration. Falckenskjold heard him coldly, and merely said: "In that case, you should address your remarks to Struensee himself." "He will not listen to me," said Rantzau, and turned away. From that moment Struensee's luck turned away from him too.

CHAPTER III.

[Pg 45]

THE MASKED BALL.

1772.

On January 8, 1772, the King and Queen returned to the Christiansborg after an absence from their capital of seven months. It required some courage to enter a city on the verge of insurrection, but the court could not remain away from Copenhagen for ever, and Struensee at last came to the conclusion that it would be better to put on a bold front, and meet his enemies on their own ground. Extraordinary precautions were taken to ensure his personal safety, and that of the King and Queen. They entered Copenhagen as though it were a hostile city. Keith thus describes the entry: "The court returned to Copenhagen on Wednesday, and the apprehensions of the Prime Minister are still very visible by the warlike parade with which the court is surrounded. Dragoons are posted on the market places, and patrols in the streets, and twelve pieces of cannon are kept constantly loaded in the arsenal. The entrance into the French play-house is lined with soldiers, and their Majesties in going from the palace to the opera-house, though the distance is not above three hundred yards, are escorted by an officer and thirty-six dragoons. [Pg 46] Notwithstanding all these precautions, I see no reason to apprehend the smallest danger to the persons of their Majesties, and am willing to hope that the popular discontent may soon subside, if the Minister does not blow up the flame by some new act of violence."[16]

[16] Keith's despatch, January 11, 1772.

There was certainly no danger to the King. The people regarded him as a prisoner in the hands of the unscrupulous Minister, and their desire was to deliver him from that bondage. The Queen was only in danger because of her blind attachment to Struensee. If he could be removed, or induced to resign quietly, all would be forgiven her, for her youth, her inexperience and her infatuation aroused pity rather than anger in the breast of the multitude. But, as Struensee's accomplice, she shared in his unpopularity, and the wrath of the Queen-Dowager and the clergy was especially directed against her. Matilda had no fear for herself; all her fears were for the man whom she still loved with unreasoning adoration; she trembled lest he might be forced to leave her, or fall a victim to the vengeance of his enemies. During the dangers and alarms of the last six months, she alone remained true to him; the hatred of his enemies, the treachery of his friends, the warnings and remonstrances of those who wished her well, made no difference. His craven fears, the revelation that her hero was but a coward after all, even the ingratitude and brutal rudeness with which he sometimes treated her, forgetting the respect due to her as Queen [Pg 47] and woman, forgetting the sacrifices she had made for him, and the benefits she had rained upon him—all this did not make any change in her devotion; she still loved him without wavering or shadow of turning. Even now, when the popular execration was at its height, she bravely stood by his side, willing to share the odium excited by his misdeeds. Though all should fail him, she would remain.

The day of the return to Copenhagen there was a ball at the Christiansborg Palace; on the following Saturday there was the performance of a French play at the royal theatre; on the following Monday there was a court. On all these occasions the Queen, heedless of murmurings and averted looks, appeared with Struensee by her side, as though to support him by her presence. Indeed, she sought by many a sign and token to show to all the world that, however hated and shunned he might be, her trust and confidence in him were unbroken; and he, craven and selfish voluptuary that he was, set his trembling lips, and sought to shelter himself from the popular vengeance behind the refuge of her robe.

It was at this time—the eleventh hour—that George III. made one more effort to save his sister. Mastering his pride, he wrote to her yet another letter, urging her for the good of her adopted country, for her own personal safety, and for the honour of the royal house from which she sprang, to send away the hated favourite, and recall Bernstorff. So anxious was the King of [Pg 48] England that this letter should reach his sister that he overcame his repugnance to Struensee sufficiently to command Keith to deliver it to the Queen through Struensee's hands, according to her wishes.[17] The letter was duly delivered, but before an answer could be returned it was too late.

[17] "I have the honour to enclose a letter from his Majesty to the Queen of Denmark, which I am commanded to direct you to deliver to Count Struensee for him to convey to her Danish Majesty, and you will observe the same mode of conveyance for all the King's private letters to the Queen of Denmark. You are to take the earliest opportunity to acquaint M^{r} Osten privately that this mode is adopted at the express desire of the Queen of Denmark."—Suffolk to Keith, January 9, 1772.

The contents of the King's letter of course are not known, but that the gist of it was probably that given above may be gathered from Lord Suffolk's previous communication to the English envoy at Copenhagen.

The continued favour shown by the Queen to Struensee, the close guarding of the royal palaces, the display of military force in the city, and the disbanding of the guards, who were regarded in a special sense the bodyguard of the monarch, all lent confirmation to the rumour that a *coup d'état* was imminent—that Struensee meant to seize the person of the King, depose him, or otherwise make away with him, marry the Queen, and proclaim himself Regent, or Protector of the King. Moreover, it was whispered that he had become acquainted with the Queen-Dowager's intrigues against his authority, and was contemplating the arrest of Juliana Maria and her son. This rumour, to which the military preparations gave colour, was told the Queen-Dowager by [Pg 49]

interested persons, with a view to forcing her at last to act. Juliana Maria was an imperious, hard, intriguing woman. From the first she had disliked Matilda, and wished her ill, but there is no evidence to show that she would have headed a revolution against her had she not been driven into it by force of circumstances. That the Queen-Dowager desired and plotted the overthrow of Struensee was natural and excusable. He had treated herself and her son with marked disrespect; he had privately insulted and publicly affronted them. His reforms both in church and state were entirely opposed to her views; his intrigue with Queen Matilda she considered dishonouring to the royal house, and his influence over the King harmful to the monarch and the nation. Juliana Maria and her son represented the old regime and were naturally looked up to at a crisis; in any event, she would have been forced into opposition to the existing state of affairs.

But Juliana Maria was above all things cautious. She was fully alive to the peril of provoking the powerful minister and the reigning Queen, who, holding, as they did, the King's authority, were omnipotent. The Queen-Dowager had been anxious to bring about the dismissal of Struensee by peaceful and constitutional means; but these had failed; neither warnings nor threats would make him quit his post. Moreover, she distrusted Rantzau, who headed the conspiracy against him. She was averse from violent measures, which, if unsuccessful, would assuredly involve both [Pg 50] her and her son in ruin. Therefore, though she had been cognisant of the growth of the conspiracy against Struensee for many months—though she had conferred with the conspirators, and secretly encouraged them—yet up to the present she had hesitated to take action. Even the mutiny of the guards, when the mutineers were shut up in the palace with her, had not moved her to make the decisive step. It was not until information was brought her of a threatened *coup d'état*, and the probable imprisonment of herself and her son, that she determined to hold back no longer. Rantzau, who knew well the Queen-Dowager's reluctance to commit herself, finally secured her adhesion to the conspiracy by means of a forged paper, which contained a full account of Struensee's supposed *coup d'état*. A copy of this plan, which never existed in the original, was given by Rantzau to Peter Suhm, the Danish historiographer royal, who stood high in the opinion of the Queen-Dowager. According to it January 28 was the day fixed for the King's abdication, the appointment of the Queen as Regent and Struensee as Protector. Suhm at once took the document to Juliana Maria, and urged her to immediate action. There was no time to be lost, he told her, for the man who meditated usurping the regal power would not long hesitate before committing a further crime. The assassination of the King would assure him of the couch of the Queen, and the Crown Prince, either imprisoned, or succumbing to the rigours of his treatment, would make way for the fruit of this intercourse. For this motive and no other had [Pg 51] Struensee revoked the law which prohibited a repudiated wife from marrying the accomplice of her infidelity. The man who had abolished the Council of State would repeal, if need be, the Salic law, which had hitherto prevailed in Denmark. The Queen-Dowager was fully persuaded by this document; she resolved to call a meeting of the conspirators, and nip Struensee's alleged plot in the bud. The situation, she agreed, was desperate, and admitted of no delay.

These conspirators included Rantzau, who has already been spoken of at length. Prince Frederick, the King's brother, who, being weak in body and not very strong in mind, was entirely under the control of his mother. Ove Guldberg, Prince Frederick's private secretary, who had acted as a means of communication between the other conspirators and the Queen-Dowager, and finally won her over to the plot. He was a man of great ability, a born intriguer, and exceedingly cautious; Juliana Maria placed implicit confidence in him, and was confident that he would not embark on a desperate enterprise of this kind unless it was sure of success.

Two prominent officers also joined. One was Colonel Köller, who commanded a regiment of infantry, a bold, rough soldier, brave as a lion, and strong as Hercules—a desperado, of whom Struensee said: "He looks as if he had no mother, but was brought into the world by a man." The other was General Hans Henrik Eickstedt, who commanded the regiment of Zealand dragoons, which had now taken the place of the discharged guards, and did duty at the palace of [Pg 52] Christiansborg. Eickstedt was not a man of any special ability, but he was honourable and trustworthy, which is more than could be said of most of the other conspirators. He honestly believed that Struensee's overthrow, by whatever means, was necessary for the salvation of Denmark, and, when he learned that the Queen-Dowager had thrown her ægis over the conspiracy, he joined it without asking any questions; otherwise the character of some of the conspirators might have made him pause.

The last of these active conspirators was Beringskjold, who had much experience in intrigue. He had played the part of Danish spy at St. Petersburg, where he made the acquaintance of Rantzau, and, like him, took part in the conspiracy which resulted in the deposition and murder of Peter III. Beringskjold later came back to Denmark and got into pecuniary difficulties. It was at this time that he renewed his acquaintance with Rantzau, who, seeing in him the tool for his purpose, made him acquainted with the plot against Struensee, which Beringskjold eagerly joined. He was especially useful in maturing the conspiracy, for his spying proclivities and Russian experiences were invaluable in such an undertaking. It was he who insisted that the Queen-Dowager must take an active part in the conspiracy, for he well knew that without her it would stand no chance of success. Beringskjold also knew that no revolution could be carried through without the aid of [Pg 53] the army, and it was he who won over Eickstedt and Köller.

A subordinate conspirator was Jessen, an ex-valet of Frederick V. He was now a prosperous wine merchant in Copenhagen, and was much esteemed by the Queen-Dowager, who knew him as a tried and faithful servant. Jessen was employed as a medium between Juliana Maria and Guldberg at Fredensborg and the other conspirators in Copenhagen. He informed her of the state of feeling in the capital, and circulated rumours detrimental to Struensee and Queen Matilda. He

sent reports of the progress of the plot to Fredensborg, addressing his letters, for greater security, under cover to the Queen-Dowager's waiting woman. When Juliana Maria returned to Copenhagen and took up her residence at the Christiansborg, it was Jessen who arranged the secret meetings of her party. They were held at the house of a well-known clergyman named Abildgaard, rector of the Holmenskirke. The house was close to the palace, and had entrances from two different streets.

Here, when the Queen-Dowager at last determined to act, a meeting of the conspirators was summoned and the details of the plot were arranged. It was decided to seize Queen Matilda, Struensee, Brandt and their adherents, obtain possession of the King and force him to proclaim a new Government. Once get possession of the King and the rest would be easy, for Christian VII. could be made to sign any papers the conspirators might require, and as absolute monarch his [Pg 54] orders would be implicitly obeyed. To this end Jessen produced a plan of the Christiansborg Palace, showing the King's apartments, the Queen's, and the private staircases that led from her rooms to those of the King and Struensee; the situation of Brandt's apartments, and of others whom it was resolved to arrest. The conspirators decided to strike their blow on the night of January 16-17(1772). On that evening a masked ball was to be given at the palace, and in the consequent bustle and confusion it would be easy for the conspirators to come and go, and communicate with each other, without being noticed. Moreover, on that night Köller and his Holstein regiment had the guard at the palace, together with a troop of Zealand dragoons under the command of Eickstedt. Therefore the whole military charge of the palace would be under the control of two of the conspirators, and the inmates would be at their mercy.

QUEEN JULIANA MARIA, STEP-MOTHER OF CHRISTIAN VII.
From the Painting by Clemens.

The night of January 16 came at last. In accordance with their recent policy of showing a bold front to their enemies, the Queen and Struensee had arranged the masked ball, the first given since the return of the court to Copenhagen, on a scale of unusual magnificence. The royal hospitality on this occasion was almost unlimited, for all the nine ranks of society, who by any pretext could attend court, were invited. This in itself was a proof of Struensee's false sense of security, for, at a time when the city was seething with sedition, to give a masked ball to which practically every one was admitted was to lay himself open to the danger of assassination. The [Pg 55] ball was held in the royal theatre of the Christiansborg Palace, which had lately, under Brandt's supervision, been elaborately redecorated. Crystal chandeliers sparkled with thousands of lights, and the boxes round the theatre were gorgeous with new gilding and purple silken hangings. The auditorium was on this occasion raised level with the stage, so that the whole formed one large

hall for the dancers. The band was placed at the back of the stage, and the wings were converted into bowers of plants and flowers, lit with coloured lamps.

The King and Queen, with Struensee, Brandt, and all their court, entered the theatre at ten o'clock, and dancing immediately began. The King, who no longer danced, retired to the royal box where card-tables were arranged, and played quadrille with General and Madame Gahler, and Justice Struensee, brother of the Prime Minister. The Queen, who was magnificently dressed[18] and wore splendid jewels, danced continually, and seemed in high spirits. Every one remarked on her beauty and vivacity. The Queen-Dowager never attended masked balls, so that her absence called forth no comment; but Prince Frederick, contrary to his usual custom (for he was generally waiting on these occasions to receive their Majesties), was more than an hour late, [Pg 56] and when he at last arrived, his flushed face and nervous air revealed his agitation. But the Queen, who thought that his unpunctuality accounted for his nervousness, rallied him playfully and said: "You are very late, brother. What have you been doing?" "I have had some business to attend to, Madam," he replied in confusion, as he bowed over her extended hand. "It seems to me," said the Queen gaily, "that you would do better to think of your pleasure than your business on the evening of a ball." The Prince stammered some reply, which the Queen did not heed; she dismissed him good-humouredly, and resumed her dancing.

[18] The dress the Queen is said to have worn at this ball—of rich white silk, brocaded with pink roses—is still preserved in the Guelph Family Museum at Herrenhausen. It was sent to Hanover after her death.

Several of the conspirators were present to disarm suspicion, including Köller and Guldberg, who strolled about as though nothing was impending. Presently Köller sat down to cards in one of the boxes, and played in the most unconcerned manner possible. When Struensee went up to him and said: "Are you not going to dance?" Köller replied with covert insolence: "Not yet. My hour to dance will arrive presently." As usual at the court entertainments, Struensee, after the Queen, was the most prominent figure. Richly clad in silk and velvet, and with the Order of Matilda on his breast, he played the part of host in all but name. Whatever might be the feeling outside the palace walls, within there appeared no hint of his waning power; he was still the all-powerful minister, flattered, courted and caressed. The Queen hung on his lightest word, and a servile [Pg 57] crowd of courtiers and place-hunters courted his smile or trembled at his frown. He was the centre of the glittering scene, and, though there were few present who did not secretly hate or fear him, all rendered him outward honour, and many envied him his good fortune.

Though the ball was brilliant and largely attended, the company was hardly what one might expect to find at the court of a reigning monarch. The bearers of some of the oldest and proudest names in Denmark were absent; and their places were taken by well-to-do citizens of Copenhagen and their wives. A few of the foreign ambassadors were present, including the English envoy, General Keith. He probably attended in pursuance of his determination to be at hand to help and defend his King's sister, in case of need. Keith feared some outbreak of violence, which would place the Queen in personal danger. He does not seem to have had the slightest inkling of the organised plot against her honour and her life. He was not ignorant, of course, of the dislike with which the Queen-Dowager and her son, representing the nobility, the clergy and the upper classes generally, viewed the Struensee regime, for which Matilda was largely responsible; but he thought they would act, if they acted at all, in a constitutional manner, by promoting the recall of Bernstorff, and the overthrow of the favourite.

The evening was not to pass without another display of Struensee's insolence, and a further [Pg 58] affront to Prince Frederick. The favourite supped in the royal box with the King and Queen, but the King's brother was not admitted, and had to get his supper at a buffet, like the meanest of the guests. The insult was premeditated, for Reverdil tells us that he heard of it the day before, and interceded for the Prince in vain. The Prince probably did not mind, for he knew that the favourite's hour had struck. But for Struensee, as he feasted at the King's table, there was no writing on the wall to forewarn him of his doom.

The King left the ballroom soon after midnight, and retired to his apartments; the Queen remained dancing for some time longer. The company unmasked after supper, and the fun became fast and furious; the ceremony usual at court entertainments was absent here, and all etiquette and restraint were banished. The Queen mingled freely with her guests, and enjoyed herself so much that it was nearly three o'clock before she retired. Her withdrawal was the signal for the company to depart, and soon the ballroom was deserted and in darkness.

The Countess Holstein had invited a few of her intimate friends, including Struensee, Brandt and two ladies, to come to her apartments after the ball. But one of the ladies, Baroness Schimmelmann, excused herself on the plea of a severe headache, and the other lady, Baroness Bülow, was unwilling to go alone, and therefore the party fell through. Had the Countess Holstein's party taken place, as by the merest chance it did not, it would probably have upset the [Pg 59] plans of the conspirators, or at least rendered them more difficult to carry out, for the principal men marked down for prey would have been gathered together in one room, and would have resisted or tried to escape.

The stars in their courses seemed to be fighting for the Queen-Dowager, for this evening also the conspiracy had been on the brink of failure owing to the vacillation of Rantzau. This traitor, whose only wish was to get his debts paid, had no more faith in the promises of the Queen-Dowager than in those of Struensee (though the event proved that he was wrong), and at the eleventh hour considered that the enterprise was too hazardous. He therefore resolved to be on the safe side, and reveal the whole conspiracy. To this end, about eight o'clock in the evening,

before the ball, he drove secretly to the house of Struensee's brother. But the Justice had gone out to dinner, and Rantzau therefore left a message with the servant, bidding him be sure to tell his master, directly he came home, that Count Rantzau desired a visit from him immediately on a matter of great importance. Justice Struensee returned soon after, and the servant gave him the message, but he knew the excitable character of Rantzau, and said: "The visit will keep until to-morrow morning. The Count is always in a fuss about trifles." He therefore went on to the ball, where he played cards with the King.

Rantzau, meanwhile, wondered why the Justice did not come, and worked himself up to a state of great alarm. He would not go to the ball, but wrapped his feet in flannel, went to bed and sent Köller word that a violent attack of gout prevented him from keeping his appointment in the Queen-Dowager's apartments as agreed. The other conspirators were much disturbed by the message, for they feared treachery. Beringskjold was sent to persuade the Count to come, and when Rantzau pointed to his feet, he suggested a sedan chair. Still Rantzau made excuses. Then Köller, who knew the manner of man with whom he had to deal, sent word to say that if he did not come forthwith he would have him fetched thither by grenadiers. The threat was effectual, and Rantzau, finding that Struensee's brother did not appear, yielded, and was carried to the Christiansborg in a sedan chair. When there, he regained his feet, and became in a short space of time miraculously better. [Pg 60]

Köller early quitted the masquerade, where he only showed himself for a short time to disarm suspicion, and had a hurried conference with Eickstedt in another part of the palace. The two officers, each possessed of an order signed by the Queen-Dowager and Prince Frederick, then separated—Köller to look after the garrison, and Eickstedt the palace guard. Eickstedt went to the guard-room and summoned the officers of the guard. The proceedings were conducted with the greatest secrecy, and, when the officers had all arrived, Eickstedt lit a candle, which he placed under the table, so that no one might see the assembly from without. By this dim light he read an order, signed by the Queen-Dowager and Prince Frederick, to the effect that, the King being surrounded by bad people, and his royal person in danger, his loving brother and stepmother hereby commanded Colonels Köller and Eickstedt to seize that same night Counts Struensee and Brandt, and several other persons named, and to place them under arrest. The Queen-Dowager and Prince Frederick had not the slightest right to command the troops; the document was, in fact, a usurpation of the royal authority; but that was a matter which concerned Eickstedt and Köller. The subordinate officers, who, in common with the whole army, hated Struensee, were only too glad to carry the order into effect, the responsibility resting not with them, but with the Queen-Dowager and their commanders. After they had all sworn obedience, Eickstedt gave them their orders. When all was ready, they were to advance at half-past three o'clock, or as soon as the ball was quite over, occupy all the doors of the palace, and allow none to go in or go out. They were at first to try to stop them politely, and if that failed, to use force. A picket of dragoons, with their horses bitted and saddled, were also to be in readiness. [Pg 61]

At the same time Köller went the round of the garrison, collected all the officers on duty, and read to them a similar order. The aid of the garrison was requested in case of need. The officers of the city guard promised obedience, and returned to their several posts. [Pg 62]

Everything was at last in readiness. Except in the Queen-Dowager's apartments, the whole palace was perfectly quiet. The lights were put out; the last of the revellers had gone home; the King and Queen, Struensee and Brandt, and the rest of the court had retired to their apartments, and were, most of them, asleep. Within and without the palace was held by armed men; the net was so closely drawn that there was no possibility of the prey escaping.

CHAPTER IV.

[Pg 63]

THE PALACE REVOLUTION.

1772.

At four o'clock in the morning the little group of conspirators assembled in the apartments of the Queen-Dowager. They were eight in all—Juliana Maria, Prince Frederick, Guldberg, Rantzau, Eickstedt, Köller, Beringskjold and Jessen—not, at first sight, a powerful list to effect a revolution; but they had the army at their command, and the whole nation at their back. Moreover, some, at least, of them were sustained by the high consciousness that they were doing a righteous work, and the others were desperate men, who had all to gain and nothing to lose. Guldberg rehearsed to each one of the conspirators his separate duty, that nothing might be forgotten. Then, at the request of the Queen-Dowager, all knelt down, and a prayer was offered, invoking the Divine blessing on the undertaking.[19]

[19] The following account of the palace revolution is based on several authorities: some are favourable to the Queen, others against her. They more or less agree on the main facts, which are those set forth in this chapter, though they conflict as to details. Among them may be mentioned the *Memoirs* of Falckenskjold, Köller-Banner and Reverdil, all of whom played a part in the affair; *Mémoires de mon Temps*, by Prince Charles of Hesse (privately printed), the Private Journal of N. W. Wraxall, who claims to have based his narrative on the statements of Bülow and Le Texier, the *Memoirs and Correspondence of Sir R. Murray Keith*, and sundry depositions made at the Queen's trial. There are a great many other accounts in printed books, but they are nearly all based on these sources.

[Pg 64]

When they rose from their knees, all the conspirators, guided by Jessen and headed by the Queen-Dowager, went silently along the dark passages to the apartments of the King. In the ante-chamber they found the King's valet fast asleep. They roused him, and told him they wished to see his Majesty immediately. Seeing the Queen-Dowager and Prince Frederick, the valet was willing to obey without demur; but the main door of the King's bed-chamber was locked from within, and they were therefore obliged to go round by the secret staircase. The valet went in front to guide them, and immediately behind him came Guldberg, carrying a candle. The others followed in single line, and soon found themselves in Christian's bedroom.

The King awoke with a start, and, seeing in the dim light the room full of men, cried out in terror. The Queen-Dowager approached the bed, and said in reassuring accents: "Your Majesty, my dear son, be not afraid. We are not come hither as enemies, but as your true friends. We have come ——" Here Juliana Maria broke down, and her voice was stifled by her sobs. Rantzau, who had agreed to explain the plan to the King, hung back. But Köller thrust him forward, and then he told the King that his Majesty's brother and stepmother had come to deliver him and the country

[Pg 65]

from the hated yoke of Struensee. By this time the Queen-Dowager had recovered her nerve, and, embracing her stepson, she repeated what Rantzau had said with ample detail. The King, who was almost fainting with excitement and terror, demanded a glass of water, and, when he had drunk it, asked if the commandant of the palace guard were present. Eickstedt stepped forward, and confirmed what the Queen-Dowager and Rantzau had said, and added that the people were in a state of revolt, for a plot was being carried out to depose the King, in which Struensee and the Queen were concerned. When the King heard the Queen's name, he refused to believe that she had anything to do with it, and said the story must be a mistake. But the Queen-Dowager assured him that Matilda was privy to it, and told him the whole of the supposed plot against his royal authority and person. Guldberg confirmed the Queen-Dowager's statement in every particular, and declared there was no time to be lost.

The bewildered King, at last half-convinced, asked what was to be done. Rantzau then pulled out of his pocket two written orders, and asked him to sign them. By the first, Eickstedt was made commander-in-chief, and by the second, Eickstedt and Köller were vested with full powers to take all measures necessary for the safety of the King and the country. Thus the obedience of the army would be assured. When Christian read these orders, he feared a conflict between the people and the military, for he exclaimed: "My God! this will mean rivers of blood." But Rantzau, who by this

[Pg 66]

time had regained his assurance, replied: "Be of good cheer, your Majesty. With God's help, I take everything upon myself, and will as far as possible prevent bloodshed." The King sat up in bed and signed the two orders; Prince Frederick counter-signed them.

Eickstedt took the first and immediately left the room; he placed himself at the head of the picket of dragoons waiting below, and rode to the garrison to inform the officers on duty of his new appointment as commander-in-chief. He promptly strengthened the palace guard, had all the gates of the city closed, and bade the garrison hold itself in readiness for any event.

Köller also took his order, and with the others retired to an ante-chamber, as the King had expressed a wish to get up. By the time Christian was dressed, he was quite convinced that Struensee had plotted against his life, and he was as eager to sign orders as he had at first been reluctant. First of all Juliana Maria impressed upon him that it was necessary to convey the Queen to some place where she could not work any further mischief, and the King, after some hesitation, wrote and signed an almost incoherent message to his consort:—

J'ai trouvé à propos de vous envoïer à Cronbourg, comme vôtre conduite m'y oblige. J'en suis très faché, je n'en suis pas la cause, et je vous souhaite un repentir sincére.[20]

[20] In his agitation the King dated it 17th Jan., 1771.

The King then signed orders, drawn up by Guldberg, for the arrest of Struensee, Brandt and fifteen other persons. He did this with alacrity, and seemed delighted at asserting his authority, and the prospect of being freed from the dominion of Struensee and Brandt. The orders which concerned Queen Matilda he copied out himself in full from Guldberg's drafts; the others he merely signed. The orders concerning the Queen included the order to Rantzau to arrest her, the order to the head of the royal stables to make ready the coaches to convey her to Kronborg, and an order to the commandant of Kronborg to keep her in close confinement. These important matters settled, Juliana Maria persuaded Christian to remove to Prince Frederick's apartments in another part of the palace. She had much more for him to do, and she was fearful of interruption. For hours the King remained in his brother's apartments, signing orders, which were to give him, as he thought, freedom and authority, but which were really only forging the links of new chains, and transferring him from the comparatively mild rule of Struensee and Matilda to the strict keeping of the Queen-Dowager. [Pg 67]

Meanwhile, in different parts of the palace the King's orders were being carried out without delay. On quitting the King's apartments, Köller went to perform his task of arresting Struensee, accompanied by two or three officers of the palace guard and several soldiers. That Köller feared resistance may be gathered from the fact that he made the senior officer promise him, in the event of his being killed, to shoot Struensee dead. Köller had a bitter hatred of Struensee, dating, it was said, a long while back, when the doctor had seduced the object of Köller's affections. He had solicited the task of arresting Struensee, and now went to fulfil it with an eagerness born of revenge. [Pg 68]

The door of the outer room of Struensee's apartments was firmly locked, and his favourite valet slept within. The youth was aroused (as he afterwards said from dreams of ill-omen) by the noise of men trying to force the door. On asking who was there, he was commanded to open in the King's name, under pain of instant death. Taken by surprise, the valet had no time to give his master warning to escape by the private staircase, which led to the apartments of the Queen, but he hurriedly secreted certain jewels and papers, and threw open the door. There he saw Köller, holding a wax taper and dressed in full uniform, and his companions. Two soldiers pointed pistols at the valet's head, and a third directed one to his breast. "Have you woke the Count?" Köller whispered, and, on the trembling youth replying in the negative, Köller made him give up the key of Struensee's bedroom, which was also locked. The door was opened as silently as possible, and Köller, with a drawn sword in his hand, entered the room, followed by three officers.

The voluptuary had furnished his chamber with great luxury. The walls were hung with rich figured damask, the mirrors were of the purest glass, and the washing service was of wrought silver. The bed was canopied with purple velvet and gold, and the canopy was shaped in the form of a royal crown. The carpet was of velvet pile, and the room was scented with costly perfumes. Struensee was sleeping heavily—so heavily that neither the light of the taper nor the entrance of Köller roused him. He was sleeping with his head on his arm, and the book with which he had read himself to sleep had fallen to the floor. [Pg 69]

For a moment Köller stood and looked down on his victim; then he shook him roughly by the shoulder, and Struensee awoke to the horror of the situation. He sprang up in the bed, and shouted: "In God's name, what is this?" Köller answered roughly: "I have orders to arrest you. Get up at once and come with me." "Do you know who I am," said the omnipotent minister of an hour ago haughtily, "that you dare to command me thus?" "Yes," said Köller with a laugh; "I know who you are well enough. You are the King's prisoner." Struensee then demanded to see the warrant for his arrest, but as Köller did not yet possess this, he replied shortly that the warrant was with the King, but he would be answerable with his head that he was carrying out the King's orders. Struensee still refused to move; but Köller thrust his sword point against his breast, and said: "I have orders to take you either dead or alive. Which shall it be?" Struensee, shivering with terror, sank back on the bed, and asked for time to think; but Köller told him he must come at once. Struensee then asked that his valet might bring him a cup of chocolate, but Köller refused this also. "You will at least allow me to dress myself?" said Struensee. Köller said he would give him two minutes to do so; but he would not suffer either Struensee or the valet to go into the next room for clothes. Struensee was therefore obliged to hurry into the clothes he had worn at the ball, and which lay, where he had thrown them off, on a chair by the bed—breeches of pink silk and a coat and waistcoat of light blue velvet—gay attire especially ill-suited for his melancholy journey. [Pg 70]

Struensee's hands were bound, and he was hurried down to the guard-room, where his legs were bound as well. Here he waited a few minutes, guarded by soldiers with drawn swords and loaded pistols, until the coach was brought round to the door. He was thrust into it, followed by Köller, and driven under a strong escort to the citadel. On the way he groaned: "My God, what crime have I committed?"—to which his companion vouchsafed no answer. When he got out of the coach he asked that something might be given to the driver, who was one of the royal coachmen. Köller handed the man a dollar, for which he thanked him, but said in Danish, with a vindictive look at Struensee: "I would gladly have done it for nothing." There was hardly a menial in the King's household who would not rejoice over the favourite's fall.

Struensee was led into the presence of the commandant of the citadel, and formally delivered over to him by Köller. By this time he had regained something of his self-possession, and said to the commandant, whom he knew well: "I suppose this visit is totally unexpected by you?" "Not at all," replied the discourteous officer; "I have been expecting to see you here for a long time." The prisoner was then marched to a small cell, which had previously been occupied by a notorious pirate. On entering this gloomy chamber, Struensee, who had expected to be treated as a state [Pg 71]

prisoner, with every comfort, if not luxury, started back and said: “Where is my valet?” “I have not seen any valet,” said the jailor shortly. “But where are my things?” “I have not seen them either.” “Bring me my furs. It is cold here. I have no wish to be frozen to death.” But the man did not move. As there was nothing but a wooden stool and pallet bed, Struensee asked for a sofa. “There are no sofas here,” said the man, and backed up his words by a coarse insult. Struensee then lost his self-command, burst out into raving and cursing, and tried to dash out his brains against the wall, but the jailor held him back. When the commandant was informed of the prisoner’s refractory conduct, he ordered him to be fettered hand and foot, which was promptly done. This hurt Struensee’s pride more than all the other treatment, and he broke down and wept, exclaiming: “I am treated *en canaille*!” Certainly it was a change from the bed of down and the purple velvet hangings of an hour ago.

Brandt was arrested at the same time as Struensee. Colonel Sames, formerly commandant of [Pg 72] Copenhagen, who had been deprived of his post by Struensee, accompanied by a guard, went to his apartments, but they found the door locked. For some time Brandt refused to answer, but on Sames threatening to break the door down unless it were opened, he at last turned the key and met his opponents, ready dressed and with a drawn sword. When the soldiers advanced to disarm him, he made no resistance, but said: “This must be a mistake. I have committed no offence for which I can be arrested.” Sames told him it was no mistake, but that he was acting on the King’s order, and it would be better for him to yield. Brandt, who was perfectly self-controlled, said: “Very well, I will follow you quietly.” He was taken down to the guard-room, put into a coach, and conveyed to the citadel, immediately following Struensee. When he entered the presence of the commandant, he said gaily: “I must apologise, sir, for paying you a visit at so early an hour.” “Not at all,” replied the commandant, with elaborate politeness; “my only grief is that you have not come before.” While some formalities were being gone through, Brandt hummed a tune with an air of unconcern, and looking round him, said: “Upon my word, these are mighty fine quarters you have in this castle!” To which the commandant replied: “Yes, and in a minute you will have an opportunity of seeing even finer ones.” [Pg 73]

Brandt was presently conducted to his cell, which was even worse than Struensee’s, and on entering it he said good-humouredly to the jailor: “On my word, the commandant spoke truth!” Brandt bore his privations with firmness, and presently pulled a flute from his pocket and amused himself by playing it. He altogether showed much greater courage and self-control than the miserable Struensee, who did nothing but weep and bemoan his fate.

The arrest of Struensee’s principal confederates quickly followed. Falckenskjold was placed under arrest at the barracks. Justice Struensee and Professor Berger were conveyed to the citadel: General Gahler and his wife were arrested in bed; the lady jumped out of bed in her nightdress, and tried to escape by the back-stairs, but she was captured and removed with her husband to the citadel. Several others, including Bülow and Reverdil, were placed under “house arrest,” that is to say, they were confined to their houses, and had sentries posted over them. The servants of Struensee and Brandt were imprisoned in the Blue Tower. The morning dawned before all these imprisonments were carried out. The new rulers had reason to congratulate themselves that everything had been effected without bloodshed.

Meanwhile the most dramatic scene of the palace revolution was enacted in the Queen’s apartments of the Christiansborg. Upon retiring from the ball Queen Matilda went to see her infant daughter, and it was nearly four o’clock before she retired to rest. Even then she did not [Pg 74] sleep, for the noise made by Köller in arresting Struensee, whose apartments were beneath, was indistinctly heard by the Queen. But she imagined it was due to the party which she understood was to be held in Countess Holstein’s rooms; she thought it had now been transferred to Struensee’s. She therefore sent one of her servants down to request them to be less noisy in their revels. The woman went, but did not return; and, as the noise ceased, the Queen thought no more about it, and presently fell asleep.

About half an hour later Matilda was aroused by the entrance of one of her women, white and trembling, who said that a number of men were without demanding to see her immediately in the King’s name. In a moment the Queen suspected danger, and her first thought was to warn her lover. She sprang out of bed, and, with nothing on but her nightrobe, rushed barefooted into the next room, with the idea of gaining the secret staircase which led to Struensee’s apartments.

In the ante-chamber the first object that greeted her eyes was Rantzau, seated in a chair and twirling his moustachios: he was dressed in full uniform, and had thrown over his shoulders a scarlet cloak lined with fur. At the Queen’s entrance he rose and bowed with great ceremony, evidently delighting in his part, of which any honest man would have been ashamed. In the ante-chamber beyond were several soldiers and frightened women. When the Queen saw Rantzau, she remembered her undress, and cried: “*Eloignez-vous, Monsieur le Comte, pour l’amour de Dieu,* [Pg 75] *car je ne suis pas présentable!*” But, as Rantzau did not move, she ran back to her chamber, and threw on some more clothes; the delay was fatal to her.

KING CHRISTIAN VII.'S NOTE TO QUEEN MATILDA INFORMING HER OF HER ARREST.

When she came forth again she found the room full of armed men, and the officer in command opposed her passage. She haughtily ordered him to let her pass, saying that his head would answer for it if he did not. Rantzau retorted that his head would answer for it if he did. The officer, in evident distress, said: "Madame, I only do my duty, and obey the orders of my King." The Queen then turned to the door, behind which was a staircase leading down to Struensee's apartments. But the door was closed and a soldier posted before it. "Where is Count Struensee?" she demanded; "I wish to see him." "Madame," said Rantzau with elaborate irony, "there is no Count Struensee any more, nor can your Majesty see him." The Queen advanced boldly towards him, and demanded his authority for these insults. Rantzau handed her the King's message. She read it through without displaying any alarm, and then threw it contemptuously on the ground. [21] "Ha!" she cried, "in this I recognise treachery, but not the King." Amazed at the Queen's fearless air, Rantzau for the moment changed his tone, and implored her to submit quietly to the [Pg 76] King's orders. "Orders!" she exclaimed, "orders about which he knows nothing—which have been extorted from him by terror! No, the Queen does not obey such orders." Rantzau then said that nothing remained for him but to do his duty, which admitted of no delay. "I am the Queen; I will obey no orders except from the King's own lips," she replied. "Let me go to him! I must, and will, see him!" She knew that if she could only gain access to the King she was safe, for she could make him rescind the order and so confound her enemies. Full of this thought she advanced to the door of the ante-chamber, where two soldiers stood with crossed muskets to bar her progress. The Queen imperiously commanded them to let her pass, whereupon both men fell on their knees, and one said in Danish: "Our heads are answerable if we allow your Majesty to pass." But, despite Rantzau's exhortations, neither man cared to lay hands on the Queen, and she stepped over their muskets and ran along the corridor to the King's apartments. They were closed, and, though she beat her hands upon the door, no answer was returned, for, fearing some such scene, the Queen-Dowager had, only a few minutes before, conveyed the King to the apartments of Prince Frederick. The corridor led nowhere else, and failing to gain entrance, the Queen, hardly knowing what she did, went back to her ante-room.

[21] Rantzau picked the paper up and put it in his pocket. It was found a year or two after his death among his papers at Oppendorft (the estate that came to him through his wife), and has since been preserved.

Rantzau now addressed her in the language of menace. Perhaps some memory of the homage he [Pg 77] had paid her at Ascheberg, when she was at the zenith of her power, flashed across the Queen. "Villain!" she cried, "is this the language that you dare to address to me? Go, basest of men! Leave my presence!" These words only infuriated Rantzau the more, but he was crippled with gout, and could not grapple with the infuriated young Queen himself, so he turned to the soldiers, and gave them orders to use force. Still the soldiers hesitated. Then an officer stepped forward and touched the Queen on the arm with the intention of leading her back to her chamber. But half beside herself she rushed to the window, threw it open and seemed about to throw herself out. The officer seized her round the waist, and held her back; though no man dared to lay hands

on the Queen, it was necessary to defend her against herself. The Queen shrieked for help and struggled wildly; she was strong and rendered desperate by fear and indignation. A lieutenant had to be called forward, but the Queen resisted him as well, though her clothes were partly torn off her in the struggle. At last her strength failed her, and she was dragged away from the window in a half-fainting condition. The officers, who had showed great repugnance to their task, and had used no more force than was absolutely necessary, now carried the Queen back to her chamber, and laid her on the bed, where her women, frightened and weeping, crowded around her, and plied her with restoratives. [Pg 78]

Rantzau, who had watched this unseemly spectacle without emotion, nay, with positive zest, now sent a messenger to Osten, and asked him to come and induce the Queen to yield quietly. Although he had threatened to remove her by force, it was not easy to carry out his threat, for the soldiers would not offer violence to the person of the Queen, nor would public opinion, if it came to be known, tolerate it. Rantzau, who was alternately a bully and a coward, had no wish to put himself in an awkward position. He therefore did the wisest thing in sending for the foreign minister. Osten, who at the first tidings of Struensee's arrest, had hastened to the Christiansborg, was in the Queen-Dowager's apartments, making his terms with her. This astute diplomatist, though he plotted for the overthrow of Struensee, and was aware of all the facts of the conspiracy, had refrained from taking active part in it until its success was assured. Now that the King had thrown himself into the arms of the Queen-Dowager, and Struensee and Brandt were in prison, he no longer hesitated, but hastened to pay his court to the winning side. He came at once, on receipt of Rantzau's message. He realised quite as much as Juliana Maria that the revolution could only be carried out thoroughly by Matilda's removal. She had gained great ascendency over the King, and, if she saw him, that ascendency would be renewed; if she were separated from him, he would speedily forget her. Therefore, it was above all things necessary that the King and Queen should be kept apart. [Pg 79]

In a short time Queen Matilda became more composed, and even recovered sufficiently to dress herself with the aid of her women. When Osten entered her chamber, he found her sitting at the side of the bed, weeping. All defiance had faded away; she only felt herself a betrayed and cruelly injured woman. Osten came to her in the guise of a friend. He had been a colleague of Struensee's, and had never outwardly broken with him, and the Queen had confidence in his skill and judgment. She therefore listened to him, when he persuaded her that more would be gained by complying with the King's orders, at this time, than by resisting them. He hinted that her sojourn at Kronborg would only be for a time, and by-and-by the King's humour would change. Moreover, the people were in a state of revolt against the Queen's authority, and it was necessary for Matilda's safety that she should be removed from Copenhagen to the shelter of Kronborg. "What have I done to the people?" the Queen asked. "I know that a good many changes have taken place, but I have done my utmost to further the welfare of the King and country according to my conscience." Osten merely replied with quiet insistence that she had herself contemplated flight to Kronborg at the time of the tumult of the Norwegian sailors at Hirschholm. Believing the man to be her friend, the Queen yielded to his advice. "I have done nothing; the King will be just," she said. She signified her willingness to go, provided that her children accompanied her. Here again difficulties were raised, but the Queen was firm, and said she would not budge a step unless her children went with her. Finally, a compromise was arrived at; Osten made her understand that the Crown Prince must not be removed, but she might take the little Princess, whom she was herself nursing. This being settled, the Queen's preparations for departure were hurriedly made, and Fräulein Mösting, one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting, was ordered to go with her, and one of her bed-chamber women. [Pg 80]

The bleak January morning was still dark when Matilda, dressed for the journey, carrying her child in her arms and followed by two of her women, came out of her bedroom, and signified her readiness to start. Rantzau, who was still sitting in the ante-chamber, waiting, rose, and pointing to his gouty foot, said with covert insolence: "You see, Madam, that my feet fail me; but my arms are free, and I offer one to your Majesty to conduct you to your coach." But she repulsed him with scorn, and exclaimed: "Away with you, traitor! I loathe you!" She walked alone down the stairs to the coaches, which were waiting in the back-yard of the palace. She entered one, but refused to part with the little Princess, whom she placed upon her knees. Fräulein Mösting sat by the Queen's side, and the opposite seat was occupied by an officer with his sword drawn. In the second coach followed the bed-chamber woman, the nurse of the Princess Louise Augusta, and some absolutely necessary luggage. The coaches were guarded by an escort of thirty dragoons, and the cavalcade clattered at a sharp trot through the streets of the still sleeping city, and was soon outside the gates of Copenhagen. [Pg 81]

The first part of the journey was in darkness, but, as the day broke, the Queen looked out on the frost-bound roads and the dreary country over which she was hurrying. She had ample time for reflection, and bitter her reflections must have been. A few hours before she had been Queen, vested, it seemed, with unlimited power, and the centre of a brilliant court; now she was a prisoner, stripped of all her power, and nearly all the semblance of her rank—a fugitive, she believed herself to be, fleeing from the vengeance of her people. Yet even now, in this supreme moment of her desolation, her thoughts were not of herself, but of the man who had brought her to such a pass. The road passed by the grounds of Hirschholm, the scene of many happy days, and the memory of them must have deepened the Queen's dejection; but she said nothing, and throughout the long and tedious journey uttered no word, but sat motionless, the image of despair.

Kronborg, whither the royal prisoner was being hurried, was a gloomy fortress erected by [Pg 82]

Frederick II. in the latter part of the sixteenth century, and restored, after a fire, by Christian IV., nearly eighty years later. It had changed little with the flight of centuries, and remains much the same to-day. Built strongly of rough-hewn stone, which has taken on itself the colour of the rocks around, the massive and imposing castle springs directly from the sea, on the extreme point of land between the Cattegat and the narrowest part of the Sound, which separates Denmark from Sweden. Its massive walls, turrets and gables frown down upon the little town of Helsingor at its base.[22] Tradition says that deep down in its casemates slumbers Holgar Danske ("the Dane"), who will rise and come forth when his country is in peril.[23] He might have come forth in 1772, for Denmark was never in greater peril than on the eve of the palace revolution.

[22] Helsingor, or Elsinore, now a busy town, is the scene of Shakespeare's play, "Hamlet, Prince of Denmark," and, on "the platform before the castle of Elsinore"—in other words, the flagged battlements of Kronborg—the ghost of "Hamlet" appeared. Local tradition also points out "the grave of Hamlet" and "the spring of Ophelia," both, of course, legendary. Hamlet, in fact, never visited Elsinore, but was born and lived in Jutland. But Shakespeare shows a curious knowledge of Elsinore and Kronborg, and some light has been thrown on this subject by the discovery among the archives of Elsinore of a manuscript, which shows that in 1585 a wooden theatre, in which a troop of English comedians had been acting, was burned down. The names of the actors are given. Nearly all of them have been proved to belong to Shakespeare's company, though the name of the poet is not among them. A monument is now being erected to Shakespeare at Kronborg, to which Queen Alexandra has contributed.

[23] A well-known character in Hans Andersen's fairy-tales. Two fragments of stone in the dungeons beneath Kronborg are still shown; one is said to serve as Holgar Danske's pillow, and the other as his table.

Kronborg was distant some twenty-four miles from Copenhagen, and the journey was covered in less than three hours. The day had broken when the melancholy cavalcade clattered through the street of Helsingor, and pulled up under the storm-beaten walls of Kronborg. At the outermost gate the officer in command of the Queen's escort produced the King's letter to the commandant, which gave his consort into his charge, and ordered her to be kept a strict prisoner. The commandant of Kronborg must have been much surprised at this communication, but he was a stern soldier, not given to questioning, and he obeyed his instructions to the letter. The outer gate was thrown open, and the little procession passed over the drawbridge, which spanned the green water of the moat, to the guard-house, where the escort from Copenhagen remained. The soldiers of the fortress then took charge of the two coaches, and they wound their way up the incline under the castle walls. They crossed another drawbridge, spanning a deep, dry ditch, and passed through the rough-hewn, tunnel-like entrance of stone, and out into the gloomy courtyard of the castle—a place where it would seem the sun never shines. Here the Queen, still carrying her child in her arms, alighted, and was hurried to a doorway on the left of the courtyard, up the winding stone stairs, and through a large room into the chamber set apart for her. This was a low, circular apartment in a tower, not more than ten feet high, and very small, with four windows, iron-barred, looking out upon the sea. The grey waves broke directly beneath the windows, and were separated from the walls only by a strip of rampart, on which cannon were placed.[24]

[Pg 83]

[Pg 84]

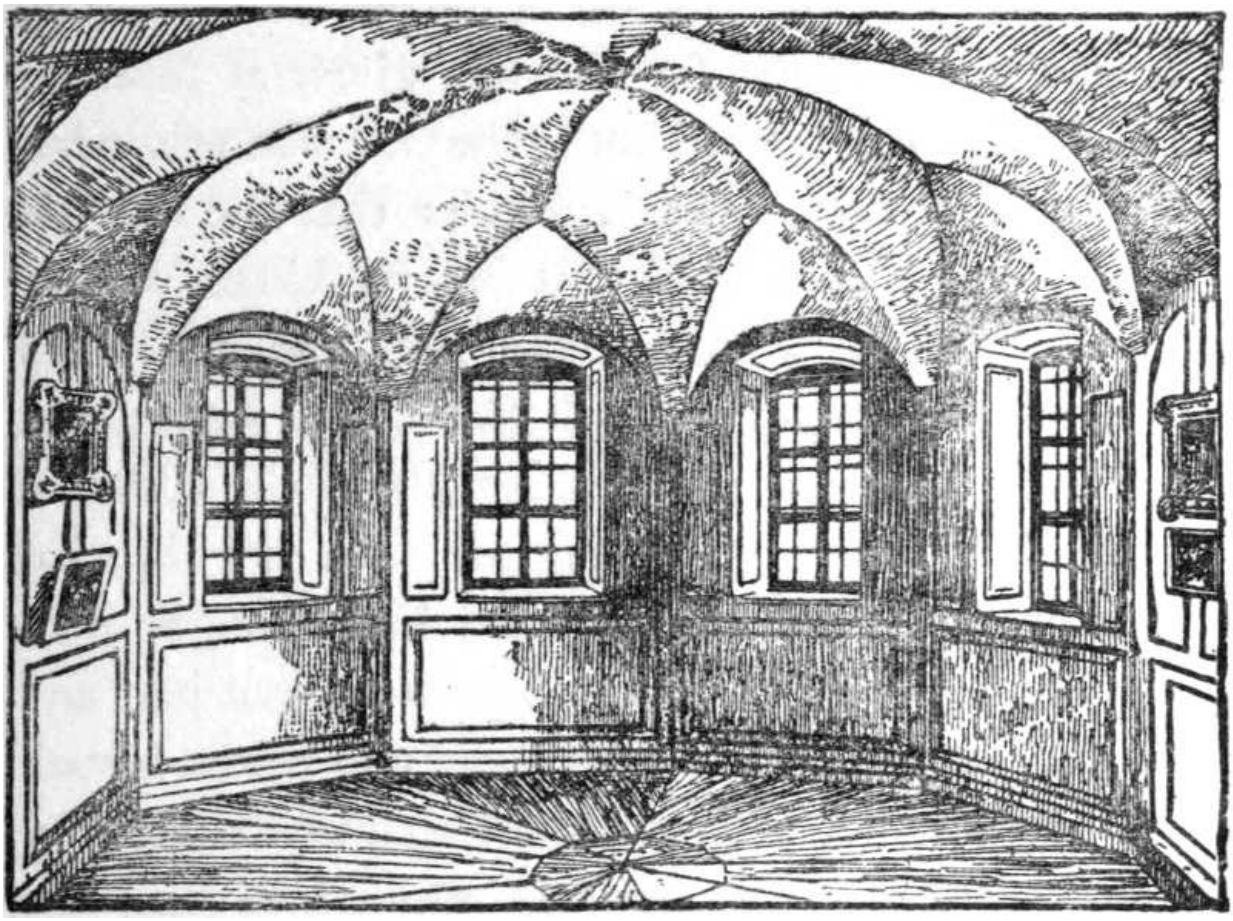
[24] The traveller De Flaux, who visited Kronborg about 1850, thus wrote of the room: "In a tower is a small oval room, the windows of which are still lined with iron bars. It was here that the Queen was confined. I was shown the *prie-dieu* used by this unfortunate princess. It was on the faded velvet that covered it that she rested her beautiful head. Who knows whether the spots on it were not produced by the tears of despair she shed?" [Du Danemark.]

I was at Kronborg in 1902. The Queen's room is now destitute of any furniture, but the iron bars guarding the windows are still there. I looked through them at the sea beneath. It was a grey, windy day; the waves were lead-coloured and flecked with white, and overhead were drifting masses of cloud. On such a scene Queen Matilda must have often gazed during the five months of her captivity.

The unhappy Queen looked round the narrow walls of this room, which was almost a cell, with astonishment not unmixed with indignation. She had hardly realised until now that she was a prisoner, for the crafty Osten had conveyed to her the idea that she was going to Kronborg more for her own safety than as a captive. But the iron-barred windows, and the guard outside her door, brought home to her her unfortunate condition. At least she, the daughter of kings, the wife of a king, and the mother of a king to be, had the right to be treated with the respect due to her rank and dignity. Whatever offences were charged against her nothing was yet proved. Even if she were a prisoner, she was at least a state prisoner, and though her liberty might be curtailed, every effort should have been made to study as far as possible her comfort and convenience. But locked into this little room, barely furnished and without a fire, she found herself treated more like a common criminal than the reigning Queen, and when she protested against these indignities, the commandant told her that he was only obeying his strict orders. The Queen, whose spirit was for the moment broken by fatigue and excitement, and who was nearly frozen from the cold of the long journey, sank down upon the pallet bed, and burst into bitter weeping. Her women endeavoured in vain to comfort her, and it was only at last, when they reminded her of her child, that she was roused from the abandonment of her grief. "You are here too, dear innocent!" she exclaimed. "In that case, your poor mother is not utterly desolate."

[Pg 85]

[Pg 86]



THE ROOM IN WHICH QUEEN MATILDA WAS IMPRISONED AT KRONBORG.

For two days the Queen remained inconsolable, and did little but sit in a state of stupor, looking out upon the waves; nor could she be prevailed upon to take any rest, or food, or even to lie down upon the bed. It was true that the food offered her was such that she could not eat it, unless compelled by the pangs of hunger, for she was given at first the same food as that served out to the common prisoners. In these first days it was a wonder that she did not die of hunger and cold. It was a bitter winter, violent gales blew across the sea, and the wind shrieked and raged around the castle walls; but there was no way of warming the little room in which the Queen was confined. In her hurried departure from Copenhagen she had brought with her very few clothes. No others were sent her, and she had hardly the things necessary to clothe herself with propriety, or protect herself against the severity of the weather. She was not allowed to pass the threshold of her room, not even to the large room beyond, where there was a fire. This room was occupied by soldiers, who acted as her jailors, and the women who passed in and out of the Queen's room were liable to be searched.

This treatment of the Queen, for which there was no excuse, must be traced directly to Juliana Maria; it was she who caused instructions to be sent to the commandant as to how he was to treat his royal prisoner. The King was too indifferent to trouble one way or another, and the [Pg 87] commandant would not have dared to inflict such indignities on the King's consort unless he had received strict orders to do so from those in authority—nor would he have wished to do so. Later the Queen acquitted him from all responsibility in this respect. After the first few days, when she had recovered from the shock of recent events, Queen Matilda accepted her imprisonment more patiently, and bore her hardships with a dignity and fortitude which enforced respect even from her jailors, and proved that she was no unworthy daughter of the illustrious house from which she sprang.

CHAPTER V.

[Pg 88]

THE TRIUMPH OF THE QUEEN-DOWAGER.

1772.

When day dawned on January 17, the citizens of Copenhagen awoke to the fact that the hated rule of Struensee was gone for ever. The constant driving through the streets during the night had attracted little attention, for the noise was thought to arise from the guests returning from the ball at the palace; but when morning came, and the streets were seen to be full of soldiers, the people realised that something unusual had happened. First there came a rumour of a fresh outrage on the part of Struensee, and of an attempt to assassinate the King. But swift on the heels of this came the truth: the King, with the aid of the Queen-Dowager and his brother, had asserted himself; the favourite and his colleagues were in prison, and Queen Matilda had been conveyed to Kronborg. During the silent hours of the night a revolution had been effected, and the mob, like all mobs, shouted on the winning side. The news ran like wildfire round Copenhagen, and soon every one was in the streets. On all sides were heard shouts of “Long live King Christian VII.!” and many cheers were raised for the Queen-Dowager and Prince Frederick. [Pg 89] The people converged towards the Christiansborg Palace, and completely filled the space in front of it, shouting and cheering.

At ten o’clock in the morning the King, who, until now, had been busy signing orders of arrest, and sanctioning appointments of others to fill the place of those arrested, appeared upon the balcony, with his brother by his side, while the Queen-Dowager, more modest, showed herself at the window in an undress. Their appearance was greeted with deafening shouts by the crowd, to which the King and the Prince responded by bows, and Juliana Maria by waving her handkerchief. The enthusiasm grew more and more, until at last the King joined in the cheers of his people. The Queen-Dowager had not miscalculated her forces: without doubt the people were on her side.

The citizens now began to deck their houses with flags and bunting, and everywhere kept high holiday. Even the heavens seemed to rejoice at the downfall of the hated administration, for the sun came out, and shone with a brilliance that had not been known in January in Copenhagen for years. About noon the gates of the Christiansborg Palace were thrown open, and the King, splendidly dressed, with his brother seated by his side, drove forth in a state coach drawn by eight white horses to show himself to his people. For the first time for months the King dispensed with all escort, and, except for the running footmen and postilions, the royal coach was [Pg 90] unattended. The King drove through all the principal streets. The crowd was so great that it was with difficulty the coach could make way, and the people pressed and surged around it, and in their enthusiasm wanted to take out the horses and drag the coach themselves. The women especially were wild with delight, and waved their handkerchiefs frantically; some even pulled off their headgear, and waved it in the air, the better to testify their joy at seeing their beloved Sovereign safe and sound, and freed from his hated guardians. The King, however, when the novelty of the situation was over, relapsed into his usual apathy, and did not respond to the greeting of his loving subjects, but kept his window up, and stared through it indifferently at the crowd; but Prince Frederick, who was usually undemonstrative, had let the window down on his side of the coach, and bowed and smiled incessantly.

The King held a court in the afternoon at the palace, and was supported on one side by the Queen-Dowager and on the other by his brother. The court was crowded, and by a very different class of people to those who had appeared during the brief reign of Struensee. Many of the nobility, who had heard the glad news, hurried into Copenhagen to personally offer their congratulations to the three royal personages on the overthrow of the detested German Junto. All the Queen-Dowager’s party, all the principal clergy, and all who had taken part in the conspiracy, directly or indirectly, were present; and many more who knew of it, but held aloof until it was an [Pg 91] accomplished fact, were now eager to pay their court. The King remained only a short time, and left the Queen-Dowager and Prince Frederick to receive the rest of the company, and they did with right good will, rejoicing in their new-found dignity and importance. It was their hour of triumph, and the inauguration of the clique which governed Denmark for the next twelve years.

In the evening the three royal personages drove to the opera through cheering crowds, and when they entered their box the whole house rose in enthusiasm. Their return to the palace was a triumphal procession, the people forming their guard as before. At night the city was illuminated; every house displayed lights in its windows, and bonfires were kindled in the streets. Salvoes of artillery were fired from the ramparts, and rockets were sent up. The whole population seemed mad with joy. So great was the illumination that the sky was lit up for miles around. At far-off Kronborg Queen Matilda, peering through her iron bars, saw the light in the sky over towards the capital, and asked what it meant. She was told that it was Copenhagen rejoicing over her downfall.[25]

[25] *Mémoires de Reverdil.*

The popular rejoicings were marred by gross excesses, though considering the excited state of public opinion it is a wonder that more were not committed. Some of the lowest characters had [Pg 92] turned into the streets, and the sailors and dockyard men, who especially hated Struensee, were drunk with wine and excitement. The mob, not content with bonfires, soon showed signs of rioting. They broke into the house of one of Struensee’s supporters and wrecked it, carried off the furniture, and smashed the windows. In the cellar there was a large stock of spirits. The

rioters broke the casks open, drank what they would, and upset the rest, with the result that they waded up to their ankles in liquor. Inflamed by drink they next attacked other houses. The police, unable to check the riot, which had grown to dangerous proportions, applied to Eickstedt for soldiers to aid them. But the Queen-Dowager was unwilling to call out the military, as she thought a conflict might bring about bloodshed and so damp the popular enthusiasm. Therefore, instead of soldiers, Prince Frederick's chamberlain was sent to the scene of disturbance, with instructions to thank the people for the rejoicings they had manifested on the King's deliverance from his enemies, and a promise that the King would especially remember the sailors (who were among the most tumultuous of the rioters), if they would now go quietly home. But the mob had by this time got out of hand, and either did not, or would not, listen. They rushed towards the royal stables, with the intention of smashing Struensee's coach, but were prevented by the palace guard. They then endeavoured to wreck the house of the chief of the police, but being foiled in this attempt also, they began to plunder the *mont-de-pieté*. At this point the soldiers had to be [Pg 93] called out, and they succeeded in dispersing the rioters without bloodshed. Next day the streets were patrolled by the burgher guard, and in the afternoon heralds rode round the city, and at certain points read a message from the King, in which he thanked his loyal people for their enthusiasm, but regretted that their zeal had got the better of their discretion. He forbade any further plundering or excesses under heavy penalties. After this the people gradually quieted down, but it was a week before the patrol could be removed.

Meanwhile the Queen-Dowager was occupied in distributing honours among her adherents. The arch-conspirator, Rantzau, at last received the reward of his intrigues. He was made General-in-Chief of the infantry, and a Knight of the Elephant, and his debts were paid in full from the royal treasury. It may be that the part he had played in the arrest of Matilda, and the callousness and insolence he had shown to the unfortunate Queen, quickened the sense of Juliana Maria's gratitude; for she rewarded him promptly and handsomely. Eickstedt and Köller were promoted to be full generals, and decorated with the order of the Dannebrog. Köller, who was a Pomeranian by birth, was offered naturalisation, with the name of Banner, an extinct Danish noble family. Köller accepted, saying that he intended henceforth to devote his life to Denmark, and was known from this time as Köller-Banner. He was also given a court appointment as aide-de-camp to the King, with apartments in the royal palace. Beringskjold was appointed Grand [Pg 94] Chamberlain, and received a pension of two thousand dollars, and a further present of forty thousand dollars paid down. His elder son was appointed a court page, and the younger was promised a captaincy. All the officers of the palace guard who had done duty on the eventful night were promoted a step. Major Carstenskjold, who had conducted Matilda to Kronborg with his drawn sabre and forty dragoons, was made a lieutenant-colonel. Colonel Sames, who had arrested Brandt, received a present of ten thousand dollars. Jessen was created a councillor of justice, and received a gift of two thousand dollars. Rewards were also given to minor personages.

The only one of the conspirators who received no reward, though he was in reality the chief among them, was Guldberg, who declared that the success of the enterprise was sufficient reward for him, and he required neither money nor titles.[26] Guldberg was sure of his influence with the Queen-Dowager; he knew, too, that his apparent disinterestedness would carry weight with the people, and so strengthen his position. He had reserved for himself the power behind the throne, and he filled in the new government something of the place that Struensee had filled in the old. That is to say, he had great influence over the Queen-Dowager; he was the indispensable man, he directed the policy, and no appointments were made of which he did not [Pg 95] approve. But unlike Struensee he conducted himself with infinite tact and discretion.

[26] He later took the name of Hoegh-Guldberg, and became a minister of state.

As the Struensee administration had been destroyed root and branch, it was necessary to make several new appointments to carry on the government of the country. The first care of the Queen-Dowager was to appoint some one to act as the King's keeper—some one who would guard him well—for Christian VII.'s formal consent was absolutely necessary for every step she took. The King was now in so weak-minded a condition, and so easily influenced, that any one who had possession of him could make him sign any order he would. All the same Juliana Maria had some difficulty in getting the King to consent to a new guardian, or "personal attendant," as he was called, to take Brandt's place. A long list of names was submitted to him, but he refused them one by one until at last, when the Queen-Dowager mentioned Osten's name, the King said: "Yes, I will have him." But Osten did not care to exchange his influential post as minister of foreign affairs for that of the King's companion, and declined the honour. So Köller-Banner, who was a great favourite of the Queen-Dowager, was appointed to the office. The Queen-Dowager was anxious to win the support of the old Danish nobility to the new Government. Therefore, Count Otto Thott and Councillor Schack-Rathlou, who had been dismissed by Struensee, were invited to take part again in the business of state. Bernstorff's recall was urged by a powerful section, but Osten and [Pg 96] Rantzau both opposed it violently, for they feared the return of this upright and conscientious man.[27] Guldberg, too, was afraid that a statesman of Bernstorff's eminence would prove a rival to his ambition. The Queen-Dowager also did not wish to recall Bernstorff, because of his well-known devotion to the royal house of England. She feared that he would interfere on behalf of Matilda, of whom she was very jealous. She determined to make her feel the full weight of her vengeance.

[27] In spite of this opposition in time Bernstorff might have come back, but his health was failing, and he died in the autumn of 1772, at the age of sixty years, at Grabow.

COUNT BERNSTORFF.

The bitter feeling against Struensee seemed to increase as the days went by, and on every side were heard cries for vengeance. On January 19, the first Sunday after the revolution, *Te Deums* were sung in all the churches of Copenhagen; and throughout the kingdom, wherever the news had penetrated, there was a thanksgiving to Almighty God for the overthrow of the godless Government. The clergy, who had been especially hostile to Struensee, and done much to bring about his fall, did not hesitate to improve the occasion from their pulpits, and spoke of "the fearful vengeance of the Lord" which had fallen upon wickedness in high places. Nor did they spare in their condemnation the unfortunate Matilda, but likened her to Rahab and to Jezebel, and urged their congregations to hate and execrate her name. The celebrated Dr. Münter, who [Pg 97] had often come into conflict with the Queen and Struensee in the days of their power, preached in the royal chapel of the Christiansborg Palace before the King, the Queen-Dowager, Prince Frederick and the court, and took for his text St. Matthew, chapter viii., verses 1-13. His sermon was nothing but a violent diatribe against the fallen minister, more especially for his policy in granting toleration in matters of religion. "Godless men ruled over us," cried the preacher, "and openly defied God. They, to whom nothing was sacred either in heaven or earth, despised and mocked the national faith. Yet, while they were meditating violent measures to secure their power for ever, the vengeance of the Lord fell upon them." So on for many pages, concluding with: "Our King is once more ours; we are again his people." The eloquence of the preacher so moved the Queen-Dowager that she shed tears.

The fanaticism of the clergy was only equalled by the fury of the press. That the journals of Copenhagen, which were more or less subsidised, should indulge in violent language was only to be expected, but the most eminent writers of the time joined in the cry, including the historian Suhm, a man who was a Dane of Danes, and who had already urged the Queen-Dowager to action. This learned man published an open letter to the King, which was sold in pamphlet form throughout the kingdom. Like many other professors, Suhm was only admirable when he confined himself to the subjects which he professed, and the moment he quitted the realm of [Pg 98] history for contemporary politics he became unfortunate and of no account. His open letter out-Müntered Münter in the violence of its abuse and the fulsomeness of its adulation. "Long enough," runs the pamphlet, "had religion and virtue been trampled under foot; long enough had honesty and integrity been thrust aside. A disgraceful mob of *canaille* had seized the person of the King, and rendered access to him impossible for every honourable man. The country swam in tears; the Danish land became a name of shame; the rich were plundered; the sun of the royal house was dimmed, and every department of the Government was given up to unscrupulous robbers, blasphemers and enemies of humanity." After recounting at great length the danger to which the nation had been brought by the "monster Struensee," the pamphlet burst forth into an eloquent exhortation to Danes to arise and defend their heritage. It called on all to rally to the standard of the Queen-Dowager and her son, who had delivered the King and the country from

imminent peril. “Who would not praise and esteem that dangerous but honourable night?” wrote Suhm. “Future Homers and Virgils will sing its praises, and so long as there are any Danish and Norwegian heroes left in the world the glory of Juliana Maria and Frederick will endure. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but their glory shall not pass away.” This precious pamphlet was greeted with praise from the highest to the lowest in the land. Suhm soon issued a second [Pg 99] exhortation addressed: “To my Countrymen—Danes, Norwegians and Holsteiners,” in which he demanded vengeance upon Struensee. Such vengeance, he declared, was imperatively demanded for the honour of Denmark, for “all the nations of Europe would regard a people that suffered itself to be governed by a Struensee as a vile, cowardly people”. Suhm’s example was followed by a number of anonymous scribblers, who flooded town and country with pamphlets calling aloud for the blood of the fallen minister. So unanimous were these pamphlets, and with such regularity did they appear, that it provoked the suspicion that the new Government had some hand in thus inflaming public opinion against its enemies. Not only were Struensee, Brandt and their colleagues denounced by every conceivable epithet, but the name of the Queen, who, though imprisoned, was still the reigning Queen, was dragged into these effusions, and covered with dishonour. Everything was done to foment the public rage against her, and “Justice against Matilda” was shouted by hirelings in the streets.

Before matters had reached this pitch, Keith had intervened on behalf of the imprisoned Queen. It was unfortunate that Matilda, at the time of her arrest, had not demanded to see the English minister, and thrown herself on his protection as a princess of Great Britain. But the thought did not cross her mind, for though Keith was anxious and willing to help her, the Queen, in her madness for Struensee, had rejected both the assistance and advice that had been offered by her [Pg 100] brother of England, and had treated his representative with reserve. But Keith, we see by his despatches, realised the situation, and cherished no feeling of resentment. He felt for the Queen nothing but chivalrous pity, and determined, if possible, to shield her from the consequences of her rashness and indiscretion. To this end he had attended the masked ball, where he saw the Queen radiant and happy, with no thought of the mine about to explode beneath her feet.

In the morning of January 17 Keith heard with astonishment and alarm of the Queen-Dowager’s conspiracy, and that the Queen, abandoned by the King, had been conveyed a prisoner to the castle of Kronborg. Rumours were current that she was in imminent peril, and that it was proposed to execute her before the sun went down. With characteristic determination Keith lost not a moment in acting on behalf of the Queen. He hastened through the crowded streets to the Christiansborg Palace, and demanded instant audience of the King. This was denied him, and so was his request that he might be admitted to the presence of the Queen-Dowager or her son. Nothing daunted, Keith demanded an immediate interview with Osten, who still acted as minister of foreign affairs. Osten, who well knew the nature of Keith’s errand, tried at first to put him off with excuses, but the envoy would not be denied, and at last almost forced his way into Osten’s cabinet, where he found him in council with some of the other conspirators. In answer to the [Pg 101] envoy’s inquiry, “Where is the Queen?” Osten replied that his Majesty had found it necessary to remove his royal consort to the fortress of Kronborg, where she would be detained until the King further signified his pleasure, and the grave charges against her of conspiracy against the King’s authority and infidelity to his bed had been disproved. Keith, under these circumstances, could do nothing but lodge a protest, and demand that the Queen, as a princess of Great Britain, should be treated with all the respect and consideration which her birth demanded, and that, as Queen of Denmark, any proceedings against her should follow the regular and constitutional rule of that country. He referred to the rumours that were current of foul play, and said that he held the Danish Government responsible for her safety, and warned them that the King, his master, would undoubtedly declare war against Denmark if a hair of her head were touched. After delivering this ultimatum, Keith left the Christiansborg Palace, returned to his own house, and wrote a long despatch to England, detailing all that had occurred, and what he had said and done. He asked for instructions as to how he was to proceed with regard to the new Government and the imprisoned Queen. This done, he shut himself up in his house until the answer should arrive.[28]

[28] *Memoirs of Sir R. Murray Keith*, vol. i. It is impossible to quote this despatch of Keith’s, as it has been destroyed. The last available despatch of Keith’s is previous to the catastrophe, and thenceforward, until after the Queen’s divorce, all the despatches relating to the Queen are abstracted from those preserved in the State Paper Office in London. These despatches were destroyed by order of King George III. There is no trace either of the despatches sent by Keith to England at this period, or of those from England to Keith, beyond an order, later, that Keith was to bring them to England.

The popular rejoicings came to an end within a week of the palace revolution, but the court [Pg 102] festivities were continued some time longer. The King frequently drove about the city in company with his brother, and, as the ground was covered with snow, he often appeared in a sleigh. The Queen-Dowager also showed herself in public on every possible occasion, in marked contrast to her previous habits of rigid seclusion. She now occupied at Frederiksberg the apartments of the imprisoned Queen, but at the Christiansborg she retained her former suite. Within a week of Matilda’s disgrace a state banquet and ball were held at the Christiansborg, at which the Queen-Dowager took the place of the reigning Queen. The King’s twenty-third birthday, January 29, was celebrated all over the kingdom with great rejoicing, and Copenhagen was decorated and illuminated in honour of the event. In the evening the King, attended by a very large suite, witnessed the performance at the palace theatre of two new French vaudevilles. With a singular lack of good taste, the titles of these pieces were “*L’Ambitieux*,” and “*L’Indiscret*,” and, as might be judged, they abounded in allusions to Struensee and scarcely veiled insults of the imprisoned Queen, who only a few days before had been the centre of the court festivities. After the play [Pg 103]

there was a grand supper in the knights' hall, to which the foreign envoys, ministers, and the most distinguished of the nobility were invited. The English envoy was absent.

The object of all these court festivities was to persuade the public that the King shared in the universal joy. There is reason, however, to believe that after the first few days of excitement were past, the King began to realise that he had bettered his condition very little by the change. He was glad to be rid of Brandt and Struensee, especially of Brandt, but he missed the Queen, who was always kind and lively, and no doubt if he could have seen her he would have forgiven her on the spot. The Queen-Dowager was fully aware of this danger, and determined at all hazards to prevent it. Already she was beginning to feel some of the anxieties of power. Popularity is a very fleeting thing, and there were signs that the popularity of the new Government would be ephemeral; the recent riots of the mob, which were comparatively unchecked, had given them a taste for similar excesses. The court lived in continual dread of further disturbance.

A ludicrous instance of this occurred at the theatre some few days after the revolution, when the court was at the French play. Owing to the house being inconveniently crowded, some slight disturbance took place in the cheaper seats. Immediately a rumour flew round the theatre that a riot had broken out in the city, Struensee and Brandt had escaped from prison, and the mob were [Pg 104] setting fire to houses and plundering everywhere. The news ran like wildfire through the audience, and in an incredibly short space of time a scene of panic prevailed. Every one began to make for the doors, with the result that the confusion became worse confounded. The King was the first to take fright, and rushed from his box, with wild looks, followed by the Hereditary Prince. The Queen-Dowager tried in vain to detain them, and when they were gone she was so much overcome that she fainted. A curious crowd had collected outside the theatre, and it was not until some time that order was restored, and the whole affair discovered to be a hoax. But the Queen-Dowager was not reassured, and the result of this panic was seen in a series of police regulations for the better preservation of the public peace. The city gates, which had been left open, were again locked at night; masters were ordered to keep their apprentices at home after dark, and public houses were ordered to be closed at ten o'clock.

The first step taken by the Queen-Dowager was to re-establish the Council of State, which had been abolished by Struensee. It consisted of Prince Frederick and the following members: Count Thott, Count Rantzau, Councillor Schack-Rathlou, Admiral Rommeling, General Eickstedt and Count Osten. All resolutions were discussed by the Council of State before they received the royal assent, and the net result of the new regulations was to take the power out of the King's [Pg 105] hands, and vest it in the Council, for the King's signature was deprived of all force and validity except in council. The members of the Council of State received in their patents the titles of Ministers of State and Excellencies. Count Thott acted as president of the Council in the absence of the King, and received a salary of six thousand dollars—the other members five thousand dollars. Guldberg, who really drew up the plan of the Council with the Queen-Dowager, and afterwards the instructions, was not at first a member, but for all that he was the most influential man in the Government. He and the Queen-Dowager worked in concert, and they ruled the situation. It was said that Juliana Maria at first entertained the idea of deposing the King, and placing her son upon the throne, but Guldberg opposed it, and pointed out that such a step would surely be followed by a protest from the nation and from the foreign powers, with England at their head.

The Queen-Dowager therefore continued to play the rôle of one who had only come forward with the greatest reluctance because her action was urgently needed for the salvation of the King and country. This was the line she took in a conversation with Reverdil, who was set at liberty a few days after his arrest by her orders, and summoned to her presence. When Reverdil entered the room, she apologised for his arrest, and said it was a mistake, and contrary to her orders. She continued: "I only wish I could have spared the others, but the Queen had forgotten everything [Pg 106] she owed to her sex, her birth and her rank. Even so, my son and I would have refrained from interference had not her irregularities affected the Government. The whole kingdom was upset, and going fast to ruin. God supported me through it all; I felt neither alarm nor terror."[29]

[29] *Mémoires de Reverdil.*

The Queen-Dowager felt well disposed towards Reverdil, who had more than once remonstrated with Struensee on the disrespect shown by him and his minions to her and Prince Frederick. She would probably have reinstated him in his post, but Osten and Rantzau disliked him. They feared he might gain an influence over the King, or enter a plea of mercy for the prisoners, or suggest to the Queen-Dowager the recall of Bernstorff, or induce her to summon Prince Charles of Hesse to court—both of whom disliked them. So Osten saw Reverdil and worked upon his fears. He advised him for his own sake to leave the court, and the honest Swiss needed no second warning, but within a week shook the dust of Copenhagen off his feet, and so disappears from this history. [30]

[30] After leaving Copenhagen, Reverdil lived for some time at Nyon, and afterwards at Lausanne. He maintained a correspondence with Prince Charles of Hesse, and lived on friendly terms with a number of distinguished personages, including Necker, Garnier, Mesdames Necker and De Stael, and Voltaire, who said of him: "On peut avoir autant d'esprit que Reverdil, mais pas davantage." Reverdil lived to an advanced age, and died in 1808 at Geneva.

The next step of the Queen-Dowager's Government was the appointment of a commission of inquiry to conduct the investigation of Struensee, Brandt, and the ten other prisoners, and send [Pg 107] them for trial. This Commission consisted of eight high officials, to whom a ninth was eventually

added. They were all known to be enemies of Struensee and his system of government. The Commission was appointed in January, and made it its first duty to search the houses of the prisoners, and examine all their papers. For the purpose of taking evidence the Commission sat daily at the Christiansborg Palace, but either because the commissioners were uncertain how to proceed, or because of conflicting counsels, five weeks passed before the examination of the principal prisoners began. Every one knew that the trial was a foregone conclusion. Keith wrote to his father before it took place: “Count Struensee is loaded with irons, and, which is worse, with guilt, in a common prison in the citadel. Without knowing either the particulars of the accusations against him, or the proofs, I believe I may venture to say that he will soon finish his wild career by the hands of the executioner. The treatment of Count Brandt in the prison, and the race he has run, bear so near an affinity to those of Struensee that it may be presumed his doom will be similar.”[31]

[31] Sir R. M. Keith to Mr. Keith, February 9, 1772.—*Memoirs and Correspondence of Sir Robert Murray Keith.*

Struensee and Brandt were kept confined closely to their cells, and treated with hardship and ignominy, which would have broken the spirits of far stronger men than they, who had been rendered soft by luxury and self-indulgence. The day after their arrival at the citadel iron chains [Pg 108] were specially forged for them. These chains weighed eighteen pounds each, and were fastened on the right hand and on the left leg, and thence, with the length of three yards, to the wall. They wore them day and night and never took them off. Struensee felt this indignity bitterly, and made pitiful efforts to conceal his fetters. Curiously enough, the smith who forged them and fastened them upon him was a prisoner who only a year before had been in chains himself, and then had begged Struensee for alms and his liberty. The minister had contemptuously tossed him some pence, but refused to set him free, saying: “You do not wear your chains on account of your virtues.” When the man, therefore, fettered Struensee to the wall, he reminded him of the incident by saying: “Your Excellency, I do not put this chain on you on account of your virtues.”[32]

[32] *Gespräch im Reiche der Todten* (a pamphlet).

Most of the severities inflicted on the prisoners, and especially those on Struensee, seem rather to have been dictated from a fear that they would attempt to commit suicide, and not in any vindictive spirit. Neither of the prisoners was entrusted with knives and forks, but the jailors cut up their food and carried it to their mouths. Struensee at first tried to starve himself, but after three days the commandant sent him word that he was to eat and drink, otherwise he would be thrashed until his appetite returned. His buttons were cut off his clothes, because he had [Pg 109] swallowed two of them; his shoe-buckles were removed, and when he tried to dash his head against the wall he was made to wear an iron cap. Brandt escaped both the strait-waistcoat and the iron cap, for he showed no disposition to take his life; on the contrary, he was always cheerful, and bore his fate with a fortitude which shamed the wretched Struensee.

FREDERICK, HEREDITARY PRINCE OF DENMARK, STEP-BROTHER OF CHRISTIAN VII.

CHAPTER VI.

[Pg 110]

“A DAUGHTER OF ENGLAND.”

1772.

The ill-news from Denmark travelled to England in an incredibly short space of time, considering how slow and difficult was the transmission of news in the eighteenth century. Though nothing definite was known, the air was full of rumours, and the gossips of the clubs and coffee-houses were much exercised over the fate of the Queen of Denmark. The greatest care had been taken to prevent any whisper of the current scandal at the court of Denmark reaching the ears of the English people. The less reputable members of the Opposition, it was thought, would be sure to use the intrigue between the Queen and Struensee as another weapon against the King and the Government. So long back as December 20, 1771, we find Keith writing to Lord Suffolk a private letter detailing the case of one Ball, an English naval surgeon, who had offered his services in aid of the Danish expedition against Algiers. Struensee, who hated every one English, had dismissed his application with scant courtesy, and in revenge Ball had written an angry letter to Struensee, threatening to expose his conduct. Keith continues: “I can hardly suppose that Count Struensee [Pg 111] will deign to send an answer to this letter, but, as Mr. Ball has picked up here a number of scandalous stories which might make a figure in a catch-penny pamphlet, I think it my duty to let your Lordship know what may be the possible consequence of his revenging his disappointment by appearing in print. If the Minister was the only person whose name might be mixed up in this altercation, I should be less anxious. Perhaps the Danish envoy in London may obtain for Mr. Ball some additional gratuity which will put an end to the dispute.”[33]

[33] Keith’s despatch, Copenhagen, December 20, 1771.

Whether Ball was muzzled or not there is no record to tell, but the events at the Danish court having culminated in the catastrophe of January 16, it was only a question of time for the scandal to be bruited abroad in every court in Europe, and in England too. As early as January 23 a London newspaper created great excitement by the following paragraph: “It is affirmed by letters from the continent that a royal princess is certainly detained in a tower, inaccessible to every creature, except such as are appointed to attend her, but that an absolute silence is imposed throughout the kingdom on this subject.”[34]

[34] *General Evening Post*, January 23, 1772.

A few days later Keith’s despatch arrived from Copenhagen, containing a full account of the revolution there, and the arrest and imprisonment of the Queen. Lord Suffolk, the foreign secretary, immediately hastened with it to the King, who was about to hold a levee. George III., [Pg 112] who had already heard evil rumours, was so much overcome by this confirmation of them that he immediately put off the levee, and the royal family were thrown into grief and humiliation. Queen Charlotte was highly indignant with her sister-in-law, and went into closest retirement, declaring that she was ashamed to appear in public. The Princess of Brunswick, Matilda’s sister, who was staying in London at the time, wept bitterly. The Princess-Dowager of Wales was seriously ill, and the Princess of Brunswick thought that it was better that her mother should not be told; but the King said: “My mother *will* know everything”; and therefore he went to her directly, and acquainted her with the contents of Keith’s despatch.

The Princess-Dowager was overwhelmed with affliction at the news of this last family disgrace. She had seen it coming for some time, and made every effort to recall her daughter from the error of her ways; but her remonstrances were unheeded, and her advice neglected, and now the ruin which she had foretold had fallen upon the Queen of Denmark. Only a few months before the Princess-Dowager had been annoyed beyond measure by the marriage of her youngest son, Henry Duke of Cumberland, with Mrs. Horton, a beautiful and designing widow,[35] and she had broken off all communication with him in consequence. Her other son, the Duke of Gloucester, [Pg 113] who had contracted a similar marriage, soon to be publicly avowed, had added to her anxieties by a dangerous illness. Her eldest daughter, the Princess of Brunswick, was unhappy in her matrimonial relations. Therefore it is no wonder that the proud Princess’s patience gave way under this last disgrace. In the first moments of her grief and anger she turned her face to the wall and prayed for death, and forbade her children and her servants evermore to mention to her the name of Matilda, who, she declared, had ceased to be her daughter. Well might Walpole write: “Such an accumulated succession of mortifications has rarely fallen on a royal family in so short a space. They seem to have inherited the unpropitious star of the Stuarts, from whom they are descended, as well as their crown.”[36]

[35] The Duchess of Cumberland was the widow of Andrew Horton of Catton, and the daughter of Simon Lord Irnham, afterwards Earl of Carhampton. The marriage took place privately on October 2, 1771, at the Hon. Mrs. Horton’s house in Hertford Street, Mayfair. The King, when apprised of the fact, immediately manifested his displeasure by publishing a notice in the *London Gazette* to the effect that such persons as might choose to wait upon the Duke and the new Duchess would no longer be received at St. James’s. This marriage was the immediate cause of the passing of the Royal Marriage Act, which made such marriages (if contracted without the consent of the reigning sovereign) in future illegal.

[36] Walpole’s *Reign of George III.*, vol. iv.

The dishonour of her youngest daughter, coming on the top of all her other mortifications, proved too much even for the indomitable spirit of the Princess-Dowager, and without doubt hastened

her death. In any case the end could not have been long delayed, for she was dying of cancer, and her sufferings the last year of her life had been agonising. Yet to the end she would not admit that she was ill, and bore her pains, like her sorrows, in stern silence. George III., whose pride was deeply wounded by these family scandals, which brought discredit on the throne and the dynasty, greatly sympathised with his mother. Doubtless he took counsel with her as to how he was to act to save his sister Matilda from the worst consequences of her indiscretion, but at first he seems to have done nothing. Perhaps this inaction was due to his great anxiety concerning his mother's health. He had always been devoted to her, and was now unremitting in his attentions. He visited her every evening at eight o'clock, and remained some hours; but though the Princess was gradually sinking before his eyes, even he did not dare to hint to her that the end was near. [Pg 114]

The night before she died the King was so anxious that he anticipated his visit by an hour, pretending that he had mistaken the time, and he brought with him Queen Charlotte. Even then, with the hand of death upon her, the Princess-Dowager rose up and dressed as usual to receive her son and daughter-in-law. She made not the slightest allusion to her state of health, though she kept them in conversation for four hours on other topics. On their rising to take their leave, she said that she should pass a quiet night. The King, who feared she might die at any moment, did not return home, but, unknown to his mother, remained at Carlton House. The Princess-Dowager fought hard for life the first part of the night, but towards morning it became evident even to herself that the end was imminent. She asked her physician how long she had to live. He hesitated. "No matter," she said, "for I have nothing to say, nothing to do, nothing to leave."[37] An hour later she was dead. She died so suddenly that the King, although he was resting in an adjoining room, was not in time to be with his mother when she breathed her last. He gained her bedside immediately after, took her hand, kissed it, and burst into tears. [Pg 115]

[37] Mrs. Carter's *Letters*, vol. iv.

The Princess-Dowager of Wales died in the fifty-third year of her age, at six o'clock in the morning, on February 8, 1772, not long after the terrible news had arrived from Denmark. She therefore died without hearing again of her daughter Matilda. "The calmness and composure of her death," wrote Bishop Newton, her domestic chaplain, "were further proofs and attestations of the goodness of her life; and she died, as she lived, beloved and lamented most by those who knew her best."[38] No sooner was this princess, who was cruelly abused all her life, dead, than the papers were filled with praise of her virtues. "Never was a more amiable, a more innocent, or a more benevolent princess," wrote one, and this was the theme, with variations, of the rest. Without endorsing all this eulogy, it must be admitted that the Princess-Dowager of Wales was in many ways a princess high above the average. Few women have been more harshly judged, and none on so little evidence. Insult and calumny followed her to the grave. A few days before she died a scandalous libel appeared, and the disgrace of the daughter was seized on as a weapon to attack once more the mother. An indecent scribbler, who signed himself "Atticus," wrote in the *Public Advertiser* of the revolution at Copenhagen as follows:— [Pg 116]

"The day was fixed: *a Favourite fell*. Methinks I hear the Earl of Bute whisper to his poor affrighted soul, and every corner of his hiding places murmur these expressions: 'God bless us! A known and established Favourite ruined in a single night by a near neighbour—the frenzy may reach this country, and I am undone. Englishmen too are haters of favourites and Scotchmen. Those old rascally Whig families, whose power and virtues seem almost lost, may reunite. In the meantime, I must do something—a lucky thought occurs to me. I'll fill the minds of the people with prejudices against those haughty Danes. Bradshaw Dyson shall bribe the printers to suppress any contradictory reports. Englishmen are always ready to vindicate injured virtue at any expense; therefore nothing shall be heard but the *honour of the King's sister*!'"

[38] *Bishop Newton's Life of Himself*, vol. i.

Thus, even when the poor woman lay dying, the old prejudice was revived. Then, as for a quarter of a century before, the pivot on which all this slander turned was the precise nature of the friendship between the Princess and Lord Bute—a matter which surely concerned no one except themselves. Her arch-maligner, Horace Walpole, put the worst construction on this intimacy, and her political enemies endorsed his verdict. But Walpole hated the Princess-Dowager, because she refused to recognise in any way the marriage of his favourite niece to the Duke of Gloucester. The evil construction placed upon the friendship, as Lord Chesterfield said, "was founded on mere conjectures". The whole life of the Princess-Dowager—the decorum of her conduct, the order and regularity of her household, her strict principles, the reticence of her character, and the coldness of her temperament—give it the lie. The eighteenth century, with its gross pleasures and low ideals, could not understand a disinterested friendship between a man and a woman, and, not understanding, condemned it. Yet there is much to show that this friendship was of that high order of affection which eliminates all thought of self or sex. It lasted for long years; it was marked by complete trust and confidence on the woman's side, by loyalty and chivalry on the man's. It never wavered through good report or ill; opposition and insult served to strengthen it, and it was broken only by death. There must have been something very noble in the woman who won such allegiance, and in the man who rendered it. [Pg 117]

The news from Copenhagen created an extraordinary sensation in London. The ladies were whispering all sorts of naughtiness behind their fans concerning Queen Matilda and Struensee; the gossips in the coffee-houses were retailing fresh bits of scandal every day, and the politicians were betting on the possibilities of a war with Denmark. Public opinion at first seemed to be on the side of the young Queen. Some of the papers already demanded that a fleet should be sent to Denmark to vindicate the honour of the British Princess, who was generally spoken of as the [Pg 118]

“Royal Innocent”. The following may be quoted as a specimen of these effusions:—

> “Recollect the manner in which that lady [Queen Matilda] was educated, and that, when delivered into the hands of her husband she was in the full possession of every virtue. All the graces were in her; she knew nothing but what was good. Can it then, with any degree of reason, be concluded that in so short a time the lady could forget every virtuous precept, and abandon herself to infamy? My dear countrymen, it cannot be, and until we have a certainty of guilt, believe it not, though an angel from Copenhagen should affirm it.”[39]

[39] *General Evening Post*, February 8, 1772.

The popular curiosity was heightened by the profound secrecy observed by the court and government. So far, nothing definite was known; the King and his ministers were naturally silent. The illness and death of his mother had hindered the King from taking action on Keith’s despatch, and while he was hesitating, another communication arrived from Copenhagen. This [Pg 119] was a letter addressed by that wily diplomatist, Osten, to the Danish envoy in London, Baron Dieden, with instructions that he was to communicate its contents to Lord Suffolk at once. This letter threw a different complexion on the affair to that of Keith’s despatch. It assumed the guilt of the Queen, and urged that the King of Denmark was only within his rights in removing his consort from the contaminating presence of her favourite. The matter, Osten urged, was of so delicate and personal a nature that it could not be treated properly by ministers or envoys. The King of Denmark, when he had recovered from the affliction into which the knowledge of his consort’s infidelity had plunged him, would write to his brother of England with his own hand, and he trusted that his Britannic Majesty would suspend judgment until then. A few days later Dieden received another despatch from Osten, enclosing a sealed letter from Christian VII. to George III., and the Danish envoy delivered this letter into the King’s hands at once. This letter, which no doubt Christian had been induced to copy by the dictation of the Queen-Dowager and her advisers, took the same line as Osten’s despatch, though of course it was written in a more intimate and confidential tone, not only as between brother monarchs, but near relatives.

George III., who was already prejudiced against his sister by the way in which she had slighted [Pg 120] his advice, and ignored his remonstrances, was not averse from dealing with the difficulty in this way. Though he greatly disliked his cousin, the King of Denmark, and knew the insults and cruelties which had been heaped upon his unhappy sister, yet, as he was of a most moral and domestic nature, he could not find in them any justification for her conduct, and he regarded her offence, if proved, with horror. Osten’s representations were so plausible that the King, when he received Christian VII.’s letter, replied to it in no unyielding spirit; he reserved his judgment, but demanded that his sister should be treated fairly, and every possible respect and indulgence be shown to her. He would not go behind his envoy’s back, in the manner suggested by Osten, for he rightly judged that Keith, being on the spot, would be thoroughly informed of the situation. He therefore gave his letter to Suffolk to transmit to Keith, with instructions that he was to have a personal audience of the King forthwith, and to deliver it into his hands. At the same time Lord Suffolk wrote a despatch to Keith asking for fuller information, and conveying to him in a special manner his Sovereign’s approbation of his conduct.

Keith all this time had remained shut up in his house, in Copenhagen, awaiting instructions from England, and unable, until he received them, to do anything on behalf of the unhappy Queen. The answer to his despatch did not arrive for nearly a month. When at last it came, “in the shape of a [Pg 121] sealed square packet, it was placed in Colonel Keith’s hands, and they trembled, and he shook all over as he cut the strings. The parcel flew open, and the Order of the Bath fell at his feet. The insignia had been enclosed by the King’s own hands, with a despatch commanding him to invest himself forthwith, and appear at the Danish court.”[40] What instructions the despatch contained will never be known; but that George III. entirely approved of the way in which his representative had acted is shown by a letter which Lord Suffolk wrote at the same time to Keith’s father:—

> “I cannot deny myself the satisfaction of acquainting you with the eminent merit of your son, his Majesty’s minister at Copenhagen, and the honourable testimony his Majesty has been pleased to give of his approbation by conferring on him the Order of the Bath. The ability, spirit and dignity with which Sir Robert Keith has conducted himself in a very delicate and difficult position has induced his Majesty to accompany the honour he bestows with very particular marks of distinction."[41]

[40] *Memoirs of Sir Robert Murray Keith.*

[41] Lord Suffolk, secretary of state for foreign affairs, to R. Keith, Esq., February 28, 1772.

Fortified with these marks of his Sovereign’s approval, and armed with the King’s letter, Keith, for the first time for many weeks, emerged from his house, and proceeded to the Christiansborg Palace, where he demanded a private audience of the King of Denmark. The audience was promised on the morrow, but when Keith again repaired to the palace, and was conducted to the [Pg 122] ante-chamber of the King’s apartments, he was astonished at seeing, instead of the King, Osten and some of the newly appointed ministers, who informed him that, his Majesty not being well, they had been charged to receive the envoy’s communication, and convey it to the King. Keith replied with some indignation that his orders were to deliver his letter into the King’s own hands, and he did not understand why his Danish Majesty, after he had consented to give him audience, should refer him to his ministers. But the ministers only politely expressed their regret, and said they were acting under the King’s orders. The whole scene of course was planned by the Queen-

Dowager, who had her own reasons for keeping the English envoy away from the King, as she was determined at all hazards that Matilda should be deposed and disgraced. Keith, who realised that there was something behind, and saw the futility of further remonstrance, reluctantly surrendered the letter; but he added that he should not fail to inform his Sovereign of the way in which he had been treated. He moreover said that his royal master's letter was a private one to the King, but that he himself had authority to state to the ministers that, if the Queen of Denmark were not treated with all the respect due to her birth and rank, her royal brother of England would not fail to resent it in a manner that would make Denmark tremble. He then withdrew.

Keith must have written a very strongly worded despatch to Lord Suffolk, exposing the trickery of [Pg 123] the Danish court, and probably hinting at the Queen's danger, for though the despatches which passed between him and Suffolk at this time are missing, we know that they became graver and more serious in tone. The relations between the two countries seemed likely to be broken off, for the Danish envoy in England, Dieden, followed Keith's example, and shut himself up in his house until he should receive instructions. When these instructions came, they could not have been satisfactory, for when the Danish envoy next appeared at court, George III. pointedly ignored him, which the minister resented by standing out of the circle, and laughing and talking with the Prussian minister, whose master also had a dispute with England at this time. Moreover, the Prussian minister had given offence to the King by talking too freely about the scandal at the Danish court. On one occasion he asked a court official with a sneer: "What has become of your Queen of Denmark?"—to which the Englishman made quick reply: "Apparently she is at Spandau with your Princess of Prussia"—a princess who had been divorced for adultery.

The secrecy which still reigned over everything concerning the King's sister, and the dilatory nature of the negotiations, led to much unfavourable comment in England. The mystery of the Queen of Denmark continued to be the only topic of discussion, both in public and private. [Pg 124] Notwithstanding all precautions, well-informed people formed a very shrewd idea of what had taken place at Copenhagen. For instance, on February 28, 1772, Mrs. Carter wrote to Mrs. Vesey: "I have very little intelligence to send you from Denmark, as there is a profound silence at St. James's on this subject. You know that the unhappy young Queen is imprisoned in a castle dashed by the waves, where she is kept in very strict confinement. I am persuaded you would think it an alleviation of her misfortunes if I could tell you it is the very castle once haunted by Hamlet's ghost, but of this I have no positive assurance, though, as it is at Elsinur, I think such an imagination as yours and mine may fairly enough make out the rest. In the letter that the King of Denmark wrote to ours, he only mentioned in general terms that the Queen had behaved in a manner which obliged him to imprison her, but that from regard to his Majesty her life should be safe."[42]

[42] Mrs. Carter's *Letters*, vol. iv.

The thought that the young and beautiful Queen—a British princess—was ill-treated and imprisoned, and possibly even in danger of her life, and her brother would not interpose on her behalf, created an extraordinary sensation, and the Opposition, thinking any stick good enough wherewith to belabour the King and his ministers, did not fail to turn the situation to account. It formed the subject of one of the most powerful letters of Junius, who made a terrific onslaught on [Pg 125] both the King and the Prime Minister, Lord North, from which we take the following extracts:—

"My Lord,

"I have waited with a degree of impatience natural to a man who wishes well to his country for your lordship's ministerial interposition on behalf of an injured Princess of England, the Queen-Consort of Denmark.... An insignificant Northern Potentate is honoured by a matrimonial alliance with the King of England's sister. A confused rumour prevails, that she has been false to his bed; the tale spreads; a particular man is pointed out as the object of her licentious affections. Our hopeful Ministry are, however, quite silent: despatches, indeed, are sent off to Copenhagen, but the contents of those despatches are so profound a secret, that with me it almost amounts to a question whether you [Lord North] yourself know anything of the matter.... In private life the honour of a sister is deemed an affair of infinite consequence to a brother. A man of sentiment is anxious to convince his friends and neighbours that the breath of slander hath traduced her virtue; and he seizes, with avidity, every extenuating circumstance that can contribute to extenuate her offence, or demonstrate her innocence beyond the possibility of cavil. Is our pious Monarch cast in a different mould from that of his people? Or is he taught to believe that the opinion of his subjects has no manner of relation to his own felicity? Are *you*, my Lord, [North] quite devoid of [Pg 126] feeling? Have you no warm blood that flows round your heart, that gives your frame a thrilling soft sensation, and makes your bosom glow with affections ornamental to man as a social creature? For shame, my Lord! However wrong you act, you must know better; you must be conscious that the people have a right to be informed of every transaction which concerns the welfare of the state. They are part of a mighty empire, which flourishes only as their happiness is promoted; they have a kind of claim in every person belonging to the royal lineage. How then can they possibly remain neuter, and see their Princess imprisoned by banditti and northern Vandals?... There is a barbarous ferocity which still clings to the inhabitants of the north, and renders their government subject to perpetual convulsions; but the Danes, I fancy, will be found the only people in our times who have dared to proceed to extremities that alarmed Europe, nay, dared to imprison an English princess without giving even the shadow of a public reason for

their conduct.... The present Machiavelian Dowager Julia may send the young Queen's soul to Heaven in a night, and through the shameless remissness of you, Lord North, as Prime Minister of this unhappy country, the public may remain ignorant of every circumstance relative to the murder. Be not, however, deceived: the blood of our Sovereign's sister shall not be suffered to cry in vain for vengeance: it *shall* be heard, it *shall* be revenged, and, what is still more, it shall besprinkle Lord North, and thus affix a stigma on his forehead, which shall make him wander, like another Cain, accursed through the world."[43]

[Pg 127]

[43] This letter, signed "Junius," appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, March 3, 1772.

This attack naturally called forth a counter-attack, and before long the guilt, or innocence, of the King's sister was as hotly debated in the public press as in the clubs and coffee-houses. But neither the thunders of Junius, nor the shrill cries of those who took the opposite view, made any difference to Lord North, and the nature of the negotiations which were going on between England and Denmark remained as much a mystery as ever. When pressed in Parliament on the subject, the Prime Minister contented himself with answering, with his usual air of frankness, that, unless expressly ordered to do so by the House, he would not reveal so delicate a matter, and in this he was supported by the good sense of the House, which had no wish to see the disgrace of the King's sister form a subject of debate within the walls of Parliament. Moreover, at this stage it was not a question which concerned ministers, but the King, and the blame for what followed must be laid not on their shoulders, but on his. George III. believed his sister guilty, and did not weigh sufficiently the extenuating circumstances, which, whether guilty or innocent, could be urged in her favour. He did not act at first with that firmness which the situation undoubtedly demanded. The Queen-Dowager of Denmark and her advisers believed the King of England to be luke-warm, and consequently proceeded against his unhappy sister with every circumstance of cruelty and malevolence. If even her brother would not defend her, Matilda was indeed abandoned to the vengeance of her enemies.

[Pg 128]

CHAPTER VII.

[Pg 129]

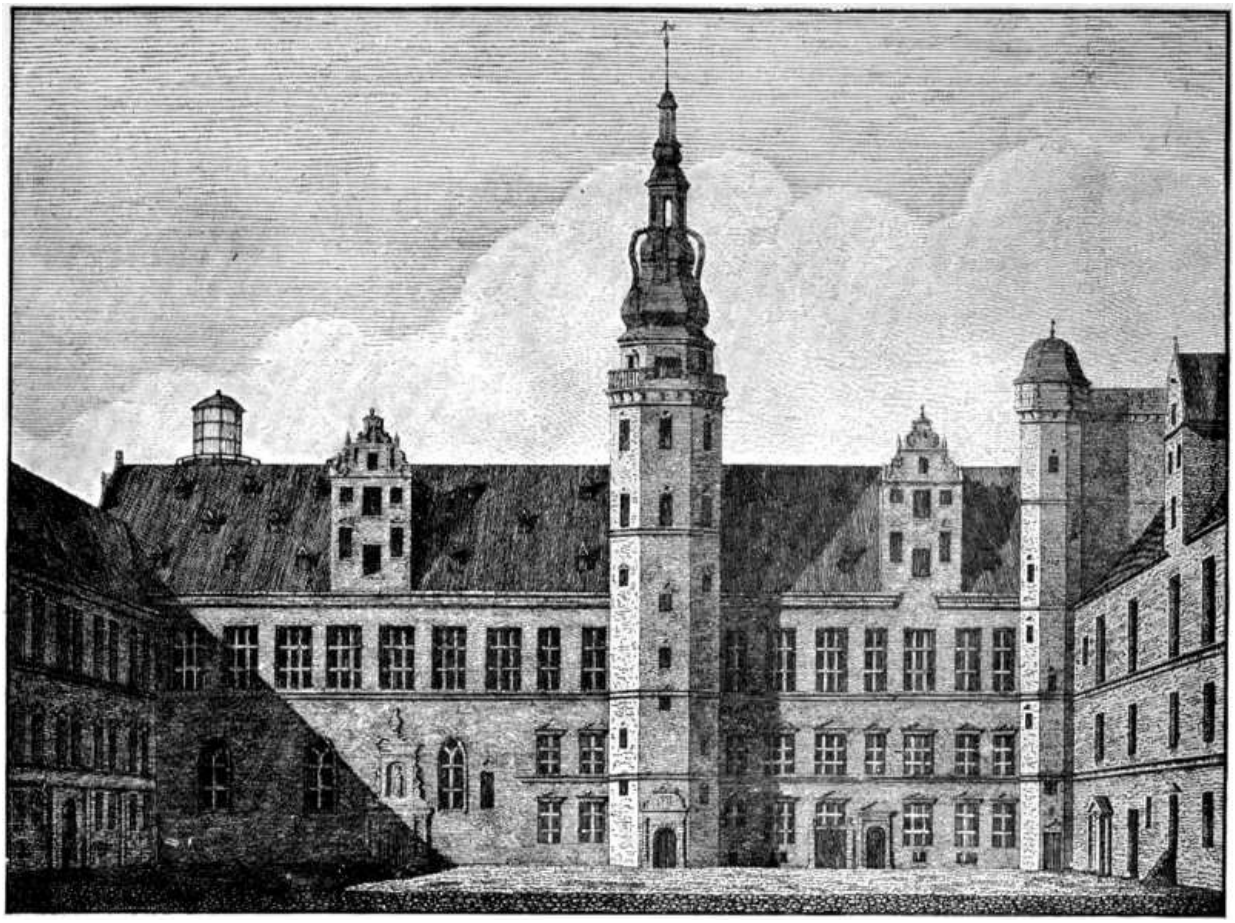
THE IMPRISONED QUEEN.

1772.

All this time the unfortunate Matilda remained at Kronborg, with no consolation except that she was permitted to retain the infant princess. She was still very closely guarded, but after Keith's spirited protest, the rigours of her imprisonment were slightly abated. Some clothes and other necessaries were sent her from Copenhagen, and by way of keeping up the fiction that she was treated with the respect due to her birth and rank, her suite was increased, and two gentlemen of the bed-chamber and two maids-of-honour were sent to Kronborg. Their duties must have been light, for, confined as the Queen was to one small chamber, they could rarely have seen their mistress during the first months of her sojourn in the fortress. But their presence at Kronborg was a device of the Queen-Dowager to throw dust in the eyes of the English and other courts, for the misfortunes of Matilda were now the subject of conversation in every court in Europe. Moreover, the persons sent to Kronborg were all, as Juliana Maria well knew, personally disliked by the young Queen, and they went rather in the capacity of spies than servants of her [Pg 130] household. As it afterwards appeared at her trial, even the women who waited on the Queen were really spies, and her most casual expressions and trifling actions were distorted by these menials into evidence against her. Matilda was allowed no communication with the outer world, and she asked her maid, a woman named Arnsberg, what had become of Struensee. The woman told her he was imprisoned in the citadel. The Queen wept, and asked: "Is he in chains? Has he food to eat? Does he know that I am imprisoned here?" These questions, natural enough under the circumstances, were duly noted by the treacherous woman, and afterwards put in as evidence against the Queen at her trial.

When the first shock was over Matilda bore her imprisonment with fortitude. Her youth and strong constitution were in her favour, and she kept well, notwithstanding her deprivations. We find Keith writing a month after the Queen's imprisonment: "The Queen of Denmark enjoys perfect health in Hamlet's castle. I wish the punishment of her cruellest *enemies*, the late Minister, Struensee, and his associates, were over, that the heat of party might subside, and her Majesty's situation be altered for the better."[44]

[44] Keith's letter to his father, February 14, 1772.



THE COURTYARD OF THE CASTLE OF KRONBORG.
From an Engraving.

In her lonely prison Matilda had ample time for reflection. She reviewed the events of the past few months and her present situation, and she saw, now that it was too late, that the advice and [Pg 131] remonstrances of her mother and brother had been given in all good faith. She saw, too, that any hope of deliverance must come from England, and that she could expect nothing from her imbecile husband and the relentless Queen-Dowager and her adherents. For weeks she was kept uncertain of the fate that awaited her; her attendants either would not, or could not, give her any information on this head, and she lived in constant dread of assassination. In her anxiety and

alarm she is said to have written impassioned appeals from Kronborg to Keith in Copenhagen, and to her brother George III., throwing herself on the protection of Great Britain.[45] Without accepting the genuineness of any particular letter, it is certain that the Queen managed to enter into communication with Keith, though he was not permitted to see her. Keith had great difficulty with Osten, who spoke fair to his face but granted nothing.

[45] These letters were first published in the English papers early in April, 1772, and the fact that they so appeared is sufficient to cast grave doubts upon their genuineness. It is most unlikely that such letters would have been allowed to pass out of safe keeping. On the contrary, the greatest care was taken that every letter and despatch to England bearing on the Queen's case should be kept secret, and they were afterwards destroyed by order of George III.

In the middle of February the news of the death of the Princess-Dowager of Wales reached Copenhagen, and Keith made some attempt to break the distressing intelligence to the imprisoned Queen by word of mouth. But here, too, he was foiled by Osten, who would only suffer [Pg 132] the intelligence to be communicated to the Queen in a formal letter. Matilda was greatly distressed at her mother's death, for she knew that she had lost not only her mother, but also a protectress, whose influence with the King of England was all-powerful. To her grief must also have been added a sense of remorse, for she had parted with her mother in anger; she knew, too, how the Princess's proud spirit must have been abased by the news of her misfortunes, and this probably hastened her death. Yet, even so, Matilda could not forget the man who had brought her to this miserable pass; she hardly thought of herself; all her anxiety was for him and his safety. That he had brought her to shame and ruin made no difference to her love; all her prayers and all her thoughts were of him. Her love was now but a memory, but it was one she cherished dearer than life itself.

Probably it was the knowledge of this impenitent condition (for everything Matilda said or did was reported through spies) that made Juliana Maria provide spiritual consolation for the hapless captive. The Queen-Dowager was a fanatical woman, who had no charity but much bigotry; it is possible, therefore, that she may have been sincere in her wish to "convert" Matilda. At least, that is the only excuse that can be offered for the insults which were heaped upon the unfortunate young Queen in the name of religion. Acting on the instructions of the Queen-Dowager, the commandant of Kronborg every Sunday morning compelled his royal prisoner to [Pg 133] come out of her small room, where at least she had the refuge of seclusion, and marched her over the rough stones of the courtyard to the chapel of the fortress.[46] There, seated in a pew with a guard on either side, and the ladies and gentlemen of her household (who put in an appearance on these occasions) behind her, the poor Queen was thundered at ferociously by the garrison preacher, one Chemnitz, who, also acting under instructions, preached at her for an hour together, and hurled at her head the fiercest insults from the safe shelter of his pulpit. For instance, on one Sunday he chose as his text: "And the people shall take them, and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the Lord for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors" (Isa. xiv. 2). On alternate Sundays another preacher, named Hansen, took up the parable, and was even more violent than his colleague. On one occasion he hurled at the Queen the following text: "Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him [Pg 134] that treadeth in the winefat?" (Isa. lxiii. 2), and then proceeded to draw a parallel between the hapless prisoner and the scarlet woman. What added to the indignity of these cruel insults was the fact that they were addressed to the Queen in the presence of the other prisoners, many of them common criminals, and in the face of the rough soldiers of the fortress. But the exhortations of these Boanerges fell on deaf ears, so far as the Queen was concerned. It was noticed that she went very white, but she otherwise showed no sign of emotion. She left the chapel as she had entered it, with her head held haughtily erect, and a dignified air. Though naturally the most kind-hearted and unassuming of women, this royal daughter of England could summon all her dignity to her aid when she chose, and look every inch a queen. It was impossible to humiliate Matilda; nor were these the methods to win her from the error of her ways. When the preachers sought to gain admittance to her cell, she absolutely refused to see them, and showed so much determination that they dared not force their way into her presence. She might be dragged to the chapel and publicly pilloried, that she suffered under protest; but the men who had so insulted her she positively declined to receive, and all exhortations and threats were unavailing. But though the insults of the preachers failed to shake Matilda's composure, her enemies, of whom Juliana Maria was the chief, had at last obtained a document by which they hoped to humble her proud head to the dust.

[46] The chapel is a handsome building, with a vaulted stone roof, and a gallery running round it. The walls are elaborately painted, and pulpit and stalls adorned with wood-carving by German masters. The chapel was restored in 1843, but, except for the pews, it presents much the same appearance as it did in Matilda's day. It is now used as a garrison chapel, for Kronborg is no longer a prison.

By the third week of February the commissioners appointed to collect evidence against the state [Pg 135] prisoners at Copenhagen had concluded their investigations, and were ready to examine the two principal offenders, preliminary to sending them to trial. Struensee was taken first. He had now been in close confinement five weeks; the heavy irons, the rough treatment and the mental anxiety had told upon his health, already failing before he went to prison. It was a feeble, broken man, very different to the arrogant minister of former days, who was dragged forth from his dungeon to be interrogated before the Commission on February 20. Extraordinary precautions were taken to guard the prisoner. The examination took place within the walls of the citadel,

though in another part of the fortress—the house of the commandant. The two gates of the citadel were closed the whole day, and in the city the garrison and burgher guard were patrolled in readiness for any outbreak. At ten o'clock Struensee was taken across the yard of the citadel in the commandant's coach, under the guard of an officer and six men, to the hall of examination. As the morning was very cold he was permitted to wear his fur coat, and before he was brought into the room where the Commission was sitting, his fetters were taken off. He trembled violently while his chains were being removed, but this may have been due to physical causes, for he had worn them day and night for five weeks, and they were very heavy. He could scarcely stand, so [Pg 136] he was allowed to sit in an armchair when he confronted his enemies.

Notwithstanding his weak condition, Struensee astonished the commissioners by his calmness, and the collected way in which he answered their questions. He declared that all the orders he had given to the military during the last weeks of his administration were precautions to ensure the public safety, and he scouted the idea of his alleged plot against the person and authority of the King, of which, indeed, no vestige of proof existed. The first day his examination lasted nearly eight hours, from ten o'clock in the morning until two, and again from half-past four in the afternoon until seven o'clock in the evening. At the close Struensee was again put in irons, and conducted back to his dungeon.

The next morning he was brought forth again, and examined from ten o'clock until two. At none of these sittings did the prisoner inculpate himself in the slightest degree. At the third examination he was closely questioned with regard to his intimacy with the Queen, but he made no confession, and, on the contrary, declared that his relations with her were innocent. It is said that one of the commission, Councillor Braem, having spoken roughly to the prisoner because he would not admit his guilt, Struensee calmly told him to imitate his tranquillity, and added that the affair surely concerned him more than anybody else. Incensed by this calmness Braem threatened him with torture, and said that instruments were ready in the next room which would [Pg 137] tear the truth from the most obstinate criminal. Struensee replied that he had already spoken the truth, and he did not fear torture.[47] The third examination closed at half-past two on the second day without any admissions having been extorted from the prisoner. In the interval the commissioners conferred together, and determined to change their tactics.

[47] According to Reverdil, it is doubtful whether Struensee was threatened with torture, or, if he were, Braem exceeded his functions. In any case, the threat was an idle one, for the instruments were not prepared.

So far they had told Struensee nothing of what had happened to Queen Matilda, but thought to entrap him by leaving him in complete ignorance of the details of the palace revolution. At a loss to explain Struensee's calmness, they now shrewdly guessed that he was counting on the protection of the young Queen. It was remembered that he had often boasted, in the hour of his prosperity, that no harm could come to him, for the Queen was absolutely identified with all his measures, and to attack him would be to attack her too; she was his shield against his enemies. He never dreamed that they would dare to attack her, for she had absolute ascendency over the King, and moreover was the sister of a powerful reigning monarch, who would assuredly defend her from peril, or at least would use all his influence to prevent a scandal for the honour of his house. When, therefore, the prisoner was again summoned before his examiners, they told him without more ado that, if he were trusting to the protection of the Queen, he was trusting to a [Pg 138] broken reed: the Queen herself was arrested and imprisoned, and would shortly be put upon her trial, with the consent of the King of England, who, equally with his Danish Majesty, viewed with abhorrence the guilty connection between her and Struensee. He might therefore as well make a clean breast of it, for everything would assuredly become known.

The effect produced on the prisoner's shattered nerves by this revelation was all that his enemies hoped; Struensee was completely overcome, and broke down at once. So confidently had he counted on the Queen's protection that, now he learned she was in the same plight as himself, all his firmness forsook him; he burst into tears and lamentations, and begged to be allowed to retire to regain his composure. But the commissioners were careful not to allow this opportunity to pass; they pressed home their advantage with renewed questions and threats, even holding out hopes of mercy if he would tell the truth. Before long Struensee, instead of "lying like a gentleman," confessed without reserve that his familiarity with the Queen had been carried to the furthest limit. The commissioners did not conceal their exultation; this base confession did more than anything else to brand the man before them as a profligate adventurer.

Some extenuation might be urged for Struensee if in a moment of terror and confusion he had been taken off his guard and blurted out the truth, or if on consideration he had recalled his [Pg 139] words; but his subsequent conduct leaves no room for this extenuation. There is no doubt that he thought, by dragging the Queen (now that she could no longer protect him) into the mud with himself, he would save his shameful life. He probably argued that a public trial would be avoided for the honour of the royal houses of Denmark and England, the affair would be hushed up, and he would be allowed to escape with banishment. It is more than probable that his crafty examiners held out this inducement for the wretched man to confess everything. Struensee needed little encouragement, for, having once embarked upon his story, he seemed to take a positive pleasure in telling the most unnecessary details. He evidently thought that the more deeply he incriminated the Queen, the better chance he would have of saving his life. Not content with this, the pitiful coward threw all the blame upon her—an inexperienced woman fourteen years younger than himself, who loved him to her destruction, who had showered benefits upon him, and to whom he owed everything. It was the old story, "*The woman tempted me*."

There is no need to quote in full here the confession of this wretched man. He not only made it

once but repeated it with ample details four days later; these details were marked by a total absence of reticence, and even decency. According to this confession—and it must be remembered that the man who made it was a liar as well as a coward—the intimate relations between the Queen and himself began in the spring of 1770, not long before the tour in Holstein. [Pg 140] The Queen first gave him marks of her affection at a masquerade; he strove to check the intimacy, and afterwards to break it off, but without success. He even quoted the rudeness and lack of respect with which it was notorious he had frequently treated the Queen to prove the truth of his statement. He declared that he had been obliged to continue the intimacy lest he should lose his mistress's confidence—that he was thus "placed in the alternative of ruining his fortunes, or succumbing to the will of the Queen". This shameful confession Struensee signed.

Having now got all they wanted, the commissioners dismissed Struensee to his dungeon until they should have further need of him. The traitor retired well pleased with himself. Hope sprang once more within his breast, and this was fostered by several indulgences now shown to him. He was allowed to be shaved, his diet was made fuller, and he was given wine. His valet was permitted to attend him under strict order of silence. The man, who was devoted to his master, brought with him the silver toilet bowls and perfume bottles—they were suffered to remain in the cell, mute testimony of the change from effeminate luxury to sordid misery.

Armed with Struensee's confession, the Government at last felt equal to dealing with the imprisoned Queen. Hitherto they had been in difficulty how to proceed. From the beginning of her incarceration the Queen, on being told whereof she was accused, had passionately demanded [Pg 141] a fair trial. She was now informed that she would receive it.

On March 8, 1772, a fortnight after Struensee's confession, a special commission, acting in the King's name (though he was probably ignorant of the proceedings, or at any rate indifferent to them), arrived at Kronborg—nominally for the purpose of examining the Queen, in reality to extort from her by fair means or foul a confirmation of the confession made by Struensee. It was imperative that her enemies should obtain it, for it would justify the Queen's treatment to the English Government, which, owing to the exertions of Keith, was becoming unpleasantly troublesome in its demands. It is said that Keith had contrived by some means to secretly warn the imprisoned Queen of the impending arrival of the commissioners, so that she should not be taken by surprise. He advised her that she should receive them with calmness, and treat them as subjects who had come to pay court to their Queen; when they began to interrogate her, she would do well to say that she had no answer to give them; she could not recognise their right to question her, as she recognised no superior, or judge, but her lord the King, to whom alone she would account for her actions. But unfortunately Keith knew nothing of Struensee's confession.

The commission consisted of two members of the Council of State—Count Otto Thott and Councillor Schack-Rathlou[48]—who were well known to the Queen in the days of her prosperity, [Pg 142] and two members of the committee of investigation who had examined Struensee, Baron Juell-Wind, a judge of the Supreme Court, and Stampe, the Attorney-General. These four men, it is scarcely necessary to say, had been opponents of the Struensee administration. As the Queen's room was too small to admit all these men, some of whom could hardly have stood upright in it, the commission sat in the large hall adjoining, generally used for the guard—a room with a painted ceiling and pictures of Danish worthies around the walls. There, when they had arranged themselves at a table, with pens, ink and paper, her Majesty was informed that they awaited her pleasure.

[48] Joachim Otto Schack-Rathlou, Minister of State (1728-1800).

The Queen did not respond immediately to the summons, but first robed herself with care. Presently she entered the room, followed by her women. She acknowledged with a bow the salutations of the commissioners, who rose at her entrance, and then, passing to a chair, waved to them to be seated. She was very pale, but otherwise her bearing showed majestic dignity and composure. The commissioners, who had expected to find her broken down by weeks of solitary suffering and suspense, were astonished at this reception, and for a moment knew not how to proceed. Schack-Rathlou, who owed the Queen a grudge for the part which he unjustly believed she had played against him, undertook to begin the examination. For some time this proved fruitless. The commissioners found the Queen armed at all points: she admitted nothing, denied [Pg 143] their right to question her, and, when she answered under protest, her replies were of the briefest. Though she was examined and cross-examined by the four men, two of whom were eminent lawyers, she showed neither confusion nor hesitation. It was evident that the Queen could not be made to incriminate herself by fair means; therefore the commissioners resolved to resort to foul ones. They could not threaten her with torture, so they determined to surprise her in the same way as Struensee had been surprised, and throw her off her guard.

Schack-Rathlou, who acted as president of the commission, therefore told the Queen that, as she would admit nothing of her own free will, it was their duty to inform her that they held damning evidence of her guilt. Thereupon he produced Struensee's confession, and read it aloud. For the first time during the examination the Queen showed signs of emotion; she flushed either with shame or anger at the scandalous accusations, but she listened without interruption to the end. Then, when Schack-Rathlou put the formal question to her, she denied everything with passionate indignation, and declared that it was impossible that Struensee could have made such shameful statements, the document must be a forgery. For answer, Schack-Rathlou held the paper up before the Queen, that she might read with her own eyes Struensee's signature. The Queen took a hasty glance, and recognising the well-known characters, she uttered an [Pg 144] exclamation of horror, fell back in her chair, and covered her face with her hands. The

commissioners had trapped their victim at last.

Presently Schack-Rathlou leaned across the table, and said significantly: “If Struensee’s confession be not true, Madam, then there is no death cruel enough for this monster, who has dared to compromise you to such an extent.” At these words Matilda let her hands fall from her face, and gazed with startled eyes at her merciless accusers. All her self-possession had fled, and for the moment she was utterly unnerved. She understood the covert menace only too well: by thus maligning the reigning Queen he was liable to death by the law of Denmark, and death the most barbarous and degrading. She still loved this man; even his shameful betrayal of her had not weakened her love. It had probably been extorted from him by trickery and torture; in any case, she refused to judge him. He had brought all the happiness she had known into her life; if he now brought shame and ruin, she would forgive him for the sake of the happiness that was gone. She had sworn never to abandon him, and should she now, because of one false step, throw him to the wolves? No! She would save him, even though it cost her her honour and her crown.

These thoughts flashed through the Queen’s brain as she confronted her judges. Then she gripped with her hands the arms of her chair, and, leaning forward, said: “But if I were to avow [Pg 145] these words of Struensee to be true, could I save his life by doing so?” The lie was ready: “Surely, Madam,” said Schack-Rathlou, “that would be adduced in his favour, and would quite alter the situation. You have only to sign this.” So saying, he spread out a document already prepared, which the commissioners had brought with them. In it the Queen was made to confirm Struensee’s confession. The unhappy Queen glanced at it hurriedly. “Ah, well! I will sign,” she said. She seized the pen which Schack-Rathlou thrust into her hand, and wrote her signature to a document that would ruin her for ever. She had hardly done so when she fell back fainting.[49]

[49] According to *Falckenskjold’s Memoirs* and the *Authentische Aufklärungen*, the Queen nearly fainted after writing the first two syllables—“Caro—,” but Schack-Rathlou seized her hand, and, guiding it, added the remainder, “—line Matilda”. This story bears a remarkable resemblance to one related of Matilda’s ancestress, Mary Queen of Scots, when forced to sign her abdication in the castle of Lochleven. Unfortunately for the truth of it, the document which the Queen signed is still preserved in the royal archives of Copenhagen, and the signature shows no sign of a break.

When the Queen recovered, the commissioners had gone, and with them the fatal document; only the women who spied upon her remained, and the guards who had come to conduct her back to her chamber. When Matilda reached it, she threw herself on her pallet, and, clasping the little Princess in her arms, gave way to unavailing lamentation. It is stated by some authorities that the threat of taking her child away from her was also used by the commissioners to extort her [Pg 146] signature, and the promise was made that, if she avowed her guilt, the child would remain. This promise, if given, like all others, was subsequently falsified; but at the time it must have carried with it every appearance of probability, for the Queen, by admitting her guilt, also cast a slur upon the legitimacy of her child. Now that it was too late, she regretted the precipitation with which she had signed the paper. Her enemies’ eagerness to induce her to sign showed her clearly how she had erred: she ought to have demanded time for reflection, or insisted on adequate guarantees. She had signed away her crown, her honour, her children, perhaps her life, and it might be all in vain.

The commissioners, who had succeeded almost beyond their hopes, hastened back to Copenhagen to lay before the Queen-Dowager the crowning evidence of Matilda’s guilt. Juliana Maria was overjoyed: her enemy was delivered into her hands; nay, she had delivered herself. In this paper she found a full justification for all that she had done, and a complete answer to the remonstrances of the English envoy and his master. Keith, it is said, at first refused to believe the evidence of his eyes, and then fell back on the argument that the Queen’s signature had been wrung from her either by force or fraud. He realised that she had committed an irretrievable mistake. For the Queen-consort to be unfaithful to her husband’s bed was, by the law of Denmark, high treason, and as such punishable with death. Questions of high treason were, as a [Pg 147] rule, solved by the King alone; the *Lex Regia* expressly prohibited the judges from trying such matters. But in this case the King could not be trusted; he probably had no wish to divorce his Queen, whether she were guilty or not guilty—much less to punish her with imprisonment or death; he regarded offences against morality with a lenient eye, and he had positively forced his unhappy consort into temptation. So he was not consulted.

The Queen-Dowager took counsel with her legal advisers, with the result that an old statute was raked up (Section 3 of the Code of Christian V.), and a special commission, consisting of no less than thirty-five members, who formed a supreme court, was appointed to try the case of the King against the Queen. The court was composed of representatives of every class: five clergy, the Bishop of Zealand and four clerical assessors; four members of the Council of State, Counts Thott, Osten, Councillor Schack-Rathlou and Admiral Rommeling; the members of the commission who had examined Struensee; the judges of the Supreme Court not members of the commission; two officers of the army; two of the navy; several councillors of state; and one representative of the civic authority. The court was thus composed of some of the most eminent men in Denmark, and representative of both the church and state. Some of them were creatures of the Queen-Dowager, and pledged to carry out her wishes, many were upright and honourable [Pg 148] men, but all were hostile to the Struensee administration, which had been carried on in the name of the Queen.

The English envoy offered no protest to this trial, though he must have known that the judges were men prejudiced against the Queen, and the sentence of divorce was already virtually determined upon. But the blame for this inaction does not rest with Keith; he had received no

instructions from the King of England, to whom Matilda’s confession had been communicated with the least possible delay by the Danish Government. George III. held that, primarily, the question was one between husband and wife, and if his sister had forgotten her duty as a wife and a queen, her husband was justified in putting her away. Hence he offered no objection to the divorce proceedings which followed, though they were conducted from first to last with the utmost unfairness. True, he entered a plea for a fair trial, but he must have known that, surrounded as his sister was with enemies, a fair trial was impossible. If George III. had entered a vigorous protest at this juncture, the trial would never have been allowed to go forward, and a painful scandal, discreditable alike to the royal houses of England and Denmark, might have been hushed up. Moreover, decided action at the outset would have rendered unnecessary the crisis which brought England and Denmark to the verge of war a few months later.

CHAPTER VIII.

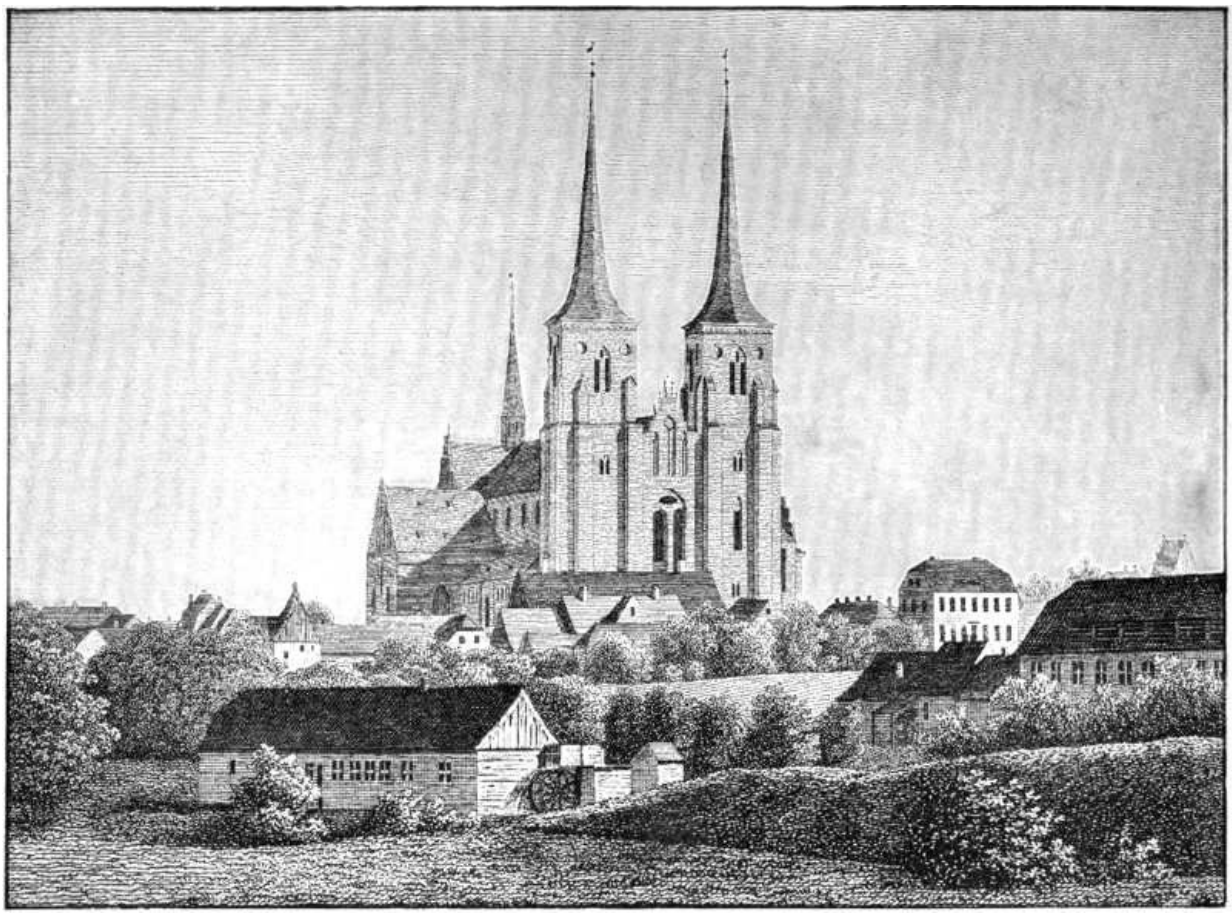
[Pg 149]

THE DIVORCE OF THE QUEEN.

1772.

The trial of the Queen began on March 14, in the great hall of the Court of Exchequer at Copenhagen. The whole of the commissioners were present, and the proceedings were vested with every possible solemnity. The court was opened by prayer, offered by the aged Bishop of Zealand, who had officiated at the Queen’s marriage five and a half years before. The judges who formed part of the commission were formally released from their oath of allegiance to the King during the trial, that they might judge of the matter between Christian and his consort in the same way as they would that between any ordinary man and wife.

Bang, a lawyer of the Court of Exchequer, undertook the King’s cause, and Uhldahl, an eloquent advocate of the Supreme Court, was appointed to defend the Queen. He was not chosen by Matilda, but by her enemies, with the object of throwing dust in the eyes of the world. A demand had been made that the Queen should receive a fair trial, and as a proof of its fairness Juliana Maria was able to point to the fact that the most eloquent advocate in Denmark had been [Pg 150] retained for the Queen’s defence. The device was clever, but transparent. Though the trial was that of the King against the Queen, neither of these exalted personages put in an appearance: the King was probably ignorant of what was going on; the Queen, who might reasonably have expected to be present at her own trial, was not given the option of attending. Nothing would have induced the Queen-Dowager to permit Matilda to return to Copenhagen, even as a prisoner. Her youth, her beauty, her misfortunes, might have hastened a reaction in her favour, and, moreover, it was even possible that she might by some means have effected a meeting with the King, and such a meeting would have been fatal to all the plans. The King would probably have forgiven her straight away, and taken her back as his reigning Queen. Therefore, the Queen-Dowager determined to keep Matilda safely shut up at Kronborg until she could remove her to a more distant fortress—that of Aalborg in Jutland, a most desolate spot. The fact that, so early as February 8, or more than a month before the trial opened, commissioners had been sent to Aalborg to inspect the castle with a view to its occupation by the young Queen, is sufficient to prove that the whole trial was a farce, since her sentence and punishment had been determined before it began.



RÖSKILDE CATHEDRAL, WHERE THE KINGS AND QUEENS OF DENMARK ARE BURIED.

The first week of the trial was occupied in preliminaries, such as taking the depositions of witnesses. These witnesses were many in number. The most prominent of them was Fräulein von [Pg 151] Eyben, who had been maid of honour to the Queen. This woman, whose virtue was by no means above suspicion, had been thrust upon the Queen by Holck after the dismissal of Madame Plessen. The Queen had never liked von Eyben, and when she became mistress of her own household, she dismissed her. That she was wise in doing so was shown by the fact that this woman now came forward with detailed accounts of the traps she had set to convict the Queen of

a guilty intimacy with Struensee. Her evidence was categorical, but it was given with so much animus that it would have been regarded as prejudiced by any unbiassed judges. The other witnesses were all of the kind common in divorce courts—servants, maids, footmen, and the like—all of whom a few dollars would buy to swear anything. Such evidence is tainted at the source, and no judge ought to be influenced by it. Matilda was always the most generous and indulgent of mistresses; yet these menials, who had been treated with every kindness, now turned and gave evidence against her—the usual kind of evidence, such as listening at doors, peeping through keyholes, strewing sand on the floor, turning out lamps or lighting them, and other details of a more particular nature, unfit to be related here. Suffice it to say that the dear secrets of the Queen's unhappy love were profaned by the coarse lips of these hirelings.

The depositions of these witnesses are still preserved in a small iron box in the secret archives of [Pg 152] Copenhagen. For many years they were missing, but about twenty years ago the box was found, and opened in the presence of the chief of the archives, the Prussian minister then at Copenhagen, and Prince Hans of Glucksburg, a brother of the present King of Denmark, Christian IX. The papers were examined and sorted, put back in the box again, and passed into the safe keeping of the secret archives, where they have since remained. The papers include not only the depositions of witnesses, but also some letters of the Queen. Yet, curiously enough, a few of these depositions were published in a pamphlet by Jenssen-Tusch[50] some years before the existence of the box was known to the authorities. Wittich afterwards repeated these quotations with great force against the Queen.[51] The great bulk of these papers have never been published, and it may be hoped never will be, for their publication would only gratify prurient curiosity. If such evidence be admitted, then all possibility of the Queen's innocence is at an end; but the question will always remain how far these witnesses, mostly drawn from the lowest class, were suborned to testify against their mistress.

[50] G. F. von Jenssen-Tusch, *Die Verschwörung gegen die Königin Caroline Mathilde und die Grafen Struensee und Brandt* (Leipzig, 1864).

[51] K. Wittich, *Struensee* (Leipzig, 1879).

On March 24, before the whole assembly of the commissioners, Bang, the King's advocate, submitted his indictment of Queen Matilda. It was a lengthy document, prepared with great care. The beginning sounds the keynote of the whole:—

[Pg 153]

> "Only the command of my King could induce me to speak against the Queen, and it is with a sense of the deepest humility, and with horror and grief, that I proceed to investigate the conduct of Queen Caroline Matilda, and submit the proofs that she has broken her marriage vow. I am compelled to indict her Majesty on these counts, because above all others the King's marriage bed must be kept pure and undefiled. As a husband the King can demand this right, and he is bound to assert it for the honour of his royal house, and the welfare of his nation. As a husband the King can demand this right given him by the marriage vow; as the head of his royal house he is bound to guard the supremacy, antiquity, honour and purity of the Danish royal family. The virtues of this exalted family are known to the whole world; but if a foreign stock were grafted on the royal stem, and the offspring of lackeys came to bear the name of the King, the antiquity of this exalted family would cease, its supremacy weaken, its respect be lost, its honour abased, and its purity sullied.... Hence his Majesty, as husband of his wife, as first of his race, and as King of his people, has appointed this commission. His personal right, the honour of his house, and the security of the nation simultaneously demand that the justice and loyalty which animate this commission should, in accordance with the law of God, the law of nature, and the law of this country, dissolve the marriage tie which binds Christian VII. to her Majesty, Caroline Matilda."

Bang then proceeded to submit his evidence. It may be divided into five heads. [Pg 154]

First and foremost, there was the confession of Struensee on February 21, a confession which he repeated subsequently on February 24 with the fullest details, and signed with his own hand.

Secondly, there was the Queen's confirmation of this document, which she signed at Kronborg on March 9. By doing so she admitted that she had broken her marriage vow, and so forfeited her rights as wife and queen.

But since it might be argued that these confessions were extorted by threat, torture or other unfair means, the evidence of other persons was submitted. Moreover, according to the law of Denmark, it was not alone sufficient that the accused persons should confess their guilt, as for divers reasons, known to themselves, they might not be speaking the truth. The advocate, therefore, proceeded to quote the evidence of a great number of witnesses, who had been previously examined by the commission. This evidence went to show that so long ago as the winter of 1769 and the beginning of 1770 the Queen's bed-chamber women and sundry lackeys formed suspicions that there was something wrong between Struensee and the Queen. They therefore spied on the Queen's movements, and set a trap for Struensee, with the result that their suspicions were confirmed. After taking counsel together, these women, "with quaking hearts and tear-laden eyes," approached the Queen, who, seeing them thus disturbed, asked [Pg 155] them kindly what was the matter. They then, instead of telling her they had spied, said there were evil rumours about the court concerning herself and Struensee, that the Queen-Dowager was aware of them, and threatened to bring the matter before the Council of State. They affected to believe that the rumours were unfounded, but wished the Queen to be more careful. The Queen apparently neither admitted nor denied anything; at that time she was ill, and Struensee

was the medical attendant sent her by the King, but she said that she would consult him about it, and perhaps if she did not see him so often the rumours would die out. But after the Queen had consulted Struensee, she changed her tone, and said to her women: “Do you know that any woman who speaks in such a way about the Queen can be punished by the loss of her tongue?”

At this point the evidence of the lady-in-waiting, von Eyben, was taken, who said that what the Queen had denied to her women she had confessed to her. She found her mistress one day weeping and in great distress, and on asking what was the matter, the Queen told her of the whole affair, confessed that she was guilty, and said that Struensee had advised her to bribe the women, which she refused to do.

Then came the deposition of Professor Berger, now under arrest, who said that, though he had no positive evidence, the intimacy between the Queen and Struensee had appeared to him most [Pg 156] suspicious. Struensee behaved towards the Queen with a familiarity that was improper, considering their relative positions.

The evidence of Brandt was also taken. Brandt declared that Struensee had confided to him the intrigue, but his confidence was unnecessary, as every word and look which passed between the Queen and Struensee showed that they were deeply attached to one another. Sometimes they quarrelled, and the Queen was very jealous of Struensee, but they always became reconciled again, and were better friends than before. Struensee’s apartments at Christiansborg, Frederiksberg and Hirschholm were so arranged that he could go from them to the Queen’s rooms unnoticed.

There remained a great deal of servants’ gossip, such as the Queen’s conversations with her women. Thus, for instance, the Queen’s words, that if a woman loved a man, she should follow the object of her devotion to the gallows or the wheel, if need be, or even down to hell itself, were repeated here with additions. One of the maids objected, and said that there were few men worthy of such sacrifices; what was a woman to do if her lover proved unfaithful? The Queen replied that in her case she would either go mad or kill herself. She envied her waiting-women their good fortune in being able to marry whom they would, and said she had been married once against her will, but if she ever had the good fortune to become a widow, she would marry the next time whom she pleased, even if he were a private person, and she had to leave the country [Pg 157] and abandon her crown in consequence. The fact that she asked for Struensee, and tried to rush to his room at the time of her arrest, was noted against her; also her tears and lamentations at Kronborg, and the inquiries she had made after him. It was also put in as evidence that she always wore a miniature of Struensee, that she took it with her to Kronborg, and kept it at night under her pillow for fear any one should take it from her. Finally, several presents that the Queen had given Struensee were put in as evidence against her, though they were of no particular value. A great deal was made out of a blue enamelled heart which the Queen had brought with her from England, and afterwards gave to Struensee as the pledge of their friendship. Having duly noted all this and a great deal more, Bang wound up his indictment by demanding a verdict in the name of the King to this effect:—

> “That in accordance with the law of Denmark set forth in the sixth section of the third book of the code of Christian V., her Majesty Caroline Matilda shall now be declared guilty of having broken her marriage vow, and that it be forthwith dissolved, so as not to prevent his Majesty the King, if he will, from contracting a new alliance.”

The indictment of Bang was neither very able nor very convincing, and, except for the Queen’s admission of Struensee’s confession, the evidence which he adduced was hardly worthy of credence. It was all of the nature of circumstantial evidence, and there was no direct proof of the [Pg 158] Queen’s guilt; on the contrary, it was in her favour that notwithstanding every effort of cajolery, bribery and threat had been employed to procure evidence against the Queen, no better result could be obtained than this hotch-potch of servants’ gossip and vague suppositions. It may be doubted whether any ordinary court of law would pass sentence on such evidence; but the judges of the unfortunate Matilda had been appointed not to execute justice, but to carry out the behests of her enemies. Their minds were already made up as to the verdict before they entered the court. Still, to maintain an appearance of fairness before the world, they announced their willingness to hear the Queen’s defence, and offered no objection when the Queen’s advocate, Uhldahl, requested an adjournment of the court for a week, so that he might have time to submit Bang’s indictment to the Queen, and consult with her concerning the defence to be offered. The court was then adjourned until April 2.

In the interval Uhldahl went to Kronborg, and took with him Bang’s indictment. He had several audiences of the Queen, who was now more mistress of her emotions, and they went through the charges against her point by point. The Queen was moved to indignation at the revelations of the treachery of those whom she had trusted, and she was aghast at the unfairness with which some of her most innocent actions were distorted into proofs of her guilt. Blinded as she had been by [Pg 159] her love for Struensee, the Queen now realised for the first time what her conduct must have looked like to the eyes of other people. Still, even admitting her lack of discretion to the fullest extent, a great deal of the evidence submitted against her was both unfair and untrue. Unfortunately, the damning testimony of her own confession remained, and not all her tears could wash out the signature which she had so incautiously written. It was therefore resolved to fall back on the strict letter of the Danish law, which did not permit the confession of an accused person to be put in as evidence, and treated it as null and void. The Queen, it is true, admitted that appearances were against her, but she pleaded that she was not guilty of the worst offence. The intimacy between herself and Struensee had been carried beyond the bounds of discretion

and propriety, considering their relative positions, but it was not wicked. For the rest, she threw herself upon the mercy of the King, who in any case would have to confirm the sentence of her judges. The Queen's forlorn condition, her youth, her tears, her prayers, her evident goodness of heart, moved even her advocate to pity, prejudiced though he was against her, and hired for the purpose of conniving at her destruction. He drew up his defence with her, and threw into the work so much heart that when he left his client it became a very different document to that which he had contemplated at first.

On Uhldahl's return to Copenhagen the second session was held on April 2, and the advocate then submitted his defence.[52] [Pg 160]

[52] The original draft of Uhldahl's defence of Queen Matilda is still among the heirlooms of the Uhldahl family. A copy of this celebrated document, in Danish, is preserved in the royal archives in Copenhagen. The above is a translation of that copy.

"It is with unfeigned emotion that I rise to fulfil the duty which the well-being of the Queen as well as the command of the King have imposed upon me.

"The rank of these exalted personages, the importance and far-reaching consequences of this trial, the intense desire I have to do my duty, and the fear that I may not be able to do it as I wish, add to my anxiety, and justify my regret at seeing the Queen compelled to lay aside her purple, come down from her throne, and, like the meanest of women, seek the protection of the law. Could any more affecting illustration of the insecurity of human happiness possibly be imagined? She in whose veins flows the blood of so many kings is suspected of having dishonoured her illustrious ancestry. She, who gave her lord the King her hand and heart, stands accused by the man who at that time swore to be her protector. She who, when she came among us, by the unanimous verdict of the nation, was regarded as the mother of her people, is now tried by the men who in that day would have shed their blood in her defence. Thus unhappy is Queen Caroline Matilda, and she alone among all the queens of Denmark. In the bloom of her youth, and dowered with every gift to ensure happiness, she finds herself to-day [Pg 161] standing on the brink of an abyss, down which her honour, her dignity, her peace of mind, may be cast. In one day she may lose her husband, her children and her throne, and yet be compelled to survive the loss. Suspected, accused, in danger of living a life of wretchedness for long years to come—can anything be more heart-rending than her position? Thus the Queen regards her situation, and thus she depicted it to me when I had the honour of waiting upon her, in the following words:—

"'I should utterly despair had not my intentions been always for the welfare of the King and the country. If I have possibly acted incautiously, my youth, my sex and my rank must plead in my favour. I never believed myself exposed to suspicion, and, even though my confession appears to confirm my guilt, I know myself to be perfectly innocent. I understand that the law requires me to be tried: my consort has granted me this much; I hope he will also, through the mouth of his judges, acknowledge that I have not made myself unworthy of him.'

"I repeat her Majesty's words exactly as she uttered them. How I wish that I could reproduce the emotion with which they were spoken—the frankness that carried conviction, the trembling voice which pleaded for pity! This last, indeed, no one can refuse her without outraging every sentiment of humanity.

"Chief among the charges brought against the Queen is that she has been false to the [Pg 162] vows and duties imposed upon her by her marriage with the King her husband. It has been well urged that the King's bed must remain unsullied in the interests of his own honour, and the honour and prosperity of his country. These truths all will admit, but they are so far from affecting the Queen that she demands the strictest investigation; she believes that she has not acted contrary to them. The more exalted her duties, the more exacting her obligations, the more terrible are the consequences of any infraction of them. The more familiar the two parties were, the clearer must be the evidence that the Queen has really committed a sin. How will the honour of the King and his royal family be better promoted—by proving the Queen guilty, or by showing her innocence? Has the Queen never known and fulfilled what she owed to herself, her husband and his people? Is it not admitted that, up to the time, at all events, when the accusations begin, she had proved herself a tender mother, an affectionate wife, and a worthy Queen? Can it be credited that her Majesty could so easily have forgotten herself? Can it be that she, who up to that day sought delight in modesty, virtue, respect of the King, and affection of the country, banished all these noble feelings from her heart in a single moment?

"Advocate Bang in the King's name submitted three varieties of proofs against the Queen—Count Struensee's confession, her Majesty's statement, and (as he knew that [Pg 163] neither of these was sufficient) the evidence of witnesses.

"Undoubtedly Count Struensee on February 21 and 24, as the documents show, made statements of the most insulting nature against her Majesty. He forgot the reverence due to his Queen, and through unfounded alarm, or confusion of mind, or the hope of saving himself by implicating the Queen in his affair, or for other reasons, he made these absurd allegations, which can only injure himself. For what belief can be given to the statement that he, if the Queen thought him worthy of her confidence, should have

been so daring as to abuse it in so scandalous a manner, or that the Queen would have tolerated it? The honour of a private person, much more that of a queen, could not be affected by such a statement. And how improbable it is that such a state of affairs should have gone on at court for two whole years under the nose of the King, and under the eyes of so many spies. The accusation is made by a prisoner not on his oath, and is utterly destitute of probability.

"Advocate Bang admits that Count Struensee's declaration is in itself no evidence against the Queen. Hence he tries to confirm it, partly by the acknowledgment which the Queen made on March 9 as to the correctness of Struensee's declaration, partly through her admission that she had broken her marriage vows, and hence lost her marriage rights. This he wishes to be regarded as proof. Certainly, in all civil causes confession is the most complete form of proof, but in criminal actions, and those such [Pg 164] as we are now trying, the law of Denmark utterly rejects this evidence when it says: 'It is not sufficient that the accused person should herself confess it, but the accuser must legally bring the accused before the court, and properly prove the offence'.

"Other proofs therefore are necessary, and since it is the King's wish that the law should be strictly followed in this action, and judgment be founded on the evidence submitted, it follows that the Queen must have a claim to this benefit as much as the meanest of her subjects....[53]

[53] Here follows an argument to show that the Queen could not be convicted on her own confession, or on the confession of Struensee, as the Danish code demanded that the evidence must be given by two persons, who agreed as to the facts as well as the motives.

"I now pass to the third class of proofs, which consist of the evidence of persons summoned by the prosecution as witnesses. Her Majesty has commanded me to declare that she does not desire them to be recalled and examined by me, but I have her commands to investigate the nature of this evidence, and what it goes to prove.

"It is worthy of note that not one of the witnesses examined alleges any other foundation for his, or her, first suspicion against the Queen than common gossip ['town-scandal'] which they had heard. It was not until this gossip became universal that it was mentioned to the Queen. As most of the witnesses were constantly about the Queen's person, and yet found no reason for believing anything wrong in her [Pg 165] intercourse with Struensee, it is clear that the conduct of the Queen must have been irreproachable up to this time. Every one knows that rumour is a lying jade; scandal is often founded on nothing, and through its propagation alone acquires credibility. But however false the slander may be, it leaves behind it, after once being uttered, a suspicion, which places the conduct of the person slandered in a new and different light. Words and actions before regarded as innocent are henceforth seriously weighed, and if anything equivocal is detected, the slander is regarded as confirmed. Thus it is with the witnesses in this case, for though, prior to hearing the rumour, they did not suspect the Queen, no sooner had they heard it than they imagined evidence against her at every point."

Uhldahl then proceeded to subject the evidence of the witnesses to analysis, with a view of showing how contradictory and worthless most of it was.

Summing up all this testimony, Uhldahl said: "If we now ask if there are any *facts* in the evidence of the witnesses to prove that an extreme and improper intimacy existed between the Queen and Struensee, the answer must be: 'There are none.' That the Queen showed the Count marks of favour and confidence cannot be denied, but no one ever saw or heard that these went beyond the limits of honour. No witness is able to say positively that the Queen has broken the vows she made to her consort, nor can any adduce a single fact which would prove the certainty of her guilt. Indeed, one of the [Pg 166] witnesses on whom the prosecution most relies, the maid Bruhn, is constrained to admit 'that she never witnessed any impropriety on the part of the Queen'. Regarded generally, all the witnesses appeal to their own suppositions. They say they *thought* that Struensee was a long time with the Queen, because they were not summoned: they *imagined* that the Queen and Struensee were guilty because they were on familiar terms. But these conjectures had their origin in rumour, and in the power which rumour possesses to stimulate the imagination. It is chiefly the favour shown by her Majesty to Count Struensee that roused the suspicions of witnesses, and caused them to draw such conclusions. It is said that he was constantly about the Queen, and in her company. But was he not also about the King? And must not the Queen's confidence in him necessarily result from the confidence with which the King honoured him? As her justification of this, the Queen appeals to her consort's action, and points to the striking proofs of the King's favour to Struensee—the offices with which the King entrusted him, and the rank to which the King raised him. There can be no doubt that he sought to acquire the Queen's confidence in the same way as he had gained the King's. The loyalty which he always showed to the King, the attention he paid to the Queen when she was ill, the devotion which he seemed to entertain for them both, maintained an uninterrupted harmony between their Majesties. Above all else, the King's will was law [Pg 167] to the Queen, and this above all else made her believe that she could freely give

Struensee her confidence without danger. His offices as Secretary to the Queen, and Privy Cabinet Minister to the King, required his constant presence. Hence it is not surprising that he acquired a greater share of the Queen's favour than any other man....

"I pass over all the rest of the evidence as things which are partly unimportant, partly irrelevant, or too improper to be answered. It is sufficient to say that no proof that her Majesty has broken her marriage vow can be derived from any of these witnesses, if we examine their evidence singly. The law requires the truthful evidence of witnesses, not all kinds of self-invented conclusions. If it were otherwise, her Majesty's rank and dignity, which ought to shield her from such danger, would be the very things to cause her ruin.

"I hope that I have now proved the innocence of the Queen. Her Majesty assumes that her consort only desires her justification, and she feels assured of the discretion and impartiality of her judges. Therefore she awaits confidently the decision demanded by her honour, the King's dignity, and the welfare of the land. I venture in her Majesty's name to submit—

"That her Majesty Queen Caroline Matilda be acquitted from his Majesty the King's accusation in this matter."

Uhldahl's defence was clever and ingenious, but it lacked the stamp of sincerity which carries conviction. His omission to cross-examine the witnesses, though he ascribes this to the wish of [Pg 168] the Queen (who could have had no voice in the matter, and was entirely in the hands of her counsel), was the course probably dictated by her enemies. If these witnesses had been taken singly, and subjected to a searching cross-examination, they would probably have contradicted each other, and broken down one by one. Moreover, Uhldahl was fighting for the Queen with one arm tied behind his back. In any divorce court, if a husband petitions against his wife, his conduct, as well as hers, is liable to investigation, and if it can be shown that he is as guilty, or guiltier, than she, or that he has connived at her indiscretion, his petition falls to the ground. But this line of defence was forbidden to Uhldahl: he dared not say a word against the King, though he could have shown that the King had from the first been guilty of the grossest infidelity and cruelty towards his Queen—that he had outraged her every sentiment of religion and virtue, that he had often told her to do as she pleased, that he had repeatedly thrust temptation in her way, and when at last she yielded, or seemed to yield, to it, he had not only acquiesced in this condition of things, but at first, at any rate, actively encouraged and abetted it. These facts—and they were all of them notorious, and perfectly well known to the Queen's judges and accusers—were not allowed to be pleaded in her favour.

Reverdil, who had an intimate knowledge of the facts, who had been with the King when Matilda [Pg 169] first came to Denmark, who had been dismissed from court because he protested against the insults heaped upon her, who had been recalled three years later, when the intimacy between the Queen and Struensee was at its height, and who, much though he pitied her, believed her to be guilty, has supplied the arguments in her favour which were omitted by Uhldahl. He thus arraigns the King:—

"Is it not true, Sir, that from the very day of your marriage up to the moment when the faction, now dominant, seized on you and your ministers some weeks ago, you had not the slightest regard for the marriage tie, and all this time you had declared to the Queen that you dispensed with her fidelity? Have you not invited all your successive favourites to tempt her? [*a lui faire la cour*]. Have you not said and proved in a thousand ways that her affection was wearisome to you, and that your greatest misery was to perform your duties to her? Your commissioners have had the effrontery to ask the Queen and Struensee who were their accomplices. In prison and in irons the accused have had the generosity to be silent for your sake; but what they have not done your conscience itself must do, and proclaim to you that you have been her real seducer.

"Do you remember, Sir, the moment when this Princess, whom they wish to make you condemn to-day, was confided to your love and generosity? The English sent her without any adviser, without a single companion to your shores. Little more than a [Pg 170] child, she had all the grace, the innocence and the *naïveté* of childhood, while her mind was more enlightened and mature than you could have expected; you were astonished at it. All hearts went out to meet her; her affability and kindness captivated all classes of the nation. When you were wicked enough to give yourself up to a frivolous and reckless favourite [Holck], and to vile companions who led you into libertinism, she found herself neglected, and you showed yourself more than indifferent to her. She loved you; she was silent, and maintained her serenity in public; she only wept in private with her chief lady [Madame de Plessen], whom you, yourself, had appointed as her *confidante*. Before long you grudged her even this poor consolation, and the lady, whose only crime was that her conduct and principles were too correct for your taste, was dismissed with the most signal marks of disgrace. Madame von der Lühe, who took her place, was the sister of your favourite. No doubt you supposed that this lady would show as much levity, and have as few principles, as her brother; but she disappointed your expectations. Therefore, without actually disgracing her, you replaced her by ladies whose reputation was the most equivocal in the kingdom. What more could the most consummate corrupter have done? This very man, with whom the Queen is accused for having shown weakness, you, yourself, forced upon her after she had first

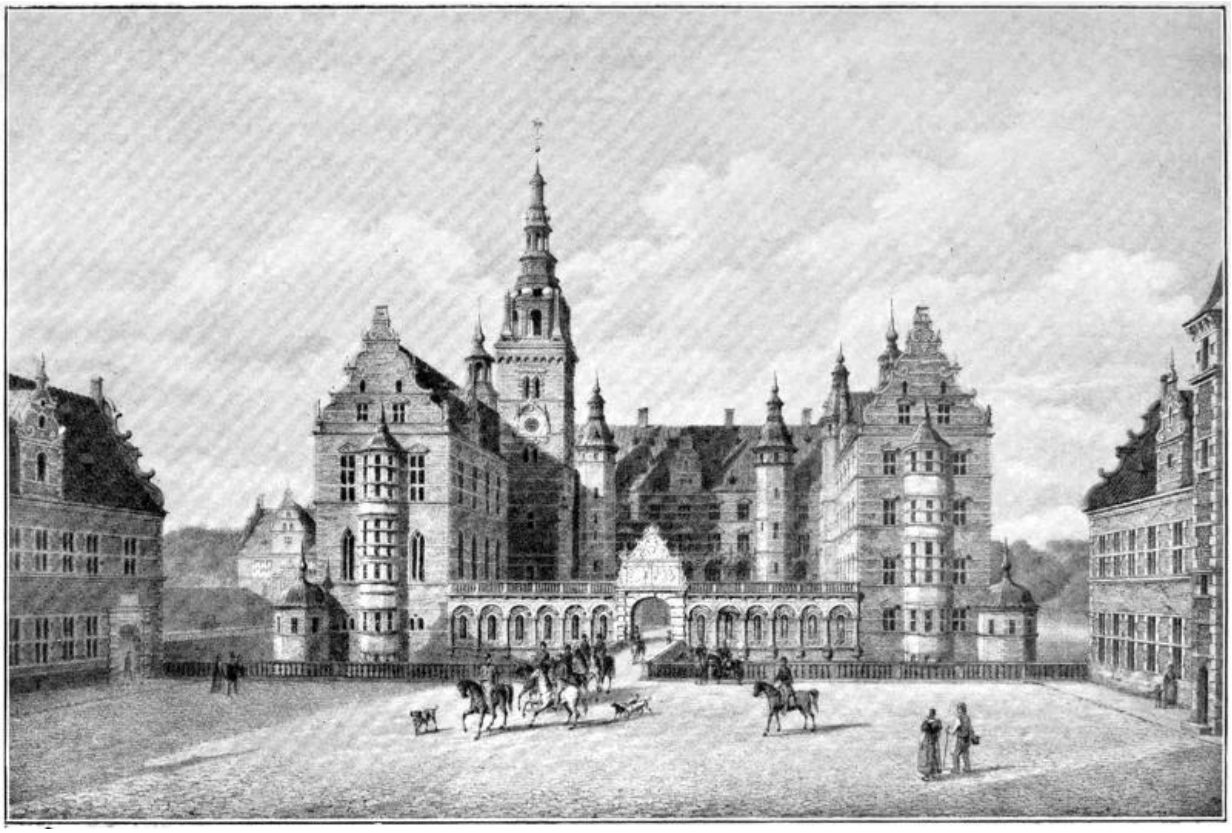
repulsed him. It was in the hope of avoiding the *tracasseries* with which your favourites annoyed her that she was at last induced to *lier* herself with the man who offered his services to bring you nearer her. It was you who broke down all the barriers which separated her from him, who diminished the distance between them, who desired to bring about what to-day is called your 'dishonour,' who excused, nay, tolerated, this *liaison*, and who, up to January 17 last, even talked of it as a good joke. [Pg 171]

"Your cause is inseparable from that of your wife, and even though the whole world should condemn her, you ought, if not from natural equity, at least from self-respect, to revoke that condemnation."[54]

[54] *Mémoires de Reverdil*, pp. 403-406.

Uhldahl made his defence on April 2. The court then adjourned, and after taking four days to consider the verdict, delivered judgment. The verdict was to the effect that Queen Matilda had been found guilty of having broken her marriage vow, and the marriage between her and King Christian VII. was therefore dissolved, and the King was free to make another alliance, if it should seem good to him. The Queen's sentence would depend upon the King's pleasure. The court at the same time declared that the Princess Louise Augusta was legitimate, and was entitled to all the honours due to the daughter of the King. Thus the verdict was contradictory, for if the Queen were guilty with Struensee, it followed almost surely (though not necessarily for certain) that the Princess was not legitimate, for the intimacy between the Queen and Struensee was declared by the evidence, upon which the judges pretended to found their verdict, to have begun more than a year before the birth of the Princess, and to have gone on continuously ever since. [Pg 172]

The exact reasons which led to this extraordinary verdict being promulgated will probably never be known, but during the four days that elapsed between Uhldahl's defence and the judgment, violent disputes and intrigues were being waged at the Christiansborg Palace. According to some, the Queen-Dowager not only fiercely insisted upon the divorce, but also the bastardising of both the Queen's children (though why the Crown Prince it is difficult to say), and so making way for the succession of her son to the throne, but was prevented from having her way by the remonstrances of Guldberg. According to others, it was Rantzau and Osten who wished these drastic measures, and Juliana Maria who interposed on behalf of the Queen's children. Be this as it may, it is certain that Matilda's enemies were divided in their opinions; and even at this early hour there seems to have been a slight reaction in favour of the young Queen. The situation was also complicated by the interference of Keith, who, though he had received no instructions to prevent the divorce of the Queen, yet, now that the trial was over, and had shown itself to be manifestly unfair, entered vigorous protests on behalf of the King of England's sister—protests which he backed by menaces. Several of the Queen-Dowager's advisers took fright; perhaps, too, they had some secret pity for the young Queen, for they urged that it was not wise to enrage the King of England too far. The result was a compromise: the Queen was declared to be guilty, but her daughter was declared to be legitimate. [Pg 173]



THE GREAT COURT OF FREDERIKSBORG PALACE.
From a Painting by Heinrich Hansen.

Doubtless in consequence of the remonstrances of the English envoy, the proceedings of the court were kept secret, and the sentence of divorce was not published—at least, not through the medium of the press. But a royal rescript was sent to the governors of the provinces and the viceroy of the duchies, in which the King stated that he had repudiated his Queen after a solemn inquiry, in order to vindicate the honour of his house, and from motives of public welfare. The verdict was also communicated to the foreign envoys for transmission to their various courts. This was done in a theatrical manner. The court assumed mourning, and the *corps diplomatique* were summoned to the Christiansborg Palace and proceeded thither, also in mourning. But the King did not appear. The Grand Chamberlain of the court announced to them the verdict, and said that the King had no longer a consort, and there was no longer a Queen. At the same time an order was issued to omit the Queen's name from the public prayers. Henceforth she was to be considered as dead in law.

Uhldahl saw the Queen the day after the decision of the court, and told her of the judgment. According to him she merely answered: "I thought as much. But what will become of Struensee?" And when he replied that Struensee would certainly be sentenced to death, "she cried and shook [Pg 174] all over". She bewailed the fact that it was she who was the cause of his misfortunes. "The Queen would have sacrificed everything to save him; she thought nothing of herself." Despite his base confession, which she was forced at last to believe he had made, she forgave him everything. Several times she bade Uhldahl to tell Struensee that she forgave him. "When you see him," she said, "tell him that I am not angry with him for the wrong he has done me."[55] Her love was boundless.

[55] *Christian VII. og Caroline Mathilde*, by Chr. Blangstrup, Copenhagen.

The unfortunate Matilda was formally acquainted with the sentence of divorce on April 9, when Baron Juell-Wind, one of her judges, went to Kronborg by order of the Council of State, and read to the Queen the verdict of the court in the presence of the commandant of Kronborg. The Queen, who had been prepared by Uhldahl, heard the sentence without emotion, but was greatly distressed at the thought that it might involve separation from her child. She did not ask, and did not seem to care, what her fate would be, but she was informed that it would depend upon the King's pleasure.

Her punishment indeed was still under debate, and was being discussed as hotly at the Christiansborg Palace as the verdict of divorce had been. The Queen had been unfaithful to the King's bed; therefore she had been found guilty of high treason; therefore, urged some, she was [Pg 175] worthy of death. The other alternative was perpetual imprisonment, and this seems to have been seriously considered, for the preparations at the fortress of Aalborg—a storm-beaten town at the extreme edge of Jutland—were pushed on with all speed. In theory, the last three months Matilda had been residing at one of her husband's country palaces, for Kronborg was a royal palace as well as a fortress; she was now to be stripped of every appurtenance of her rank, and sent to Aalborg. Once there she would probably have died mysteriously.

But Keith, who had interfered to prevent the Queen from being publicly disgraced, now interfered again, with even more determination, to mitigate her punishment. He could not prevent the divorce, but he could prevent the punishment. The King, the Grand Chamberlain had informed the foreign ministers, had no longer a consort; Denmark had no longer a Queen; Matilda was dead in law. This declaration gave Keith his opportunity. Though, he argued, it might please the King of Denmark to declare that Matilda was no longer his wife or his queen, it must be remembered that she was still a princess of Great Britain, and the sister of the King of England. Since the King, her consort, had repudiated her, it followed that the King, her brother, became her guardian, and her interests and future welfare were his care. By the sentence of divorce she had passed entirely out of the jurisdiction of Denmark to that of her native country; she became an English subject, and as an English subject was free as air. Osten shuffled and [Pg 176] changed his ground from day to day, but Keith became more and more insistent, and his tone grew more and more menacing. He sent home the most urgent despatches, describing the unfairness of the Queen's trial, and the danger she was in through the malice of her enemies. In default of particular instructions, he could do nothing but threaten in general terms; but his intervention secured a respite. The Queen remained at Kronborg; her punishment was still undecided, and her fate uncertain.

CHAPTER IX.

[Pg 177]

THE TRIALS OF STRUENSEE AND BRANDT.

1772.

The Queen's case being ended, it was resolved to proceed without delay against the other prisoners, and chief among these were Struensee and Brandt. Struensee was tried first. The day of his trial was originally fixed for April 10, the day after the sentence of her divorce had been communicated to the Queen at Kronborg, but, as the advocate appointed to prosecute Struensee was not quite ready with his brief, the trial was deferred for eleven days.

Struensee had now been in prison more than three months, and had ample time for reflection. Seven weeks had passed since his shameful confession compromising the Queen, but he made no sign of recanting it; on the contrary, he imagined that it would tell in his favour. Struensee was now a broken man; the signs of premature decay, which first made themselves manifest in the days of his prosperity, had, since his imprisonment, developed with great rapidity. He had shown himself unable to bear prosperity; he was even less able to cope with adversity. Every now and then a flash of the old Struensee would assert itself, but for the most part he was a feeble [Pg 178] creature who brooded day after day in his dungeon, and bore but little resemblance to the once imperious minister. All Struensee's thoughts were now concentrated on a craven desire for life—life at any cost—and to this end he offered up in sacrifice not only the woman who had done everything for him, but all the principles and ideals which had guided him throughout his career.

The Queen-Dowager, who had affected so much concern for the welfare of Queen Matilda's soul, was equally interested in the soul of Struensee. Perhaps she thought that spiritual terrors might induce him to amplify his already too detailed confession. From the first days of his imprisonment Struensee had been urged to see a clergyman, but had always refused. After his confession of adultery with Matilda, which was taken as a sign of grace, the Queen-Dowager insisted that he should receive a ghostly counsellor, even against his will. To that end she appointed Dr. Münter as the fittest instrument to effect Struensee's conversion. The choice of Dr. Münter was of course designed. He was the most fanatical and violent of all the preachers in Copenhagen, and had shown himself a bitter opponent of Struensee and the Queen. He had denounced them from the pulpit in the days of their prosperity, and from the same sanctuary he had savagely gloated over them in the days of their ruin. It was a refinement of cruelty, therefore, to send him, of all others, to the miserable prisoner now.

Münter entered upon his task with alacrity. He took a professional pride in his work, and [Pg 179] apparently felt much as a doctor would feel who had before him a difficult case; if he could effect a cure, it would be a great triumph for him. But, apart from this, there is no doubt that Münter was perfectly sincere. By nature a bigot, and by education narrow-minded, he had all the thoroughness born of that same narrowness. To him it was all-important that he should save Struensee's soul: the greater the sinner, the greater would be his salvation. Therefore, Münter set to work to make Struensee confess everything, heedless, or oblivious, of the fact that, while he was labouring to effect the miserable man's conversion, he was (by repeating his confessions) helping his enemies to complete his ruin.[56]

[56] Münter wrote a full and particular account of his efforts, entitled, *Narrative of the Conversion and Death of Count Struensee*, by Dr. Münter. This book was translated into the English by the Rev. Thomas Rennell: Rivingtons, 1824. It contains long and (to me) not very edifying conversations on religion which are alleged to have taken place between Struensee and the divine. But since these are matters on which people take different views, it is only fair to say that Sir James Mackintosh awards the *Narrative* high praise as a "perfect model of the manner in which a person circumstanced like Struensee ought to be treated by a kind and considerate minister of religion" (*Misc. Works*, vol. ii.). To support this view he suggests that "as Dr. Münter's *Narrative* was published under the eye of the Queen's oppressors, they might have caused the confessions of Struensee to be inserted in it by their own agents without the consent, perhaps without the knowledge, of Münter". But even he is fain to admit that the "internal evidence" does not favour this preposterous hypothesis. The confessions extorted by Münter from Struensee were used not only against the wretched man, but to the prejudice of the Queen.

Münter paid his first visit to Struensee on March 1. The prisoner, who had been told that he must [Pg 180] see the man, whom he had always regarded as his enemy, did so under protest, and received the preacher in gloomy silence, and with a look that showed his contempt. But Münter—we are quoting his own version of the interview—so far from overwhelming the prisoner with reproaches or exhortations, greeted him in a cordial and sympathetic manner, and told him that he wished to make his visits both pleasant and useful. Struensee, who had not seen a friendly face for months, was disarmed by Münter's manner, and offered him his hand. The latter then opened the conversation by saying that he hoped if he said anything displeasing to Struensee by mistake the latter would overlook it. "Oh, you may say what you please," answered the prisoner indifferently. Münter then began his exhortations with the warning: "If you desire to receive comfort from me, your only friend on earth, do not hug that mistaken idea of dying like a philosophic hero." Struensee answered, not very truthfully: "In all my adversities I have shown firmness of mind, and therefore I hope I shall not die like a hypocrite." Then followed a long and animated conversation, in which Münter bore the leading part. Struensee now and then ventured to advance arguments which were knocked down like ninepins by the nimble divine. Struensee, though the son of a clergyman, had in his youth become a freethinker, and had always remained so. He was saturated with German rationalism, and by every act and utterance had shown

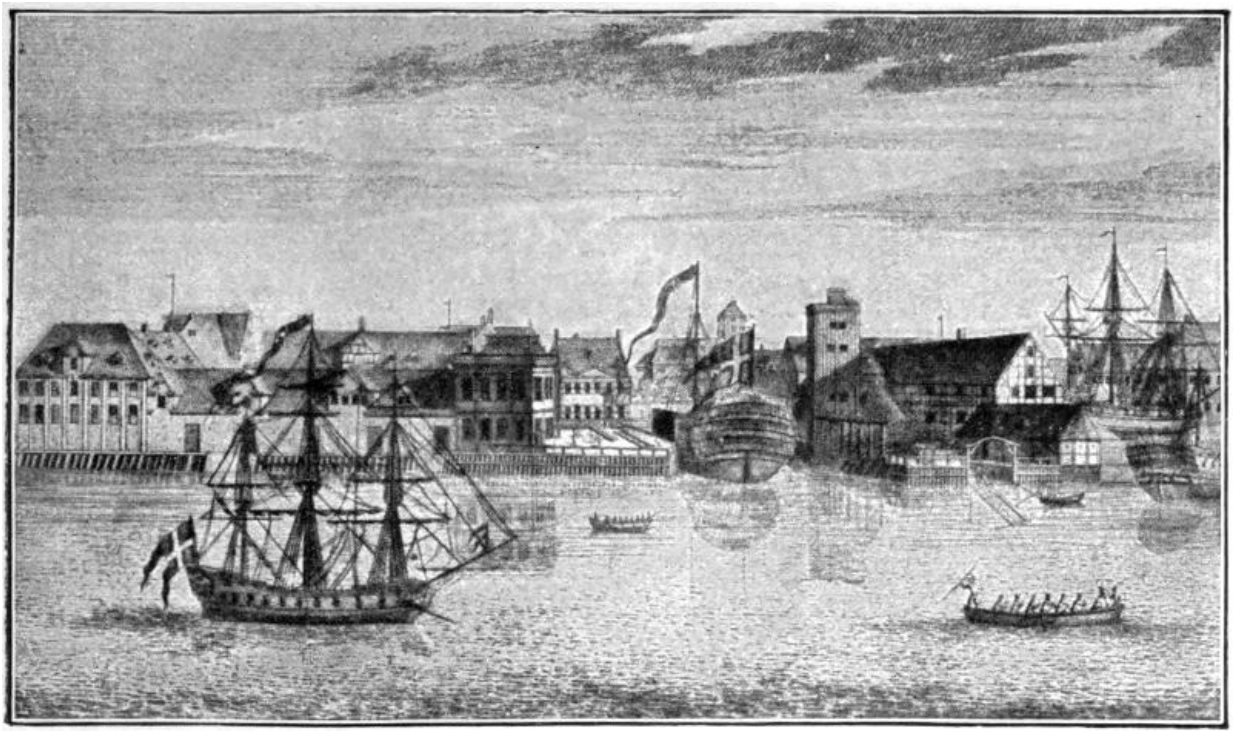
himself to be a confirmed unbeliever in Christianity. It is therefore very unlikely that a man of Struensee's calibre would be convinced by such arguments as Münter adduced—at least, by those which he states he adduced in his book.[57] But Struensee clung to life; he knew that Münter was a power in the land, and he thought that, if he allowed him to effect his conversion, he would make a friend who would probably save him from death. In this first conversation he admitted that he was afraid of death: "He wished to live, even though it were with less happiness than he now enjoyed in his prison." But he would not seem to yield all at once. "My views, which are opposed to yours, are so strongly woven into my mind; I have so many arguments in favour of them; I have made so many observations from physic and anatomy that confirm them, that I think it will be impossible for me to renounce my principles. This, however, I promise: I will not wilfully oppose your efforts to enlighten me, but rather wish, as far as lies in my power, to agree with you." [Pg 181]

[57] I should be the last to say that such changes are not possible. I only wish to suggest that in Struensee's case the motives which led him to yield to Münter's arguments were not sincere.

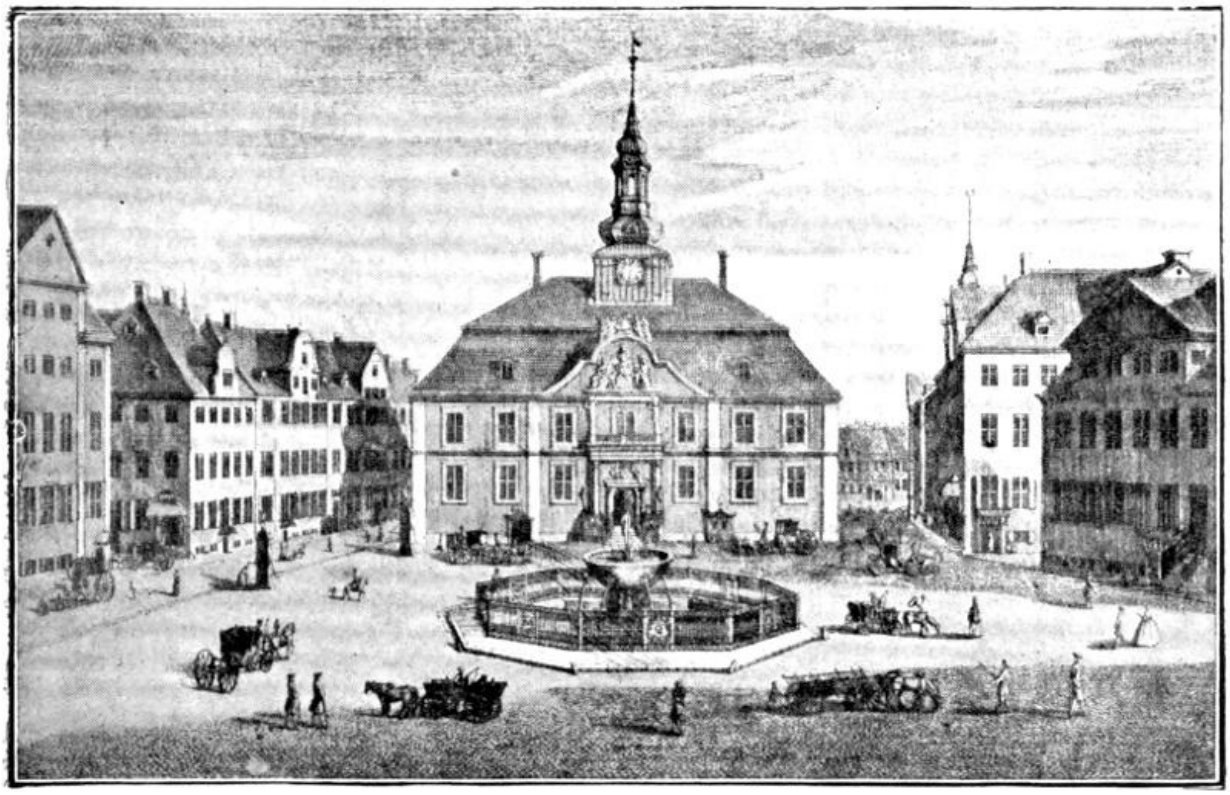
On the second visit Struensee showed himself to be a little more yielding, though he said his mind was neither composed nor serene enough to examine into the nature of Münter's arguments. Struensee wept when he thought of the trouble he had brought upon his friends; he had no tears for the woman whom he had betrayed. Münter exhorted him to acknowledge his errors and crimes, and search his former life, in order to qualify himself for God's mercy. "God," said Münter, "has given you an uncommon understanding, and, I believe, a good natural disposition of heart, but through voluptuousness, ambition and levity you have corrupted yourself." Struensee was flattered by this view of his character, and admitted unctuously that voluptuousness had been his chief passion, and had contributed most to his moral depravity. After seven conferences Münter gave Struensee a letter from his father, which he had for some time carried in his pocket, awaiting a favourable opportunity to deliver. The letter was a long and affecting one. It assumed Struensee's guilt as a matter of no doubt, and worthy of the worst punishment; it lamented that he had not remained a doctor—that his ambition had led him into all these crimes: now nothing would bring his afflicted parents comfort but the knowledge of his conversion. This letter affected Struensee much, and so did another one from his mother, written in the same strain. [Pg 182]

There is no need to trace this process step by step. Suffice it to say that after twenty-one days of exhortation, when his trial was drawing near, Struensee was so far converted as to declare to Münter: "I should be guilty of the greatest folly if I did not embrace Christianity with joy, when its arguments are so convincing, and when it breathes such a spirit of general benevolence. Its effects on my heart are too strong"—and so forth. In the days that followed Struensee often expatiated on the advantages of the Christian religion, and even advised Münter as to the best way of spreading the truths of Christianity among the people. He suggested the distribution of tracts, which does not seem very novel. So zealous was he that he even drew up, in consultation with Münter, a long description of his conversion. The document shows undoubted signs that the man's brain had weakened; it is in parts so confused as to be almost unintelligible. But such as it was, it sufficed for Münter, who was overjoyed at the thought that he had snatched this brand from the burning. Yet Struensee, though he expressed repentance for his sins, showed neither repentance nor remorse for his most grievous one—his betrayal of the woman to whom he owed everything. Recantation of this base treachery would have done more to rehabilitate Struensee in the eyes of the world than any number of maudlin confessions detailing his conversion, and it would have been quite as effective for the object which, it is to be feared, the newly-made convert had in view. Struensee's conversion availed nothing with his merciless enemies; on the contrary, his confessions of weakness and guilt made their task easier. Münter's good-will also availed him nothing; the fanatical divine was only interested in saving his soul; he cared nothing what became of his body. Thus the wretched criminal sacrificed both his Queen and his convictions, and in either case the sacrifice was vain. [Pg 183]

Struensee's trial began on April 21, and Wivet, who had received the King's orders to prosecute him, opened his indictment in a speech of almost incredible coarseness and ferocity. In his attack, Wivet exceeded the bounds of common decency, though there is no doubt that he voiced the malevolent hatred which was felt against Struensee, not only in the breasts of his judges, but among all classes in the kingdom. Apart from his undoubted offences, which surely were heavy enough, Wivet twitted Struensee with his low birth, his complaisance as a doctor, his ignorance of the Danish language, his errors in etiquette, his fondness for eating and drinking, his corpulence, his unbelieving views, and other peculiarities, forgetting that invective of this kind proved nothing. [Pg 184]



THE DOCKS, COPENHAGEN, *TEMP.* 1770.



THE MARKET PLACE AND TOWN HALL, COPENHAGEN, *TEMP.* 1770.

The substance of the accusation against Struensee was catalogued under nine heads.

First: His adultery with the Queen. This was based almost wholly on Struensee's own confession and its confirmation by the Queen, and thus the very deed which Struensee signed in the hope of saving his life was brought forward as the head and front of the evidence against him. Fräulein von Eyben's deposition, and Brandt's and Berger's depositions were also read, but the evidence of the other witnesses in the Queen's divorce was not put forward at all.

With reference to the testimony of Fräulein von Eyben, the advocate said he produced it "not in order to prove what is already sufficiently proved, but only to point out how Struensee strove always to be present at places when there was an opportunity for him to obtain what he desired, and how the indifference with which he was at first regarded by the Person [the Queen] whose confidence he afterwards gained, proves that it was not he who was tempted, but that his superhuman impudence, his bold, crafty and villainous conduct were so powerful that he at last obtained that which virtue and education would never otherwise have granted, and therefore he is the more criminal because he effected the ruin of another in order to gain honour himself". This shows what even the Queen's enemies thought of Struensee's baseness in trying to shield himself behind the pitiful plea that the Queen tempted him. His prosecutors did quite

[Pg 185]

right in scouting such a plea, which, so far from extenuating him, only added to his infamy.

Secondly: Struensee's complicity in Brandt's ill-treatment of the King.

Thirdly: The harshness with which he had treated the Crown Prince, "so that it seems as if it had been his sole intention to remove the Crown Prince from the world, or at least to bring him up so that he would be incapable of reigning."

Fourthly: His usurpation of the royal authority by issuing decrees instead of the King, and attaching his own signature to these decrees.

Fifthly: His suppression and dismissal of the Guards, which was declared to be without the consent of the King.

Sixthly: His peculations from the Treasury. It was stated that Struensee had not only taken large sums of money for himself, but for his brother, for Falckenskjold, for the Countess Holstein, for the Queen, and for Brandt. The Queen's grant from the Treasury was 10,000 dollars, not a very large sum, and one to which she was surely entitled, as the grant was signed by the King. But the same paper contained grants of money to Brandt, Struensee and Falckenskjold—a grant of 60,000 to Brandt, 60,000 to Struensee and 2,000 to Falckenskjold, a total of 122,000 dollars. It was said that the document which the King signed contained only a grant of 10,000 dollars to the Queen, and 6,000 each to Brandt and Struensee; but Struensee added a nought to the donations to himself and Brandt, and wrote in 2,000 dollars for Falckenskjold, so that he tampered with the document to the extent of forgery. The King now protested that he had never made such a grant. [Pg 186]

Seventhly: Struensee had sold, with the Queen's consent, a "bouquet" of precious stones, although this was one of the crown jewels and an heirloom.

Eighthly: He had given orders that all letters addressed to the King should be brought to him, and he opened them, and thus kept the King in ignorance of what was going on.

Ninthly: He had so arranged the military in Copenhagen in the month of December that everything pointed to hostile intentions on his part, probably directed against the King and the people.

These were the principal charges brought against Struensee by Wivet; but, the advocate said: "To reckon up all the crimes committed by him would be a useless task, the more so when we reflect that the accused has only one head, and that, when that is lost by one of these crimes, to enumerate the other offences would be superfluous." He therefore demanded that Struensee should be found guilty of high treason, and suffer death with ignominy. [Pg 187]

The next day Uhldahl, who had defended the Queen, also undertook the defence of Struensee. The defence was lukewarm—so lukewarm that it could hardly be called a defence at all. The only time when Uhldahl waxed eloquent was when he reproved Wivet for his brutal attacks on the accused, and here it is probable that professional jealousy had to do with his warmth, rather than interest in his client. The chief count in the indictment against Struensee—his alleged adultery with the Queen—Uhldahl kept to the last, and here he offered no defence, for the prisoner had recanted in nowise his confession, but on the contrary made it the ground of a craven cry for mercy. To quote Uhldahl:—

"He throws himself at his Majesty's feet, and implores his mercy for the crime against his Majesty's person [adultery with the Queen] first maintained by the Fiscal-General Wivet, but till now unalluded to by him. It is the only thing in which he knows he has consciously sinned against his King, but he confesses with contrition that this crime is too great for him to expect forgiveness of it. If, however, regard for human weakness, a truly penitent feeling of his error, the deepest grief at it, the tears with which he laments it, and the prayers which he devotes to the welfare of the King and his royal family, deserve any compassion, he will not be found unworthy of it. In all the other charges made against him, he believes that the law and his innocence will defend him, and for this reason he can expect an acquittal, but for the first point (which he admits) he seeks refuge in the King's mercy alone." [Pg 188]

Thus it will be seen, even in his advocate's defence, Struensee, though denying all the other charges against him, reaffirmed his adultery with the Queen, and on the strength of that admission threw himself on the King's mercy. The only satisfactory thing about this sordid business is that mercy was not granted to him.

Wivet replied, but Uhldahl waived his right of answering him again, and thus saying the last word in favour of the prisoner. The two advocates had in fact played into each other's hands; the first inflamed the prejudices of the judges, already sufficiently prejudiced, by malevolent details, the second by scandalously neglecting his duty, and putting in a defence hardly worthy of the name.

Struensee became aware of how the advocate appointed to defend him had given him away, and so he resolved to make a defence of his own, which was certainly abler and more to the point. He wrote a long document, containing an elaborate review of, and apology for, his administration, answering his indictment at every point except one—his intimacy with the Queen; on that alone he kept silence. This document offers a remarkable contrast to the rambling and incoherent effusion in which he gave an account of his conversion. One can only suppose that his heart was [Pg 189]

in the one and not in the other. In both cases he might have spared himself the trouble, for neither his conversion nor his apology availed him anything.

Brandt's trial followed immediately on that of Struensee. His treatment in prison had been the same as that of his fellow-malefactor. After his examination he, too, was granted certain indulgences, and an eminent divine was appointed to look after his soul. Brandt's spiritual adviser was Hee, Dean of the Navy Church. Hee was more of a scholar than Münter, and less of a bigot; moreover, he had the instincts of a gentleman, which Münter had not, as was shown by the insults he heaped upon the unfortunate young Queen. These considerations perhaps hindered him in his work, for Hee's "conversion" of Brandt was not so successful as Münter's conversion of Struensee. Brandt received Hee courteously, conversed with him freely, and appeared to be much affected by his arguments; but it may be doubted whether they made any real impression on him, for Brandt, like Struensee, was a convinced freethinker, and, moreover, suffered from an incurable levity of temperament. But, like Struensee, he was anxious to save his life, and to this end he was quite ready to be converted by Hee or any one else. Even so, Brandt's conversion did [Pg 190] not seem to extend much beyond Deism; but that may have been due to his converter, for Hee was not nearly so orthodox a Christian as Münter. Brandt was very emotional, and frequently burst into tears when Hee reproved him for the wickedness of his former life, but as soon as the preacher's back was turned he relapsed into his old levity. This being reported to Hee, he reprimanded the prisoner, and gave him several religious books to read, such as Hervey's *Meditations*. Brandt then became very quiet, and his conduct was reported as being most edifying. In fact, he seems rather to have overdone his part, for he would sometimes take up his chains and kiss them, and exclaim: "When I thought myself free I was really a slave to my passions; and now that I am a prisoner, truth and grace have set me at liberty." He also denounced Voltaire, whom he had met on his travels, and his teaching with great vehemence, and, as for Struensee, he said that he was "a man without any religion, who, from his infancy, according to his own admission, never had the slightest idea or sentiment of piety about him". Shortly after this denunciation Struensee sent to inform Brandt that he had "found salvation" and he was praying that he too might repent him of his sins. Whereupon Brandt, not to be outdone in hypocrisy, replied that "he greatly rejoiced to hear of Struensee's conversion. For his own part, he found comfort only in religion, and from his heart forgave Struensee for all he had done to draw him into his misfortunes."

But Brandt's pious sentiments and edifying behaviour availed him nothing at his trial. Wivet, who [Pg 191] had prosecuted Struensee, also prosecuted Brandt; and Bang, who had prosecuted the Queen, was now appointed to conduct Brandt's defence. Brandt was indicted on three counts.

> First: That he had deliberately committed a gross attack on the person of the King—an awful deed, declared his prosecutor. "In the words of David: 'How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?... Thy blood be upon thy head.'"[58]

[58] 2 Sam. i. 14, 16.

> Secondly: That he was an accomplice to the improper intimacy which Struensee had with the Queen.
>
> Thirdly: That he joined Struensee in robbing the Treasury, and was an accomplice to the forged document, whereby he received sixty thousand dollars.

He was also, in a greater or lesser degree, an accomplice in all the offences committed by Struensee. On these grounds Wivet asked for sentence of death.

Wivet handed in this indictment to the judges the same day as the indictment of Struensee. Two days later Bang delivered a half-hearted defence, which may be summarised thus:—

First: Though Brandt fought with the King, he did so at the King's own command—that he only fought in self-defence, and left off directly the King wished him to do so. He had voluntarily inflicted no injury on his Majesty, and the account given by the prosecution of the affray was very [Pg 192] much exaggerated.

Secondly: He was in no sense an accomplice of the intrigue between Struensee and the Queen. Though he felt morally convinced that improper intercourse took place, he had no absolute proof of it, and he could not take any steps in the matter without such proof. Moreover, it would have been as much as his life was worth to have said anything.[59]

[59] This does not tally with his assertion that Struensee had confided in him.

Thirdly: If Struensee had committed a forgery, that did not affect Brandt, as he was ignorant of the matter. The grants which had been given him were given with the approval of the King, and, though he received large sums, yet he had to play cards daily with the King and Queen, at which he lost heavily.

Thus it will be seen that Brandt's defence, though it actually denied none of the charges, gave a plausible explanation of them all. Brandt does not seem to have realised his danger, nor to have imagined that anything he had done, or left undone, could be considered worthy of death. In addition to his defence, he sent a memorial to his judges, and a letter to the King, in which he begged to be allowed to go away, and end his days quietly in Holstein. The letter to the King is lost; but the memorial to the judges remains, and is written in such a spirit of levity that it suggests doubt as to the writer's sanity. Of course it was unavailing.

The legal farce was now drawing swiftly to a close. On April 25 the judges assembled at the Christiansborg Palace to deliver judgment on both cases. The judgments were very long and argumentative. There is no need to give them at length; to do so would be merely to recapitulate in other words the arguments brought forward by the prosecution. In Struensee's sentence the chief count against him—his alleged adultery with the Queen—was summed up in a few words: "He has already been convicted of it" (presumably by the Queen's sentence), "and has himself confessed it: he has thereby committed a terrible crime, which involves in an eminent degree an assault on the King's supremacy, or high treason, and according to the law deserves the penalty of death". The rest of the judgment, which occupied some thirty pages, dealt in detail with the other offences alleged against him, and condemned him on every count. [Pg 193]

> "Therefore," the judgment concluded, "as it is clear that Count Struensee in more than one way, and in more than one respect, has not only himself committed the crime of high treason in an extreme degree, but has participated in similar crimes with others; and that, further, his whole administration was a chain of violence and selfishness, which he ever sought to attain in a disgraceful and criminal manner; and as he also displayed contempt of religion, morality and good manners, not only by word and deed, but also through public regulations,—the following sentence is passed on him, according to the words of Article I. of Chapter 4 of Book 6 of the Danish law:— [Pg 194]
>
> "Count John Frederick Struensee shall, as a well-deserved punishment for himself, and as an example and warning for others of like mind, have forfeited honour, life and property, and be degraded from his dignity of count and all other honours which have been conferred on him; his coat of arms shall be broken by the executioner; his right hand shall be cut off while he is alive, and then his head; his body quartered and broken on the wheel, but his head and hand shall be stuck on a pole.
>
> "Given by the Commission at the Christiansborg Palace, this 25th day of April, 1772."

Here follow the signatures of the nine judges, headed by that of Baron Juell-Wind, and ending with that of Guldberg.

Brandt's sentence was delivered at the same time. It contained no direct allusion to the Queen, and was a long, rambling and confused document. Finally, it declared that, by his treacherous and audacious assault on the person of the King, he had committed an act of high treason, which deserved the punishment of death, according to the same article of the Danish law as that quoted in the case of Struensee. Therefore:—

> "Count Enevold Brandt shall have forfeited honour, life and property, and be degraded from his dignity of count and all other honours conferred on him; his coat of arms shall be broken by the executioner on the scaffold, his right hand cut off while he is still alive, then his head; his body quartered and exposed on the wheel, but his head and hand stuck on a pole. [Pg 195]
>
> "Given by the Commission at the Christiansborg Palace, this 25th day of April, 1772."

The judgments were immediately published in the Danish journals. Thence they found their way into foreign newspapers, and were by them adversely criticised, not so much on account of the punishment, as for the extraordinary and diffuse way in which the judgments were written. In Denmark they were received with enthusiasm by the great majority of the people, but there was a minority growing up which regarded them more dubiously, and was disposed to criticise. The Government, however, determined to allow little time for criticism or reaction, and resolved to carry the sentences into effect at the earliest possible moment, before any change took place in public opinion.

CHAPTER X.

[Pg 196]

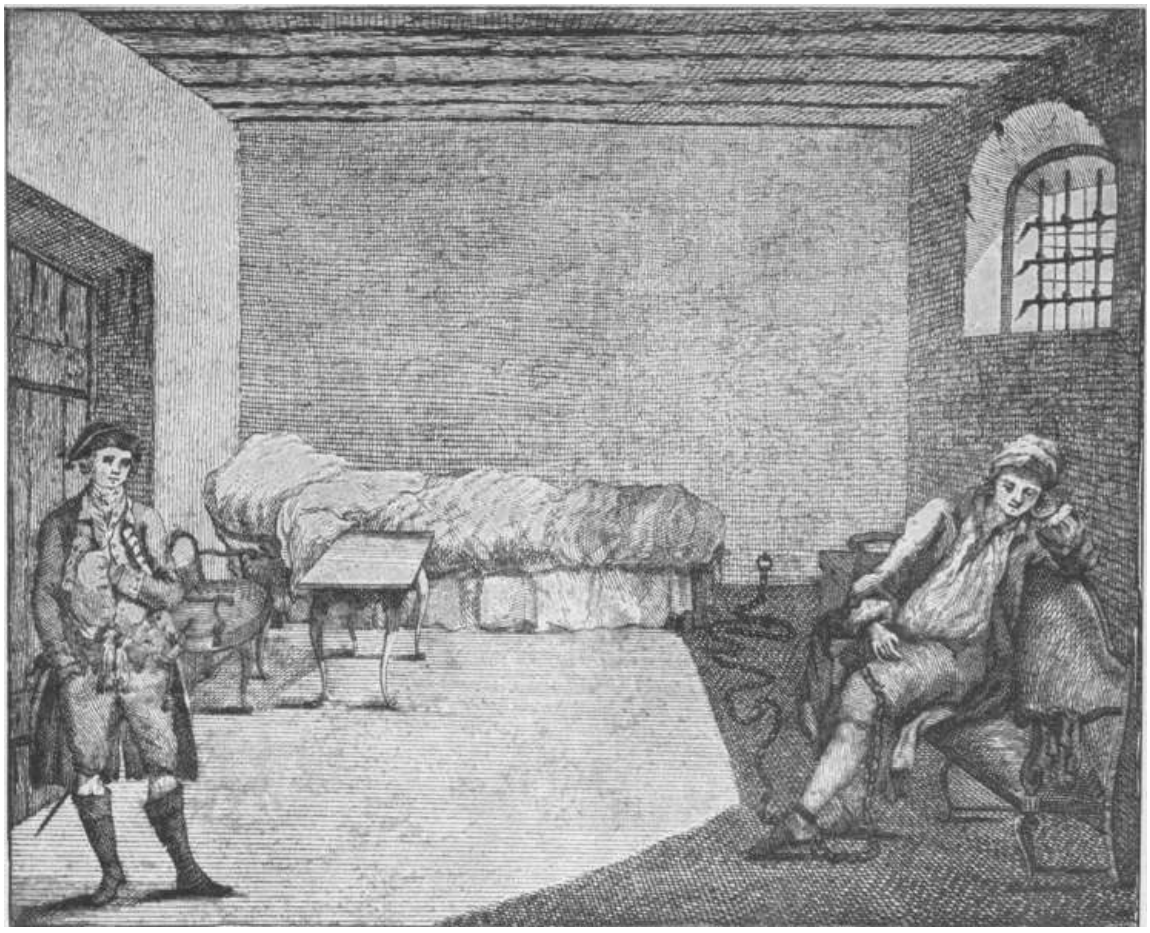
THE EXECUTIONS.

1772.

The prisoners were told of their fate on Friday, April 25, immediately after the sentences were pronounced. Uhldahl and Bang went to the citadel to inform their respective clients of the judgment against them, and to hand them a copy of their sentences.

Uhldahl, who had undertaken the defence of Struensee with a very ill-grace, entered the condemned man's cell and curtly said: "Good Count, I bring you bad news," and then, without a word of sympathy, he handed Struensee a copy of his sentence. Struensee, who had shown craven fear at intervals during his imprisonment, now read the document which condemned him to a barbarous and ignominious death with an unmoved air, and when he had perused it to the end, he handed it without a word to Dr. Münter, who was with him at the time. Apparently only the sentence, and not the judgment, was handed to the condemned man, for Struensee asked his advocate if he were condemned on all the counts in his indictment, to which Uhldahl answered in the affirmative. "Even on that concerning the education of the Crown Prince?" asked Struensee. [Pg 197] "Even on that," replied Uhldahl briefly. Struensee said that, if he had had any children of his own, he should have reared them in exactly the same way—to which Uhldahl made no reply. "And what is Brandt's fate?" asked Struensee. "His sentence is exactly the same as yours." "But could his counsel do nothing to save him?" demanded Struensee. "He said everything that could be urged in his favour; but Count Brandt had too much laid to his charge." The thought of Brandt's fate moved Struensee far more than his own; but he soon regained his composure, and resolved to petition the King, who had not yet signed the sentences, for mercy.

When Struensee and Münter were left alone, the latter lamented the barbarities of the sentence, but Struensee assured him they mattered little. He still held the same ground—that is to say, he admitted his guilt so far as the Queen was concerned, but maintained his innocence of all the other charges against him, even the one of having forged the document that gave him money from the Treasury, which must have been true. But he admitted that his intrigue with the Queen made him liable to the extremest punishment of the law. "My judges," he said, "had the law before them, and therefore they could not decide otherwise. I confess my crime is great; I have violated the majesty of the King." Even now, when the sentence had robbed him of almost his last [Pg 198] hope, and he was face to face with a hideous death, this wretched man had no word of remorse or grief for the ruin, misery and suffering he had brought upon the Queen. Uhldahl had given him Matilda's pathetic message—that she forgave him everything he had said and done against her, even the shameful confession by which he had striven to shield himself at her expense. Struensee received the message without emotion, and even with sullen indifference; he was so much engrossed with his own fate that he had no thought to spare for the Queen. Perhaps he thought it was a device of the Evil One to lure him away from the contemplation of his soul. However much we may suspect the motives which first led Struensee to his conversion, there is no doubt that he was sincerely zealous for his spiritual well-being at the last. The long months of solitary confinement, the ceaseless exhortations and prayers of the fervent Münter, the near approach of death, perhaps, too, some echo from the pious home in which he had been reared, combined to detach Struensee's thoughts from the world and to concentrate them on his soul. He had reached that point which counts earth's sufferings as little in comparison with the problems of eternity. The worldling, who had once thought of nothing but his material advancement, was now equally ambitious for his spiritual welfare. In his pursuit of the one he was as selfish and as absorbed as he had been in pursuit of the other. The motive had changed, but the man was the same.



STRUENSEE IN HIS DUNGEON.
From a Contemporary Print.

Brandt had also received a copy of his sentence from Bang, and, like Struensee, immediately petitioned the King for mercy. It was generally expected that the royal clemency would be exercised in his case. The judges who tried the case had no option but to pass sentence, but some of them had hoped that the extreme penalty of the law would be mitigated. It was the King's business to sign the sentences, but the question of whether he should, or should not, confirm them was first discussed by the Council of State before the documents were sent to the King to sign. In the council itself there were voices on the side of mercy, especially for Brandt, but Rantzau and Osten, the two members of the council who had been familiar friends of the condemned men, absolutely opposed the idea of any mercy being shown to either of them. Yet there is no doubt that, if strict justice had been meted out, Rantzau, at least, would have been lying under the same sentence. Perhaps it was this thought which made him of all the council the most implacable and unyielding: dead men could tell no tales, and until both Struensee and Brandt were dead, Rantzau would not feel safe. So the council, at any rate by a majority, reported that the King should confirm the sentences. [Pg 199]

All effort was not at an end, for Guldberg, the most influential of the judges who had condemned Struensee and Brandt, had an audience of Juliana Maria, and implored a mitigation of the punishment, or at least that Brandt's life should be spared. But Juliana Maria showed herself inflexible, and the vindictive side of her nature asserted itself without disguise. Brandt as well as Struensee had inflicted many slights upon her and her son; therefore he, too, should die. Guldberg, who had supposed his influence over the Queen-Dowager was all-powerful, as indeed it was on most points, was unable to move her in this, and might as well have pleaded to a rock. After a long and violent altercation he withdrew worsted, and until the executions were over he remained in strict retirement. Whatever may be said of the others, Guldberg, at any rate, washed his hands of the blood of the condemned men. [Pg 200]

It may be doubted, however, if Juliana Maria, even if she had been otherwise minded, could have saved Brandt's life, for the King, though easily led in many respects, showed remarkable obstinacy in this. Some of his ministers suggested to him that it would be generous of him to pardon Brandt, as the chief offence was one against his royal person; but the King at once showed the greatest repugnance to pardon. He hated Brandt much more than he hated Struensee; he had never forgiven him the assault, and the mere mention of his name was sufficient to fill him with rage. He positively declared that he would not sign either of the sentences unless he signed both, and, as no one wished Struensee to escape, the ministers gave way. The King signed both sentences, and displayed a savage joy when he heard that they were to be carried out without delay. In the evening he dined in public and went in state to the Italian opera. [Pg 201]

On Friday, April 25, the prisoners were told of their sentences, and on Saturday they were informed that the King had signed them, and all hope was over. Their execution would take place on the Monday following. Both prisoners received the news with composure, though Struensee was much affected when he heard that every effort to save Brandt's life had failed, and

commented indignantly on the injustice of his sentence. Münter, who brought him the fatal news, greatly lamented that the barbarous and needless cruelties of the sentence had not been abolished. Struensee exhorted his friend and confessor to maintain his firmness, and said he would dispense with his services at the last if the sight would be too much for him. But to this Münter would not listen. “I shall suffer much more,” said Struensee, “if I see that you suffer too. Therefore, speak to me on the scaffold as little as you can. I will summon all my strength; I will turn my thoughts to Jesus, my Deliverer; I will not take formal leave of you, for that would unman me.” As to the brutal indignities of his death, he said: “I am far above all this, and I hope my friend Brandt feels the same. Here in this world, since I am on the point of leaving it, neither honour nor infamy can affect me any more. It is equally the same to me, after death, whether my body rots under the ground or in the open air—whether it serves to feed the worms or the birds. God will know how to preserve those particles which on the resurrection day will constitute my [Pg 202] glorified body. It is not my all which is to be exposed upon the wheel. Thank God, I am now well assured that this flesh is not my whole being.”

Struensee wrote three letters—one to Brandt’s brother, in which he bewailed having been the innocent cause of bringing “our dear Enevold to this pass”; another to Rantzau, saying he forgave him as he hoped to be forgiven, and exhorting him to turn to religion; and the third to Madam von Berkentin of Pinneberg, the lady who had first recommended Struensee to influential personages, and thus unwittingly had laid the foundation of his future greatness and of his future ruin. To his brother, Justice Struensee, who was also a prisoner, the condemned man sent a message of farewell through Münter. But to the Queen he sent neither word of remembrance nor prayer for forgiveness for the wrong he had done her. In this respect, at least, it would seem Struensee’s conversion was not complete.

When Hee brought Brandt the news that his execution was determined upon, he displayed a firmness and dignity hardly to be expected from one of his volatile temperament. He indulged in no pious aspirations after the manner of Struensee, but said quietly that he submitted to the will of God.

For the next two days Copenhagen was filled with subdued excitement. On Sunday, the day before the execution, the places of public resort were closed, but the citizens gathered together in little groups at the corners of the streets, and spoke in hushed accents of the tragedy of to- [Pg 203] morrow. Meanwhile, the Government was taking every step to hurry forward the executions and preserve public order. Soldiers were already guarding a large field outside the eastern gate of Copenhagen, where a scaffold, eight yards long, eight yards broad and twenty-seven feet high, was being erected. Other soldiers were posted on the gallows-hill a little distance to the west, where two poles were planted, and four wheels tied to posts. The Government had some difficulty in finding carpenters to build the scaffold, as the men had a superstition about it; many of them refused, and were at last coerced by threats. No wheelwright would supply the wheels on which the remains of the wretched men were to be exposed, so at last they were taken from old carriages in the royal stables. Though the work was pressed forward with all speed, the scaffold was only completed a few hours before the execution, which was arranged to take place early in the morning of Monday, April 28.

All the night before crowds of people were moving towards the eastern gate, and at the first break of dawn large bodies of troops marched to the place of execution, and were drawn up in a large square around the scaffold. Others formed a guard along the route from the citadel, and everywhere the posts were doubled. When all preparations were complete, the eastern gate of the city was thrown open, and huge crowds surged towards the fatal field, or pressed against the soldiers who guarded the route along which the condemned men were to journey from the citadel [Pg 204] to the scaffold. Everywhere was a sea of countless heads. Upwards of thirty thousand persons, including women and little children, were gathered around the scaffold alone—some animated by a lust for blood and vengeance, but most of them by that morbid curiosity and love of the horrible common to all mobs in all ages of the world.

At a very early hour the two clergymen went to the condemned men to comfort and attend them in their last moments. When Münter entered Struensee’s cell, he found him reading Schegel’s *Sermons on the Passion of Christ*. The unhappy man was already dressed. His jailors had given him, as if in mockery, the clothes he had worn at the masquerade ball the night of his arrest, and in which he had been hurried to prison—a blue cut-velvet coat and pink silk breeches. For the first time for many months his chains were taken off. Struensee greeted Münter calmly, and together they conversed on religious matters until the cell door opened and the dread summons came.

Dean Hee found Brandt brave and even cheerful. He, too, had been unchained from the wall, and was enjoying his brief spell of comparative freedom by walking up and down the room. Brandt, also, was vested in the clothes he had brought with him to the citadel—a green court dress richly embroidered with gold. He told Hee that he was not afraid to die, and seemed only anxious that the ordeal should be over. He asked him if he had seen any one executed before, and how far he [Pg 205] ought to bare his neck and arm to the headsman’s axe. Presently the summons came for him too.

Both the condemned men were marched out to the large hall of the citadel, where they were again fettered by a chain attached to their left hand and right foot. As the morning was cold, they were allowed to wear their fur pelisses. In this attire they entered the coaches drawn up in the courtyard of the citadel. Brandt occupied the first coach, Struensee the second. On one side of each of the prisoners sat an officer with a drawn sword, on the other the clergyman; opposite them were placed two sergeants. The two coaches were guarded by two hundred infantry soldiers with fixed bayonets, and an equal number of dragoons with drawn sabres. In a third

coach were seated the Fiscal-General, Wivet, and the King's bailiff, and facing them was the deputy-bailiff, holding the two tin shields on which the arms of the Counts were painted, which were to be broken in the sight of the people.

At half-past eight the bell began to toll from the tower of the citadel. The gates were thrown open, and the melancholy procession emerged, and began its slow progress to the place of execution. Though the streets were thronged, and every window, balcony and housetop was filled with spectators, the condemned men passed along their last journey in silence—a silence only broken by the tramp of the soldiers' and horses' feet. The morning was dull and cold, and a slight mist hung over the Sound. When the procession reached its destination, the Fiscal-General and [Pg 206] the King's bailiff and his deputy-bailiff mounted the scaffold, where the executioner, masked, and two stalwart assistants, also masked, awaited their victims, surrounded by the dread emblems of their hideous office. The large scaffold, which was twenty-seven feet in height, rose far above the heads of the soldiers who guarded it and the vast crowd beyond. All could see what took place there, even from a far distance, for this platform and the figures upon it were clearly silhouetted against the morning sky.

Brandt was the first of the condemned men to mount the flight of wooden stairs to the scaffold—a task made more difficult from the fact that he was chained hand and foot. He was closely followed by Dean Hee, who exhorted him to firmness the whole time. Arrived on the scaffold, Brandt turned to the clergyman, and assured him that he had no fear, and his mind was quite composed. The worthy divine, however, continued to encourage him with these words: "Son, be of good cheer, for thy sins are forgiven thee." Brandt throughout behaved with heroism. When his fetters were struck off the King's bailiff stepped forward to read his sentence; he listened quietly to the end, and then protested his innocence. The deputy-bailiff held up to Brandt the tin shield, and formally asked him if it were his coat of arms painted thereon. Brandt merely nodded in answer, and the bailiff swung the shield into the air and broke it, with the words:

"This is not done in vain, but as a just punishment." Hee then began to recite in a loud voice the [Pg 207] prayer for the dying, and when it was over he put to the condemned man the usual questions, to which Brandt answered again that he was sorry for what he had done wrong, but he left all to God, and was not afraid to die. Hee then gave him his blessing, and, taking him by the hand, delivered him over to the executioner.

When the headsman approached to assist the prisoner in undressing, Brandt exclaimed firmly: "Stand back, and do not dare to touch me!" He undressed alone; he let his fur pelisse fall, took off his hat, removed his coat and waistcoat, bared his neck, and rolled up the shirt sleeve of his right arm. In this he suffered the executioner to help him, for he was afraid he might not roll it up sufficiently. Brandt then knelt down, laid his head on one block, and stretched out his right hand on another, and smaller one, hard by. While he was in this position, Hee whispered some last words of comfort, and then stood back. As the clergyman was reciting: "O Christ, in Thee I live, in Thee I die! O Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy!" the executioner stepped forward, and with two well-directed blows completed his dread task.

Immediately the execution was over the assistants advanced to perform the most horrible part of the sentence, and wreak the last indignities. They stripped the body, laid it on a block, disembowelled it, and split it into four quarters with an axe. Each part was then let down by a [Pg 208] rope into a cart standing below, with the other remains; the head was held up on a pole, and shown to the multitude; then that, too, was let down into the cart, and lastly the right hand. After this the scaffold was strewn with fresh sand, the axes were roughly cleaned, and everything made ready for the next victim.

Brandt's execution had taken nearly half an hour. During the whole of this horrible scene Struensee sat in his coach, which was drawn up near the scaffold, with Pastor Münter by his side. Münter, who showed much more emotion than his penitent, had ordered the coach to be turned round in such a way that they should not see Brandt's execution. But Struensee's eyes had wandered to the block, and he said to Münter: "I have already seen it," and then added: "We will look up again to heaven." In this position he and his comforter remained while the last indignities were being wrought upon Brandt's poor body, and together they prayed until Struensee was informed that his turn had come.

Struensee became deadly pale, but otherwise retained his composure, and, getting out of the coach, he saluted the guard on either side. Some favoured personages had been allowed inside the square made by the soldiers. Many of these Struensee had known in the days of his triumph, and as he passed, led by Münter, he bowed to them also. But, as he approached the scaffold, his fortitude began to give way, and it was with difficulty that he mounted the fifteen steps which led [Pg 209] to the top. When he reached the summit, Münter repeated in a low voice the comforting words: "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Then came the same formalities as in the case of Brandt: Struensee's fetters were knocked off, the King's confirmation of the sentence was read, and his coat of arms was broken. Then Münter, having prayed according to the melancholy ritual, solemnly asked Struensee if he repented of his sins and died in the true faith of a Christian.

Struensee having answered these questions in the affirmative, Münter laid his hand upon his head, and said with deep emotion: "Go in peace whither God calls you. His grace be with you." He then handed him over to the executioner.

Struensee took off his fur pelisse and his hat. He would fain have undressed himself alone, but his trembling hands refused to do the work, and he was obliged to let the executioner help him. When his coat and waistcoat had been taken off, he produced a handkerchief to bind his eyes; but

the executioner assured him that it would not be necessary, and took it away. He further removed his shirt, so that nothing might hinder the fall of the axe. Struensee then, with half his body bare, went with faltering steps to the block, which still reeked with the blood of Brandt. Here he reeled and would have fallen, but the headsman assisted him to kneel, and, with some difficulty, placed his head and hand in the right position. As the executioner raised his axe in the [Pg 210] air to cut off the right hand, Münter recited: "Remember Christ crucified, who died, but is risen again." The blow fell before the words were finished, and the right hand lay severed on the scaffold. But the victim was seized with violent convulsions, with the result that the executioner's second blow, which was intended to behead him, failed. The wretched man sprang up spasmodically, but the assistants seized him by the hair, and held him down to the block by force. The executioner struck again, and this time with deadly effect; but even then it was not a clean blow, and a part of the neck had to be severed.

The same revolting indignities were committed on Struensee's corpse as on that of Brandt; it is unnecessary to repeat them. When all was over, the mangled remains of both men were thrown into a cart and were conveyed through the city to the gallows-hill outside the western gate. The heads were stuck on poles, the quarters were exposed on the wheels, and the hands nailed on a piece of board. Thus was left all that was mortal of Struensee and Brandt—an awful warning that all might see.[60]

[60] Archdeacon Coxe, who visited Copenhagen in 1775, states in his *Travels* that he saw Struensee's and Brandt's skulls still exposed on the gallows-hill. There they remained for some years. Wraxall says that Struensee's skull was eventually stolen by four English sailors belonging to a Russian man-of-war.

From her watch-tower afar off, the Queen-Dowager witnessed the execution of the men whom she deemed her greatest enemies. Early in the morning Juliana Maria mounted to a tower on the [Pg 211] eastern side of the Christiansborg Palace, and there through a strong telescope gloated over this judicial murder. The keen interest she took in every revolting detail revealed the depth of her vindictiveness. When Brandt's execution was over, and Struensee mounted the steps to the scaffold, she clapped her hands triumphantly and exclaimed: "Now comes the fat one!" So great was her satisfaction that, it is said, she momentarily forgot her caution, and declared the only thing that marred her joy was the thought that Matilda's corpse was not thrown into the cart with those of her accomplices. When the cart moved away, the Queen-Dowager, fearful lest she should lose any detail of the tragedy, ran down from the tower to the apartments which she occupied on the upper floor of the palace, and from the windows, which commanded a view of the gallows-hill to the west, she saw the last ignominy wrought on the remains of her victims. In after years the Queen-Dowager always lived in these unpretending rooms of the Christiansborg, though at Frederiksberg and the other palaces she took possession of Matilda's apartments. Suhm, the historian, says that he once expressed surprise that she should still live in little rooms up many stairs, when all the palace was at her disposal, and Juliana Maria replied: "These rooms are dearer to me than my most splendid apartments elsewhere, for from the windows I saw the remains of my bitterest foes exposed on the wheel." From her windows, too, for many years after, she could see the skulls of Struensee and Brandt withering on the poles.[61] [Pg 212]

[61] The statement that the Queen-Dowager witnessed the execution from a tower of the Christiansborg Palace is controverted by some on the ground that it would not be possible for her to see it from this point. Certainly it would not be possible to-day, owing to the growth of Copenhagen, and the many houses and other buildings which have been erected, but in 1772 there were comparatively few buildings between the Christiansborg Palace and the scene of the execution, so it was quite possible for the Queen-Dowager to view the gallows through a telescope.

Against this statement of Suhm's is to be set one of Münter's. It does not necessarily conflict, but it shows how capable the Queen-Dowager was of acting a part. If she forgot herself for a moment on the tower of the Christiansborg, she quickly recovered her self-command, and behaved with her usual decorum. She sent for Münter, ostensibly to thank him for having effected Struensee's conversion, in reality to extract from him all the mental agonies of her victims' last moments, and thus further gratify her lust for vengeance. Münter expatiated on Struensee's conversion, and gave her full particulars of his terror and sufferings at the last. The Queen-Dowager affected to be moved to tears, and said: "I feel sorry for the unhappy man. I have examined myself whether in all I have done against him I have been animated by any feeling of personal enmity, and my conscience acquits me." She gave Münter a valuable snuff-box of rock-crystal, as a small token of her appreciation of his labours on behalf of Struensee's soul. To Hee she also sent a snuff-box, but it was only of porcelain. Whether this was to mark her sense of the greater thoroughness of [Pg 213] Struensee's conversion, or whether it showed that she was not so much interested in Brandt as Struensee, it is impossible to say. Nor did her rewards end here. That both she and the ministers looked upon these clergymen as accomplices in bringing Struensee and Brandt to their death is shown from the fact that, when a commission of inquiry was appointed to consider "in what manner the persons employed in convicting the prisoners of state should be rewarded," this commission allotted to Münter and Hee three hundred dollars each. But Juliana Maria was of a different opinion, and judged it more proper to make them presents.[62]

[62] Münter afterwards was appointed Bishop of Zealand.

The executions of Struensee and Brandt brought about a revulsion in public feeling. It was felt that the national honour was satisfied, and the time had come to temper justice with mercy. The Queen-Dowager's party were quick to note the change. Fearful of the least breath of popular displeasure, they now swung round from barbarity to leniency. Those placed under "house

arrest" were set free, and the ten prisoners of state imprisoned in the citadel, were treated, for the most part, with leniency. Madame Gahler, Colonel Hesselberg, Admiral Hansel, Councillor Stürtz, Lieutenant Aböe, and Councillor Willebrandt, since no evidence could be produced against them, were released after an imprisonment of four and a half months, and were all banished from the capital. Professor Berger, the physician, who had been accused of poisoning, [Pg 214] or drugging, the King, was also set free, and banished to Aalborg, in northern Jutland. It was found, after a searching examination, that the medicines he had given the King were quite innocuous.

Three state prisoners still remained—General Gahler, Colonel Falckenskjold and Justice Struensee. Gahler was dismissed from the King's service, and all his appointments, and was banished from Copenhagen. But on the understanding that the ruined soldier would neither speak nor write of public affairs, the King, by an act of special clemency, granted him a pension of five hundred dollars, and the same to his wife. Justice Struensee was also released, but ordered to quit the country immediately. This clemency, so different from what had been shown to his brother, was due to the interposition of the King of Prussia, who had kept Struensee's position as professor of medicine at Liegnitz open for him, and with whom he was a favourite. Justice Struensee eventually became a Minister of State in Prussia.

Falckenskjold, who was considered the worst of all the offenders after Struensee and Brandt, was stripped of all his employments and honours, and condemned to be imprisoned for life in the fortress of Munkholm. Falckenskjold remained at Munkholm for four years, where he suffered many hardships; but in 1776, through the intercession of Prince Frederick, he was set at liberty, on the condition that he would never return to Danish territory. After the revolution of 1784, [Pg 215] when Queen Matilda's son assumed the regency, the penalties against him were repealed; he was allowed to return to Copenhagen for a time to look after his affairs, and later was promoted to the rank of major-general. He never again took active part in Danish politics, but retired to Lausanne, where he found such friends as Gibbon and Reverdil. There he wrote his *Memoirs*, which were largely directed to proving the innocence of Queen Matilda, and there he died in 1820 at the age of eighty-two years.

CHAPTER XI.

[Pg 216]

THE RELEASE OF THE QUEEN.

1772.

During the weeks occupied by the trials of Struensee and Brandt, Keith had been untiring in his efforts on behalf of Queen Matilda, and wrung from her enemies one concession after another. As the result of his insistence, the Queen was no longer confined in one small room, but was permitted to use the large dining-hall outside it and the other apartments adjoining. She was also allowed to go out and take the air on the ramparts and the leads of the castle. Her food was better served, and she was waited on with some ceremony by her household. The preachers in the fortress chapel were no longer instructed to hurl insults at the Queen, and when she attended divine service there was nothing to remind her of her misfortunes, beyond the omission of her name from the liturgy. The little Princess was still allowed to remain with her. This indulgence was probably due to the fact that the child was ill of the measles, and it might have cost the infant her life to take her away at this time from the Queen, who most devotedly nursed her day and night, and found in the child her only consolation. Keith wrote of this incident: “A more tender mother than this Queen never was born in the world.”

[Pg 217]

Queen Matilda had now been imprisoned at Kronborg several months, and by the gentleness and dignity with which she bore her sorrows she won the respect and devotion of her jailors. Her natural kindness of heart showed itself even under these distressing circumstances; she made inquiries concerning the other prisoners who were detained in the fortress, and, as soon as greater freedom was allowed her, did what she could to alleviate their lot. From the little money she possessed, she gave sums from time to time to buy them comforts, and, when her dinner was served to her properly, she put aside two dishes from her table every day, with orders that they should be given to certain prisoners whom she had singled out for compassion. One of these was a Danish officer, who had been confined for many years in a small cell on suspicion of having entered into a treasonable correspondence with Sweden. The commandant of Kronborg remonstrated with the Queen, and asked her to bestow her little bounty on some other, lest her kindness should be construed into a condonation of the prisoner’s heinous offence. The Queen declined, and quoted the following line of Voltaire’s: “*Il suffit qu’il soit homme, et qu’il soit malheureux*.”

The Queen in her prison heard of the tragic death of Struensee and Brandt. According to one account she swooned with grief and horror, and when she rallied spoke no word. According to another she received the news with emotion, and exclaimed to Fräulein Mösting, her maid-of-honour: “Unhappy men; they have paid dearly for their devotion to the King and their zeal in my service.” These words, it must be admitted, do not show overwhelming grief for the death of the man who but a short time before had been dearer to her than all the world. Perhaps his shameful confession, and the way he had received her message of forgiveness, influenced her in spite of herself. She forgave him the wrong he had done her; she uttered no word of reproach; she showed the deepest pity for his sufferings and horror at his fate; but it was impossible that she could feel quite the same towards him as she had done. Perhaps, too, long months of solitary confinement had brought reflection, and the death of her mother, and the thought of her children, whom she dearly loved, had aroused her to a higher sense of her duties; and her eyes, no longer blinded by passion, saw clearly in what she had failed. Certain it is that Matilda’s character was purified and ennobled by suffering.

[Pg 218]

After the sentence of divorce was pronounced, Keith had insisted upon seeing the Queen. For some time this request was refused, or rather he was always put off on one pretext or another. But Keith clamoured in season and out of season at the doors of the Christiansborg, and became so threatening that at last the crafty Osten and the vindictive Juliana Maria had to give way, and most unwillingly gave leave to the English envoy to visit his Sovereign’s sister. But this permission does not seem to have been granted until after the execution of Struensee and Brandt.

[Pg 219]

SIR ROBERT MURRAY KEITH, K.C.B.

Unfortunately, there exists no account of the first interview at Kronborg between Queen Matilda and Keith; the despatches which the English envoy wrote home at this time have all been destroyed. But we can imagine what it must have been. In the days when Struensee was in the ascendant, the young Queen was hardly permitted to see her brother's representative—much less to have any conversation with him. She was taught to look on him rather as an enemy than a friend, and an enemy he undoubtedly was to Struensee and his administration. But, freed from that baneful influence, she realised that the Englishman was her only friend, and, if help came at all, it must come from England, her native land, which, in the days of her brief madness, she had forgotten. Now she clung to Keith as her friend and champion; she placed herself unreservedly in his hands; she spoke to him quite freely, and besought him to save her from the malice of her enemies. But it needed neither her tears nor her prayers to urge this brave soldier to fight for his King's sister; indeed, in her defence he was more zealous than the King himself. He sent home a copy of the sentence against the Queen, and a full account of her trial, pointing out its obvious unfairness, the suborned and perjured nature of the evidence, and the way the Queen's so-called confession had been extorted from her under false pretences. It is said that George III. had these [Pg 220] papers submitted to some of the first law officers of the crown, and they reported that the evidence was insufficient to prove the Queen guilty, and, even where it might be believed, it was only of a presumptive and inconclusive nature. On the strength of this report George III. determined to give his sister the benefit of the doubt. Moved by the despatches in which Keith eloquently portrayed the young Queen's privations and sufferings and the danger to which she was exposed from the fury and malice of her enemies, George III. sent instructions to his envoy to peremptorily demand that Matilda should be set at liberty forthwith, and handed over to his keeping.

On receipt of this despatch Keith lost no time in acquainting the Danish Government with its contents; but the Queen-Dowager and her adherents demurred. Every preparation had been made to remove the unfortunate young Queen to Aalborg—a lonely fortress on the extreme edge of Jutland, and to keep her there in perpetual imprisonment. And to Aalborg, they informed Keith, she would shortly be conducted. Matilda had a presentiment that if she once went to Aalborg she would never leave it alive. The only link that bound her to Denmark was her children; apart from them, she had nothing there, and her one wish was to leave it for ever, and return to the country which gave her birth. But, though Keith stormed and protested, the Danish Government showed no signs of yielding. Perhaps they trusted to the alleged lukewarmness of the King of England, [Pg 221] and believed that he would not force matters to extremities. Keith wrote home a strongly worded despatch, saying that it was absolutely necessary for the English Government to take prompt and vigorous measures if this daughter of England were to be set free. He also pointed out the bad effect it would have upon British influence in Europe if, at such a moment, England did not show

herself as good as her word. On receipt of this despatch, George III. no longer hesitated and took the vigorous measures he ought to have taken long before; his own honour and the honour of England alike demanded that the Queen should not be abandoned to her fate. He commanded Keith to inform the Danish Government that, unless they at once agreed to deliver the Queen to his keeping, the English minister would present his letters of recall, a state of war would be declared between England and Denmark, and a fleet would be despatched to bombard Copenhagen. And, in order to follow up his words with action, orders were sent to the Admiralty for the fitting out of a strong fleet, and though no directions were given as to where it was to sail, it was universally thought to be destined for Denmark. The Danish envoy in London thought so too, for he wrote to Copenhagen in great alarm. He said that the King of England was really roused at last, he referred to his well-known obstinacy, and urged the Danish Government to yield to his demands.

In England the fate of the Queen of Denmark, which for so many months had hung in the balance, [Pg 222] was followed with close attention, and when rumours came of the fitting out of the fleet, the public excitement was wrought to the highest pitch. The Opposition, which had first championed the cause of Matilda with more zeal than discretion, now turned against her, and denounced the Government in the strongest terms for bringing about a war between two friendly nations for a worthless woman. The vilest pamphlets suddenly flooded the streets. To quote a journal of the day: “Yesterday, in some parts of the city, men were crying about printed papers, containing the most scandalous rumours, and impudent reflections on the Queen of Denmark. The worst prostitute that ever Covent Garden produced could not have had more gross abuse bestowed on her.”[63]

[63] *General Evening Post*, April 30, 1772.

Fortunately, for all concerned, the crisis was averted. When Keith, on receipt of the King of England’s orders, presented himself at the Christiansborg Palace and delivered his ultimatum, panic struck the hearts of the Queen-Dowager and her adherents, and this panic was heightened by the news, conveyed to them by the Danish envoy in London, that a fleet was fitted out and ready to sail. The Queen-Dowager did not yield her victim without a struggle, she hated Matilda more than Struensee and all his accomplices put together, but she was overborne by the remonstrances of the rest, who knew that to precipitate a conflict with England at this juncture would assuredly prove their ruin. Whatever the issue of the struggle (and there was not much [Pg 223] doubt about that), the Danish people would never forgive the Government for involving them in a ruinous war on such a pretext. Moreover, there was a revulsion of feeling in favour of the young Queen, and, since the death of Struensee, sympathy with her had been gaining ground daily. It really would be safer, urged some, to get her out of the country than to keep her shut up at Aalborg, for her adherents would always be plotting to obtain her release. These considerations weighed even with Juliana Maria, and made her see virtue in necessity. Keith, who had noted these signs of weakness and divided counsels, pushed his advantage, and with such success that he gained every point, and more than every point, that George III. demanded. Not only did the Danish Government agree to deliver Matilda to the King of England’s keeping, but they further promised that the sentence of divorce should not be officially published, that they would do all they could to hush up the scandal, that she should be permitted to retain her title of Queen, and that they would pay a yearly allowance towards her maintenance in another country. The Queen was not only to be set free, but to be set free with honour. On only one point they would not yield: they would not allow her to say good-bye to her son, or to take her daughter with her. By the finding of the judges the Princess was the King of Denmark’s child, and therefore he was her proper guardian.

As Keith had no instructions on this point, he was powerless to insist upon it; but it was with a [Pg 224] glad heart that he sat down to write his despatch, which informed his King that every point had been gained—that his demands had been complied with, and war would be averted.

The English Government received Keith’s despatch with a great sense of relief. The King, now his blood was up, would undoubtedly have insisted upon the fleet sailing, and many complications would have ensued. The Government were by no means sure that they would have the nation at their back in declaring war on such a pretext. The whole story of the Queen of Denmark’s errors would have become common property; the King of Prussia, who was in close alliance with Denmark, and whose Queen was the sister of Juliana Maria, would probably have marched an army into Hanover if Copenhagen had been bombarded, and a new war would have been kindled in the north of Europe. Therefore, both the King and the Government had every reason to congratulate themselves that these difficulties had been avoided, and it was resolved to promote Keith as a reward for the successful way in which he had conducted the negotiations. Lord Suffolk wrote to Keith the following despatches:—

“St. James’s, *May 1, 1772*.

“Sir,

“Your despatches by King the messenger have already been acknowledged; those by Pearson were received on Wednesday afternoon, and I now answer both together.

“His Majesty’s entire approbation of your conduct continues to the last moment of your [Pg 225] success, and his satisfaction has in no part of it been more complete than in the manner in which you have stated, urged and obtained the liberty of his sister, and the care you have taken to distinguish between a claim of right and the subjects of negotiation, and to prevent the mixture of stipulations with a demand is perfectly agreeable with your

instructions.

"The national object of procuring the liberty of a daughter of England confined in Denmark after her connection with Denmark was dissolved is now obtained. For this alone an armament was prepared, and therefore, as soon as the acquiescence of the court of Copenhagen was known, the preparations were suspended, that the mercantile and marine interests of this kingdom might be affected no longer than was necessary by the expectation of a war.

"Instead of a hostile armament, two frigates and a sloop of war are now ordered to Elsinore. One of them is already in the Downs—the others will repair thither immediately: and, as soon as wind permits, they will proceed to their destination. I enclose to you an account of them, which you may transfer to Monsieur Ostein [Count Osten] ministerially, referring at the same time to the assurance of these pacific proceedings.

"The compliance of the Danish court with his Majesty's demand, however forced, is still a compliance. Their continuing, unasked, the style of Queen and other concessions, and the attainment of the national object, accompanying each other, his Majesty would [Pg 226] think it improper to interrupt the national intercourse from any personal or domestic consideration. You will therefore inform Monsieur Ostein that his Majesty intends to have a minister at the court of Copenhagen, the explanation you may give of this suspension of former directions and his determinations being left to your own discretion.

"You will not be that minister. His Majesty will have occasion for your services in a more eligible situation, and, as soon as you have discharged your duty to the Queen of Denmark by attending her to Stade, you will return home, either on board his Majesty's ship which conveyed you thither, or, if the passage by sea is disagreeable to you, by land, with the least possible delay.

"I am, with great truth and regard, Sir,

"Your most obedient and humble servant,

"SUFFOLK."[64]

[64] *Memoirs and Correspondence of Sir R. Murray Keith*, vol. i.

"ST. JAMES'S, *May 1, 1772*.

"For your own information, I enclose a list of the ships which were intended to enforce the demand for the Queen of Denmark's liberty, if it had been refused. Those from Plymouth would have been sailed if the countermand had been a few hours later than it was. The others were just ready to proceed to the Downs, and the whole fleet would probably have by this time been on their way to Copenhagen, under the command of Sir Charles Hardy.

"I am, etc.,

"SUFFOLK."[65]

[65] *Memoirs and Correspondence of Sir R. Murray Keith*, vol. i.

The public curiosity in London, which had been keenly aroused by the news that a fleet was being [Pg 227] hastily fitted out for the Baltic, was no less excited when the preparations were suddenly stopped by a counter-order, sent to Portsmouth on April 22. Though no official information was vouchsafed, people shrewdly guessed the truth. Horace Walpole gives a fair idea of the gossip which was floating about London:—

"The King, as Lord Hertford told me, had certainly ordered the fleet to sail; and a near relation of Lord North told me that the latter had not been acquainted with that intention. Lord Mansfield, therefore, who had now got the King's ear, or Lord Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, must have been consulted. The latter, though I should think he would not approve of it, was capable of flattering the King's wishes; Lord Mansfield assuredly would. The destination was changed on the arrival of a courier from Denmark, who brought word that the Queen was repudiated, and, I suppose, a promise that her life would be spared, for though the Danes had thirty ships and the best seamen next to ours, and though we were sending but ten ships against them, the governing party were alarmed, probably from not being sure that their nation was with them."[66]

[66] Walpole, *Journals of the Reign of George III.*

Again: "They gave her [the Queen of Denmark] the title of Countess of Aalborg, and condemned her to be shut up in the castle of that name. The King of England had certainly known her story two years before; a clerk in the secretary's office, having [Pg 228] opened a letter that came with the account,[67] told me he had seen it before the secretary gave it to the King. It was now believed that this intelligence had occasioned the Princess of Wales to make an extraordinary journey to Germany, where she saw her daughter, though to no purpose. Princess Amelia told Lord Hertford on the 26th [April]

... that Queen Matilda had a very high spirit, and that she believed the Danes would consent to let her go to Hanover. 'But she will not be let go thither,' added the Princess, meaning that the Queen's brother, Prince Charles of Mecklenburg, commanded there, 'or to Zell, but she will not go thither' [another of the Queen's brothers was there]; 'perhaps she *may* go to Lüneburg.'"[68]

[67] The account of the Queen's alleged intrigue with Struensee.

[68] Walpole, *Journals of the Reign of George III.*, vol. i.

Queen Matilda's destination had been determined by her brother before her release was assured. Matilda had herself petitioned that she might be allowed to return to England, and live the rest of her life among her own people; but this natural request was refused. The King at first was inclined to grant it, and, if the Princess-Dowager of Wales had been alive, no doubt it would have been granted. But Queen Charlotte, who had always shown the greatest jealousy of the King's sisters, and had quarrelled fiercely with the Princess of Brunswick, displayed the bitterest animus against the unfortunate Matilda, who surely could have given her no cause of offence, for [Pg 229] she had left England when a child of fifteen. It is probable that the King's harsh judgment of his sister, and his slowness to intervene on her behalf, were instigated by Queen Charlotte, who now shrilly opposed the idea of Matilda returning to England. Her rigid virtue rose in arms at the bare suggestion of such a thing; she declared that she would not receive her sister-in-law; that her presence at court would be an insult; that she would contaminate the young princesses, her daughters, and be to them a bad example. Queen Charlotte had her way, for the King did not venture to stand up against the tempest of her virtuous indignation. He then thought of sending his sister to Hanover; there were three empty palaces there, and his Hanoverian subjects would be sure to receive her kindly. But Queen Charlotte opposed that too: Hanover was too gay a place, she said, for one who ought to hide her head from all the world; and at her instigation her brother, Prince Charles of Mecklenburg, who commanded there, raised objections also. The idea of sending Matilda to Lüneburg was out of the question, for there was no house there, and it was too near the frontier of Denmark. So at last the King decided upon Celle as the most suitable place for his sister to find a refuge. True, Prince Ernest of Mecklenburg-Strelitz commanded the garrison, another of the Queen's brothers (Queen Charlotte provided for all her needy relatives at the expense of her adopted country), but he was young and unmarried, and offered no objection. On the contrary, he looked forward to the advent of the Queen as a break in the monotony of [Pg 230] Celle. To Celle, therefore, it was determined she should go.

Celle was an old town in the King's Hanoverian dominions, about twenty miles north of Hanover. It was formerly the capital of the Dukes of Brunswick-Lüneburg, and the town was dominated by the magnificent castle where they formerly held their court.[69] The last Duke of Celle was George William, brother of Ernest Augustus, first Elector of Hanover and the father of George I. of England. George I., then the Hereditary Prince of Hanover, married his cousin, the only daughter of the Duke of Celle, the unfortunate Sophie Dorothea. At Duke George William's death he became, through his marriage, possessed of the dukedom of Celle, which was merged into the electorate of Hanover. Since the death of Duke George William in 1705, there had no longer been a court at Celle, and the importance of the town had waned, while that of its rival, Hanover, had increased, though Celle still remained a seat of justice, and a garrison was quartered there. The castle as a place of residence needed many things to make it habitable. George III. now gave orders that it was to be thoroughly repaired, and a suite of apartments re-decorated and furnished for his sister, and rooms prepared for the accommodation of her household.

[69] The ancestors of the royal families of England, Germany (Prussia) and Hanover all lived at Celle.

Keith carried to the imprisoned Queen the tidings of her deliverance early in May. It was with [Pg 231] feelings of triumph and gladness that he hastened to Kronborg to inform her of his success, and the King of England's plans for her future welfare. As he wrote to his sister: "To demand the liberty of a captive Queen, and to escort her to a land of freedom is truly such a commencement of my chivalry as savours strongly of the romantic. You will easily judge of the warmth of your brother's zeal in the execution of a commission so well adapted to his genius. Can you figure to yourself what he must have felt in passing through the vaulted entrance of Hamlet's castle to carry to an afflicted and injured princess these welcome proofs of fraternal affection and liberty restored?"[70] His emotion was reciprocated, for, when Keith came into the Queen's chamber and told her the glad news, she burst into grateful tears, embraced him, and called him her deliverer. The gallant soldier could have had no better reward.

[70] *Memoirs and Correspondence of Sir R. Murray Keith*, vol. i.

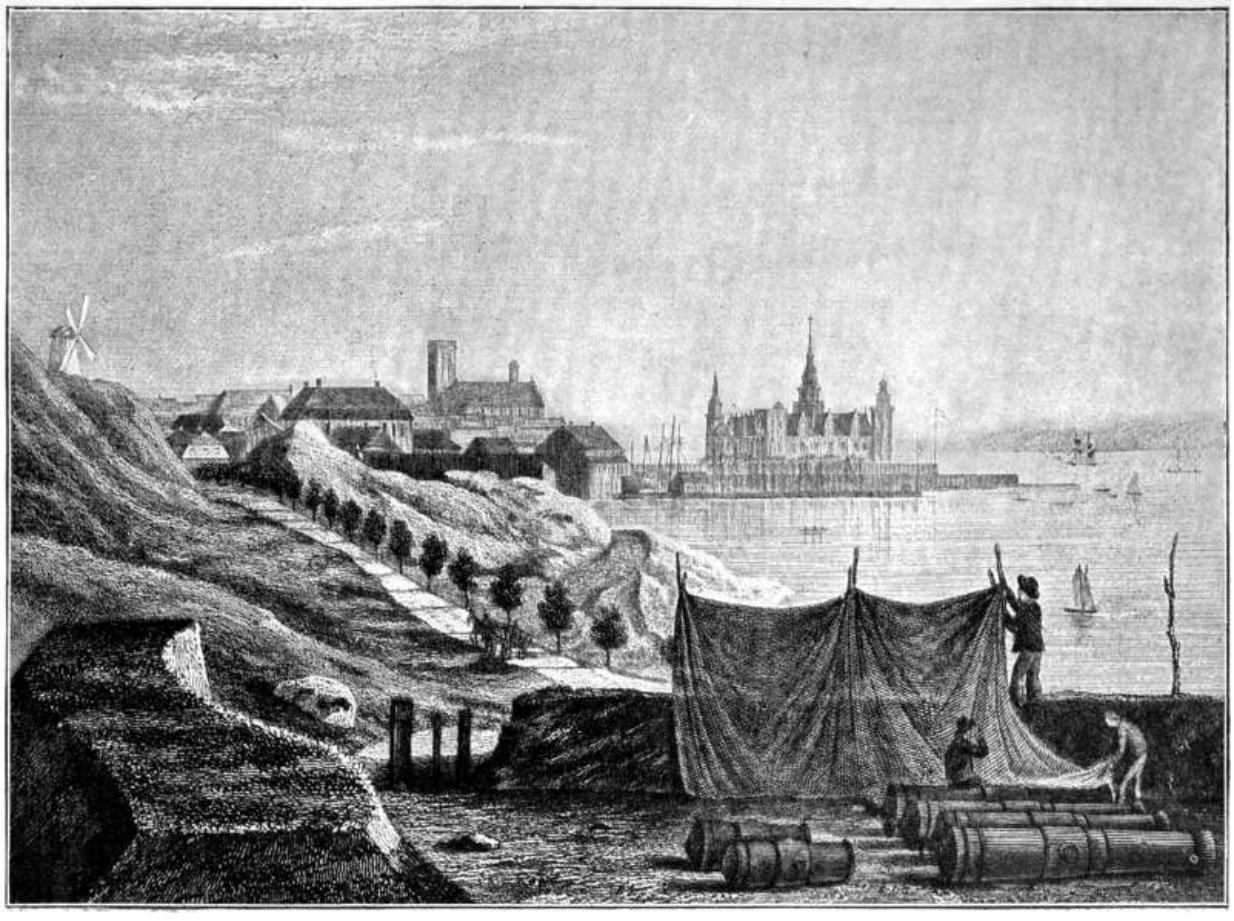
It was Keith's duty and pleasure now to inform the Queen that she was no longer to consider herself a prisoner, but was merely residing in the King of Denmark's palace of Kronborg until such time as the English squadron should arrive to escort her to her brother's Hanoverian dominions with every mark of honour and respect. He also told her of the other concessions he had obtained for her; he had wrung almost everything from her enemies except a proclamation of her innocence. On this delicate subject the Queen is stated to have said that she found some [Pg 232] consolation in the thought that time would clear her character. "I am young; I may, therefore, perhaps live," said she, "to see Denmark disabused with respect to my conduct; whereas my poor mother, one of the best women that ever lived, died while the load of obloquy was heavy upon her, and went to her grave without the pleasure of a vindicated character."[71] Throughout her imprisonment at Kronborg Matilda had worn black—"in mourning," she said, "for her murdered

reputation”.

[71] *General Evening Post*, May 14, 1772.

Though Keith brought to Matilda the news of her deliverance early in May, it was not until the end of that month that the Queen left Kronborg. During that time she saw the English envoy almost every day, though he, too, like herself, was making preparations for departure. She was no longer treated as a prisoner, but rendered all the honour due to her rank, and she was free to wander within the outer walls of the fortress as she pleased—a very large space. The Queen’s favourite walk was on the ramparts in front of the castle, where she would often pace for hours together, straining her eyes across the grey waters of the sea to catch the first glimpse of the British squadron which was to take her away from Denmark. She declared that until she beheld the British flag she would not feel herself safe. The Queen-Dowager was now quite as anxious to [Pg 233] get Matilda out of Denmark as she was to go, and to this end agreed to almost everything suggested by Keith, and in some respects even went beyond his suggestions. Matilda had a great many jewels, which were not the property of the Danish crown, but her own. Some of them she had brought with her from England; others had been given her by the King, her husband; some she had purchased with her own money. All of these had been seized by Juliana Maria, together with the Queen’s clothes and her personal possessions. When Matilda was first sent to Kronborg she had little or nothing beyond the clothes she wore, but little by little, grudgingly, things had been sent her. Now the Queen-Dowager volunteered to send Matilda the jewels which King Christian had given her; but the wronged wife rejected the offer with disdain. She would take no favour she said; she wished to have nothing to remind her of the husband who had repudiated her, or the country which had treated her so cruelly; as a British princess she would retain none of the trappings of her Danish slavery. The question formed a subject of despatches, and Lord Suffolk wrote to Keith as follows: “His Majesty does not see any objection to his sister receiving the jewels you mention, which were formerly given, and are now intended to be delivered to her. Her Danish Majesty will thereby only retain a property, not accept a present. There seems no occasion for rejecting the attention voluntarily offered; but, if the Queen of Denmark is very averse from the proposition, his Majesty does not wish to control her inclination.” The Queen *was* [Pg 234] very averse, and so the offer was rejected. But Matilda requested that her personal trinkets which she had brought from England, and her books, clothing and other things, left scattered about in the King of Denmark’s palaces, should be packed up and sent to her new home at Celle. We shall see how that order was carried out later.

On May 27 the Queen’s longing eyes were gladdened by the sight of the English squadron rounding the point off Elsinore. The Queen was at dinner when the guns at Kronborg saluted and the English ships answered back. She immediately ran out on the ramparts, and wept with joy at the sight of the British flag. Yet it was with mingled feelings that she beheld it, for the vessels which were to carry her away to liberty were also to carry her away from the child whom she dearly loved. The squadron consisted of the *Southampton* (Captain Macbride), the *Seaford* (Captain Davis), and the *Cruiser* (Captain Cummings). Keith, who had now said good-bye to Copenhagen to his great satisfaction, and had handed over the affairs of the legation to his secretary, was at Kronborg when the ships anchored off Elsinore. He at once went down to the harbour to meet Captain Macbride, and conduct him to the castle to have audience of the Queen.



A VIEW OF ELSINORE, SHOWING THE CASTLE OF KRONBORG.
From the Drawing by C. F. Christensen.

The Queen received Captain Macbride very graciously, and conversed with him a few minutes. [Pg 235] When he asked her when it would please her to sail, she exclaimed: “Ah, my dear children!” and, putting her hands to her face, abruptly quitted the room. Later she sent Captain Macbride a message, asking him to forgive her emotion, and appointing two days later, May 30, as the date of her departure.

When it was known that the British squadron was anchored off Elsinore, great excitement prevailed at the Danish court. By way of speeding the parting guest, perhaps also to spy upon her, a deputation of noblemen was sent from Copenhagen by the Queen-Dowager to formally wait upon Matilda and wish her a pleasant voyage. Queen Matilda received the deputation with quiet dignity, and said the day would come when the King would know that he had been betrayed and deceived, but, for herself, she henceforth lived only for her children.

On the day appointed by the Queen for her departure, a lady from the Danish court arrived at Kronborg in one of the royal coaches, with an escort, to take charge of the Princess Louise Augusta. The Queen was agonised at parting from the infant, who had been her sole consolation in the dreary months of her captivity, and whom she had nursed at the breast. She even thought her liberty purchased at too dear a price. The hope that this child would be allowed to remain with her had been one of the inducements which led her to sign the damning paper called her confession. It must have been a bitter thought to her that she had signed away her honour in [Pg 236] vain, and the babe for whom she made this supreme sacrifice was to be torn from her arms. For a long time the Queen held her child to her breast, and wept over it, showering on it caresses and endearing words. The lady who had come to take charge of the infant, and all who witnessed the parting, were hardly less affected; but the scene could not be prolonged for ever. Pleadings and remonstrances were unavailing, and the women had almost to use force to take the little princess from her mother’s arms. At last the heart-broken Queen yielded her infant, and cried wildly, “Let me away, for I now possess nothing here!”

By this time it was six o’clock in the evening. Everything was ready for the Queen’s departure, and Captain Macbride and Sir Robert Keith had been waiting at the castle all the afternoon to escort the Queen on board. At last she was ready to leave. It was arranged that the Queen should be attended as far as Stade by Count and Countess Holstein, Fräulein Mösting and a page. Of her other Danish attendants the Queen now took farewell, and many of them were moved to tears. She also bade adieu to the commandant of Kronborg and his wife, and exonerated them from all blame for the deprivations she had suffered. She thanked the commandant for what he had done directly he was allowed to ameliorate the rigours of her captivity; to his wife she gave a gold snuff-box as a souvenir. Nor did she forget the poor prisoners, for whom she left a sum of money. Though she came to Kronborg a prisoner she left it as a Queen, and a Queen to whom full [Pg 237] honours were paid. The guard presented arms and an escort was drawn up in the courtyard; the Queen descended the stone stairs up which she had been hurried five months before, and entered her coach. The commandant accompanied her to the outermost gate of the fortress, where he took his leave. Thence it was only a few yards to the harbour, where a Danish royal barge was waiting to row the Queen out to the English squadron.

Immediately the Queen and her suite stepped on board H.M.S. *Southampton* the royal standard of England was unfurled, and the cannon of Kronborg and of the Danish guardship in the Sound fired a salute of twenty-one guns. The anchors were weighed immediately, and the little English squadron set sail up the Cattegat, for it was decided to go round Jutland, and so avoid Copenhagen. It was a fine summer’s night, and the Queen remained on deck, her eyes fixed on the vanishing fortress (her child was to remain there until the morrow, when she was to be taken to Copenhagen); nor could she be persuaded to go below until darkness intercepted her view. As there was little wind during the night the vessels made small headway. At the first break of dawn the Queen was on deck again, and to her satisfaction found that she could still catch a glimpse of the towers of Kronborg, which she watched until they faded from her view.

Owing to contrary winds the voyage to Stade took several days. The Queen is said to have [Pg 238] beguiled her voyage by writing a long poem beginning:—

> At length from sceptred care and deadly state,
> From galling censure and ill-omened hate,
> From the vain grandeur where I lately shone,
> From Kronborg’s prison and from Denmark’s throne
> I go.[72]

[72] This poem was found among Sir R. M. Keith’s papers after his death, headed: “Written at sea by the Queen of Denmark on her passage to Stade, 1772.” But the writing was not that of the Queen, and, as Matilda had no gift for literary composition, it is doubtful whether it is genuine. I therefore only quote the first five lines.

CHAPTER XII.

[Pg 239]

REFUGE AT CELLE.

1772-1774.

The English squadron arrived at Stade, a seaport town on the mouth of the Elbe, then in the electorate of Hanover, on June 5. Matilda was received with all the honour due to her rank as Queen of Denmark and Princess of Great Britain. Two highly placed Hanoverian officials rowed out to the flagship, and formally welcomed her to her brother's dominions. The Queen landed shortly afterwards from a royal barge. Here the Hanoverian ladies and gentlemen who were to form her new household awaited her, and here her small Danish suite took their leave, preparatory to returning to Copenhagen by land. The Queen gave Count Holstein a diamond solitaire and similar souvenirs to the others. She also recommended Captain Macbride and the other officers for promotion through the envoy.[73] A large crowd had assembled to witness the Queen disembark, by whom she was greeted with great enthusiasm. There was a very general idea that she had been hardly used, and her brother's Hanoverians were enthusiastic in her defence. The Queen was treated with honour: she was lodged in the principal house at Stade, and [Pg 240] attended by her suite, which was composed of the Dowager Baroness d'Ompteda, chief lady of her court, two other ladies-in-waiting, two chamberlains, three pages and a number of servants. Sir Robert Keith acted as minister in attendance.

[73] Lord Sandwich's despatch, June 28, 1772.

The Queen remained at Stade two days, and then travelled by way of Harburg to Göhrde, a distance of thirty miles, where she was to remain until the castle of Celle was ready for her reception. Göhrde had formerly been a hunting-box of the Dukes of Celle. It was a long, low, unpretending house of brick and timber, and the accommodation was so limited that most of the suite had to be lodged in cottages hard by. Göhrde was situated in the midst of a forest, far removed from any town, and the Queen was more separated from the outer world there than she had been at Kronborg.[74] At Göhrde Sir Robert Keith took leave of the Queen, who parted from him with many expressions of gratitude and good-will. He went, in accordance with his instructions, to England, to give the King a full and particular account of the late revolution in Denmark, and to say all that he could in the Queen's favour.

[74] The house at Göhrde is still standing, and is sometimes used as a hunting-box by the German Emperor, who as King of Prussia has appropriated it, together with all the other palaces of the King of Hanover—except Herrenhausen—which remains the private property of the Duke of Cumberland.

Matilda remained at Göhrde throughout the summer, and the quiet did much to refresh her [Pg 241] weary mind after the exciting scenes she had gone through. In her loneliness the Queen turned to the consolations of religion; the pastor of Lüneburg often visited her, and once a week conducted divine service for her and the household. In August Matilda received a visit from her sister Augusta, Hereditary Princess of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, who came with her husband, and stayed four days. Matilda was overjoyed to see her sister again. They had not met since the days of their youth in England, but they had corresponded regularly. Through good report and evil the Princess of Brunswick had stood by her young sister, and she now determined to see as much as possible of her in the future, which would be comparatively easy, as Brunswick was only a few hours' journey from Celle. She had nothing but sympathy for Matilda, and indignation at her wrongs. Together, no doubt, they went over the whole miserable story of the unhappy marriage in Denmark; here, too, they probably recalled the memories of their childhood in England. The Princess of Brunswick, who had lately come from London, also gave her sister much information concerning George III. and Queen Charlotte, which enabled her to understand better the state of affairs at the English court. The Prince of Brunswick, gallant soldier that he was, also championed the cause of his young sister-in-law, and his visit to her at this time was a proof to all the world that he believed her to be an injured woman. His visit was the more significant from [Pg 242] the fact that he was a nephew of Matilda's greatest enemy, Juliana Maria, who was by birth a princess of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. The Princess of Brunswick and her husband did not always get on very happily together, for the Princess resented her husband's many amours. Their visit to Göhrde, therefore, was regarded not only as evidence of their friendship for the unfortunate Queen, but as proof that harmony was restored between them.

Though the preparations at Celle were pushed forward with all speed, it was late in October before everything was ready in the castle for the Queen's reception. The honest townsfolk of Celle were prepared to give their King's sister the heartiest of welcomes. There had been no court at the castle for nearly seventy years, and they were proud that its ancient glories were to be in part revived; moreover, they sympathised with the sorrows of the young Queen, were indignant at her wrongs, and firmly believed her to be the innocent victim of a court plot. When, therefore, after four months' residence at Göhrde, Matilda fixed October 20 for her entry to Celle, the magistrates and burgesses determined to give her a right royal reception. A public holiday was proclaimed; the streets of the quaint little town, which contain some fine specimens of north German architecture, were gaily decorated, and odes of welcome, both in prose and verse, were prepared. Prince Ernest of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Queen Charlotte's brother, and commandant of the garrison, heartily supported the efforts of the townspeople, and for weeks [Pg 243] nothing was talked of but the entry of Queen Matilda.[75]

[75] The following particulars of the Queen's entry are taken from contemporary newspapers and the town registers of Celle.

The day of October 20 dawned beautifully fine. The town was bright with the sunshine of late autumn; the royal standard floated proudly on the castle tower, and soldiers paraded the streets. There was such an influx of visitors to Celle from the surrounding villages that every house was filled to overflowing, and there was no more accommodation to be had at the inns. At an early hour the townsfolk assembled under arms at the headquarters of the local militia. Each citizen wore red and white ribbons in his hat, and a rosette of the same in his buttonhole. A procession was formed, and headed by the chief officials, the “Four Men,” the townsfolk, with banners flying and music playing, marched to the market-place. Here, after refreshing themselves and generally making merry, they proceeded to line the route to the castle. At the west gate of the town twenty-eight of the most notable burgesses, “clad in blue velveteen and mounted on horses magnificently caparisoned,” awaited the arrival of the Queen, and then, since her coming was delayed, they marched out about a quarter of a mile from the town to meet her. After they had waited a long time, a courier dashed up and informed them that her Majesty was approaching. A few minutes later the Queen’s coach came in sight, followed by the other coaches containing her suite. One of the chief merchants, deputed by the rest, then rode towards the royal carriage, and when the [Pg 244] Queen commanded a halt, he offered her on bended knee the following greeting:—

To us returns the sun of golden days.
“God save the Queen!” shall be our song.
Thou comest laden with a blessing
For which our hearts have hungered long.

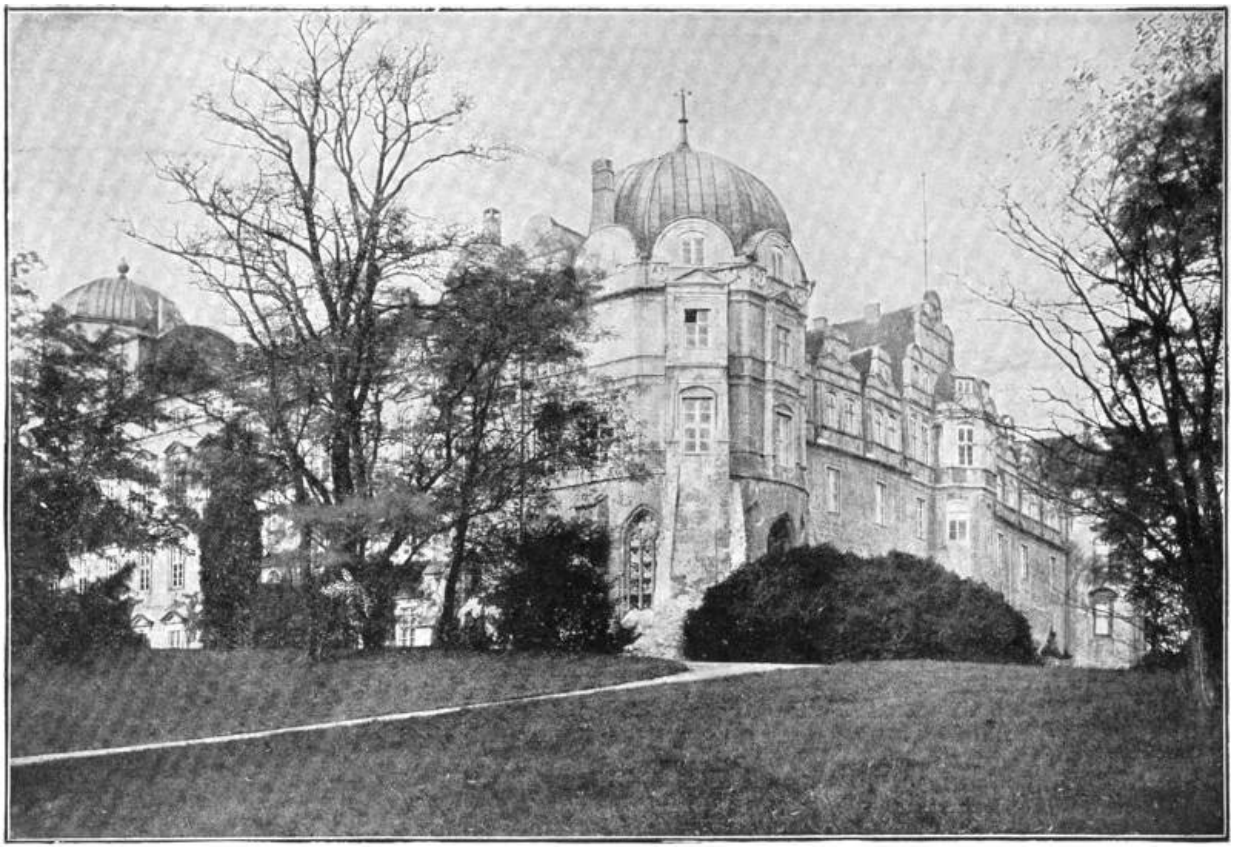
—and so on for many verses. The Queen received the address most graciously. Then the escort of burgesses formed up, and the procession moved towards the western gate. The Queen’s coach was drawn by six horses from the royal stables at Celle, ridden by postilions in liveries of scarlet and gold. An escort of cavalry formed the rear of the procession. At the west gate the Queen again halted, and Würning, the senior of the “Four Men,” read to the Queen an ode written on white satin, beginning:—

Through us, O Queen, Celle utters her rejoicing,
By us doth seek her joy to celebrate,
That thou, O Majesty, hast come among us,
And hast not scorned our lowly gate.

The Queen again signified her liveliest satisfaction, and when the reading of the ode was over, she passed through the gates, and a flourish of trumpets announced her Majesty’s entry into the town. From this point the procession could only make its way slowly, for although the route was lined with burgesses, and the Queen’s coach was escorted by cavalry, the people pressed through and surrounded the carriage, all anxious to get a view of the Queen. “Nor would she have any [Pg 245] turned away, but bowed and smiled from side to side without intermission, and showed in the most unmistakable manner her lively satisfaction and pleasure.” Indeed, the Queen is said to have exclaimed with joyful gratitude: “Thank God! my brother’s subjects do not believe me guilty.” Slowly Matilda made her way past the town hall, where the members of the corporation were drawn up and the commandant of the town had stationed his regiment, towards the castle. She passed over the drawbridge, and a second later entered her new home. She was received at the main entrance by Prince Ernest of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, who conducted her up the grand staircase to her apartments.

The Queen rested a while, and took some refreshment; but after supper, seeing that the town was illuminated in her honour, she announced her intention of going out to view the illuminations, and accompanied by her suite, she made a tour of the streets on foot, commenting with unaffected delight at the devices on the houses. It was ten o’clock before the Queen returned to the castle, tired out with the pleasant excitements of the day. She declared that it did her heart good to come among so kind and devoted a people, who had striven to outvie one another in rendering her honour. Of a truth, after the harshness and averted looks she had encountered everywhere in Denmark the last two years, the warm-hearted greeting must have come as a balm to the youthful Queen. From that hour she took the townsfolk of Celle to her heart, and they took [Pg 246] her to theirs. Even to this day the traditions of her goodness and amiability linger in the little town.

George III. handsomely supplemented his sister’s allowance from Denmark, and though her means did not allow of magnificence or display, she had amply sufficient for her needs, in the quiet and secluded life which her brother wished her to lead. Matilda was royally lodged in the castle of Celle, and had no reason to complain of her quarters. The castle was at that time strongly fortified and surrounded by a moat, which perhaps gave rise to the absurd report, circulated in England, that she was a prisoner in a few small rooms of a gloomy fortress. Nothing could be further from the truth.



THE CASTLE OF CELLE: THE APARTMENTS OF QUEEN MATILDA WERE IN THE TOWER.

I was last at Celle in 1902, and visited the castle especially to see the apartments occupied by the Queen of Denmark. The following notes written at the time may be of interest:—

The castle of Celle is a huge building, partly in late Gothic and partly in the Renaissance style. It is built round a quadrangle, and the apartments used by Queen Matilda occupy the whole of the south side. The largest room is a long gallery, where her household and guests were wont to assemble. This gallery is a long, low, handsome room, hung with pictures on one wall, and pierced by many windows on another. At one end of the gallery is the dining-room, at the other the Queen's favourite sitting-room or boudoir. This is an octagon-shaped room in the south-west [Pg 247] tower of the castle, and lighted by four large windows overlooking the beautiful schloss garden, and giving a glimpse through the trees of the silvery Aller. The walls of this room are lined with a sort of canvas, on which are painted bright birds of paradise and flowers. The castellan declared that the wall-covering and hangings were unchanged since the Queen's day, and were put up by order of George III. for his sister. Before 1866 Matilda's apartments were used by the Queen of Hanover; they are now occupied by the Regent of Brunswick on his rare visits to Celle. The octagon room leads to the Queen's bedroom, a large apartment with walls lined with the same material, on which are painted bright flowers. The windows look over some noble beech-trees. From this a few wooden steps lead down to the garde-robe (dressing-room), and following the winding staircase down, we are confronted by a stout door. Opening this, we emerge directly on the western, or royal, gallery of the beautiful little chapel. In this gallery is the closed pew wherein Matilda used to sit during divine service—a pew not unlike an opera-box, cushioned and carpeted, and with diamond-paned glass windows. At the back is a fresco representing the denial of Christ by Peter. The pew directly faced the altar, and from it Matilda must often have gazed at the beautiful triptych painted by Martin Vos of Antwerp. The centre panel represents the Crucifixion, and George William, the last Duke of Celle, and his wife, Eléonore d'Olbreuse (not [Pg 248] very saintly personages by the way), are painted in the wings of the triptych, kneeling on either side of the central panel in attitudes of adoration. Sometimes, to hear the preacher better, Matilda moved round to the south gallery, immediately facing the pulpit, where she also occupied a lattice-windowed pew. Here, on one of the panes, local tradition has it that she wrote with a diamond the following words in German: "The fear of God is over all things, and will guide me both in the present and in the future." The writing may still be seen, scratched on the pane, but, unfortunately for the legend, it bears no resemblance to the well-known writing of the Queen, though it is always shown as hers.[76]

[76] This chapel (and indeed the whole castle) is full of memories of the great house of Guelph. It is a gem of its kind, exquisitely proportioned and richly decorated, and was restored by the late King of Hanover, George V., "the Blind King," shortly before he was robbed of his kingdom by Prussia. A fresco, representing the King kneeling, in the armour of a Christian warrior, his hands clasped in prayer, and his beautiful face turned towards the altar, occupies the north wall of the chancel.

A few days after Queen Matilda arrived at Celle she received a visit from Keith, who had spent

the summer in England. After reaching London and reporting himself at the foreign office, Keith was commanded to the palace, where the Sovereign gave him audience. He was about to kneel when George III. took him by both his hands, and said: "No, no, Keith; it is not thus we receive our friends," and then expressed to him in the warmest terms his satisfaction at the way in which [Pg 249] he had exerted himself on Queen Matilda's behalf. He soon received well-deserved promotion from the King, who appointed him ambassador at Vienna, a post formerly filled by his father. Keith was now on his way to take up his duties at Vienna. In conformance with instructions, he travelled round by way of Celle to see the Queen in her new home, and report concerning her to the King.

Before Keith left England Lord Suffolk wrote him a private letter in which he said: "*You cannot be too minute and ample on all points of your mission to Zell*. A thousand little circumstances which would of course be passed over on other occasions will be interesting upon this, and I think I may venture to assure you that the more conformable your accounts are to this hint the better they will please."[77]

[77] Letter of Lord Suffolk to Sir R. M. Keith, October 11, 1772.—*Memoirs and Correspondence of Sir R. Murray Keith*, vol. i. The italics are Suffolk's.

This goes to show that George III., who had been reproached with indifference to his sister, now took a particular interest in her welfare, and was anxious to do everything to make her situation as comfortable and happy as circumstances admitted. This is further borne out in the letter which Keith wrote to Lord Suffolk, which gives so authentic and particular account of the Queen at Celle that it is worth quoting in full:—

[Pg 250]

"Celle, *November 2, 1772*.

"My Lord,

"I arrived here on October 31, late in the evening, and next day had the honour of delivering the King's letter to her Danish Majesty, whom I found in perfect health, and without any remains of pain from her late accident. In two very long audiences, which her Majesty was pleased to grant me, I endeavoured to execute with the utmost punctuality his Majesty's command, and shall now lay before your Lordship all the lights those audiences afforded me, relative to the Queen's wishes and intentions. I cannot enter upon that subject without previously assuring your Lordship that the Queen received those repeated proofs of his Majesty's *fraternal affection and friendship*, which my order contained, with the warmest expressions of gratitude and sensibility, and that nothing could be more frank and explicit than her answers to a great number of questions, which she permitted me to ask upon any subject that arose.

"In regard to Denmark, the Queen declares that, in the present situation of that court, she has not a wish for any correspondence or connection there, beyond what immediately concerns the welfare and education of her children. That she never has written a single letter to Denmark since she left it, or received one from thence. That the only person belonging to that kingdom from whom she hears lives in Holstein, and is not connected with the court.[78]

[78] A letter of Queen Matilda's which she wrote from Celle to a member of the Struensee family in Holstein has recently come to light. Unfortunately, I cannot quote it, but it is only of interest as showing that she maintained friendly relations with the family of Struensee after his death.

[Pg 251]

"The Queen having expressed great anxiety with respect to the false impressions which may be instilled into the minds of her children, particularly regarding herself, I thought it my duty to say that such impressions, however cruelly intended, could not, at the tender age of her Majesty's children, nor for some years to come, take so deep a root as not to be entirely effaced by more candid instructors, and the dictates of filial duty, when reason and reflection shall break in upon their minds. The Queen seemed willing to lay hold of that hope, yet could not help bursting into tears when she mentioned the danger of losing the affections of her children.

"Her Majesty appears very desirous to communicate directly to her royal brother all her views and wishes in the most confidential manner; hoping to obtain in return his Majesty's advice and directions, which she intends implicitly to follow. She said that in matters of so private and domestic a nature, it would give her much greater pleasure to learn his Majesty's intentions upon every point *from his own pen*, than through the channel of any of his electoral servants.

"It gave me great satisfaction to find her Majesty in very good spirits, and so much pleased with the palace at Zell, the apartments of which are very spacious and handsomely furnished. She *wishes to have an apartment fitted up in the palace for her sister, the Princess of Brunswick*, as she thinks that the etiquette of this country does [Pg 252] not permit that Princess, in her visits to Zell, to be lodged *out of the palace*, without great impropriety. Her Majesty said that she intended to write herself to the King on this head.

"The Queen told me that the very enterprising and dangerous part which Queen Juliana has acted in Denmark had created greater astonishment in Brunswick (where the abilities and character of that Princess are known) than, perhaps, in any other city of

Europe.

"Her Majesty talked to me of several late incidents at the court of Denmark, but without appearing to take much concern in them. She mentioned, with a smile, some of the paltry things which had been sent as a part of her baggage from Denmark, adding, that this new instance of their meanness had not surprised her. But the Princess of Brunswick, who happened to be present when the baggage was opened, expressed her indignation at that treatment in such strong terms, that she (the Queen) could not help taking notice of it in her letters to the King.

"She made me understand that a small collection of English books would be very agreeable to her; leaving the choice of them entirely to the King.

"Her Majesty more than once expressed how much she considered herself obliged to the King's ministers for the zeal they had shown in the whole of the late unhappy [Pg 253] transactions relating to Denmark and to herself. She is particularly sensible of the great share your Lordship had in all those affairs; and has commanded me to convey to your Lordship her acknowledgments for that constant attention to her honour and interests, which she is persuaded the King will look upon as an additional mark of your Lordship's dutiful attachment to his royal person and family.

"It only remains that I should beg your forgiveness for the great length to which I have swelled this letter. The only excuse I can offer arises from my ardent desire to execute the King's orders with the utmost possible precision.

"I am, etc., etc.,

"R. M. Keith."[79]

[79] *Memoirs and Correspondence of Sir R. Murray Keith*, vol. i.

Keith remained at Celle only a few days. Then he took leave of the Queen whose cause he had championed so doughtily, and proceeded to Vienna. He never saw her again.[80]

[80] Keith remained at Vienna for many years, and retired from the diplomatic service in 1789. He became a Privy Councillor and Member of Parliament. He died at Hammersmith in 1795, aged sixty-four.

George III. tried in every way to shield his sister's reputation, and to prevent any details of the scandal reaching England. "The King of England," wrote Suffolk some months after the Queen's arrival at Celle, "has repeatedly received assurances that no part of those proceedings which affected the Queen of Denmark should ever be made public."[81] Woodford, who had succeeded [Pg 254] Keith at Copenhagen as Minister-Resident, received strict orders to do all in his power to prevent the dissemination of scandalous publications. There were a great many. The year of the Queen's arrival at Celle, Woodford writes to England of "a most injurious libel," in manuscript, being circulated against the Queen, and suspects it is a piece of malice on the part of Count Rantzau.[82] Again, he writes of the circulation of a paper containing the "most detestable part of Struensee's deposition".[83] A whole case of these papers was seized at the Custom House, and owing to the protests of the English minister, Count Osten ordered all copies to be suppressed and the sale forbidden under heavy penalties. Woodford later had a conversation with Count Andreas Bernstorff[84] (who had succeeded Osten at the Foreign Office) on the subject, and reported: "The Danish Minister said it could never be forgotten that the Queen of Denmark was mother of the Prince Royal, the King's sister, and a daughter of England, which were too important considerations not to engage him to be vigilant and active against everything that could in the most distant manner reflect upon the late melancholy and unfortunate [Pg 255] transaction."[85]

[81] Suffolk's despatch to Woodford at Copenhagen, December 15, 1772.

[82] Woodford's despatch, Copenhagen, December 2, 1772.

[83] *Ibid.*, December 8 and 29, 1772.

[84] Andreas Peter Bernstorff, nephew and successor of the famous minister, who became foreign minister on the disgrace of Osten in 1773 and resigned in 1780. He was recalled by the Crown Prince when Regent, afterwards Frederick VI.

[85] Woodford's despatch, May 1, 1773.

Queen Matilda was exceedingly touched by the way in which she was received by the townsfolk of Celle, and as the days went by she more than confirmed the first impressions they had formed of her, and won the affection of all the inhabitants from the highest to the lowest. Celle now, as then, is a quiet little town, with quaint old houses and irregular streets, and no description could convey a complete idea of its homelike charm. The houses are not built with the magnificence of those of Lübeck or Brunswick, whose style they resemble, but on a more modest scale. Most of the old houses date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with high-pitched, red-tiled roofs, and with huge wooden beams built into the walls, and the intervening spaces filled up with brickwork or clay. Here a window, there a doorway or gable-end, calls up the glamour of the past. The outside walls of the old houses are often painted with figures, vines, grapes, oak-leaves, and so forth, while the beams, sills, ties and other woodwork are enriched with carvings showing quaint devices, or texts or mottoes—sometimes humorous and sometimes pious.[86]

[86] The town of Celle has altered very little since Matilda's day. It has grown towards the south, and is now the seat of the higher provincial tribunal of the province of Hanover.

The town has nearly twenty thousand inhabitants.

The Queen walked almost daily about the town, generally attended by only one lady. She went freely in and out among the people, making purchases in the shops, visiting the poor and sick, comforting them with kind words and deeds, and taking a sympathetic interest in everything that concerned them. In her intercourse with the townsfolk of Celle she showed herself opposed to all pride and etiquette, and did her best to bridge over the gulf which separated the classes even more in the eighteenth century than to-day. It was known that she had her sorrows, but she never complained, and conducted herself with a gentle kindness which won all with whom she came into contact. She found great consolation in the society of her former friend, Madame de Plessen, who, soon after she had been banished from Copenhagen, took a house at Celle, and who now renewed her friendship with her young mistress. Matilda never rode, fond though she was of that exercise, and though horses in the royal stables were at her disposal. But she drove occasionally in the country around Celle, which was not very interesting, being for the most part a flat plain varied by clumps of birches, firs and patches of heather. Her farthest excursion was to Hanover, whither she went at long intervals on visits of some ceremony.[87] [Pg 256]

[87] Malortie II., *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Braunschweig-Lüneburgischen Hauses und Hoses*.

QUEEN MATILDA.
From the Painting formerly at Celle.

The Queen’s favourite walk was in the French garden outside the town—so-called because it was planned out after the fashion Le Nôtre had set at Versailles. The paths ran in straight lines between avenues of lime-trees and clipped hedges, something after the manner of Herrenhausen, but smaller. The French garden was public to the town, and in her walks there Matilda made many friends. She often conversed with the townsfolk, walking there, with such affability that they were speedily put at their ease, and became convinced that the Queen’s friendliness was not feigned, but true and natural. She was especially fond of children, and rarely passed them without a kind word; almost every day the school children were able to tell their parents that the “good Queen,” as she was everywhere called, had talked to them. She often invited children to a little party at the castle, where all sorts of things were done to give them pleasure; sometimes she would go to the parents of quite poor children in the town and ask them to spare her their little ones for a few hours. [Pg 257]

The Queen was never so happy as in the society of children, and her great grief was her forced separation from her own; she was never heard to regret the loss of her throne or the brilliant life of courts, but she frequently bewailed the loss of her children. Juliana Maria was determined to prevent every means of communication between the exiled Queen and her children, and for good reason. The secretary at the British Legation writes of her “apprehension” that the Crown Prince

"might one day revenge the injurious treatment his royal mother had undergone".[88] It was with much difficulty that Matilda at last obtained from Copenhagen a picture of her little son. She [Pg 258] hung it in her bedroom, immediately facing her bed, and often gazed at it longingly. Once when she was repeating some verses to the picture, she was surprised by the Baroness d'Ompteda. The Queen repeated the lines, which she said she had altered to suit her sad case:—

Eh! qui donc, comme moi, gouterait la douceur
De t'appeller mon fils, d'être chère à ton cœur!
Toi, qu'on arrache aux bras d'une mère sensible,
Qui ne pleure que toi, dans ce destin terrible.[89]

[88] J. J. Haber's despatch, November 27, 1773.

[89]
Ah! who, like me, could taste the joy divine,
My lovely babe! to mix thy soul with mine!
Torn from my breast, I weep alone for thee
Amidst the griefs which Heaven dispensed to me.

The Queen often wept when she thought of her children, and this, indeed, was the only point on which she refused to be comforted. Maternal love was very strong in Matilda's heart. She took into the castle a motherless little girl of four years old, named Sophie von Benningsen, so that she might give her a mother's care and training.

To provide the Queen with some diversion the theatre in the castle was fitted up, and a company of players came from Hanover at regular intervals, and gave representations there. To these entertainments the Queen would invite the principal people in Celle, and she always attended, and occupied the ducal box—the same box from which her great-grandmother, Sophie Dorothea, had smiled across the courtiers to Königsmarck a hundred years before. Great care was taken [Pg 259] that there should be nothing in the plays which could even remotely resemble the Queen's sad history; to this end comedies were always acted, and tragedies were forbidden. Nevertheless, once, when some children appeared on the stage, the Queen was overcome by emotion, and hurriedly left her box. It was a long time before she could recover her self-control, and she walked about the gardens, notwithstanding that the night was rough and windy, until she regained it. After this incident no more children figured in the plays at Celle.

One day of the Queen's life at Celle very much resembled another, and in that it had no history it might be regarded as happy, though the shadow of sadness brooded over all. She rose early—between seven and eight—and, if the weather permitted, took a little walk in the gardens of the castle, or by the side of the Aller. Some mornings she would breakfast in the gardens, at others return to the castle. After breakfast she would dress herself for the day, and appear in her little circle for an hour. Then often she would go out again, either for a drive, or for a walk in the French garden, and come back to dinner at the castle about two o'clock. She dined with all her household, seated at the head of the table, and conversation was generally brisk and lively. After dinner she would retire to her own apartments, and read, or do some needlework, or play on the harpsichord, and sing to it, for she was an accomplished musician. Later, she would again go for [Pg 260] a walk in the garden, if the weather was fine. Then she dressed for the evening, and joined the circle of her court at eight, when supper was served. To this meal guests were frequently invited from the town, such as Prince Ernest of Mecklenburg-Strelitz or Madame de Plessen, the colonel of the regiment, or some of the neighbouring nobility and gentry. After supper there would be music, or cards, or conversation in the long gallery; sometimes there was a performance in the theatre. At eleven the Queen would retire to her apartments, and the company broke up. She did not always retire to bed at once, for she was fond of astronomy, and on fine nights would repair to the tower of the castle, where there was a telescope, and gaze for a long time at the starry heavens; sometimes she would recite some poetry. Her favourite poem was a hymn of Gellert's, which began:—

Nie will ich dem zu schaden suchen,
Der mir zu schaden sucht.
Nie will ich meinem Feinde fluchen,
Wenn er aus Hass mir flucht.[90]

[90]
Never will I try to harm
Him who does me wrong, etc.

She was regular in her attendance at public worship; every Sunday found her in the chapel, attended by her household. The service, which was after the Lutheran ritual, was conducted by her chaplain, Pastor Lehzen. On rare occasions she attended the church in the town. Every now and then she gave little parties at the castle—on the occasion of her own birthday, or that of members of her suite. In a letter (July 24, 1773) to her chief lady, Baroness d'Ompteda, who was [Pg 261] then absent for a few weeks, taking the waters of Prymont, the Queen wrote: "Madame de Plessen, having wished to celebrate my birthday, gave an illumination in the garden; but the wind was so strong that the bonfire would not burn, so she gave it yesterday evening, when the weather was more favourable. I was there, and went to see the illuminations, which were

everywhere good. The whole of the town was illuminated."[91] One or two more letters, of no particular importance, addressed by the Queen to the Baroness d'Ompteda, have been found. Some slight signs of weariness are evident. She laments that she is unable to send any news; "but you know Celle," she writes, "and therefore will understand".[92] Her life was undoubtedly monotonous, but it seems to have been fairly happy, and she enjoyed the visits of her sister, the Princess of Brunswick, who frequently posted over to Celle for a few days. These visits were the pleasantest distractions of Matilda's life.

[91] N. Falck, *Neues Staatsbürgerliche's Magazin*, Band i., Schleswig, 1883, S. 623.

[92] *Ibid.*, S. 624.

One John Moore, who was a travelling companion of the Duke of Hamilton, came with the Duke to Celle in the summer of 1773 on the way from Hanover, and afterwards published a volume of his travels, in which appears the following account:—[93]

[93] *A View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland and Germany*, by John Moore, London, 1779.

[Pg 262]

"Before dinner I went with the Duke to the castle, where we remained till late in the evening. There was a concert of music between dinner and supper, and the Queen seemed in better spirits than could have been expected....

"The apartments are spacious and convenient, and now handsomely furnished. The *entourage* of the court—the Queen's maids-of-honour and other attendants—have a very genteel appearance, and retain the most respectful attachment to their ill-fated mistress.

"The few days we remained at Zell were spent entirely at court, where everything seemed to be arranged in the style of the other small German courts, and nothing wanting to render the Queen's situation as comfortable as circumstances would admit. But by far her greatest consolation is the company and conversation of her sister; some degree of satisfaction appears in her countenance while the Princess remains at Zell, but the moment she goes away, the Queen, as we are informed, becomes a prey to dejection and despondency. The Princess exerts herself to prevent this, and devotes to her sister all the time she can spare from the duties she owes to her own family. Unlike those who take the first pretext of breaking connections which can no longer be of advantage, this humane Princess has displayed even more attachment to her sister since her misfortunes than she ever did while the Queen was in the meridian of her prosperity.

[Pg 263]

"The youth, the agreeable countenance and obliging manners of the Queen have conciliated the minds of every one in this country. Though she was in perfect health and appeared cheerful, yet, convinced that her gaiety was assumed and the effect of a strong effort, I felt an impression of melancholy which it was not in my power to overcome all the time we remained at Zell."

So matters remained at Celle for nearly two years, and then there came excitement into Matilda's quiet life.

In September, 1774, a young Englishman, named Wraxall, of good Somersetshire family, arrived at Celle. Wraxall was an active, ambitious and enterprising youth, and the fact that he was not rich warned him that he must do something. He therefore resolved to win fame and money by authorship, and to this end set out to make a tour in northern Europe, then comparatively little known. He travelled through Denmark, Sweden and a little of Russia, and came back by way of north Germany to Hamburg. The recent events in Copenhagen (for they were then recent) had excited an extraordinary amount of interest in England, and Wraxall resolved to be the first to give a really full and particular account of what had happened there two years before. So he went to Copenhagen on a voyage of inquiry, and when he was there kept his eyes and ears well open, with the result that he gleaned a great many details of the palace revolution. On his return to Hamburg, as he was so near, he thought he would go to Celle, and pay his respects to the unfortunate heroine of the Danish revolution of 1772, and thus make his contemplated book more complete. To this end he travelled to Celle, and presented himself to Baron Seckendorf, the Queen's chamberlain, and stated his wishes. Seckendorf submitted his name to the Queen, who, always accessible, said that it would give her pleasure to receive Mr. Wraxall, whom she understood to be a young Englishman of birth and education. The Princess of Brunswick, who was staying with her sister at the time, and who was above all things anxious to amuse her, also thought that the company of a travelled and agreeable Englishman would be a welcome diversion. Therefore Baron Seckendorf informed Wraxall that the Queen would receive him. He described the audience in his private journal:—

[Pg 264]

"*Monday, September 19*:—

"I went at half-past one to the castle of Zell. M^{r} Seckendorf introduced me to the *Grande Maîtresse* of her Highness the Princess of Brunswick. The Princess herself entered in about a quarter of an hour; she gave me her hand to kiss, and began conversation with me directly. It was interrupted by the Queen's entrance, to whom I was presented with the same ceremony. Her Majesty and the Princess kept me in constant talk before and after dinner. We talked of Denmark, of Prince Frederick, his intended marriage, etc. 'He was a youth,' said she [the Queen], 'unknown while I was

there.’ Hirschholm, she said, was her favourite palace. ‘But tell me,’ said the Princess, ‘about the Queen-Mother; she is my aunt, but no matter. Say what you will; you may be [Pg 265] free. And for the King, how is he?’ I very frankly expressed my sentiments. The Queen asked me a thousand questions about the court of Russia, Sweden, my travels, etc. The Queen asked me also about her children, the Prince in particular; I told her how they dressed him now. I assured her I had been taken for a spy in Copenhagen.... Her Majesty was very gay, and seemed in no way a prey to melancholy; she was very fat for so young a woman. She asked me my age; I told her. ‘You are then,’ said she, ‘exactly as old as I am; we were born in the same year.’ Her features are pretty, and her teeth very small, even and white. She resembles his Majesty [George III.] infinitely in face, but the Princess said not so strongly as she. I don’t think so, and told her Royal Highness so; her Majesty appealed to one of her maids-of-honour, who agreed in opinion with me. The Queen was dressed in a Barré-coloured gown, or at least an orange-red so very nearly resembling it that I could not distinguish the difference. I asked her how many languages she spoke. ‘Five,’ she said—‘Danish, English, French, German and Italian.’

“The Princess [of Brunswick] is much thinner in face, but not a great deal less in her person; she wants the Queen of Denmark’s teeth, but has a very good complexion. She talked to me about the Duchess of Glo’ster—if I had seen her, if I knew her. ‘She is a very fine woman,’ she added, ‘even now.’ Mrs. C ... was mentioned. ‘She was a [Pg 266] prodigious favourite,’ I remarked, ‘of the Duke of York.’ She replied with a smile: ‘For the moment!’ She did me the honour to ask me to take Brunswick in my way next summer, or whenever I visited Germany again. She said she might and should have mistaken me for a Frenchman. ‘You don’t take that for a compliment, do you?’ the Queen observed. Indeed, no; I was too proud of my country. Macaronis formed a part of our conversation. ‘It is all over now,’ I said; ‘the word is quite extinct in England.’ ‘But tell me,’ said her Majesty, ‘tell me ingenuously, were you not a bit of a one while it lasted?’ I assured her not. I took my leave soon after dinner.

“*Tuesday, September 20*:—

“About ten o’clock I went to the Hôtel de Ville, where at this time the shops of the merchants who come to the fair of Zell are held. Her Majesty the Queen and her sister the Princess were there. I had the honour to talk with them nearly an hour; we conversed in English most familiarly on fifty subjects—the Grand Duke of Russia, the Empress, the peace between Russia and Turkey, my travels, Dantzig, formed the chief articles. I showed her Majesty my medals of the Empress of Russia and some other things. She was dressed quite *à l’Anglaise*—a white bonnet, a pale-pink night-gown a gauze handkerchief, with a little locket on her bosom. Her face is very handsome; they are his Majesty’s features, but all softened and harmonised. Pity she is so large in her [Pg 267] person. The Princess was quite English all over—a black hat over her eyes and a common night-gown with a black apron.”

The next day Wraxall took his leave of Celle, well pleased with his visit, and proceeded to Hamburg, where he intended to take ship for England. But at Hamburg something happened which upset all his plans, and for a short time linked his fortunes closely with those of Queen Matilda.

AUGUSTA, PRINCESS OF GREAT BRITAIN AND DUCHESS OF BRUNSWICK, SISTER OF QUEEN MATILDA.
From the Painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

CHAPTER XIII.[94]

[Pg 268]

THE RESTORATION PLOT.

1774-1775.

[94] This chapter is based upon Sir N. Wraxall's *Posthumous Memoirs*, vol. i., where a more detailed narrative will be found.

Altona, then a town in Danish territory, was only half a mile from the free city of Hamburg, and at the time of Wraxall's visit was thronged with partisans of the deposed Queen. Many of them had been exiled from Copenhagen after the palace revolution of 1772; several belonged to the Danish nobility, and chief among these was Baron Bülow, who had formerly held the post of Master of the Horse to Queen Matilda. Owing to the unpopularity of the Queen-Dowager's rule at Copenhagen, their numbers were increasing daily, and already a plan was under consideration to effect another palace revolution, abolish Juliana Maria and her adherents, and restore Matilda. But so far the plan existed on paper only; no steps had been taken to carry it into effect.

Things had not gone well with the Danish Government at Copenhagen since Matilda had sailed from Kronborg more than two years before. The Queen-Dowager quickly found that it was one thing to seize power and another to maintain it; her spell of popularity was brief, and before long [Pg 269] she became the most hated woman in Denmark, not always very justly, for according to her lights she seems honestly to have tried to do her duty. Before long the conspirators who, under her, had effected the palace revolution fell out among themselves, and the Government was split into two factions, with Rantzau and Köller-Banner on one side, Eickstedt and Guldberg on the other, and Osten trimming between the two. It was not long before the Guldberg faction triumphed. Rantzau was compelled to resign all his offices, and dismissed with a pension to his estates in Holstein, but, as he showed a desire to return to Copenhagen, he was eventually exiled.[95] Osten was banished to Jutland, where he was living in retirement.[96] Köller-Banner was in disgrace, and dismissed from his posts on a suspicion of treasonable correspondence with the French and Swedish envoys. The Queen-Dowager tried to recall him, for he was a favourite with her, and succeeded for a time; but he was eventually overthrown.[97] Thus retribution had fallen on some of Matilda's chief enemies, and though others, like Eickstedt and Beringskjold, remained, their authority was shaken, and the whole power had insensibly passed into the hands of Guldberg, [Pg 270] who acquired the unbounded confidence of the Queen-Dowager. Guldberg was very clever, and a far more cautious man than Struensee, though he did not possess either his genius or his aspirations. The first step of the new Government had been to establish the old *régime*, and to abolish all the reforms brought in by Struensee,[98] and place the power once more in the hands of the privileged classes. But the people, having once tasted the sweets of liberty, did not take kindly to the re-imposition of their former yoke, and the Government grew daily more unpopular. Much though they had disliked Struensee, they had approved of many of his reforms: it was not so much what he did, as the way he did it, to which they objected.

[95] Rantzau went to the south of France. He died in 1789, in his seventy-second year.

[96] A few years later Osten was recalled, and appointed President of the Supreme Court in Copenhagen, but he fell again with Juliana Maria's Government, and died in 1797 at the age of eighty years.

[97] Köller-Banner died at Altona in 1811.

[98] The only one that remains of Struensee's institutions to this day is the foundling hospital, which was so bitterly attacked at the time of its foundation.

The King, who was theoretically the source of all power, was tightly held in the grasp of the Queen-Dowager, whom he had now come to hate quite as much as he used to hate Struensee and Brandt. But he was powerless to free himself from this thraldom, though at times he showed flashes of insubordination. For instance, in one of his comparatively lucid intervals he signed a state paper as follows: "Christian VII. by the grace of God King of Denmark, etc., in company with Juliana Maria by the grace of the devil." He often lamented the loss of Matilda, whom he said he had been forced to divorce against his will, and wished her back again. He had probably [Pg 271] discovered that this annoyed the Queen-Dowager more than anything else, and so he spoke of his wife in the most affectionate terms. Of his divorce he said it was the only one on record effected when neither of the parties wished it. In the popular mind, too, a strong reaction had set in in favour of the exiled Queen. She had always been kind and affable to the people, and she was credited with whatever was beneficial to them in Struensee's legislation. The picture of her torn from her children and forced to live in exile powerfully appealed to the public imagination, and now that Struensee was out of the way her popularity returned with threefold force. Her sufferings and sorrows were attributed to the vindictiveness of the Queen-Dowager; all Matilda's shortcomings were forgiven on the score of her youth and inexperience; it was declared that she was the innocent victim of a cruel plot, and she gradually became vested in the eyes of the people with the attributes of a saint and a martyr. The Queen-Dowager was aware of this and sought to win over the malcontents. "The suspected partisans and friends of the unfortunate [Queen] have many of them been caressed this winter," writes Woodford, "and some have received places."[99] But her efforts did not meet with great success. Those of the Danish nobility who favoured Matilda's cause were aware of the popular feeling, and did their utmost to encourage it, for they counted on the young Queen's personality as their most powerful weapon to overthrow the [Pg 272] Guldberg ministry and the domination of Juliana Maria.

[99] Woodford's despatch, Copenhagen, July 18, 1773.

Such, then, was the state of affairs in Denmark when Wraxall arrived at Hamburg after his visit to Matilda at Celle. The opera, the theatre and all public amusements were at Hamburg; it consequently offered great attractions to the Danish families at Altona, and many of them were constantly to be found in the places of amusement at Hamburg, and in the houses of its wealthy citizens. Wraxall dined with Hanbury, the English consul, on September 28, and among the company present were several Danes, including Baroness Bülow, Baron and Baroness Schimmelmann and M. le Texier, who had been treasurer to Christian VII. during his tour in England. He also saw at the opera the next night the beautiful Countess Holstein, who had taken refuge in Altona. He says: "I examined her through my glass. She is doubtless pretty, though not in my opinion so divinely fair as fame says. Her history at Hirschholm is well known. There was no gallantry, I thought, marked in her features, though it is said she certainly has that quality in her constitution. I thought of the unhappy Brandt as I looked at her." Wraxall was well received by several of the first families at Hamburg, and one night, when he was supping at the house of a brother-in-law of Le Texier, where several of the Danish nobility were present, he spoke of his recent visit to Celle, and expressed himself strongly in favour of Queen Matilda, and spoke of his [Pg 273] eagerness to avenge her wrongs. He was a young man of mercurial temperament, and had probably supped too freely, but his words made an impression on the Danes who were present.

A few days later Le Texier called upon Wraxall, and with an air of secrecy asked him if he really meant what he said the other evening, and whether he would be willing to serve the Queen of Denmark, because, in that case, he could put him in the way of doing so. Wraxall was momentarily overcome with astonishment at being taken at his word, but he soon recovered himself, and declared with all the enthusiasm of youth that he was willing to risk his life, if need be, for the sake of the young Queen. Le Texier within the next few days introduced him to the eldest son of Baron Schimmelmann, and then to Baron Bülow. These two were the leaders of a project to restore the Queen. So far they had not been able to communicate with Matilda, for though Celle was only eighty miles distant from Hamburg and Altona, they were surrounded by spies from the court of Copenhagen, who reported every movement they made. At Celle, too, there were spies, who would assuredly have reported the arrival of any Dane there. Wraxall, therefore, a young Englishman travelling apparently for his pleasure, was the very agent they wanted to open up communications with the Queen. Baron Bülow having sworn Wraxall to secrecy, unfolded at some length the plan which had been formed, and bade him acquaint the [Pg 274] Queen with it verbally, since they were afraid to put anything on paper. He gave Wraxall his seal as his credentials to prove to the Queen that he came from Bülow. Wraxall was instructed to go to Celle and tell the Queen that a numerous and powerful party were anxious to restore her to the throne, and were willing to incur the dangers of such an enterprise if she on her part would agree to the following conditions:—

> First: She must assure them of her willingness to return to Denmark and take up the reins of government, which the King was incapacitated from holding in his own hands.
>
> Secondly: She must co-operate with, and assist, her adherents in every way in her power.
>
> Thirdly: She must endeavour to induce her brother, the King of England, to extend his powerful protection and assistance to the enterprise.

This last condition was adjudged the most important, for according to Woodford, who followed Keith at Copenhagen, the idea which discouraged the partisans and well-wishers of the unfortunate Queen was that: "His Majesty is too offended ever to permit his royal sister to return again to this country."[100]

[100] Woodford's despatch to Suffolk, Copenhagen, October 17, 1772.

Thus authorised and instructed, Wraxall set out from Hamburg on the evening of October 8, and by travelling all night reached Celle the evening of the following day. He learned to his regret that the Princess of Brunswick was still at the castle, for Bülow and his friends had warned him [Pg 275] that she was not to be trusted in this matter, as she was the niece by marriage of Juliana Maria; also they feared that Matilda might confide in her sister too freely. Wraxall, therefore, determined to say that he had come back from Hamburg to Celle as the bearer of a letter from Mr. Matthews, the British minister there, to the Queen. The letter, it need scarcely be said, was not from Matthews, but from Wraxall, in which he informed the Queen, without mentioning names, of the proposed plan for her restoration. On the first page of the letter he wrote a warning, in which he entreated the Queen to consider what followed as secret, and to be especially careful not to arouse the suspicions of the Princess of Brunswick. The following morning Wraxall waited upon the Queen's chamberlain, Baron Seckendorf, and told him he had a letter for her Majesty from the English minister at Hamburg, relative to a company of travelling comedians whom he understood the Queen wished to act at Celle, and he would like to deliver it into her own hands. Seckendorf shortly returned with a message from the Queen, saying that she would be pleased to see Mr. Wraxall at dinner at two o'clock the same day. At that hour he presented himself at the castle, and awaited the Queen with her household in the long gallery. Presently the Queen and the Princess of Brunswick came together out of the Queen's apartments, and the Queen, advancing towards Wraxall, said: "I am glad to see you here again. I understand [Pg 276] that you have a letter for me from Mr. Matthews." Wraxall presented it, and the Queen withdrew to the window to break the seals. The Princess of Brunswick also welcomed Wraxall cordially, and he tried to keep her in conversation while the Queen was glancing over her letter. He noticed the Queen start when she read the first lines, and she hastily put the paper into her pocket, her face showing considerable agitation, but as dinner was announced at that moment her confusion

did not attract attention. What followed had better be told in Wraxall's own words:—

"At table Caroline Matilda recovered herself, and conversed with her usual freedom and gaiety. The Queen and Princess were seated in two state chairs, separated nearly five feet from each other. When the dessert was brought the Queen, unable any longer to restrain her curiosity and impatience, took the letter from her pocket, and, placing it in her lap, perused it from the beginning to the end; from time to time she raised her eyes, and took part in the conversation. The distance at which she was from the Princess of Brunswick rendered it impossible for the letter to be overlooked." After taking coffee the Queen and the Princess withdrew, and Wraxall returned to the little inn where he lodged.

A few hours later Wraxall received a visit from Seckendorf, who told him that the Queen had informed him of the whole business, and had sent him as her confidential agent. She was fully [Pg 277] alive to the necessity of caution, and she therefore feared she would not be able to receive Wraxall in private audience while her sister was there, as the Princess scarcely quitted her for a moment, but if he would send his credentials through Seckendorf she would communicate with him further. Wraxall then gave to Seckendorf Bülow's signet-ring, and acquainted him with the names of those from whom he came. The following day Seckendorf came back with the Queen's answer, which he delivered verbally. It was to the following effect: That the Queen, as she was living under the protection of her brother, the King of England, could not commit herself to any plan without first obtaining his consent and approbation. That, if she consulted only her own happiness and peace of mind, she would never return to Copenhagen, but her duties as a mother and a queen compelled her to overlook the wrongs she had suffered, and resume her station in Denmark if a proper opportunity offered. That, as far as she herself was concerned, she agreed to the propositions made by the Danish nobility if it could be proved to her that they were sufficiently numerous and powerful to carry out their plans with any hope of success; on this point she desired they would give her more information. She would then write as strongly as possible to the King of England, and ask him to lend his assistance towards her restoration. She returned Bülow's seal, which she had enclosed in an envelope addressed in her own handwriting [Pg 278] to Baron Bülow, and sealed with one of her own seals; she had also written her initials "C. M." on the envelope, but beyond this she wrote nothing.

Armed with this Wraxall left Celle the following day, and returned to Hamburg where he reported his progress to Baron Bülow (who met him at a retired spot on the ramparts) and gave him back his seal. Bülow immediately recognised the Queen's handwriting on the envelope, which was Wraxall's credential, and, when he had learned all that had passed, he said he would communicate with his associates, and inform Wraxall again.

Wraxall remained at Hamburg a week, and then received instructions to return to Celle. His message to Queen Matilda, as before, was only verbal, though he was authorised to put it on paper when he reached Celle. It was to the following effect: The Danish nobility thanked the Queen for her gracious reply to their communication, and were quite satisfied with it. With regard to her request for further information, Baron Bülow, in addition to himself and Baron Schimmelmann the younger, was empowered to answer for the Viceroy of Norway, who would secure that kingdom and its capital, Christiania, for the Queen; for Baron Schimmelmann the elder, who, though he refused to take any active part in the enterprise, or to risk by any overt act his safety and vast fortune, was sincerely attached to the cause; for the Governor of Glückstadt, one of the most important fortresses in Holstein, who was disposed to aid the Queen; for certain [Pg 279] officers in Rendsburg, the key of Schleswig, which would open its gates (as the party had secret adherents in the garrison, who would declare themselves on the Queen's side) when the moment arrived; and for numerous friends who, he declared, were powerful in the army, the navy, the guards, in the metropolis, and even about the person of the King himself. For the rest, the Queen's friends entreated her to be content with the assurances of the Baron Bülow, their spokesman, and not ask for a list of all the names, which would be dangerous. They also urged her to write to the King of England as soon as possible, and ask him not only whether he would approve of the plan to restore his sister, but if he would grant some pecuniary assistance towards it. During the forthcoming winter they would prepare everything to carry out their plans, and strike the blow in the spring, as soon as the two Belts should be free of ice.

Fortified with this message, Wraxall again went to Celle, entering the town this time *incognito*, and lodging under an assumed name in a little inn in the suburbs. He communicated immediately with Seckendorf, who came to him the following morning, informed him the Princess of Brunswick was no longer at Celle, and took his letters and messages to deliver to the Queen. A few hours later Seckendorf came back, and told Wraxall to go immediately to the French garden outside the town, where the Queen would meet him. Wraxall repaired thither without delay, and [Pg 280] a few minutes later the Queen drove up in a coach. She sent away her carriage and all her attendants except one lady, who discreetly retired to a pavilion. The Queen gave Wraxall an hour's interview. During the greater part of the time they paced up and down between the avenue of limes in a secluded part of the garden. The Queen spoke quite unreservedly. She said that she was satisfied with the names mentioned, and, for the rest, she would trust the good faith of Baron Bülow. That she would write to the King of England with great earnestness, and ask him to send a minister to Copenhagen, friendly to her restoration, and also to help the cause with money; for herself, she regretted that she could not contribute, owing to her limited income, which only sufficed for her needs, and she had no jewels, as everything had been robbed from her when she left Denmark. That she was quite willing for her part to visit her friends in disguise, but she was convinced that the King her brother would never permit her to do so. "Still," she added, "could I come, or did I come disguised, nobody would know me, as I am much altered

since I was in Denmark." This was true, as the Queen since her residence at Celle had become very stout. She determined that Wraxall should go to London to endeavour to obtain an audience of the King, and the Queen gave him very minute instructions as to how he was to behave. "You must," she said, "go very quietly to work with my brother. If you manage with address, he will favour the attempt, but it will be tacitly, not openly." When the conversation was ended the [Pg 281] Queen took Wraxall to the summer-house, where her lady was waiting, and a dessert of fruit was laid; here he took his leave. The Queen mentioned during the audience that no less than three emissaries from Copenhagen had reached her since she came to Celle, but as they were all either suspicious or worthless she refused to have anything to say to them.

Acting on the Queen's commands and the instructions of Bülow, Wraxall started the following day for England, *via* Osnabrück; he arrived in London on November 15. The Queen had told him to go first either to Lord Suffolk or to the Baron von Lichtenstein, grand marshal of the court of Hanover, then in London, who was highly esteemed by the King, and who had shown her much kindness: she had written to them both. Wraxall first called on Lord Suffolk in Downing Street, but that nobleman either would not, or could not, see him, urging in excuse that he was ill with the gout. So Wraxall repaired to Lichtenstein's lodgings in Pall Mall, where he was more fortunate. He gave Lichtenstein the Queen's letter, and the Hanoverian promised that he would try to find an opportunity to put the matter before the King; but he advised Wraxall not to call again on Lord Suffolk until he had seen the King. He then asked Wraxall several questions, which the latter answered to the best of his ability, and gave him the fullest account possible of the project, and of everybody connected with it.

Three days later Lichtenstein saw Wraxall again, and told him that he had talked to the King at [Pg 282] "Queen's House" on the subject, and that the King had given him positive injunctions that Wraxall was not to see Lord Suffolk, but to consider Lichtenstein the sole medium through which all communications were to pass to the King. The King was at present considering the Queen's letter, and until he had considered it he did not think fit to grant Wraxall an audience; but he commanded him to put on paper a full and complete account of the project, including the names of every one connected with it directly or indirectly. Wraxall thereupon drew up another long document, which was duly transmitted to the King through Lichtenstein, and on December 5 he received the King's answer through the same medium. George III. was very cautious: he gave a general approval of the plan to effect the Queen's restoration, but he refused to lend any direct assistance; he therefore declined to advance any money at present, and finally he would not be induced by any entreaties of the Queen, or by any supplications of the Danish nobility, to affix his signature to any paper promising aid, or expressing general approbation. This unsatisfactory reply Wraxall transmitted to Bülow by cipher at Hamburg, and he also wrote to the Queen through Baron Seckendorf. From Seckendorf he received an answer on January 3, 1775, expressing the Queen's satisfaction with the King's approval, though regretting the qualifications which accompanied it. On January 20 he received an answer from Bülow, in which he adjured [Pg 283] Wraxall to return to Hamburg as soon as possible, with the King's approbation authenticated in whatever way might be practicable. He added that his friends were busily preparing everything to strike the decisive blow, and they were sanguine of success. These letters Wraxall at once communicated to Lichtenstein, who submitted them to the King. On February 2 Wraxall received through Lichtenstein a letter from the King to his sister, and a paper containing four articles, which the Baron drew up in Wraxall's presence, and affixed his seal and signature to them—so empowered by the King. These articles ran as follows:—

> "First: His Britannic Majesty gives his consent and approval to the plan concerted by the adherents of his sister, the Queen of Denmark, for restoring her to the throne.
>
> "Secondly: His Majesty insists that in the execution of it no blood be spilled, nor any measures of severity exercised towards the personal administration in Denmark, except such as are indispensable to maintain the counter-revolution.
>
> "Thirdly: His Britannic Majesty guarantees the repayment of all the money advanced or expended in a necessary prosecution of the Queen of Denmark's revolution.
>
> "Fourthly: His Britannic Majesty will authorise and empower his resident at the court of Copenhagen to declare in the most public manner, as soon as the revolution in favour [Pg 284] of the Queen is accomplished, that the King of Great Britain approves of it, and will maintain it against all opposition."

LOUISE AUGUSTA, PRINCESS OF DENMARK AND DUCHESS OF AUGUSTENBURG, DAUGHTER OF QUEEN MATILDA.

Lichtenstein told Wraxall that it was the King's pleasure that he should first go to Celle to deliver the letter to the Queen, and show her the articles signed by Lichtenstein; then, after he had seen the Queen, he was to proceed to her Danish adherents at Hamburg. Accordingly, Wraxall left London on February 3, 1775, and after a long and troublesome journey arrived at Celle a fortnight later, on February 17.[101] He entered the town as before under an assumed name, and went to an obscure inn. The next morning he received a visit from Seckendorf, who received him with pleasure, and told him that the Queen was most impatient to see him, and would give him an audience that afternoon. "When you hear the palace clock strike four," Seckendorf said, "set out from the inn on foot for the castle. Mantel, the Queen's valet, will wait to receive you, and conduct you to her." Accordingly, Wraxall gave Seckendorf his despatches, and went to the castle at the hour named. Mantel was waiting for him, and admitted him through a side door, probably in the western wing. He was led through a great number of rooms to a small apartment, and there left alone; at the end of it were stairs leading to the Queen's chamber.[102] A minute later the Queen came into the room, and welcomed Wraxall most graciously. Their interview is best told in his own words:— [Pg 285]

> "We conversed till about ten minutes past six entirely alone, and in the most unreservedly undisguised manner. Her Majesty made me the recital of her reign—of the revolution—of her own conduct on that fatal night when she lost her crown. I listened in silence and astonishment. What a recapitulation did she not make me! Her words are for ever engraven on my heart; I could repeat her story almost verbatim. I know what scarce any other man on earth can know. I must own her unreserve, her goodness, her minute detail of circumstances the most concealed in their nature, my situation quite alone with her, superadded to some consciousness still more affecting, made me more than once forget I was talking to a queen. She was dressed in a brown silk polonaise, trimmed with green silk, her hair powdered, a locket on her bosom. Her under-lip is too large, but her teeth are fine, and that family violence in speaking becomes her; her nose is finely shaped, and her eyes are eloquent; she is thinner in the face than she was last October. She showed me his Majesty's letters to her, and permitted me to carry an extract from one away with me. She was obliged to leave me

soon after six, which otherwise she seemed in no way inclined to do. Her talents are very good, and in mimicry she excels; her specimen of Prince Frederick of Denmark was excellent.” [Pg 286]

[101] In his private journal Wraxall gives a long account of the hardships of this journey, but, as they concern himself rather than the Queen of Denmark, I omit them here.

[102] I have seen this room—a small, dark apartment. It was the garde-robe (or dressing-room), and is on the way from the Queen’s bedroom and the chapel.

After another interview with Seckendorf Wraxall was conducted out of the castle as secretly as he came. The next day he went to Hamburg, where, after an inclement journey, he arrived on February 21. At Hamburg he remained three weeks, and saw a good deal of Baron Bülow, to whom he communicated the result of his visit to England and many messages from Queen Matilda. The articles drawn up and signed by Lichtenstein on behalf of George III., which Wraxall had first submitted to Matilda, he now handed to Bülow, who received them with mingled feelings. The first two articles he wholly approved, but he regretted that George III. would not advance any pecuniary assistance and still more he lamented the fourth article, which promised that the English envoy at Copenhagen would only support and avow the revolution *after* it had been effected, instead of avowing it while it was actually in progress.

Bülow forwarded the articles to his confederates in Copenhagen, and also had many consultations with his friends at Altona. It was not until March 14 that he received an answer from Copenhagen, which was much as Bülow had anticipated: all the conspirators objected to the fourth article, and all agreed that it would be well to get the King of England to reconsider his decision on that point. What they asked was that the British envoy should come forward at the [Pg 287] time they were effecting the counter-revolution, and publicly avow it on behalf of the King, his master. Bülow therefore resolved that a letter to the King of England should be drawn up to this effect, and Wraxall should convey it to London.

On March 20 Bülow gave Wraxall the letter to the King. His instructions were that he should take this document first to Celle, submit it to the Queen, and ask her to enclose it in a letter written by herself to the King of England, in which she would urge their plea by every means in her power. Wraxall was also to acquaint the Queen with the plan of the revolution, which was now settled, and was as follows: On the day fixed certain of the conspirators would repair to the palace, obtain access to the King (Christian VII.), and induce, or compel, him to affix his name to documents already drawn up. These documents would include an order to the Queen-Dowager to retire to her own apartment until the King’s further pleasure were known, and to Prince Frederick to remove to one of the country palaces—probably that of Frederiksborg. At the same time, by virtue of a similar order, the ministers would be dismissed, or arrested, and a messenger sent off to Celle to invite the Queen to return to Denmark to resume her proper rank and authority. That their measures would be so well concerted and so rapidly executed as to produce the counter-revolution in a space of a few hours. That they trusted, therefore, Queen Matilda on her part [Pg 288] would repair with all possible expedition to Copenhagen. A proper escort, becoming her dignity, would be formed to accompany her from Altona through the Danish territories, and her adherents calculated that she might, with despatch, reach Copenhagen in four days from the time of her quitting Celle, if no extraordinary impediment arose in her crossing the two Belts. Her presence in the capital of Denmark would animate the courage of her friends, cover her enemies with consternation, and complete the counter-revolution.

Wraxall arrived at Celle on March 22 with the same secrecy as on former occasions. As the Princess of Brunswick was at the castle he was unable to see the Queen for two days, and then he was taken to the Queen secretly on the night of Friday, March 24, and had an audience with her after the Princess of Brunswick had retired to rest. It was a dark and stormy night when Wraxall set out from his lodgings, and he waited for some little time at the entrance of the drawbridge over the moat, sheltering himself as well as he could from the wind and rain. At last Mantel came, and led him in silence over the drawbridge, under the portico, and into the courtyard of the castle, and thence by a side door up a private staircase and along a corridor into the Queen’s library or boudoir. “Two candles were burning,” says Wraxall, “and the book-cases were thrown open, as it was uncertain at what hour the Queen would come to me.” He waited some time alone, and then Mantel brought him a note from Seckendorf, saying that the Queen was in the [Pg 289] Princess of Brunswick’s apartments, and would come directly she had retired. As this was his last interview, it had better be told in his own words:—

> “I had scarcely perused the note when I heard the Queen’s footstep on the staircase; a moment afterwards she entered the room. She was charmingly dressed, though without diamonds; she had on a crimson satin sacque and her hair dressed. I drew a chair, and entreated her to allow me to stand and receive her commands while she was seated, but she declined it, and we both stood the whole time. Our interview lasted about two hours. It was a quarter past eleven when I asked her Majesty if I should retire, and she signified her pleasure that I should. She approved of the letter drawn up by the Danish nobility to the King of Great Britain, as well as the request contained in it, which she confessed to be natural and just, though she doubted his Britannic Majesty’s consent to it. ‘I will, however,’ she added, ‘write to my brother the letter requested before I go to bed to-night, enforcing as far as I am able the petition of the nobility. You shall receive it from Baron Seckendorf to-morrow morning, and at the same time that of the Danish nobility shall be returned to you.’
>
> “Her Majesty ordered me to assure Baron von Bülow by letter that she was satisfied

with all I communicated to her on his part, and that she should be ready on the shortest notice to mount on horseback in men's clothes, in order more expeditiously to reach Copenhagen, there to encounter every difficulty with her friends." [Pg 290]

The Queen thanked Wraxall very warmly for his zeal in her service, and said she would commend him to the King her brother, who, she doubted not, would recompense him properly. She told him to write to her freely from England, and then bade him adieu. "When the Queen was about to withdraw," says Wraxall, "she opened the door, but held it a few minutes in her hand as if she had something to say; she then retired." He was conducted from the castle as secretly as he had entered it, and the next morning left Celle on his way to England.

Wraxall arrived in London on April 5, and at once went to Lichtenstein's lodgings, but to his dismay found that the Baron had gone to Hanover ten days previously. He had, however, left him a letter, directing him to wait upon Herr von Hinuber, the Hanoverian *Chargé d'Affaires*. Accordingly Wraxall went to Hinuber, who told him he had "the King's directions to take from Mr. Wraxall any letters he might have, and send them immediately to the King at the 'Queen's House'". Wraxall therefore gave him two packets addressed to the King, one from Queen Matilda, and the other from her Danish adherents. He also added a letter from himself, in which he again prayed the King to give him a private audience.

To these letters George III. returned no reply, and Wraxall, after waiting a fortnight in London, [Pg 291] wrote to Baron Bülow telling him how matters stood, and asking for instructions; he also wrote to the Queen at Celle. Then followed another interval of silence. It was not until May 10 that Wraxall received a letter from Bülow, in which he informed him that the state of affairs at Copenhagen was extremely critical, and he could not give him further directions until the return of Baron Schimmelmann the younger, who had gone to Copenhagen. In the meantime he besought him not to leave London, either for Celle or Hamburg, unless he received instructions from George III.

But no word came from the King, and, while Wraxall was waiting, the London journals announced the death of the Queen of Denmark, which had taken place on May 11 at Celle.

This was the first intimation Wraxall received of the melancholy event, and he was quite overcome, for it meant not only the loss of the Queen, for whom he felt a chivalrous devotion, but the death-blow to all his hopes of reward and promotion. On May 25 Wraxall received a letter from Seckendorf, in which he lamented the loss of a kind and gracious mistress at a moment when they had hoped her troubles were nearing an end. The letter also informed him of an important fact, namely, that George III. had written to Queen Matilda an answer to the letter in which she urged the request of the Danish nobility that the English envoy at Copenhagen should [Pg 292] avow the revolution while it was in progress. Whether the King refused her prayer, or granted it, will never be known, for the letter arrived at Celle when Matilda was either dying or dead, and it was returned to the King unopened. The probability is that he refused, and preferred to send his refusal to her direct rather than through the agency of Wraxall. The fact that he declined to see Wraxall, or recognise him in any way, goes to show that he regarded the plot with very dubious approval. Of the existence of the plot there is no doubt, but Wraxall's version of it, and especially of the part he played, needs some corroborative evidence. This is afforded by a confidential letter which George III. wrote some years later to Lord North, in answer to Wraxall's repeated demands that some reward should be given him for the services he had rendered to the King's sister. The letter (dated February 9, 1781) ran as follows:—

> "You may settle with Mr. Wraxall, member for Hinton, in any just demands he may have. Undoubtedly he was sent over by the discontented nobility of Denmark previous to the death of the late Queen, my sister, with a plan for getting her back to Copenhagen, which was introduced to me with a letter from her. Her death and my delicate situation, having consented to her retiring to my German dominions, prevented me from entering eagerly into this proposal."[103]

[103] Stanhope's *History of England*, 3rd edition, 1853, vol. vii., Appendix xxxii. Further corroborative evidence has been furnished by the publication of some letters of Bülow, in which he mentions that he employed Wraxall as his agent in the plot to restore the Queen.

Wraxall considered himself very shabbily treated by George III., who turned a deaf ear to his [Pg 293] demands for years. It was not until 1781, when Wraxall had won a seat in the House of Commons, and with it a useful vote to the Government, that the Prime Minister, Lord North, gave him, on behalf of the King, a thousand guineas for his services to the Queen of Denmark, together with the promise of a seat at the Board of Green Cloth. Wraxall's support was purchased for a time, but two years later, when he gave a vote against the Government, he forfeited all chance of further favours from the King, and the promised appointment vanished for ever. But a thousand guineas was surely a sufficient reward for a young and unknown man, admittedly in quest of adventure, who did little but carry a few letters between Hamburg, Celle and London, and it was rather for Baron Bülow and the Queen's adherents, whose agent he was, to reward him than for George III.

Shortly after the Queen's death Wraxall states that he received a letter from Bülow, who said that the revolution was on the point of fruition when the ill news from Celle came to scatter consternation among Matilda's adherents. It would seem, therefore, that Bülow and his friends would have proceeded with their plan whether George III. had granted their request or not. It is idle to speculate whether they would have succeeded in their undertaking. All things were [Pg 294]

possible in Denmark at that time to those who could seize the person of the King. But it must be remembered that Christian VII. was closely guarded. Moreover, there is no evidence to show that the conspirators had the army on their side, and, without the help of the army, though they might have effected a revolution, they would have been unable to maintain it.

CHAPTER XIV.

[Pg 295]

THE DEATH OF THE QUEEN.

1775.

We last saw the Queen with her hand on the door, as she bade farewell to Wraxall and wished him God-speed on his journey. “She never perhaps looked more engaging,” he wrote later, “than on that night, in that attitude and in that dress. Her countenance, animated with the prospect of her approaching emancipation from Zell—which was in fact only a refuge and an exile—and anticipating her restoration to the throne of Denmark, was lighted up with smiles, and she appeared to be in the highest health. Yet, if futurity could have been unveiled to us, we should have seen behind the door, which she held in her hands, the ‘fell anatomy,’[104] as ‘Constance’ calls him, already raising his dart to strike her. Within seven weeks of that day she yielded her last breath.”[105]

[104]

> Then with a passion would I shake the world
> And rouse from sleep that fell anatomy.
>
> *King John*, Act III., Scene iv.

[105] Wraxall’s *Posthumous Memoirs*, vol. i.

[Pg 296]

Queen Matilda’s end was tragically sudden—so sudden as to call forth the wildest rumours of foul play. A report was current in Celle that the Queen was poisoned at the instigation of her deadly enemy, Juliana Maria, acting through the agency of a negro, named Mephisto, who was cook at the castle. It was said that he first gave a poisoned cup of chocolate to a young page in the Queen’s household, and seeing that it worked with fatal effect, he poisoned the Queen in the same way. The death of the Queen at the moment when their plans were nearing fruition doubtless seemed suspicious to her Danish adherents who spread this report, which was firmly believed by the common people in Copenhagen and Celle. But the evidence of her physicians,[106] who sent a detailed account of the Queen’s last illness and death to George III., leaves no doubt that she died from natural causes.

[106] Leyser, a physician of Celle, and Zimmermann, a physician of Hanover.

Like all the children of Frederick Prince of Wales (except Augusta of Brunswick and possibly George III.), Matilda was not of a strong constitution. The climate of Denmark never agreed with her, and the awful experiences she had gone through at Copenhagen shattered her health. She was naturally of a plethoric habit of body, and though in Denmark she had kept this tendency in check by continual exercise, such as riding, walking and dancing—harmless amusements which her enemies urged as offences against her—in her five months’ imprisonment at Kronborg she could take no exercise at all, and afterwards at Celle she voluntarily gave up riding and dancing

[Pg 297]

lest she should call forth unkindly comment. The result was she became exceedingly stout—in so young a woman much too stout for health. She had always lived an active life, and the forced inaction to which she was condemned at Celle was very bad for her, and the dulness and monotony weighed on her spirits. Moreover, during the last few months, she had been leading a life of suppressed excitement; the thought of her possible restoration continually agitated her, and one day she would be greatly elated, and another day correspondingly depressed. All this told upon her strength, and rendered her the more susceptible to illness, should any come her way.

In the spring of 1775 (in fact, while Wraxall was there) an epidemic called indifferently “military fever” or “the purples” had spread to a great extent in Celle, and there were many deaths. Queen Matilda was accustomed to walk freely about the town, and she therefore may have exposed herself to infection; but she does not seem to have taken any harm from the epidemic until after the death of her page. This boy, who died on May 5, was a great favourite with the Queen; she felt his death very much, and insisted on going to see him when he was lying dead in one of the rooms of the castle. Her ladies tried to dissuade her, but she would go, and either then, or at some other time, she caught the infection. On coming back from the page’s room she learned that the little girl, Sophie von Benningsen, whom she had adopted, was also down with the fever. The

[Pg 298]

Queen, very much depressed, went for a walk in the French garden, and when she came back she was so tired that she could scarcely mount the steps of the castle. She dined as usual with her court, but ate scarcely anything, and after dinner felt too unwell to play cards and withdrew to her chamber.

The next morning, after a bad night, she complained of a sore throat and chill. Her physician, Dr. Leyser, was called in, and compelled her to remain in bed. Towards evening her condition showed a slight improvement, but the next day symptoms so alarming appeared that Leyser sent for Dr. Zimmermann, a celebrated physician at Hanover. The Queen seemed to have a presentiment of death, for she said to Leyser: “You have twice helped me through a dangerous illness since October, but this time I shall die.” The doctors affected a cheerfulness which they were far from feeling, for the Queen’s condition grew worse every hour, and the fever became very violent. Prayers were offered for her in the churches; she was deeply touched when her women told her that the whole of Celle was praying for her, and even the Jewish community had offered up supplications on her behalf.

The dying Queen was eager to avail herself of the consolations of religion; Pastor Lehzen, her

chaplain, prayed by her bedside, and read, at her request, her favourite hymns and some verses from the Bible. She went towards death without fear, indeed she seemed to welcome it. Her [Pg 299] sufferings were agonising, but through them all she manifested a marvellous patience and fortitude. The Queen kept her senses to the last, and almost with her dying breath expressed her forgiveness of her enemies. Her last thought was of others; she inquired after the little girl, Sophie, and when the doctor told her that the child was out of danger, she whispered: “Then I die soothed,” and fell quietly asleep. In this sleep she died. The good pastor, who was praying by the Queen’s bedside when her spirit fled, thus described the end: “I never witnessed so easy a passing; death seemed to lose all its terrors. The words of Holy Writ: ‘O Death, where is thy sting?’ were literally true in her case. She fell asleep like a tired wayfarer.”

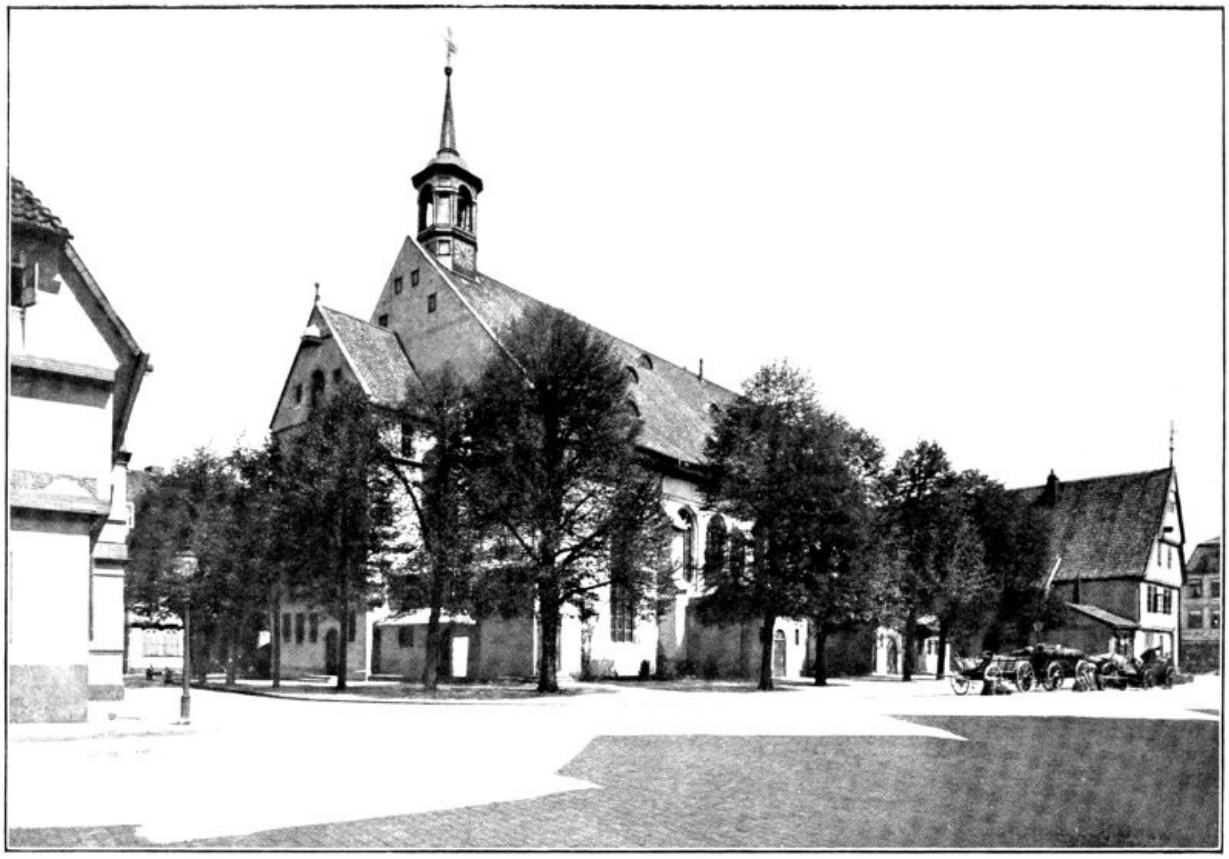
Queen Matilda died on the evening of May 11, 1775, at ten minutes past eleven, at the age of twenty-three years and nine months.

This “Queen of Tears” was married at fifteen; she died at twenty-three. What unhappiness, what tragedy, what pathos were crowded in those brief eight years! If she erred, she suffered greatly—imprisonment, exile, the loss of her children, her crown, her honour—surely it was enough! To those who are inclined to judge her harshly, the thought of her youth and her sorrows will surely stay their judgment. We would fain leave them to plead for her, without entering again on the oft-debated question of how far she erred in her great love for the man who showed himself [Pg 300] altogether unworthy of the sacrifices she made for him. But her indiscreet champions have unwittingly done her memory more harm than good by claiming for her, throughout her troubled life at the Danish court, what she never claimed—absolute innocence in thought, word and deed. They rest their contention on evidence which we would gladly accept if we could. But alas! it does not bear the test of critical investigation.

Nearly a hundred years after Matilda’s death (in 1864) one of her many apologists, Sir Lascelles Wraxall, grandson of the Nathaniel Wraxall who had acted as agent in the plot for her restoration, published a letter which he said had been given him by her daughter the Duchess of Augustenburg, who had been allowed to take a copy of it by the King of Hanover from the original document preserved in the Hanoverian archives.[107] This letter purported to be written by the Queen when she was on her deathbed to her brother George III., and proclaimed her innocence. The Duchess of Augustenburg was the Princess Louise Augusta of Denmark, the infant daughter taken from Matilda’s arms at Kronborg, the Princess whose birth occasioned so much scandalous rumour. She, therefore (though formally recognised as the daughter of Christian VII.), was interested in the question of her mother’s innocence, and, coming from such hands, the genuineness of the letter at first sight would seem to be, as Wraxall says, [Pg 301] “incontestable”. The letter ran as follows:—

[107] Wraxall was apparently unaware that this letter had already appeared in print—in the *Times* of January 27, 1852.

> “Sire,
>
> “In the most solemn hour of my life I turn to you, my royal brother, to express my heart’s thanks for all the kindness you have shown me during my whole life, and especially in my misfortune.
>
> “I die willingly, for nothing holds me back—neither my youth, nor the pleasures which might await me, near or remote. How could life possess any charms for me, who am separated from all those I love—my husband, my children and my relatives? I, who am myself a queen and of royal blood, have lived the most wretched life, and stand before the world an example that neither crown nor sceptre affords any protection against misfortune!
>
> “But I die innocent—I write this with a trembling hand and feeling death imminent—I am innocent. Oh, that it might please the Almighty to convince the world after my death that I did not deserve any of the frightful accusations by which the calumnies of my enemies stained my character, wounded my heart, traduced my honour and trampled on my dignity.
>
> “Sire, believe your dying sister, a queen and even more, a Christian, who would gaze with terror on the other world if her last confession were a falsehood. I die willingly, for the unhappy bless the tomb. But more than all else, and even than death, it pains me [Pg 302] that not one of all those I loved in life is standing by my dying bed to grant me a last consolation by a pressure of the hand, or a glance of compassion, to close my eyes in death.
>
> “Still, I am not alone. God, the sole witness of my innocence, is looking down on my bed of agony; my guardian angel is hovering over me, and will soon guide me to the spot where I shall be able to pray for my friends, and also for my persecutors.
>
> “Farewell, then, my royal brother! May Heaven bless you—my husband—my children—England—Denmark—and the whole world. Permit my corpse to rest in the vault of my parents, and now the last, unspeakably sad farewell from your unfortunate
>
> “Caroline Matilda.”



THE CHURCH AT CELLE, WHERE QUEEN MATILDA IS BURIED.
From a Photograph.

If this document were genuine, it would go far to prove the innocence of the Queen, for it must be remembered that the evidence against her, even at its worst, was presumptive only, and it is unlikely, from all we know of the genuine piety of her later years that she would have faced death with a lie on her lips. But after patient inquiry nothing can be found to prove its genuineness. The most convincing proof, of course, would be the existence of the original letter in the Queen's well-known handwriting; but no such letter exists in the Hanoverian archives; nor does it exist among the Guelph domestic papers, which the King of Hanover took with him into exile after the [Pg 303] war of 1866. While there was still a king in Hanover the late Mr. Heneage Jesse[108] applied to the Hanoverian officials for information concerning this letter, and received the following reply from Baron von Malortie, minister and chamberlain to the King: "In the royal Hanoverian archives there is not the letter alluded to of the late Queen Caroline Matilda of Denmark. Solely the royal museum contains a *printed* copy of a letter pretending to be written by the said late Queen on her deathbed to her royal brother, George III. of Great Britain, and it is presumed that the Duchess of Augustenburg was permitted by the late King, Ernest Augustus' Majesty, to take a copy of this printed copy, now in the family museum." He then went on to say that all the officials of the Hanoverian archives were strongly of the opinion that the Queen "never did write, nor could write, on her deathbed such a letter, and that the pretended letter of her Majesty is nothing but the work of one of her friends in England, written after her death and then translated. The history of her Majesty's last illness and of her death is here well known, and excludes almost the possibility of her writing and forwarding such a letter to her royal brother."[109]

[108] Author of the *Memoirs of the Life and Reign of King George III.*

[109] Jesse's *Memoirs and Life of George III.*, 1867, vol. ii.

There still remains the theory put forward by some—that the Queen, in writing this letter, protested her innocence only in general terms, and she may have been referring to the charges [Pg 304] made against her of plotting with Struensee to poison or depose her husband, of which she certainly was innocent. But this theory is untenable from another plea put forward by the Queen's defenders, and which perhaps deserves more respectful consideration than the letter. Some years after the Queen's death Falckenskjold published his *Memoirs*, and in them we find the following statement:—

> "In 1780 I had an opportunity at Hanover of forming the acquaintance of M. Roques, pastor of the French Protestant Church at Celle. One day I spoke to him about Queen Caroline Matilda.
>
> "'I was summoned almost daily by that Princess,' he said to me, 'either to read or converse with her, and most frequently to obtain information relative to the poor of my parish. I visited her more constantly during the last days of her life, and I was with her a little before she drew her last breath. Although very weak, she retained her presence of mind. After I had recited the prayers for the dying, she said to me in a voice that seemed to become more animated: "*Monsieur Roques, I am about to appear before God. I protest that I am innocent of the crimes imputed against me, and that I was never faithless to my husband.*'"

> “M. Roques added that the Queen had never before spoken to him, even indirectly, of the accusations brought against her.
>
> “I wrote down on the same day (March 7, 1780) what M. Roques said to me, as coming from a man distinguished by his integrity of character.”[110] [Pg 305]

[110] *Mémoires de M. Falckenskjold*, Officier Général dans le service de S. M. Danoise.

If Falckenskjold is to be believed, this, it must be admitted, is remarkable evidence; but in his *Memoirs* he can be more than once convicted of misstatements, and, at best, this one rests on second-hand information obtained five years after the Queen’s death. It was Pastor Lehzen, and not Pastor Roques, who attended the Queen in her illness, and he published afterwards an edifying account of her last moments, which contained no statement of this nature.[111] As Lehzen was the Queen’s chaplain throughout her residence at Celle, and rector of the principal church there, it seems more likely that she would have confided in him than in the minister of the French Protestant chapel, whom she only saw from time to time in connection with little deeds of beneficence to the poor among his congregation.

[111] Lehzen’s *Die Letzten Stunden der Königin von Danemark*.

It is not necessary to invest Matilda with the halo of a saint to feel sympathy for her sorrows and pity for her fate. She loved greatly and suffered greatly for her love. Let it rest there.

“Our good Queen is no more,” announced Pastor Lehzen, as he came from her deathbed to the long gallery, where the whole of the late Queen’s household, some fifty in number, were assembled. There was not one of them who did not hear the words without a sense of personal loss, for there was not one, even the meanest, to whom the Queen had not endeared herself by some kind word or deed. The castle was filled with weeping and lamentation. The ill news was quickly communicated to the town, and every house became a house of mourning, for during her residence at Celle Matilda had endeared herself alike to the highest and the lowest, and was spoken of by all as their “*lieben und guten Königin*” (their beloved and good Queen). [Pg 306]

Owing to the danger of infection the Queen’s funeral took place within fifty hours of her death. It was found impossible to delay her obsequies until the King’s instructions could be received from England, and therefore at midnight on May 13 the Queen was interred in the burial vault of the Dukes of Celle in the old church.

The grand marshal of the court of Hanover, Baron von Lichtenstein, took charge of the funeral arrangements. The Queen’s coffin was carried on a hearse, drawn by six horses, from the castle to the church under an escort of soldiers, and the route was guarded by soldiers bearing torches, and lined with rows of weeping people, all clad in black. The Queen’s household, headed by Baron Seckendorf, her chamberlain, and the Baroness Dowager d’Ompteda, her chief lady-in-waiting, followed on foot. The church was crowded with the chief people of Celle, including Prince Ernest of Mecklenburg-Strelitz and Madame de Plessen. The simple service was conducted by Pastor Lehzen, and the coffin was lowered to the ducal vaults.[112] [Pg 307]

[112] Though the funeral was quite private, the expenses were very heavy, amounting to some £3,000. They were defrayed, by order of George III., by the privy purse.

The Sunday after the Queen’s death mourning services were held in the churches of Celle. At the town church, where she was buried, Pastor Lehzen concluded his sermon with the following words:—

> “She endeavoured to win the love of every one, even of the humblest, and the many tears shed for her prove that she succeeded in her endeavour. Those who were nearest her person testify how she strove in a higher strength to exercise the most difficult of Christian virtues [forgiveness of her enemies], and that not from a lofty, worldly pride, but from reasons set forth for us by the Pattern of all virtues. The last steps of her life were taken with submissive surrender to the will of God, with trust and hope. O God! we thank Thee for Thy grace, and for its blessed working; we honour, we extol, we praise the same, and offer to Thee our most hearty thanks for all the goodness wrought in this immortalised soul. May she now enjoy the rest, the reward, the bliss of the perfected just! May a blessing rest on her royal children, such as this loving mother sought for them so often from Thee, O God, with many tears! Lighten the sorrow which the news of this unexpected and grievous event will cause to the hearts of our gracious King and Queen [George III. and Charlotte], and for the blessing of the world, and of this country in particular, bring their Majesties to their full term of happy years, and permit them to see their royal house flourish and prosper. Look upon those who are nearest to the deceased Princess, and mourn a Queen who was always full of graciousness and gentleness. Console them in Thy mercy and loving providence, and teach them that Thy counsel is very wonderful, and wise and tender. And thou, Celle, overcome by the death which leaves thee forlorn, look up through thy tears to God! Honour Him with childlike trust, and pray Him to compensate your loss by manifestations of His mercy in other ways, and by granting a long and happy life to our gracious King.” [Pg 308]

It was thought that the ducal vault of Celle would prove only a temporary resting-place for the Queen, and, in accordance with her expressed wish, her remains would be removed to England to rest in Westminster Abbey beside those of her father and mother. But George III. did not see his

way to grant this last request, and all that is mortal of Matilda remains at Celle to this day. On one side of her George William, the last Duke of Celle, and his consort, Eléonore d'Olbreuse, sleep their last sleep; on the other is the plain leaden coffin of their unfortunate daughter, Sophie Dorothea, whose troubled life in many ways closely resembled that of her great-granddaughter Matilda.

I visited this vault a few years ago. Queen Matilda's coffin is easily found, as it is the only wooden (mahogany) one there. It is of extraordinary breadth—almost as broad as long—and at the head is the following inscription in Latin: *Here are deposited the mortal remains of Caroline Matilda, Princess of Great Britain and Brunswick-Lüneburg, Queen of Denmark and Norway. Born July 22, 1751, died May 11, 1775.* A few faded wreaths were lying near the coffin; many of these were deposited many years after her death by pilgrims to her last resting-place; but I was assured that some of them had been there since the funeral. The vault is now closed. [Pg 309]

When the news of Queen Matilda's death reached England general mourning for three weeks was commanded for the King's sister, and court mourning for six weeks. Among the few English friends who knew her profound sorrow was felt at the early death of this unfortunate daughter of England. On May 24 a deputation of the House of Lords and a deputation of the House of Commons waited on the King at St. James's, and presented addresses of condolence on the Queen of Denmark's death. To each George III. replied: "The King returns his thanks to the House for the concern they have expressed for the great loss which has happened to his family by the death of his sister, the Queen of Denmark." The few thousand pounds the Queen left behind her, and her personal effects, George III. committed to the charge of the regency of Hanover, with orders to guard the property for her children until they came of age, and Baron Seckendorf was entrusted with the administration of the Queen's estate. [Pg 310]

The news of the Queen's death travelled to Copenhagen as quickly as to London, and completed the revulsion of feeling in her favour. She was henceforth regarded by the people as a saint and martyr, who had been sacrificed to the intrigues of the Queen-Dowager, and the unpopularity of Juliana Maria and her Government was greatly increased. The Queen-Dowager could not conceal her satisfaction at Matilda's death. The English envoy relates how the Danish court received the news. Writing on May 20 he says:—

> "An estafette from Madame Schimmelmann brought the melancholy news from Hamburg to Count Bernstorff very early yesterday morning, and I had the grief to receive the confirmation of it soon after by the post.... Orders were given yesterday, as I am positively assured, to put the Prince and Princess Royal into the deepest mourning worn here for a mother, and I am likewise further assured that Count Bernstorff was the adviser of that measure. But as consistency is not to be expected here, he could not prevent the Royal Family's appearing at the play on Wednesday and yesterday evenings, and what was worse, their assisting on Thursday night at a ball in dominoes at the theatre, where they made the King of Denmark dance, though they had ordered young Schack to acquaint him on Wednesday with the circumstance he was in, with which he was most [deeply] affected. And yesterday at Court (where I was not) his countenance and manner were such as startled the Foreign Ministers who approached him. The Prince Royal did not see company. And to-day they all went to dine out of town, the King assisting at the launching of two frigates, which resolution was taken suddenly at twelve o'clock. They say they will wait till I, or M. Reiche, notify the Queen of Denmark's death, in his Majesty's name."[113] [Pg 311]

[113] De Laval's despatch, Copenhagen, May 20, 1775.

In accordance with this resolution no notice was taken of the event by the Danish court, nor was any mourning donned, until George III. sent a letter to the King notifying the death of Queen Matilda. This notification was formally delivered by the English envoy at the Christiansborg Palace the day when a court ball was appointed. The Queen-Dowager so far forgot her discretion, or was so blind to decency, that she did not order the ball to be postponed, and the court danced merrily the evening of the day that the Queen's death was notified at Copenhagen. But the next morning the Danish court went into mourning—not as for the Queen of Denmark (for the Queen was considered politically to have died three years before), but as for a foreign princess who was connected with the Danish royal house—as a princess of Great Britain Caroline Matilda was first cousin to Christian VII. This court mourning lasted for four weeks—the usual time—and the only concession seems to have been that the late Queen's children, the Crown Prince Frederick and his sister, Princess Louise Augusta, remained in mourning for a longer period. [Pg 312]

It is said that George III., to whom the news of the court ball was communicated, deeply resented the affront offered by the Danish court not only to his dead sister but to him. No trace of this appears in the official despatches. On the contrary, we find, soon after this wanton insult to the Queen's memory, a despatch from England, saying that "the King hoped the Queen's death would make no difference to the good relations existing between the two courts".[114] George III. was not a man to allow personal considerations to stand in the way of what he considered to be public good, and he had recently obtained a pledge from the Danish Government to the effect that they would not offer any help, direct or indirect, to the American colonists, recently goaded into revolt. A sister's memory was nothing to the King in comparison with the prosecution of an unrighteous war which he believed to be righteous.

[114] Lord Suffolk's despatch to De Laval, St. James's, June 9, 1775.

THE MEMORIAL ERECTED TO QUEEN MATILDA IN THE FRENCH GARDEN OF CELLE.

It was only in little Celle, among the people who had known and loved her the last years of her brief life, that the memory of Matilda was treasured and held sacred. Soon after the funeral a public meeting was held at Celle and attended by the principal burgesses of the town and the leading noblemen of the principality of Lüneburg, and after resolutions had been passed [Pg 313] lamenting her death, it was resolved to petition George III. for permission to erect a monument to her memory. In this petition it was stated: “Our only object is to raise a lasting proof of the general affection and respect with which we regarded the great and noble qualities of her Majesty Queen Matilda, and, by a permanent memorial of the grief for her death felt by all true subjects of your Majesty, to give an opportunity to our remotest descendants to cherish with silent respect the memory of the best and most amiable of queens.” The petition was graciously received by George III., and he willingly granted his permission.

A monument of grey marble was sculptured by Professor Oeser of Leipzig, and erected in the French garden of Celle—the garden of which she had been so fond—and stands to this day. A medallion of the Queen, as she appeared in the last year of her life, is carved upon an urn, which is upborne by allegorical figures of truth, maternal love, charity and mercy—the virtues by which the Queen was pre-eminently known; and an inscription runs round the pedestal setting forth her name and titles and the dates of her birth and death. This handsome monument stands out in bold relief against a background of sycamores, and looks across the trim gardens to an avenue of ancient limes—the very trees, maybe, under which Queen Matilda paced with Wraxall a few months before her death.

I saw it first on a June evening five years ago. At the base of the monument blue forget-me-nots [Pg 314] were planted, and red and white roses clambered up the low railing around it—a touching testimony to the fact that the Queen is not yet forgotten in Celle, and the memory of her good deeds is still living in the hearts of the people.

CHAPTER XV.

[Pg 315]

RETRIBUTION.

1784.

Nine years passed, after the death of Queen Matilda, before retribution overcame Juliana Maria for the part she had played in compassing her ruin. By that time all the conspirators who had taken part in the palace revolution of 1772 had been banished or disgraced, except two, Eickstedt and Guldberg, and of these the latter was by far the more powerful. The sex of the Queen-Dowager did not permit her to preside in person over the Council of State; her son, the Hereditary Prince Frederick, who was a puppet in the hands of his mother, nominally presided, but he was there only as a matter of form. Guldberg in reality presided, and behind Guldberg was Juliana Maria, for she ruled entirely through him. The mental condition of Christian VII. made it impossible for him to take any part in the government, though he still reigned in theory. The whole of the regal power was transferred from his hands to those of Juliana Maria and her other self, Guldberg, who eventually filled the post of Privy Cabinet Secretary to the King, and acted in many ways as Struensee had done.

[Pg 316]

Their rule was not successful. The one measure to be placed to their credit was a law passed in 1776, which decreed that only natives of the kingdom could hold office, though the King had the power of naturalising deserving foreigners. In home affairs the Government became more and more unpopular. The democratic reforms instituted by Struensee were nearly all repealed: the orthodox clergy were gratified by the reintroduction of public penance for sexual sins, the nobility and landowners by the restoration of serfdom. The result of this legislation was that the peasants were more oppressed than before, the taxes grew heavier, and the old abuses flourished again vigorously. The foreign policy of Denmark was to lean more and more towards Prussia. The King of Prussia had, by means of his relative Juliana Maria, acquired great influence over the foreign policy of Denmark, and under his direction it grew hostile to England. The Danish Government was weak and vacillating in foreign affairs, and its administration of home affairs was feeble and corrupt. As the years went by, it became greatly discredited, and the Queen-Dowager, who was regarded, rightly or wrongly, as the cause of this loss of national *prestige*, became more and more hated. Indeed, so unpopular was the Government of Queen Juliana Maria that the wonder was it lasted so long; it only endured because no strong man arose to overthrow it.

[Pg 317]

The hopes of the Danish nation were centred in the Crown Prince Frederick, the son of Queen Matilda. At one time there was a design to set both him and his sister aside,[115] but the Queen-Dowager and her friends were afraid the nation would not suffer it. The Crown Prince grew up under the care of Eickstedt, and his education was entrusted to a learned professor named Sporon. Taking their cue, no doubt, from the Queen-Dowager, the ministers treated the heir to the throne with scant deference or respect: he was tyrannised over by Eickstedt, neglected by Sporon and insulted by Guldberg. By the *Lex Regia* he came of age at fourteen, but the policy of the Queen-Dowager was to keep him in the background as much as possible, and he was not confirmed until he had reached his seventeenth year. Reports were spread abroad that he was afflicted with the same mental imbecility as his father. Nothing could be more untrue, for the Crown Prince was endowed not only with sound sense and a firm will, but a strong constitution. He was about his father's height, his complexion was fair, and his hair so flaxen as to be almost white. In face he much resembled his mother, and it was said that he cherished her memory.

[115] Woodford's despatch, Copenhagen, December 5, 1772.

[Pg 318]

The Crown Prince showed his character soon after he attained his legal majority, for though only a lad of fourteen, he expressed strong dissatisfaction concerning the cabinet orders reintroduced by Guldberg—the same kind of cabinet orders as had cost Struensee his head—and protested. Guldberg sent an insulting message in reply to the Crown Prince's protest, and Eickstedt forced the young Prince to make an apology. Frederick's remonstrance was ill-timed, and it was probably the cause of his confirmation being delayed for three years. But Guldberg's insult had the effect of determining him to overthrow his domination and that of the Queen-Dowager at the earliest opportunity. To this end he carried on a secret correspondence with Bernstorff (who had resigned office in 1780 because of the French and Prussian policy of the Queen-Dowager) and other opponents of the Guldberg ministry, including Schack-Rathlou and Reventlow.

At last, on April 4, 1784, the Crown Prince was confirmed in the royal chapel of the Christiansborg Palace, and before the confirmation his public examination took place in the presence of the foreign ministers and the court. This examination effectually dispelled the rumours which had been industriously spread concerning the young Prince's mental abilities, for he answered clearly and directly the questions put to him, and spoke with a firmness which carried dismay to the hearts of the Queen-Dowager and her supporters.

[Pg 319]

The confirmation of the Crown Prince was followed, as a matter of course, by his admission to the Council of State, and this took place on April 14, 1784. As it was an occasion of some ceremony, the King himself occupied the presidential chair; the Crown Prince was seated on his right, and Prince Frederick, the King's brother, on his left. The Queen-Dowager had taken the precaution of appointing two new members of the Council of State, her creatures, who were sworn to carry out her wishes, and outvote any proposals of the Crown Prince. The first business of the meeting, therefore, was the swearing in of these two new members, and of Count Rosencrone, another nominee. When the three men advanced to sign the oath and formally take their seats, the Crown

Prince rose and begged the King to command them to wait until he made a proposition. The King bowed assent—he was in the habit of assenting to every proposal—and before any one could interpose, the Crown Prince produced a memorandum which he read from beginning to end. It proved to be a most revolutionary document: he requested his father to dissolve the present cabinet, to recall two of his own supporters—Rosenkrantz and Bernstorff—to the Council of State, and to appoint two others, also his supporters—Huth and Stampe—thus giving him a majority in the Council. The Crown Prince then laid the memorandum before the King for signature, and, dipping a pen in the ink, placed it in the King's hand. At that moment Prince Frederick, who, with the other members of the Council, had been taken by surprise, recovered his self-possession, and attempted to snatch the paper away from the King, who was about to sign it, but the Crown Prince intervened and held it fast. One of the newly appointed members of the Council, Rosencrone, entered a protest, and said: "Your Royal Highness, you must know that His Majesty [Pg 320] cannot sign such a paper without due consideration." The Crown Prince turned to Rosencrone with an air of great dignity. "It is not your place, sir," said he, "to advise the King, but mine—I am heir to the throne, and, as such, responsible only to the nation." To the astonishment of all, Guldberg remained silent, and, taking advantage of the momentary hesitation, the Crown Prince obtained his father's signature to the document, and further got him to write "approved" across the corner. He put the paper into his pocket.

The imbecile King, who was greatly frightened at this scene, took advantage of the pause to run out of the council chamber to his apartments. Prince Frederick, foiled in obtaining the paper, resolved at least to secure the King, and ran after him with all speed, bolting the door from the outside when he left the room.

The Crown Prince at once assumed the presidency of the council, and, turning to four Privy Councillors—Moltke, Guldberg, Stemen and Rosencrone—declared that the King no longer required their services. At the same time he announced the dismissal of three other members of the Government. He then broke up the meeting, and endeavoured to follow his father, but finding the door locked which led to the King's apartments, he went round another way. Here, too, he found the door barred against him. He declared that he would have it broken down by force, and [Pg 321] had given orders for this to be done when the door opened and Prince Frederick appeared, leading the King by the arm, with the intention of conducting him to the Queen-Dowager's apartments. The Crown Prince sprang forward, and, seizing the King by the other arm, endeavoured to draw him back, assuring him that nothing would be done without his sanction, and that he only wished to secure the King's honour and the welfare of the country. The feeble monarch seemed inclined to stay with his son rather than go with his brother, and this so incensed the Prince Frederick that he seized the Crown Prince by the collar, and endeavoured to drag him away from the King by force. But the younger man was the stronger, and clutching his father with his left hand, he used his right so energetically against his uncle that Prince Frederick was obliged to let go. At that moment the Crown Prince was reinforced by his page, and between them they drove Prince Frederick down the corridor, and shut the door on him. The King, who had been almost pulled asunder by the excited combatants, ran back to his apartments, whither he was followed a few minutes later by his son, who now had his father in his safe keeping.

Thus was effected the palace revolution of April 14, 1784—a revolution which overthrew not only the Government, but the Queen-Dowager and her son. Its success or its failure turned on the result of this undignified struggle for the possession of the King's person, for if Prince Frederick [Pg 322] had succeeded in carrying the King to the Queen-Dowager's apartments, the recently signed ordinance would have been revoked, and steps would have been taken to prevent a repetition of the Crown Prince's efforts to assert himself.

The Queen-Dowager's rage when her son told her what had occurred in the Council of State, and that the King was now in the keeping of the Crown Prince, may be better imagined than described. She vowed and protested that she would never submit to the power being thus snatched from her hands; she wished to go to the King at once, but was told that the Crown Prince and his friends would surely not admit her. She threatened to summon the palace guard to take the King away by force, but she was told that the Crown Prince had taken the precaution to secure the good-will not only of the palace guard, but, through commander-in-chief, of the whole army, and she was, in fact, already a prisoner. Then at last Juliana Maria realised that she was outwitted, and her reign was over for ever. The bitterness of her defeat was intensified by the thought that it had been effected by the son of the woman whom she had imprisoned and driven into exile.

The Crown Prince was proclaimed Regent the same day amid scenes of the greatest enthusiasm. In the afternoon he walked alone through the principal streets of Copenhagen; there was no guard, and the crowds which filled the streets everywhere made room for him to pass, and [Pg 323] welcomed him with shouts and acclamations. As he said, the Danish people were his guard, and when he returned three hours later to the Christiansborg Palace, he had firmly riveted his hold on the affections of his future subjects.

The Crown Prince behaved, as his mother would have done if she had been restored to the throne, with magnanimity: there was no bloodshed, and he treated even his bitterest enemies with great clemency. The rule of Juliana Maria was at an end, and henceforth neither she nor her son had the slightest influence in affairs of state. But the Crown Prince treated them both with every respect and courtesy: they were permitted to retain their apartments at the Christiansborg Palace,[116] and the palace of Fredensborg was made over for the use of Juliana Maria. She lived in retirement until her death, which took place in 1796, at the age of sixty-seven years. Until the

last she was pursued by popular execration, and even after her death, until comparatively recent time, it was the habit of many of the Danish peasants to spit on her tomb at Röskilde as a mark of their undying hatred.

[116] In 1794 they were driven out by the great fire which destroyed the Christiansborg, but apartments were found for them in the Amalienborg.

Her son, Prince Frederick, who had neither his mother's abilities nor her evil traits of character, had not the energy to meddle in affairs of state, and spent the rest of his days in promoting the [Pg 324] arts and sciences. He died in 1805. He had married in 1774 Sophia Frederika, a princess of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, by whom he had two sons and two daughters.[117] His elder son succeeded to the throne of Denmark in 1839 as King Christian VIII.[118]

[117] The younger of these daughters was the grandmother of Queen Alexandra.

[118] He died in 1848, and was succeeded by his son Frederick VII., who, dying in 1863 without issue, was succeeded by the present King of Denmark, Christian IX.

Of Queen Matilda's two children little remains to be said. Her daughter, Louise Augusta, grew up a very beautiful and accomplished princess, who in wit and affability strongly recalled her mother, and between her and her brother there existed the fondest ties of attachment. She married the Duke of Augustenburg, and died in 1843, at the age of seventy-two. The daughter of this Princess, Caroline Amalie, married, as her second husband, Prince Christian Frederick, son of the Hereditary Prince Frederick (who, on the death of his cousin, Frederick VI., without male issue, became Christian VIII.), and thus the rival races of Juliana Maria and Matilda were united. Queen Caroline Amalie survived her husband for many years, and died in 1881, aged eighty-five years.

FREDERICK, CROWN PRINCE OF DENMARK (AFTERWARDS KING FREDERICK VI.), SON OF QUEEN MATILDA.

Queen Matilda's son, who, after a long regency, became, in 1808 (on the death of his father, Christian VII., at the age of fifty-nine), Frederick VI., was a liberal and enlightened prince; yet neither his regency nor his reign was very successful. When Regent he made repeated efforts to [Pg 325] obtain the hand of an English princess in marriage, one of the many daughters of George III.; but the King of England, who had taken a violent dislike to Denmark after its cruel treatment of his unfortunate sister, would not listen to the proposal. The heir to the Danish monarchy, thus repulsed, married Marie Sophie Frederika, a princess of Hesse-Cassel, who bore him two daughters, Caroline, who married the Hereditary Prince Ferdinand, and Vilhelmine Marie, who married Prince Frederick Carl Christian. His self-love was deeply wounded by the way in which his overtures had been spurned by his uncle, George III., and henceforth his foreign policy became anti-English, and he threw in his lot with France. To this may be traced directly, or

indirectly, many of the disasters that overcame Denmark during the reign of Frederick VI.—the naval engagement of 1801, wherein the English attacked Copenhagen and forced the Danes to abandon it, the second attack by the British on Copenhagen, and its bombardment in 1807, which resulted in the surrender of the whole of the Danish and Norwegian fleets, and, in 1814, through the alliance of Denmark and France against Great Britain and Sweden, the loss of Norway to Denmark.

These disasters naturally engendered a feeling of bitterness on the part of the brave Danes towards the English for a time, but this feeling has long since passed away, and the two nations, whose history is intimately connected, and who are akin in race and sympathy, are now united in [Pg 326] the bond of friendship—a bond which has been immeasurably strengthened by the auspicious union which has given to us the most beautiful Queen and the most beloved Queen-Consort that England has ever known.

THE END.

APPENDIX.
LIST OF AUTHORITIES.

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