THE STORY OF AN EMPRESS

Part XI—Conclusion

Professor Nippold, in his book on the first two German Emperors, has drawn a very sympathetic and understanding picture of the Empress Frederick.

She had, he says, a most cheerful temperament, and a rapid eye for the humorous, in spite of so many terrible blows of fate. She always saw everything from the good side and quickly forgave people their faults; no one was allowed to speak ill of any one in her presence. She was often misunderstood and unjustly accused, and when she saw things written against her in the papers she was terribly wounded. For instance, it was said that she had prevented the building of a tower on the "Altkönig" for the public to enjoy the view, but the fact was that she had never heard anything about the proposal. Sometimes she could hardly be restrained from answering some of these base accusations. She was also accused of parsimony, and her income was enormously exaggerated. The claims on her purse were innumerable. She had forty-two philanthropic institutions which she had to help, and in one year there were thirty-seven bazaars, to each of which she had to send gifts. Altogether her expenses were enormously heavy.

When the Empress is blamed for being a thorough Englishwoman, let it be said at once, exclaims Professor Nippold, that everything good and praiseworthy in England she tried to introduce into her own adopted country. She was always vexed and pained when things were said against England, more especially in the case of England's colonies. "The English," she would say, "arrange everything in the Colonies most beautifully,—roads, railways, post, telegraphs, hospitals, schools, and police, and then every one, to whichever nation he belongs, can trade undisturbed. And I cannot think that for that England should be thanked in such an evil way!" Many people regarded it as an injustice to Germany that she should have had such warm sympathies with England. She was through and through an Englishwoman, if not by descent, yet by every impression received in childhood and by education.

The professor goes on to express the opinion that no Englishman or Englishwoman, of whatever age, ever gives up his or her nationality and love of country, in whatever circumstances they may find themselves, "a contrast to so many Germans, who are far less faithful to their nationality. The Empress Frederick, as eldest child of Queen Victoria of England, had the title of Princess Royal, and she could not help feeling herself the first princess of a wonderful Empire of very old culture, and this proud feeling never left her."

This estimate and defence of the Empress is particularly valuable as coming from a man of shrewd intelligence and observation, who was himself a German.

On another occasion Nippold wrote of the Empress with clear insight: "One thing this distinguished woman never un-

derstood—to hide her feelings. She never posed; everything was sincere in her in the true sense of the word."

In her will the Empress left Professor Nippold a letter-weight, which she had used every day, as a souvenir of a conversation they had had one evening in her study. This letter-weight, which always lay on her table, was composed of an old Roman bronze—a broken Sphinx figure—on a marble slab. A ring bound this figure to the slab, and the inscription engraved was: "This stone was picked up by H.R.H. Princess Elizabeth on the walk of Frogmore, 1808."

Professor Nippold goes on to say that while the Empress was talking to him one evening a telegram arrived which obviously had to do with the crisis which led to the Greco-Turkish War. As Nippold saw that she was much preoccupied with the telegram and had to think of the answer, and yet did not want to send him away, he delicately asked to be allowed to wait and look at the pictures. When the Empress resumed the conversation, the professor asked about a picture which hung in the study. She named the different figures in the group, among them being that young Princess Elizabeth who had found the stone.

That she should have left Nippold the letter-weight showed, as he truly says, the wonderful memory and kindly attention in which consists *la politesse des princes.*

This Princess Elizabeth married one of the last Counts of Hesse-Homburg. Since then a monument to that Royal house has been erected in Homburg, and in the Emperor's speech at the unveiling on August 17, 1906, occurred these words: "I commemorate the Landgräfin Elizabeth, a daughter of George III of England. She was a real mother to this country and worked and cared for her adopted fatherland. The Homburgers to this day think of her with real thankfulness and reverence."

Professor Nippold gives a characteristic letter which he received from the Empress, evidently on the subject of those historical studies of the House of Hohenzollern to which, as we have already mentioned, the Emperor Frederick at one time devoted himself with ardour. The letter is so interesting, especially in the views which it expresses on the subject of royal biography, that to quote it in full needs no apology:

"DEAR PROFESSOR,—Many thanks for sending the separate pages from the *Deutsche Revue* of February, and for your excellent report, which has so much in it that does my heart good. You mean well and truly, not only as regards history, but also with the noble men who now lie in their graves, and whose deeds and influence should be properly appreciated in wide circles and through the proper medium.

"The work grows, however, even as you work upon it; the subject becomes more and more important, and one should ask one's self whether the time has come thus to lift the veil. Would it not be wiser and more cautious to close these papers for the *Revue,* and then to continue your labours, so that later a book could appear for which we could utilise this material, but not lightly or too soon? The letter of which you send me a copy—from our Kaiser Friedrich Wilhelm IV—should not, for instance, appear without the letter from my father, but that would arouse a fearful storm of discussion. In the political world there is so much tinder ready that one must do all one can to avoid bringing in anything exciting.

"As long as Bismarck is alive, it is very difficult! Also these things affect my mother, so that I should like very much to have a serious talk with you before the publication continues in the *Deutsche Revue.* Professor Ranke has handled the life of Friedrich Wilhelm IV as the Court here wished it to be treated. Similar books have now appeared, with authorisation, with regard to the Kaiser Wilhelm, and in Weimar, I believe, some one iswriting a book on the Kaiserin Augusta. All these writers, however, are strictly conservative and orthodox in religion (therefore one-sided), and of all those currents which flowed into the lives

of the dead, no word is spoken, in the sense that I mean. It is impossible thus to omit and yet give the public a true picture of the persons, of their time, and of the parts they played. You will see for yourself the consequences of such publication. You have more experience than I, and perhaps you can reassure me."

During the last years of her life, the Empress Frederick paid repeated visits to England, where she had many attached friends.

She much enjoyed a visit to the Bishop of Ripon in 1895, when she was able to study the wood-carving in the cathedral, as well as Fountains Abbey and other places of historical interest. It was characteristic of her that only a few moments before she left Ripon, while she was actually waiting for the carriage to take her to the station, she exclaimed, "How much I should like to paint this view!" Drawing materials and a paint-box were brought her; she sat down, and in a few minutes produced a charming sketch of the cathedral amid fields and trees.

As an artist the Empress was undoubtedly far more than a mere amateur, especially in sculpture. It is said that on one occasion, having given a commission to the famous German sculptor, Uphues, for a colossal statue of the Emperor Frederick, she visited his studio one day when he was at work on the clay model. This did not seem to her to promise a good likeness, and she thereupon set to work on the clay herself, and in about half an hour she quite transformed the model, so that when it was carried out in marble it became universally recognised as the best presentment in existence of the Emperor's features. Uphues also made a bust of the Empress herself, which was set up in 1902 on the Kaiser Friedrich Promenade at Homburg.

The Empress had first met the Boyd Carpenters in 1866, soon after the death of Prince Sigismund. She happened to hear a sermon from the then Canon Boyd Carpenter which brought her much comfort, and the acquaintance then begun developed into warm friendship.

The Bishop had a great admiration for the Empress's sympathetic alacrity of mind. "She had wide range," he writes, "and quick intellectual sympathies; she understood a passing allusion; she followed the track of thought; there were no irritating delays; there were no vacant incoherences in an observation, which show that the thread has been lost. She had read; she had thought; she had travelled; she had observed; she had mixed with many of the foremost minds of the time; she had taken practical part in many great and humane enterprises. Consequently her range was large, and her mental equipment was well furnished and ready for use. Conversation with her could never become insipid."

The Empress always did everything she could to improve Anglo-German relations, and the feeling aroused by the famous telegram which her son sent to President Kruger in January, 1896, keenly distressed her. She wrote to her old friend Sir Mountstuart Grant Duff:

"But even this most sad episode between our two countries has not shaken my faith in our old opinions that there are many, many higher interests in common, why we should get on together and be of use to each other in helping on civilisation and progress. I trust that a good understanding will outlive hatred and jealousy."

And again: "When I think of my father and of all his friends and of our friends, it appears to me almost ludicrous that Germany and England should be enemies."

In 1897 the Empress Frederick took part in the Diamond Jubilee, driving in the procession with Princess Henry of Battenberg. The sight of the two widowed sisters, who had put aside their grief to join in that great day of national rejoicing, deeply touched many of the spectators. The Empress herself wrote of this occasion in which she "gladly and thankfully joined with proud heart":

"The weight of lonely, hidden grief often feels heaviest when all surroundings are in such contrast. And yet the

heart of man is so made that many feelings find room in it together; so gratitude and thankfulness mingle with memories so sad that they can never lose their bitterness."

Madame Waddington, the wife of that old Rugby and Cambridge man who filled with such distinction the post of French Ambassador in London, has left a record of a conversation she had with the Empress in August, 1897. Madame Waddington, who was an American by birth, was struck by a question the Empress asked her, namely, whether she did not find it difficult to settle down in France after having lived ten years in London—"the great centre of the world." Madame Waddington replied that she was not at all to be pitied for living in Paris, that her son was a Frenchman, and all his interests were in France; and she adds: "Au fond, notwithstanding all the years she has lived in Germany, the Empress is absolutely English still in her heart."

They had some talk about Wagner, and Madame Waddington informed the Empress that there was a difficulty as to the performance of *Die Meistersingers* at the Grand Opera owing to the fact that Frau Wagner considered the choruses too difficult to translate or to sing with the true spirit in any language but German. The Empress replied:

"She is quite right; it is one of the most difficult of Wagner's operas, and essentially German in plot and structure. It scarcely bears translation in English, and in French would be impossible; neither is the music in my mind at all suited to the French character. The mythical legends of the Cycle would appeal more to the French, I think, than the ordinary German life."

The Empress was a real connoisseur in music, of which she had a wide knowledge, though her skill as a performer was considered to be inferior to that of Queen Victoria.

Like her mother, the Empress Frederick was a great letter-writer. She wrote in a mixture of German and English, choosing the most telling expressions, and she was in constant communication with various distinguished Englishmen for years. To them she sent long and very frank letters about everything that interested her, especially foreign politics.

As has been already indicated in this book, the Empress was in the habit of showing, far more clearly than most Royal personages allow themselves to do, exactly what she felt about those whom she met even for the first or the second time. This found either an answering antagonism or a reciprocal liking in those with whom she was brought in contact. Many of the distinguished men whom she heartily admired speak of her, and that in their most secret letters and diaries, with an admiration approaching enthusiasm. But now and again comes a discordant note. Such may be found in Mr. G. W. Smalley's *Anglo-American Memories.*

The old journalist describes her in a way which gives a far from pleasant impression of the Empress towards the end of her life. He was presented to her by the then Prince of Wales at Homburg, and the first thing he noticed was that, though she was very like Queen Victoria, her manner was less simple and therefore had less authority. He also criticises her dress, and observes that both the late Queen and her eldest daughter "showed an indifference to the art of personal adornment."

Mr. Smalley admits that the Empress has a much greater vivacity than the Queen, but he thinks that this vivacity becomes restless, and that her mind can never be in repose. He says drily that, from her marriage and down to the day of the Emperor Frederick's death, she had lived in a dream-world of her own creation, her belief being so strong, her conviction that she knew what was best for those about her so complete, that the facts had to adjust themselves as best they could to that belief and that conviction.

As was the Empress's way when a stranger, and especially a foreigner, was presented to her, she at once began to talk of Mr. Smalley's country and of

what she supposed would interest him. Instead of allowing him to say what he thought, she plunged directly into American topics, especially commenting on what she supposed to be the position of women in the United States. It soon became clear, or so he thought, that she had a correspondent in Chicago from whom she had derived her impressions. "She talked with clearness, with energy and almost apostolic fervour, the voice penetrating rather than melodious."

Mr. Smalley said to himself that all that she asserted might be true of Chicago, but of what else was it true? And he was evidently much nettled that she generalised from the "Windy City" to the rest of the United States.

Instead of seeing, as probably most women would have seen, that she was speaking to an auditor who was fast becoming prejudiced, the Empress continued to unburden herself in the frankest, freest way to this journalist whom she had never met before. She even seems to have touched on politics, on Anglo-German relations, on the internal affairs of Germany:

"Never for a moment did this dreamer's talk stop or grow sluggish. Carlyle summed up Macaulay in the phrase 'Flow on, thou shining river'; he might in a sardonic mood have done the same to this Princess."

It was an illuminating interview, declares Mr. Smalley, throwing light on events to come as well as on those of the past, and he goes on to explain that multitudes of Germans shared Bismarck's distrust of the Crown Princess, and believed that she wanted to Anglicise Germany. He reiterates what has so often been said—that she told all-comers that what Germany needed was Parliamentary government as it was understood and practised in England. In little things as in great she made no secret for her preference for what was English over what was German:

"Judgment was not her strong point, nor was tact; if I am to say what was her strong point, I suppose it would be sincerity. Her gifts of mind were dazzling rather than sound; impulse was not always under control. Her animosities, once roused, never slept, as Prince Bismarck well knew."

Seldom has a more prejudiced view of the Empress been given to the world, but it is interesting as showing how she sometimes impressed those who had been fascinated by the Bismarck legend when they were brought into passing contact with her eager, enthusiastic mind.

To a fall from her horse at Cronberg in the autumn of 1898 may be traced the beginning of that merciless disease which ultimately killed her.

It was a bad accident. The horse reared and the Empress fell on the wrong side on her head with her feet under the horse and her habit still clinging to the saddle. Her head was much bruised, and her right hand was injured and trodden on by the horse. She was not at all frightened, indeed she took it very calmly, observing:

"I have ridden for fifty years, and it is natural that an accident must come sooner or later. But I shall ride to-morrow. I'm going to try and paint and write some letters, in spite of my hand."

But her injuries did not yield to treatment, and very soon began the long martyrdom of pain which she bore for more than two years with the same stoic fortitude which the Emperor Frederick had shown. The disease was undoubtedly cancer, and it is suggested that it had been gathering force for quite a number of years. However that may be, it was certainly known in 1900 that a cure was impossible.

The most terrible feature of these last months was the severe pain which seized the Empress at intervals. It was characteristic, both of her courage and of her kindly nature, that during these attacks she would not see even the members of her family, to whom the sight of her sufferings would have been so distressing. But in the intervals she occupied herself with conversation, or one of her ladies would read aloud to her, and she even painted a little. Her son, the Emperor, was constant in his attentions, coming

over almost daily from Homburg, but even he was only allowed to remain with her a few minutes at a time.

Physically the patient had suffered a great change. Her cheeks, which had been round and apparently in the bloom of health, gradually became thin and sunken, and her face assumed that curious transparent paleness which is an unmistakable sign of approaching death.

It is said that when the Empress received the news of Queen Victoria's death, in January, 1901, she said to those about her: "I wish I were dead, too." But for more than six months longer she bore with extraordinary fortitude the chronic suffering which the most able physicians were unable to relieve. Her consideration for those around her was constant. On one occasion, in a spasm of agony, she cried out loudly and seized the nurse's hand; then at once apologised: "I am so sorry, I am afraid I hurt you." The nurse said afterwards, "I have only been with the Empress for a week, but already she has filled me with higher ideals, and I am going back resolved to be a better nurse than ever."

As long as it was possible, the Empress continued her painting and drawing; and to the very end she was especially happy when she was able to work with some practical object in view, such as the laying out of a new rose-garden or suggesting alterations in architectural plans. Her greatest pleasure—and she was intensely susceptible to happiness even during the last six sad months—was a visit from her eldest brother. When she was expecting King Edward, she supervised closely every little arrangement made for his comfort and convenience, and while doing so she would be wheeled in her bath-chair about the rooms he was to occupy.

She felt most deeply the attacks which were then being made in Germany on England, and even on King Edward, at the time of the Boer War. An article in the *Vossische Zeitung,* which observed that such attacks on a constitutional Sovereign were unworthy of a great nation, gave her much satisfaction.

King Edward paid his last visit to his sister at Cronberg in February, 1901. A contemporary chronicler notes that everything was arranged to show that the visit was meant for the Empress Frederick and not for her son. This was doubtless by the wish of the Emperor himself, for though he did all due honour to his uncle, meeting him at Frankfort and conducting him across the lovely Taunus Valley to the very door of Friedrichshof, he took leave of King Edward at the threshold, so that the brother and sister might be alone at their first meeting.

Among the last English visitors received by the Empress at Friedrichshof were her old friends, the Boyd Carpenters. This was in May, 1901.

They found her on their arrival lying on a couch in her beautiful garden, and the Bishop was struck by her likeness to Queen Victoria—a likeness enhanced by the black dress and by the form of hat which she wore. The Empress rejoiced in the spring and in the colour which was spreading everywhere through her garden. She still took a practical interest in everything concerning the beautiful home she had created. The Bishop gives one instance: the great blue face of the clock, the tower of which dominated Friedrichshof, needed re-painting. Before she decided what exact tint should be used, she caused slips of paper giving different shades of blue to be held up against the face of the clock. Then she made up her mind.

Once, as they passed through the flower garden together, she quoted to the Bishop the words, "The effectual prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Another time, looking round at the beauty of the trees she had planted, she said, "I feel like Moses on Pisgah, looking at the land of promise which I must not enter."

When parting from Mrs. Boyd Carpenter, for whom she had a great regard, the Empress gave her a bracelet of her own, one she had often worn and with which she had affectionate associations.

To the Bishop she gave a seal which had belonged to Queen Victoria, and which had been in the room when the

Queen died. It commemorated a picnic in Scotland, in which the Queen, the Prince Consort, and Princess Alice had shared. The seal, mounted in silver and set in Aberdeen granite, was a cairngorm found by Prince Albert and Princess Alice on that day.

The Bishop remained with her a moment at the very last, and she said to him, "When I am gone I want you to read the English Burial Service over me." And then she characteristically explained to him exactly what would have to be done to make this possible. When the end came three months later, thanks to the prompt acquiescence of the Emperor, his mother's wishes were carried out.

The Empress became much worse at the beginning of August, and, by the wish of her son, Canon Teignmouth-Shore was telegraphed for. He arrived at Friedrichshof on August 5th, and in the presence of the Emperor and the Empress's daughters the Canon knelt down and offered some prayers from the Office for the Visitation of the Sick. The whole sad scene, he says, was quite overpowering and far too sacred for him to describe. "The dying Empress was at first slightly conscious, and I could see a gentle movement of her lips as we said the Lord's Prayer."

Toward six o'clock in the evening the Canon was again summoned to the sick-room. "The sweet noble soul was just passing away. I said a few prayers at the bedside, concluding with the first two verses of that exquisite poem, 'Now the labourer's task is o'er.' "

A butterfly flew into the room and hovered for a while over the dying Empress, and when she had breathed her last it spread its wings and flew out into the free air again.

The Emperor desired Canon Teignmouth-Shore to arrange with Dr. Boyd Carpenter for a private funeral service to be held at Friedrichshof.

On the following Sunday the Canon preached a funeral sermon in the English church at Homburg. In it he made a statement with regard to her Majesty's religious views which deserves quotation:

"The religious conceptions which inspired and guided this life, alike in its humblest and in its loftiest spheres of action, were, as I believe, neither crude nor complex nor dogmatic; they were clear and simple and broad—an absolute faith in the Fatherhood of God, and in the Brotherhood and redeeming love of Him who died that we might live."

The Lutheran funeral service, which was held in the parish church of Cronberg, was most impressive in its simplicity. At one point of the service the Crown Prince and three of his young brothers rose from their seats, and, having put on their helmets, drew their swords and took their places at each corner of the coffin of their grandmother, where they remained until the end of the service.

This old church, which, as we have said, the Empress had herself restored, dates back to the middle of the fifteenth century. On the organ, which is of exquisite tone, Mendelssohn often played when he visited the Taunus.

Perhaps the most touching of all the hundreds of wreaths sent for the funeral was one of simple heather which had been made by the Emperor's younger children. Attached to it was a sheet of black-edged paper on which they had all written their names in large childish characters.

The Empress was buried beside her husband and her son Waldemar in the Friedenskirche at Potsdam, and the sarcophagus over her tomb is by her artist friend, Begas.

Of memorials to her, there is the bust at Homburg already mentioned. In the English church at Homburg, where she attended divine service for the first time after the death of her husband, is a memorial consisting of four reliefs, placed in the spandrels of the arches in the aisle, representing the four Evangelists. A striking statue of the Empress in coronation robes by Gerth was unveiled by the Emperor William in October, 1903. It is opposite the statue of her husband in the open space outside the Brandenburg gate at Berlin.

So lived, and so died, this most gifted and generous lady, who was rendered illustrious, not by the symbols of her Imperial station, but by her many winning qualities of heart and intellect.

We cannot do better than quote in conclusion from the remarkable tributes which were paid to her memory by the late Lord Salisbury and the late Lord Spencer.

Lord Salisbury, who was then Prime Minister, in moving an address of condolence with King Edward in the House of Lords, summed up in masterly fashion both the beauty and the tragedy of the Empress's life:

"When the then Princess Royal left these shores, there was no person, either of contemporary experience or in history, before whom a brighter prospect extended itself in life, and all that could make it desirable spread itself before her. She had a devoted husband, himself one of the noblest characters of his generation, who probably centred in himself more admiration than any man in his rank or in any rank. She had every prospect of becoming the Consort of the Emperor—an absolute emperor—of the greatest of the Continental Powers. She had every hope that she would share fully in his illustrious position, and in no small degree in the powers that he wielded. This was before her for nearly thirty years, and in that time she had all the enjoyments which were derived from her own great abilities, her own splendid artistic talents, and from the powers which she exercised over the artistic, æsthetic, and intellectual life of Germany. She occupied an unexampled position. Then suddenly came the blow, first on her husband and then on herself. By that fell disease—which probably is the most formidable of all to which flesh is heir—her dream of happiness, of usefulness, and glory was suddenly cut short. The blow, in striking her husband, struck herself in even greater degree; and she felt—she could not but feel—how deeply she shared in all the disappointments, all the sufferings, that attached themselves to his history. When he had been Emperor only a few weeks, he died, and then she spent her life in retirement. Her health failed, and she, too, fell under the same blow, passing through years of suffering, with the sympathy of all connected with her and all those who knew her. She was deeply valued in this country by those who knew her, and they were very many. She had an artistic and intellectual charm of no common order; she spread her power over all who came within her reach; and her gradual disappearance from the scene was watched with the deepest sorrow and sympathy by numbers in her own country and in this."

The motion was seconded on behalf of the Opposition by Lord Spencer, who, it will be remembered, was a near kinsman of that Lady Lyttelton to whom was entrusted the charge of the Empress's early childhood:

"Her Imperial Majesty had no ordinary character. Brought up with the greatest care and solicitude by her Royal and devoted parents, she early and ever afterwards showed the highest accomplishments, not only in art but in literature. She was herself an artist of no small merit, and her power of criticism and influence in art was even of a higher order. In this age, which had been so remarkable for the enormous number of persons who have joined in endeavours to alleviate the sufferings of the human race, whether in peace or in war, I venture to think that no one stands in a higher position than the Empress Frederick of Germany. During those wars, in which her illustrious husband played such a splendid part, she exerted herself to do all she could to alleviate the sufferings of the wounded, and she had ever in peace used her endeavours to promote the same objects among the suffering poor of her country. No one, I am sure, will be remembered in the future with more affection and devotion on this account than her Majesty. She was always sympathetic and energetic with regard to other matters. There was nothing which stirred her sympathies or energies more than the education and improvement of

her own sex. She did much in this respect in her adopted country; but we cannot consider her life without remembering the beautiful simplicity and earnestness of it. She was devoted to duty, and although she suffered intensely during her life when her noble husband was afflicted with the terrible disease which took him off, and during the sad years in which the same malady afflicted her, she always showed a patient endurance which will remain an example for all mankind.

I cannot but refer to her great charm in private as well as in public life. It so happened that very early in my life, before she was married, she honoured me with her acquaintance. It was only on rare occasions I had the privilege of continuing that acquaintance, but I have from time to time within the last few years seen her Majesty, and I shall always recall, as one of the most delightful recollections of my life, the charm and influence of her conversation."

THE END