



THE STORY OF MY LIFE



MYSELF. FROM THE PORTRAIT BY SIR J. E. MILLAIS AT WINDSOR.
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THE STORY OF MY LIFE

BY
MARIE,
QUEEN OF ROUMANIA

VOLUME I

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“Character is Destiny”

Foreword

THE story of my life! I have often been asked to write it, and I have always hesitated to do so for many reasons.

With the death of my dear husband, King Ferdinand, a certain chapter of my life closes, and I feel therefore that I can more easily look back upon the way, the long way, already pursued; I can look at it from farther away, less personally, and that is perhaps what I have always been waiting for.

I have always wondered from what angle I should relate my own story, knowing that to a certain degree I must weigh my words, and yet I want to be as accurate, as truthful as possible; I do not want to be too dry, but I also do not want to be too passionate; feelings must not run away with me.

In a way I want to look back upon it as though I were relating someone else's story; I would almost prefer to write it in the third person, but that would be like pretending, and I have never pretended. All my life I have been almost dangerously sincere and I cannot depart from that absolute sincerity.

I think to-day I have found the angle from which I want to write my story, the angle which represents me in relation to Roumania. Let it be Roumania and I, or I and Roumania—it comes to the same thing, and have patience with me if many thoughts, many inferences and conclusions are woven in among the facts I have to relate, for life has already been long enough and events plentiful enough to have taught me many a lesson, and to have made of me something of a philosopher in my own small way.

Roumania and I—but of course I shall have to return to the far, far past, because no life can be completely told without telling also of childhood and youth, which are such factors for the forming of character, and my childhood was a happy childhood, upon which I love to look back.

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Part One
CHILDHOOD

Chapter I

EASTWELL PARK

I WAS born in Eastwell, Kent, in 1875. A big grey house in a huge beautiful English park : woods, great stretches of grass, wide undulating horizons, not grand or austere, but lovely, quiet, noble—an English home.

I was my parents' second child. The first was a boy and he had been given the name of Alfred, after my father, who was Queen Victoria's second son and an officer in the British Navy.

My mother was delighted to have a little girl ; she said she liked girls better than boys, and she called me Marie, which was her name and also her mother's. She loved and venerated her mother with all the strength of her soul.

In 1873, Marie Alexandrovna, only daughter of the Emperor Alexander II of Russia, had married Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, and had come from far Russia to live in England.

Most people would imagine that it was a great piece of luck and happiness to come from Russia to England. But my mother dearly loved her native country, and she never really felt completely happy in England, though she had many dear friends there. We, her children, on the contrary, born in England, loved England deeply and clung with all our hearts to that love all through our lives, and it was a sadness to discover, later on, that never in her heart of hearts had our mother looked upon England as home, not as the home of homes that one passionately loves.

This is one of the sadnesses of mothers who are "exported," or should I rather say "imported"; when their own children become in their turn ardent patriots, they can

never quite realize how their mothers also cling to the countries of their birth. To their minds their mother belongs to them and to the country her children were born in, and they cannot imagine any other love in their parent's heart. Certain things always remain difficult to understand and generations should be merciful towards each other, parents to their children, but also children to their parents, for who can fathom the depths, the longings, the struggles and disappointments of the human heart? And mothers must not imagine that they can implant their ideals, their loves and their passions, in the souls of those to whom they have given birth.

Times, circumstances, environment, influences, all go to make children different from their parents; besides, a mother often forgets, when her child astonishes or disappoints her, that she did not make it all by herself. There are always two streams of blood that run in one child, two long series of ancestors (illustrious or not, that has nothing to do with it), who go fundamentally to the making of the child each mother instinctively believes is hers, for did she not carry it for nine months and then through her own agony give it life?

My parents had three more daughters, Victoria Melita, born in Malta in 1876, Alexandra Victoria, born at Coburg two years later, and last of all Beatrice, born, like me, at Eastwell in 1883, who was the "Benjamin" of the family and well knew how to affirm that enviable position.

Our childhood was a happy, carefree one, the childhood of rich, healthy children protected from the buffets and hard realities of life.

Our mother played a greater part in our lives than our father did; he, being a sailor, was often away from home; he was even a little bit of a stranger to us, a rather wonderful stranger, exceedingly good-looking, sunburnt, blue-eyed, and I seem to remember that he had almost black hair, though later on in his portraits I remarked that his hair was less dark than it seemed to my childish eyes.

Were we in awe of him? A little perhaps; he was very wonderful, anyhow, and the days when he paid atten-



MY MOTHER IN THE EASTWELL DAYS.

tion to us were red-letter days, but it was Mamma who was the great reality of our lives.

It was Mamma who settled things, Mamma to whom we turned, Mamma who came to kiss us good night, who took us out for walks or drives. It was Mamma who scolded or praised, who told us what we were or were not to do.

Mamma loved us passionately. Her whole life was given up to her children, we were the supreme and central interest of her existence, but she had her own ideas about education, and she never admitted any mixing of generations; she was never comrade nor companion, but always very definitely the parent; the one who represented authority as well as love, the ruling sovereign of her household, the one who held the sceptre and let you feel that the power over good and evil was hers.

Papa was a sailor; he was also a sportsman, a very good shot and, like all English gentlemen, he loved the shooting season, and in autumn many people were invited to come to Eastwell Park, gentlemen and ladies with high-sounding names and of many nationalities.

On these occasions before going to bed we children were dressed in our finest clothes and sent down to the big library to say good evening to our parents' friends. I still remember the feeling of having my hair well brushed; I had a great mass of what my sisters called "yellow" but what I loved to think of as "golden" hair, of which old nurse Pitcathly, a splendid old Scotch woman, was tremendously proud. It would stand out in all its combed beauty, for indeed Nana groomed and cleaned and polished us up like pampered horses, and I can still feel in my shoulders the little twist I would give to be able to catch a glimpse of my own shining mane. But old Nana loved sister Ducky—as Victoria Melita was called in the family—best, and Ducky had brown corkscrew curls which Nana rolled over her finger with the aid of a comb. Ducky was my dearest chum, we were inseparable, though very different both in looks and character.

Ducky was dark and though a year younger was always taller than I, and was mostly taken for the elder, which

annoyed us both. She was more serious than I and inclined to be resentful when reproved; she also loved jealousy and was what our elders called a "difficult child."

I was more smiling, my hair was golden, I took things more easily than Ducky, and made friends more quickly, but Nana liked Ducky best because she imagined that the rather passionate child was often misunderstood, and perhaps she was.

Ducky and I were scrupulously fair towards each other: we always played the game and never wanted to have separate successes; we could not conceive of a life where we should not be side by side.

Later on our mother told us that she had never cared for these big shooting-parties: she said the gentlemen came home sleepy and had no conversation after a long day with their guns! Besides, she never cared for the damp English climate in winter.

Mamma was not fond of sport; she was highly cultured and liked to talk to clever, interesting people, and I remember my rather pained astonishment when one day she told us that she much preferred diplomats and politicians to soldiers, sailors or sportsmen; this as a child and even later as a girl and quite young woman seemed incomprehensible to me, for I and my sisters had a truly feminine love of uniform and of the strong, tanned, out-door man, even if he yawned in the evening after a long day's sport!

But these parties which bored our mother were full of interest and excitement to us. We immediately classed the guests as children always do, according to their likes or dislikes. Of course their looks played a great part, but also the way they treated us, for some grown-ups know better than others how to make themselves loved by children.

I was, even at the age of five, a real daughter of Eve in my love for beautiful dress; in fact, beauty in every form found in me an ardent, yea almost a pagan adorer.

It was at one of these Eastwell shooting-parties that I first remember seeing the lovely Princess of Wales. She came down one day at tea-time in a marvellous red velvet robe with long flowing train. She dazzled me utterly, I was speechless with adoration and my enchantment can be

imagined when this velvet-clad apparition, who called herself Aunt Alix, volunteered to come up to the nursery to see us in our bath!

There she sat in her glorious crimson gown, and fascinated, I gazed at her over my sponge, spellbound, fearing that the enchanting vision might suddenly fade away.

I was always strangely moved by beauty. Any form of beauty, be it a lovely woman, flower, house or horse, be it a glorious landscape or picture; each time beauty came to me I felt as though it was a God-given pleasure, a gift He had especially allowed me to possess, with my eyes at least if not with my hands. And my joy was made keener by the faculty I had of enjoying beauty as a whole as well as in detail. The splendour of a wide-spreading view of sea or mountain did not hinder me from perceiving and loving the most humble flower in the ditch.

This faculty of enjoying beauty as a whole and in detail has followed me all through life. Line, colour, form and the sounds and scents belonging to each picture, have made life extraordinarily rich, and with every one of those unforgettable impressions comes always that feeling of gratitude for each new beauty revealed to my soul.

To-day I still feel grateful to beloved Queen Alexandra for the vision of beauty she was to me that evening in her ruby-red velvet gown, as I also remember, later in life, how another beautiful woman of our family moved me to such a degree of enchantment that I felt like falling down before her and worshipping her as the pagans of old worshipped their goddesses.

This other beautiful woman had a tragic and terrible fate. She was the Grand Duchess Elisabeth of Russia, my cousin, sister of the late Tsarina. She had married one of my mother's younger brothers, the Grand Duke Serge. He was blown up by Nihilists, long, long before the revolution, whilst Governor of Moscow. She then entered holy orders, building a convent in which she lived, but her holy life brought her no mercy from the Bolsheviks; she was abominably slaughtered in Siberia, but curiously enough her body was found and later on transported to Jerusalem, where it now lies in the Holy Land.

She was quite newly married when her beauty burst upon me as a marvellous revelation. Her loveliness was of what used to be called the "angelic" kind. Her eyes, her lips, her smile, her hands, the way she looked at you, the way she talked, the way she moved, all was exquisite beyond words, it almost brought tears to your eyes. Looking at her one felt like exclaiming with Heine :

*Du bist wie eine Blume
So hold und schön und rein
Ich schau dich an, und Wehmut
Schleicht mir ins Herz hinein.*

*Mit ist als ob ich die Hände
Aufs Haupt dir legen sollt,
Betend dass Gott dich erhalte
So rein und schön und hold . . .*

But I seem to have wandered far from my subject ; forgive me this digression, but let me warn you that there will be many another as we go along.

Our life at Eastwell is as a once vivid dream become just a little dim. It was mostly the winter months we spent there. I believe it was often cold and damp, but to me the remembrance is entirely lovely.

Certain pictures and feelings have remained specially imprinted upon my mind. I shall carry them with me to the end of my life, hoarded away with all the memories I love.

Certain scents belong specially to Eastwell. However old I may grow, the smell of dry or damp autumn leaves will ever bring the old English home before my eyes, the park with each tree standing well apart from its neighbour so that it could develop in unhindered beauty, every single one of giant growth, and we children shuffling through the dead leaves, sniffing in the pungent smell we delighted in, while wisps of mist, like smoke, played about the branches overhead. That scent of autumn leaves, no matter where I may be, still evokes the vision of Eastwell Park and its woodland paths that our childish feet once trod. And in the kitchen garden there was that perfume of violet leaves mingling with the mouldy smell of potatoes and old sacks



GRAND DUCHESS SERGE, SISTER OF THE EMPRESS ALEXANDRA.
(From a portrait by Fr. von Kaulbach.)

hoarded up in the tool-house near by, and a little farther on the rather bitter scent of the high laurel hedges we would slip through, which seemed to us a darkly mysterious passage to dream places to which we must finally come.

And the huge cedar tree on the lawn in front of the house, with its lowest boughs sweeping the ground under which we would crawl. This tree was a wonderful cathedral-like mansion in which we children each possessed a room. Some brambles, having found their way beneath the old tree's shade, had climbed up its drooping branches, and swung down from them in long festoons. These hanging creepers gave a jungle-like appearance to our secret abode, and I imagined they were bell-ropes used by the fairies in the moonlight, during those enchanted hours when Nana would never let us creep out of our beds to explore the white world.

This curious sensation of mystery in all things is very characteristic of childhood. Children see things in other proportions, differently from their elders; in all things there are strange shapes, there are colours, secrets, scope for discovery, that big people are quite unaware of. There are pictures within pictures, depths within depths, in all things there are possibilities just out of reach.

I had an imaginative turn of mind. I was the one who could tell wonderful stories to my brother and sisters, romance lived in my soul and in all things I saw more than the naked eye could perceive.

This peculiarity has followed me through life, and now, at the age of fifty-two I still see visions and beauty in the most unexpected things and places.

At Eastwell there was a terrible unexplained mystery near the big lake. Our governess or nurse did not often take us that way as it was a long distance for short legs, but occasionally we would coax them to take that road which had, all unknown to those in authority, a gruesome attraction.

Hidden away in the bushes at the farther end of the lake was a well—at least, we imagined it to be a well—and from that well came an extraordinary sound. A deep, hollow, ghostly sound, as though desperate hands were thumping, thumping, eternally thumping against dungeon doors.

“Someone is down there!” we would whisper to each other, “a ghost, a prisoner, or a terrible ogre, or some fearful creature that has been walled up?” but we never dared ask who was shut up there in that well. I do not think we even wanted to know, the glorious terror of the thing was better left unexplained. Boom, boom, boom! and our hearts would beat excruciatingly; we would hold each other’s hands and try not to hurry past or look afraid. Boom, boom!—what could it be?

To-day I know as little as I knew then what made that well, tank or reservoir, beat in that uncanny way, but in imagination I like to feel again those delicious shivers of fear we felt when we stole with hushed tread past the haunted place.

There was another corner which filled us with a feeling of dark mystery, but this was in the house itself.

I do not know if Eastwell House was as huge as it seemed to us children, but it had many unexplored parts and rooms into which we had never penetrated. Leading out of the marble-flagged hall was a broad, shallow front staircase of very dark wood, but there was also a back staircase. “No place for little girls,” declared our governess, forthwith making of the back-stairs a place of burning interest, a land of discovery and dark possibilities we longed to explore.

It was a very terrifying place, that back staircase; it gave you the shivers as did the well near the lake, because it went deep, deep down, it seemed to descend into the very bowels of the earth. Looking over the railings, or rather, at that age, peeping through them, giddiness overcame you and you had to turn away. But as soon as you had looked away, something stronger than fear impelled you to look back again, to take another peep, because, half-way down was a mysterious corner which the servants called the “Glory Hole,” and this of all places was a place “not for little girls.” As far as I remember, the “Glory Hole” had a curtain before it instead of a door, which flapped backwards and forwards and there was always a light burning on the other side, so the “Glory Hole” must have been a very dark place. Like the well, even to-day I really have no clear idea what

rites were perpetrated down in the "Glory Hole." Was it a pantry of sorts? I cannot say, but to our childish imagination it was a private little "Hell" peculiar to the back-stairs, and we even imagined that it had a particular smell. Probably it had, but it was too far down, I think, to reach up to our inquisitive noses!

If we were discovered by the authorities peeping down over the back-stair banisters towards the "Glory Hole" we were quickly driven back to regions more in keeping with "nice little girls" as we were reprovngly told.

Oh, there is so much that I remember, though it was all so long ago. The Highland cattle for instance, those wide-horned, large-eyed creatures sauntering placidly over the path that led through the park to church. Lovely creatures they were, all curly, sometimes sand-coloured, sometimes chestnut, sometimes black, and their coats were so long that the hair hung in fringes over their foreheads. This gave a rugged and at the same time an almost childish look to their faces and somehow it was those fuzzy fringes that reassured you; it made their expressions so kindly that you almost forgot the startling dimensions of their horns. They would stand as still as statues contemplating with raised heads and gentle eyes our goody-goody little procession, prayer-books in hand, winding its way to the House of God.

And the deer, whole herds of them grazing on the grass, or suddenly scared, scampering away into the woods. There was nothing more wonderful than to pick up during our rambles bits of their fallen horns, bleached by exposure to sun and wind; these were carried home and considered great treasures.

And one day we discovered a hollow tree with a big, big hole in it. It really must have been a very big tree because we three elder sisters as well as our brother could all four of us sit inside this hole. Of course we had to crawl into it on hands and knees, but inside there was room enough for the lot of us, and this hollow tree, for a long time, was the very centre of our games. Endless marvellous possibilities had arisen in our lives because of this wonderful refuge. We were Robinson Crusoe, we were Robin Hood

and his followers, we were Red Indians or pirates and goodness knows what else.

In the middle of our round and rather dark retreat there was a lump of wood which hung down, disturbing our perfect comfort and we decided that to get rid of it we must either use an axe or a saw. Such implements were not to be had for the asking, so we had to plead with our father to procure us the tool needed, and I well remember his answering that we could take a saw if we liked, but that he absolutely forbade an axe. "An axe would take off a finger at one blow," he declared, "whilst you would soon enough stop sawing if you began sawing your finger!" How well I remember his saying this; some sentences remain with you all through life.

Papa was a "rare" person, by which I mean that he did not occupy himself actively with his children; he left that to Mamma, but occasionally he would, so to say, discover us and then he would invent some game or amusement that he seemed to enjoy as much as we did. He invented a thrilling game for the winter evenings; the lamps were all put out and Papa would hide in a dark corner pretending to be an ogre. We never knew in which room he was. With fearful trembling we would crawl through the ink-black chambers and suddenly, when all danger seemed over, he would spring out from somewhere and catch us whilst we screamed as though he were really going to eat us up. It was a gruesome game and gave us the real thrill that danger gives to adventurers.

One day, rare occurrence, there was a tremendous fall of snow and Papa took us out for some tobogganing down a hill near the dairy. That was wonderful. I think it was the first snow I ever saw, and what child can resist the fascination of snow? But in England snow never lasts—it came and went like a scarcely realized dream.

But I also remember some skating on the big lake, and although we were but wee wobbly beginners, I can still feel the rapturous ecstasy of launching forth upon the shiny surface. The keen winter air made your eyes water and painted your cheeks and nose fiery red, but it was beyond

words glorious. How I remember, too, the crumply round black velvet caps, trimmed with dark Russian sable which we wore for this memorable occasion ; these becoming little caps still further enhanced the pleasure of skating as did also the sip of the hot cinnamon-flavoured red wine which was given us as the sun sank in the West.

Likewise of delightful memory was the apple- and pear-house, and I can still almost taste the aromatic flavour of the huge golden pear the gardener selected for me off one of the shelves where the fruit stood in tempting lines of green, red and yellow. Last but not least there was the excitement of Christmas !

The Christmas tree was set up in the big library, whilst the presents were laid out on white-covered tables all round the walls of the room. But what mysteries went on beforehand ! Papa, especially, became tremendously important at this season ; he liked occasionally to take things in hand, and became himself as eager as a child. But like all men he was excessively meticulous and could get very angry if the smallest detail he had planned was not religiously adhered to.

One of the fore-thrills of Christmas was the stirring of the servants' plum pudding. This ceremony took place in the steward's room, and also in the official part of the stables, because house and stables were two separate realms and one never dared overlap the other. The etiquette amongst the servants of a well-organized English household is all-important. An enormous bowl was set upon the table and each child had to have a "go" at the stirring, which was a stiff job, but of immense consequence.

At last Christmas Eve was there, and the library doors, which had been kept closed for several days, were thrown open, and there stood the tree, a blaze of light, and all around upon the white-decked tables, one mass of gifts for everybody, no one ever being forgotten.

Oh, glorious moment of realization ! And rather shyly, holding each other's hands, we children advanced towards all that light, till we stood in the very centre of it, were part of it ourselves.

For many, many a year the thrill of Christmas held good,

the days of secret preparation beforehand, the mystery, the whispering, the hushed silence before the closed door and then the sudden fulfilment in a blaze of candlelight, accompanied by that delicious fragrance of singed fir-branches so inseparable from Christmas. Later the trouble and care of sorting, preparing, organizing became our share; the thrill, the ecstasy of fulfilment had passed over to the younger generation, but all through my life in the far land of my adoption I tried to make the Christmases I arranged as much as possible like the Eastwell, and later the Malta Christmases. For those will ever be the Christmases that remain most unforgettable to me.

I feel I dare not pause too long there where my recollections are enveloped in a haze of enchantment, due in a great part to distance and also to that wonder world in which children alone can dwell.

But something of that child-faculty of seeing pictures within pictures, depths within depths, mystery and romance in the every day, has been mine all along my road. It is the blessed faculty of beautifying things, of rendering more interesting events and people, of drawing out light rather than shade. It is the optimist's attitude, a bit trying to the pessimist, or so I have been told, but although I belong to those who see reality with "peeled" eyes, I nevertheless perceive in all things the possibility of beauty instead of the sordidness people to-day seem to delight in. I see the good in people rather than the bad, the pity and pathos in wickedness and sin, rather than the crime; far rather would I help with kind words than punish with a rod.

Weakness some may declare, but I would rather call it strength. Severity? Yes, when absolutely necessary, but seven times at least, if not seventy times seven, would I give my criminal the benefit of the doubt.

If this speciality of mine is going to be an irritation to you, then throw down my book straight off, because you will meet this spirit of optimistic tolerance all through its pages, till the very end, I hope!

Quite lately I met a delightful American who was already seventy years old; he came to Roumania to see me because

he felt from afar in sympathy with me and my attitude towards life. I asked him what he was doing and he answered: "Travelling about from one country to another to know people, because all people are lovable if you really know them, be they English, American, Chinese, Hungarian, Hottentot or Zulu. I am going to spend what days are left to me in trying to make people at least *like* each other, if *love* is too big a word!"

And that old gentleman and I clasped hands. "I thank God," said I, "for sending me someone who put my own thoughts into words!"

And now back again to my childhood, for you must still patiently follow me along more than one road, and I suppose I had better introduce you to some members of my family if this is really to be the story of my life.

The most important person, of course, dwarfing all others, was Grandmamma, Queen Victoria, "Grandmamma Queen" as we called her, in contrast to "Grandmamma Empress," my mother's mother, after whom I was called, whilst Ducky had been called Victoria after Grandmamma Queen, the name of Melita being added as Ducky was born on the enchanted island of Malta; but more of Malta anon.

I believe that Grandmamma Queen had expected that I, as eldest daughter of the family, would be given her name, but Mamma felt that I must be called Marie, a name which, because it was her mother's, was dearer to her than all others, and I must say I love my name; Mary or Marie, there is something eternal about it, because is it not the name of the Mother of God?

I do not think that my mother always found it easy being Queen Victoria's daughter-in-law, though they had a great respect for each other. Mamma had been brought up at the most autocratic of courts, the splendour of which had to be seen to be realized. She had been the Emperor's only daughter and her position had therefore been exceptional. Now she was the wife of Queen Victoria's second son and all her sisters-in-law, even the unmarried ones, had precedence over her, having rights to the English throne. I believe my mother felt this rather sorely, but I was too much

of a child then to know about any of those things which perplexed or upset grown-up people. My mother kept all worry and conflict from us, we lived in a real fool's paradise. It was perhaps not a very good training for the future battles of life, but I thank her for it, all the same, with every fibre of my heart do I thank her, because with that life which she helped us to lead, she sowed a seed of idealism in my soul which nothing, nay, neither conflict, disappointment, disillusion nor stern reality, was ever quite able to uproot.

My mother had been very severely brought up, and she herself had strict ideas upon education and behaviour, but there was at the same time a wideness of mind about her which made of her an exceptional woman, and above all her generosity was extraordinary. Of course she was wealthy, but she gave even beyond what it was reasonable to give, gave and gave, to big and small, to rich and poor; her very reason of existence was to be able to give.

She made us wonderfully happy, so of course we children imagined that she was perfectly happy herself. But later on I found out that she had never been really happy, or at peace with herself; many things tormented her, she did not take life easily. The tremendously severe upbringing she had received, the care expended upon her that her education and instruction should be in every way complete, the great and somewhat oppressive influence her own religion, which was the Orthodox, had upon her, all went to make her dissatisfied and critical with herself. Outwardly she may have appeared haughty, a stickler for form and proud of her rank, but inwardly she was humble, always tormenting herself, tortured with the idea that she had never lived up to the ideal set for her by her parents and those who had educated her.

But none of this did we notice as children; later on, however, when life little by little opened my eyes to most things I began to fathom my mother's real character and the moral conflicts that she had been through, and how she never really felt at peace with herself.

She clung to her Church with all her soul, and no matter in what house she lived, a little Orthodox chapel was erected in some corner of it, and she always kept in her service a



MYSELF AT THE AGE OF TEN.



1895

Russian priest and two chanters who followed her wherever she went.

We children were brought up in the Anglican Church, and I believe it was a lifelong grief to my mother that we were Protestants. Sometimes, though, she would take us into her little chapel, where, awed by the mystery of rites foreign to us, we stood gazing as in a trance at the precious icons, at the wondrous three-doored screen which shut off the altar, inhaling the heady fragrance of the incense and listening with beating hearts to the grave, soul-stirring Russian chants. The Russian language is the language of languages for song, and Russia is the country for stupendous bass voices.

The mystical atmosphere of these little sanctuaries impressed me deeply. I never felt an urge to change my own religion for that of my mother; but standing beside her whilst she prayed and devoutly crossed herself in her own chapel, made me feel very near the Holy of Holies, and the ardent expression of belief lighting up my mother's face during these services, moved me in a way difficult to describe.

The fact that she worshipped God in a way different from us, surrounded her in my imagination with a special nimbus; it made her just a little unapproachable, strange, not quite belonging to the everyday world. Scrupulously respecting the faith we were christened in, she rather shunned speaking of religion with us, fearing perhaps to influence us in any way. But there was also, I think, a feeling that we might not understand the beauty of her cult, that we might not approach with sufficient reverence that which was so fundamentally part of her inner being. So a certain shyness always existed between us when discussing or referring to religious matters.

Curiously enough, fate was later on to put the same problems before me, only the other way round.

I always remained a staunch Protestant, but all my six children were christened in my mother's religion as it is the official religion of their country, and it was one of my mother's most excruciating anxieties to see if her daughter would be equal to the difficult task, always fearing that I might not

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feel sufficient reverence for her Church, which she instinctively considered superior to mine.

I shall return later to religious questions as I have pondered much over them, coming to my own conclusions. I would, however, like to say here that my children and I never had that same diffidence about discussing religious questions as my mother and I had, for nowadays children and parents speak more easily to each other.

My mother had been brought up with the conception that generations must be kept strictly apart, and any more familiar attitude of child towards parent was in her eyes a want of respect.

Even now, one of my deepest regrets is that because I was her daughter she never admitted, even when I was forty, that I should discuss things with her as though we were equals. She would not bridge the generations.

And yet I have the feeling that both of us would have found infinite comfort in discussing life's problems together, in mutually confessing to each other what we had found hard or perplexing on our so different roads, both of us having married into foreign lands.

Because of that attitude of hers I seldom dared approach her for advice, because I always to a certain degree had to keep on a mask whilst with her, because she never lifted hers.

Many a useless little comedy have we thus played to each other, she pretending not to know those things she knew as well as I did, and what was worse, knew that I knew that she knew! And yet our masks were on all the time.

Had she the same desire as I had to tear them off? This has remained unanswered. Yet I dare to say that had she only been able to treat me as a woman, forgetting that I was her daughter, I might at times even have been a help, because my none too easy apprenticeship in a far-off country had taught me much; but to the very end she would admit of no wisdom coming out of the mouth of the babe she had brought into the world.

Nowadays we talk freely with our children, we let them have ideas of their own, we will even occasionally allow them to give us a lead; we do not abuse our rights as elders,

we have more sympathy with their struggles, conflicts and desires. Are we preparing a stronger and better generation? I wonder. Sometimes perhaps we swing too far round in the other direction, we recognize *too many* rights, too much freedom; but that may also come from the fact that parents themselves do not grow old as quickly as in our times; they feel themselves to be no more than middle-aged much longer than used to be the case.

About all these problems I have my ideas, and through having lived, seen and felt, I have come to many a conclusion, but I shall never in this one small book be able to relate, explain or argue out all that I have thought and learnt.

But suppose we now come back to Queen Victoria.

Many have already written about that great little woman, have described her, dissected her character, her reign, her personal value. Far be it from me to want to paint any other picture of her than the one that fitted into my life, the picture of her as my childish eyes saw her and in later years the eyes of a woman, young and far away from her native land. In these days she was following my career with grandmotherly affection, but also with the anxious severity of one who wished that those of her House should do it every honour, no matter where they were placed.

Dear old Grandmamma, with her crinoline-like black silk dresses, her white widow's cap, her shy little laugh and that little shrug of the shoulders which had become almost a trick, what a wonderful, unforgettable little lady she was.

The hush round Grandmamma's door was awe-inspiring, it was like approaching the mystery of some sanctuary.

Silent, soft-carpeted corridors led to Grandmamma's apartments which were somehow always approached from afar off, and those that led the way towards them, were they servant, lady or maid, talked in hushed voices and trod softly as though with felt soles.

One door after another opened noiselessly, it was like passing through the forecourts of a temple, before approaching the final mystery to which only the initiated had access.

Wonderful little old Grandmamma, who though such a small, unimposing little woman to look at should have known

so extraordinarily how to inspire reverential fear. Our nurses would drive us along before them like a troop of well-behaved little geese, they too having suddenly become soft-tongued and even their scoldings were as words breathed through a flannel so that all sharpness was taken out of their voices of reproof.

When finally the door was opened there sat Grandmamma not idol-like at all, not a bit frightening, smiling a kind little smile, almost as shy as us children, so that conversation was not very fluent on either side.

Inquiry as to our morals and general behaviour made up a great part of it, and I well remember Grandmamma's shocked and yet amused little exclamations of horror when it was reported that one or the other of us had not been good.

I have a sort of feeling that Grandmamma as well as ourselves was secretly relieved when the audience was over.

But there was a wonderful charm about Grandmamma's rooms which always smelt deliciously of orange-flowers, even when there were no orange-flowers about the place.

First and foremost there were portraits of Grandpapa, portraits of every kind. Pictures and prints, statues, statuettes and photographs. There was Grandpapa in full general's uniform. Grandpapa in his robes of the Order of the Garter, Grandpapa in kilt, in plain clothes, Grandpapa on horse-back, at his writing-table, Grandpapa with his dogs, with his children, in the garden, on the mountains. Grandpapa with important-looking papers in his hands, Grandpapa with his loving wife gazing enraptured up into his face. Grandpapa was certainly the first and foremost spirit of these rooms.

Then they were so excitingly full of every imaginable treasure, from the glass ball in which many colours could be seen, to the wonderful pictures by Landseer of dogs, ponies and deer. And so many photographs, amongst others mysterious photographs of dead people, even of dead little children which, although they made us feel creepy, we always furtively looked at again and again. Then there were all sorts of delicious queer little objects made of Scotch granite and cairngorm. And above all there was Grandmamma's bullfinch, such an angry little fellow, who became thin with rage, and screeched at you when you stuck your finger in



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alfred'.

MY FATHER, ALFRED, DUKE OF EDINBURGH, LATER DUKE OF
SAXE-COBURG-GOTHA.

between the bars of his cage ; but when he liked someone, he puffed himself up till he looked like a round ball of fluff and then he piped softly and enchantingly a gay little tune he had been taught.

Once upon a time I had a little bullfinch like Grandmamma's, but that was much later and is a sad little story, oh, so sad, and does not fit in here.

These explorations round about Grandmamma's rooms could only take place if it was Mamma who went with us, because then Grandmamma talked with Mamma instead of with us, and their conversations were more lengthy and more substantial, giving us time for our voyages of discovery.

It is especially the Windsor rooms and corridors I remember ; at Osborne and Balmoral Grandmamma generally used to be met outside.

Like all overworked people Grandmamma loved to escape at certain hours of the day from the hushed "royalness" of her apartments, so whenever weather permitted she would take her breakfast and tea out of doors.

It is principally at Frogmore and Osborne that I see Grandmamma at breakfast under a large *écru* green-lined and green-fringed parasol which had been fixed into the ground.

Here, too, everybody approaching her trod softly, but it was on emerald-green lawns instead of carpets, and in the open air one was less afraid of the sound of one's own voice.

A delicious fragrance of coffee and of a certain brown biscuit which came in flat round tins from Germany was characteristic of Grandmamma's breakfast. Our greedy little noses sniffed it in longingly, but it was not always that we were invited to have a taste.

Grey-kilted and green-kilted Highlanders or white-turbaned Indians mostly seemed to be attending to Grandmamma's wants, though the tall monumental footmen also had their place in the picture, I remember, as had also the numerous dogs : collies, Skye, Scotch and rough-haired terriers, and above all the adorable cream-coloured pony with pink nose and ruby-red eyes, harnessed to Grandmamma's pony carriage, the exact replica in miniature of the huge state horses that were harnessed to Grandmamma's golden coach when

she drove to Parliament or to Westminster Abbey on days when great events took place.

Oh, that cream-coloured pony, he has haunted many of my childish visions. In dreamland I possessed him, I even rode him through marvellous countries, over the classical seven hills and seven dells in the land of fairies. Swift as the wind was his gallop, no noise did his four hoofs make, whilst mane and tail were real rivers of light.

The moment breakfast was over cups, plates, coffee and tea-pots were cleared away to make room for innumerable leather dispatch boxes. Each box had a protruding slip of paper, indicating the contents I suppose.

These dispatch boxes seemed almost a part of Grandmamma herself.

Osborne! The very name is still a joy. It meant summer holidays, it meant the sea and the seashore, it meant wonderful shells to be found when the tide was low, shells of every colour and shape. It meant glorious bathing when the tide was high, and drives in the big "wagonette," as we called our brake, through the sweet-smelling woods, past hedges full of honeysuckle.

And it meant dear old Grandmamma Queen in the background. Grandmamma Queen at breakfast under her écu green-fringed parasol, surrounded by dogs, Indians, Highlanders, and also an aunt or two in nervous attendance or occasionally a curtsying lady-in-waiting, in correct black, all smiles and with the mellowed voice usual to those who served or attended to the great little old lady.

It also meant the beautiful terraces in front of Osborne House where the big magnolias grew against the walls, those giant magnolias which had a lemon-like fragrance and into which you could bury your whole face, but which you never dared pick, because they were far too precious and exotic for childish plunder. Even when faded and their petals turned to a sort of leathery brown, they still kept their delicious scent and then their curious hard-pointed centres became very prominent; they really were mystery flowers, as also were the passion flowers with their cross in the centre and the many stamens laid flat in a perfect circle like the wheels

of a watch. There was also jasmine on those terraces and jasmine has always filled me with a sort of ecstasy.

That feeling of ecstasy over flowers has always been one of the enchantments of life; I feel it to-day as I did then. It is a sort of rapture, a sort of prayer-like gratitude for something which delights soul as well as body, eyes as well as heart.

I must speak of that curious sensation of ecstasy that certain things always gave me. Once, much later, talking them over with my sister Ducky, I found that she had almost always felt the same raptures I had for exactly the same things.

It was a sort of tightening of the heartstrings, something that brought tears to your eyes and at the same time made you want to shout with joy or fall on your knees and worship or sing hymns of praise and thanksgiving.

The causes responsible for these ecstasies were manifold and varied. Some had to do entirely with the eyes, some with scent, some with sound, some entirely with feeling. These were more mysterious and less easy to fathom.

When I begin to sum up my childish ecstasies, many will make you smile, but they were so strong that even to-day I have only to shut my eyes and they still take hold of me with the same power as then.

There was for instance the indescribable thrill of reaching the Osborne beach at low tide; the stepping out of the wagonette before the coastguard's little castle, with the ever-renewed possibility before us of finding wonderful shells.

The sand lay white, damp and smooth beneath our bare feet and half buried in this sand were these treasures only waiting for discovery. It was always Ducky and I who shared these raptures.

Our hearts beat, our eyes glowed; each step might mean marvellous discovery. The fan shells were what we searched for especially, and one day I found a broad, pink fan shell, pale rose pink, with deeper markings; it was a stupendous find, much bigger than the fan shells generally picked up on the Osborne beach, more like shells found in the tropics.

Ducky and I considered this find almost a miracle, it was a red-letter day, a date always to be remembered ; and others envied my luck.

But now you may smile when I mention another of my several ecstasies, thrills you might almost call them.

Mamma had two pairs of magnificent coal-black Orloff trotters, which Prince Orloff himself had given her as a present when she was in Russia.

Their coats were incredibly shiny, like polished marble, and when they moved, blue lights played about on their glossy flanks. Our coachman was called Robert. He was a wizened little man with a thin set face that had a sort of frozen smile at one corner of his mouth. He drove with impeccable English correctness though he always leaned a wee bit towards the off-side ; that was a characteristic of his ; of course we children loved Robert.

The most beautiful of these Orloff trotters was called Viceroy, but in the stables he had the nickname of Skitty because he was skittish and difficult to handle. Skitty was the object of our deepest adoration. Everything was perfection in Skitty, the way he held his head, tossing the foam from his jingling bit, the way he lifted his knees, the marvellous line of his rounded flanks, but—and now comes my ecstasy—there was a wave in his mane as he curved his beautiful neck, a sort of ripple that ran over it whilst he trotted and that I could just see if I bent right out over the side of the wagonette to watch it.

No position was too dangerous if I could only catch a glimpse of Skitty's curved neck and that ripple in his mane as he trotted. It was a sort of rapture that cannot be described or explained, but only felt from the crown of your head to the tip of your toes. It was ecstasy in fact : that is the only word that describes it.

You can laugh to your heart's content ; I am well aware that it is absurd, but that curve of Skitty's blue-black neck was and has remained in memory, one of my most exquisite ecstasies.

There was also the deep, soul-satisfying ecstasy of the

wild rose, pink and frail, with a perfume so delicate that it might have been distilled by the Fairy Queen herself. In fact the wild rose was a fairy flower and has always remained so. And also the primroses in the copses, those rounded pale yellow bunches, nestling amongst last year's fallen rust-coloured leaves.

There are no primroses in Roumania, but a few years ago when my daughter married and went to Serbia, I found primroses in all the woods round about Belgrade.

My delight was so great that my children always invite me for the primrose season and those delicate pale bunches, rising from the rust-coloured ground, still ravish me to-day as they did in those far-off days of Eastwell, Windsor and Devonport, the three chief places where we used to pick primroses.

Blessed, blessed faculty that God has given me of being able to thrill with every drop of my blood, with heart, soul and senses, to feel, adore, rejoice and give thanks !

But now a humble confession ! Although this sounds horribly material, I have also known ecstasy of taste !

I was never a specially greedy child, but all the same certain tastes could induce the same rapture as scents, sounds or sights, and these tastes have also remained unforgettable.

There were, for instance, certain little sweets only to be had at the Russian Court. These were wee double round fondants made of fresh strawberries and served up in tiny paper baskets. Their colour was as exquisite as their taste. The very moment when you lifted them off the dish on to your plate was one of enchantment, your mouth watered even before you tasted them. The "fore-pleasure," as the Germans would express it, was almost as wonderful as the actual eating of the sweets. This was fairy food, and whenever I told a story to myself or to my sisters, my imaginary personages always ate these super-exquisite sweets.

Two more "tastes" have remained with me as a delicious memory. One was at Queen Victoria's table.

Every Sunday Grandmamma had more or less the same menu served, which had roast beef as *pièce de résistance*, and "Mehlbrei" as sweet dish.

This was almost a nursery dish and when it had to receive an elegant French name the cooks would call it *bouillie de farine à la vanille*. But Grandmamma, who was sentimental about all things pertaining to Germany, admitted German names on her menu, so plain "Mehlbrei" was allowed.

The deliciousness of this "Mehlbrei" was heightened by little diamond-shaped pieces of brown skin which floated on the top. The taste of these little squares of skin, which was simply the top part of the *bouillie* slightly burnt, belonged to those things that for some reason gave my palate exquisite satisfaction. I would shut my eyes and let the wee morsel lie for a moment on my tongue so as to taste it to the utmost.

The tragedy was that there were very few of these floating little squares in each dish, and as I was very young I was of course served one of the last and it more than once happened that when my turn came, the little squares had all been already consumed by those luckier and more privileged than I. In fact, to be accurate, I think only once did I taste of this ambrosial food, but the memory has remained for ever, so it must have been specially exquisite.

And there is still one last "taste" I must mention.

This last was at Coburg where we had an old nursery footman named Wiener. Wiener was as excellent as he was undecorative. But he had a warm heart and he loved children, and like all people who have a soft spot in their hearts for the little ones, he liked to feed them on good food.

Now Wiener had a cousin who kept the restaurant at the Kalenberg (the Kalenberg being one of the royal castles beyond the town). Like all self-respecting German castles the Kalenberg stood on a hill, and at its foot, in accordance with Teutonic tradition, there was a restaurant where the worthy burghers made merry on high days and holidays, and Wiener's cousin ran this plebeian "Kaffee" as it was also called, and this cousin made a special sort of cake.

If you have never tasted the Kalenberg cake, it is no good trying to make you understand its perfection.

It was delicious beyond description and its rareness added to its value, for it was only occasionally that Wiener's Kalenberg cousin would send the little princesses one of these dream cakes.

To look at the Kalenberg cake was in no way wonderful. It was a plain brown cake, just like the cakes you see in the pictures in all German children's books, in "Struwelpeter" for instance. The sort of cake that Fidgety Phil drags off the table with him when he collapses under the tablecloth, after a special fit of the fidgets and his mother, aghast, contemplates the disaster through her "lorgnon."

The Kalenberg cake had no raisins in it, and it was into the bargain called, I believe, "Gesundheitskuchen," which ought to have robbed it of all its charm, but its crust especially had just that something about it that made it more luscious than any other "living" cake.

I would eat my slice deliberately, with a slowness which was infinitely greedier than any gobbling, and I would nibble it away gradually to the top where resided the *summum bonum* of taste. This very last top bit of the Kalenberg cake belongs to the same category of "ecstasy" as did the strawberry fondants and the little squares of burnt skin on Grandmamma's Sunday "Mehlbrei." But they had also something of the thrill, though more material, I confess, that the primroses, the wild roses and Skitty's mane gave me, Skitty who was really called Viceroy according to the enamelled plaque over his box.

Those who have similar remembrances of their childhood will understand what I mean, those who have not must just forgive me my trivial digression and turn to another page.

Chapter II

OSBORNE COTTAGE

BUT I am not yet finished with Osborne, for there is real relish in bringing to light these dear buried memories which are such a happy background to a life which was destined to be lived in a country so far from the land of my birth.

We inhabited Osborne Cottage, a delightful little house just beyond the royal park which Grandmamma Queen lent us occasionally for the summer months.

Mamma loved the Isle of Wight, whilst other members of the Royal Family declared that the climate of Osborne was too relaxing. I particularly remember the word "relaxing," which I did not like because it had a sound of pills and medicine about it, a sound as of doses given by Nana of an evening when your inside was upset.

Evidently Mamma liked a relaxing climate, declaring that she did not care to be blown to pieces in what English people called "bracing" places, where you could not keep a hat upon your head.

Mamma was very funny about her hats. Altogether, indeed, she had strange ideas about clothes because, it must be confessed, Mamma was always just a little in opposition to the times. It seemed to give her a particular satisfaction to consider yesterday much better than to-day, and I have known her bitterly regret a fashion of yesterday, which she had loudly denounced with hoots of disapproval when it had been the fashion of to-day!

Mamma had, for instance, a strange idea that she could only stick a pin into her hat on the right side. She had never, she said, learned in her youth how to put in a pin with the left hand, she had never done it in Russia and she was not going to try and do it either in England, Germany

or Malta. For such was my Mamma, and no one could more persistently stick to her convictions and principles even when they made her thoroughly uncomfortable.

In later years these little idiosyncrasies narrowed her life down most unnecessarily till she became something of an original.

Anyhow, because Mamma had never learnt in Russia how to put two pins into her hat, she hated the wind with the healthy hate she put into all her hatreds through life. There was nothing half-hearted about Mamma: what she liked she liked, innovations were abhorrent to her, and she preferred places where she had not to "dress up," as she called it.

She wore practical skirts, jackets and hats, though she always stuck to funny-shaped boots with little leather bows on their tips, boots that were ordered in St. Petersburg, and she had them specially made the same for each foot, declaring that it was nonsense to imagine that you needed a left and right shoe, it was much more rational to have them both alike.

It was only much later that I understood that Mamma was really somewhat of a character, to use a literary expression. As a child I imagined that everybody had those ideas, and those strong likes and dislikes which often isolated her from her neighbours.

No one could tell a story better than Mamma. She was a wonderful conversationalist and could keep a whole table amused. She used to encourage us to talk and entertain people, always declaring that nothing was more hopeless than a princess who never opened her mouth. "Besides," she added, "it is very rude and please remember that, my dear children."

I have remembered it all through my life.

Another thing she was very severe about was that when invited out somewhere for a meal you must never refuse a dish set before you, even if you did not like it, because she declared that nothing was so insulting to a hostess as not eating the good things that she provided.

"But if they are not good, Mamma?"

"Then you must just behave as though they were good."

“But if they make you feel sick!”

“Then be sick, my dear, but wait till you get home. It would be most offensive to be sick then and there!”

This was Mamma's good advice. Something of a Spartan, she expected her children to follow her lead.

Mamma hated anyone to be ill. She herself had marvellous health that she handed on to me, for which I thank her every day of my life as the greatest of my blessings.

According to Mamma's code one must never complain. A headache must never be confessed or given way to, a cold did not keep you at home, a fever did not send you to bed. Yet no one had such an eagle eye as Mamma. She spotted the smallest indisposition and was always at hand with pills or medicines.

She declared that English doses were much stronger than continental doses and she used to call them “*des remèdes de cheval*.”

Mamma spoke perfect English, but preferred French, declaring that it was by far the most elegant language and that a beautiful letter could only be written in French. She did not, however, particularly care for the French as a people, preferring the English, Russians and Germans.

We children hated speaking French; we considered it an affected language, a language for grown-ups, not for children, and we wilfully threw away all the good opportunities of absorbing the language properly.

This exasperated Mamma, who said we were little fools, which, no doubt, we were, only we did not like to be told so.

“Children,” Mamma would say, when giving some of her Spartan advice, “don't let English people persuade you that certain foods are indigestible; everything is digestible for a good stomach, but English people spoil their digestion from earliest childhood by imagining that they cannot eat this or that. I always ate everything; in Russia no one ever spoke about their digestions, it's a most unpleasant subject and not drawing-room conversation.” All this proving that Mamma herself had an excellent Russian digestion.

Once with the greatest satisfaction Mamma declared:

“Missy” (that was I) “is like me, she can eat stones and feel none the worse for it.”

Without doubt this Russian peculiarity, handed down to me from my Russian ancestors, has been a great asset all through my life.

Mamma had an old maid called Fanny Renwick. She was a great character. She was dark and had a moustache and liked to imagine that Spanish blood flowed in her veins. I doubt if her forbears had come from Spain but there might have been an Irishman amongst them.

Fanny ruled us with a rod of iron. We loved and we hated her in turns. Her humours changed like the weather, but on sunny days she was most affable.

Fanny looked after Mamma’s wardrobe and laid in stores of all that Mamma might need. There was a Russian largeness about the size of these needs.

It was a wonderful day when we caught Fanny inspecting her stores; there were cupboards and cupboards of them and these cupboards smelt delicious.

Here were endless rows of scents, boxes of “sachets,” cold cream, soap, rose-water, but nothing in the form of cosmetics, which Mamma abhorred as violently as the prophets of old denouncing the Jezebels of their time.

There were incredible provisions of pills, especially castor-oil pills that looked like transparent white grapes with the oil moving about inside. These for some reason were always ordered in St. Petersburg, perhaps for fear of their being “*des remèdes de cheval*” if ordered in England.

I think these castor-oil pills mostly dried up in their boxes, because Mamma’s Russian digestion hardly justified the ordering of such an enormous quantity. But as they were sent all the way from the Russian capital, perhaps it was more practical to have a great provision sent at one time. I think that Mamma had no idea of the miraculous stores that she had in her cupboards; Fanny had a free hand in the ordering.

The most enchanting of Fanny’s provisions were the “smoking pastilles.” These were of every sort. Some were tiny and of every colour of the rainbow, others were

pink, half-moon shaped, packed in small flat boxes with an Oriental name on the top and for some reason the picture of a small gazelle. There were also heart-shaped lavender-coloured pastilles that tasted of violets. I think I liked these best, and on fine-weather days, the moustachioed, Spanish-looking Fanny was very generous with Her Imperial Highness's stores.

Big sachets like little mattresses, blue or pink, hung or lay between all Mamma's dresses or linen. These were filled with iris powder and were always sent from Florence where they were made.

Fanny Renwick was a tyrant. All royal head-maids become tyrants, however humble may have been their beginnings. It is also quite a tradition that they should quarrel with and even illtreat those under them, especially the second-in-command.

Later, Mamma had a second maid called Jolly, but that was after my days at home. Anyone less jolly than Jolly could not be imagined, but when Fanny was pensioned, Jolly became the tyrant over others, and martyriized them as she had been martyriized, but even this agreeable advancement did not make Jolly any the jollier.

Fanny's Spanish ancestors were perhaps responsible for a certain sense of humour in her; there could be a wink in old Fanny's eye sometimes that made it possible with a little imagination to think of her in a black mantilla with a red flower behind her ear, smiling at a dagger. Not so, Jolly! Her grimness was that of the Quaker or the Huguenot and I think that no cavalier would ever have dared to smile at *her*.

Later, Jolly became the great chum of my children, but she kept sister Baby (Beatrice) strictly in order, thoroughly disapproving of the Duchess's youngest daughter who was longest at home.

Osborne Cottage was a typical English cottage overshadowed by lime trees, and honeysuckle nodding in at its windows. These were two more scents that filled me with beatitude. Ever afterwards, no matter where I was, the perfume of lime trees in full bloom carried me back to Osborne Cottage, just as the smell of damp autumn leaves ever con-

jures up again the Eastwell woods before me as with a magic wand.

It was always in the season of lime trees in flower and of honeysuckle that we came to the Isle of Wight.

The hall of Osborne Cottage was always full of white lilies with pink spots, which also had a perfume that regularly tingled all through me in shudders of delight. They stood in great pots near the staircase and the first thing we did on arriving was to bury our noses in them, staining our faces with their pollen till we looked like little Red Indians.

Our French governess, whom we called Mademoiselle, was an Alsatian. She had her holiday during the summer months. Mademoiselle had experienced the siege of Strasbourg in 1870, and harboured a healthy hatred against the Germans which she implanted in us for many years.

She knew how to fire our imagination and told stories very well. We liked and disliked her in turns. She had a rather large nose and smiled in a way that made her lips spread all over her face. It was an ugly smile. Also her hair was poor and had an ugly colour. She would read to us by the hour, a great quality, because we were greedy for stories of every kind. She initiated us into the charms of "La Bibliothèque Rose" (of which "Les Mémoires d'un Ane" was our favourite), of "Sans Famille," "Robinson Suisse," and later into the joys of "Les Enfants du Capitaine Grant."

It was considered healthy for us and good for our growing backs to lie flat on the floor for about an hour a day. Mademoiselle used to read to us whilst we underwent this daily trial. She kept on knitting stockings whilst she read. I remember watching her from my position beneath her, trying to reverse her face, making of her nose a chin, and a chin of her nose, but she remained hopelessly homely, as the Americans so politely call "ugly," whichever way I imagined her face.

Stocking-knitting was for some reason considered a virtuous occupation for little girls. The turning of the heel, the decreasing and increasing it involved was comparable only to the geography of Switzerland and the Alps, with the lakes on both sides of these troublesome moun-

tains. I cannot explain why, but there was always some connexion in my mind between the two. Later on Queen Victoria had a picture made of me by Millais, knitting a green stocking, which still hangs somewhere in Windsor Castle.

Mademoiselle possessed certain treasures we loved to look at; one was a little crystal locket with a sort of flat bird on it, in small blackish diamonds with a wee pearl hanging from its beak, the other was a little amethyst seal with a plaintive-looking pansy engraved upon it. A great treat was to be allowed to seal our letters with this pansy-crest.

There was also a certain sort of biscuit Mademoiselle used to send for from Strasbourg, which was the quintessence of all that was excellent.

Mademoiselle certainly had a certain fascination for us, but she was not absolutely loyal to our mother, and for this we judged her with our childish instinct of fair play. She was too often inclined to belittle or criticize "la Duchesse" to her own children.

It was of course a great delight to be governessless during the Osborne holidays. Mamma and the nursery maids looked after us and took us out with the occasional help of M. de Morsier, Alfred's French tutor.

He was supposed to polish up our French during the holidays, and the unfortunate man, who was round, blue-eyed and smiling, had an awful time of it trying to give us "*des dictées*" in the garden, whilst we were always escaping from him to climb trees, from the branches of which we would look down on him, playing him no end of tricks. But M. Edouard de Morsier never denounced us; he was a good sport, and I have the feeling that he was secretly in sympathy with our pranks. I do not suppose he enjoyed the *dictées* any more than we did.

About this time I remember the visit of Winston Churchill as a little boy. He was red-haired, freckled and impudent, with a fine disdain for authority. He and I had a sneaking liking for each other. At first we did not dare to show it openly, but by degrees our red-haired guest threw away all

pretence and brazenly admitted his preference for me, declaring before witnesses that when he was grown up he would marry me!

I do not think that Mamma considered that he improved our manners, but personally I have kept a very pleasant memory of that short visit young Winston paid us, and can still smile to-day when remembering the sly look of his eyes, with a snub nose set very pugnaciously between them and his impudent expression when reproved.

I very much liked to be as capable as the boys, as quick, as nimble, as untiring, but I was very much a little girl as regards my feelings towards them and theirs towards me.

I remember once at Clarence House, my brother had some boys to come and play with him. This did not happen very often, but on this memorable occasion I can still see a boy I inordinately admired. He was dressed as a Gordon Highlander, was dark and remarkably good-looking and he was called Stephen—Stephen Hastings, I believe, but of that I am not sure. The boys were being very wild together, rushing about the corridors and our nurses considered the games too rough for little girls. With great longing we sisters were watching them from our nursery door. I had eyes only for Stephen.

Amongst others, a splendid game was invented; sliding down the back-stairs on a tea-tray.

This was too wonderful! Overcoming all shyness, and ignoring strict prohibition, I sidled up to the handsome Stephen and begged him to let me ride down with him on a tray. Stephen was a real cavalier and was only too pleased to be the brave driver of a fair-haired little girl who was more nervous than she dared show. I have no clear remembrance how our joint undertaking succeeded: it is only Stephen's face that I remember and his dark green, black and yellow kilt.

Of course Stephen might easily have refused to take a girl down on his tray with him, but he did not, for which I am grateful to him to this day.

Think of what a cruel snub it would have been had he said "No."

I never saw Stephen again and I have no idea whose son

he was and how he came to be invited that day. But he is one of my pleasant memories for all that.

Close to Osborne Park there was another park. The front gates of the two large properties stood, as far as I remember, almost opposite each other, or side by side, but I may be mistaken in this as it is so long since I was there.

Norris Castle was the name of this other place and one year the Empress Frederick, my father's eldest sister, and mother of the Kaiser, had leased it for the summer. Norris Castle was closer to the sea than Osborne House; it was a large place built in grey stone in the same style as Windsor, it seemed to me. But my remembrance of it is vague except that I thought it extraordinarily beautiful and that there were peacocks strutting about in all their glory on the terraces. It was the first time I heard peacocks calling and ever since the call of the peacock has reminded me of Norris Castle.

I remember the Empress Frederick all in black with several daughters around her. Her eyes were extraordinarily blue, her voice enticing and her smile perfectly delightful. There was great harmony between her smile and her eyes, both were astonishingly bright and alive. She was exceedingly sweet with us children and asked us many questions. She spoke English with a strong foreign accent, but her voice was very much like my father's, a soft voice with rather slurred "r's," which both of them rolled in the same way. What I cannot at all remember is if this was before or after the Emperor Frederick's death, if she was already a widow or not. But I think it was in the Jubilee year because I do just remember the Emperor Frederick, then still Crown Prince, on the Osborne beach, and that he was already voiceless.

He was a tall, good-looking man, with a very full chestnut beard. He could not talk to us, but I remember how he pretended to bombard us with sand and dry seaweed. He was jolly and yet one somehow felt he was condescending, which made us feel shy.

I can remember another time seeing the Crown Prince Frederick and Aunt Vicky at the Neue Palais, Potsdam. It is only a faint recollection; one or two pictures only remain and these quite blurred, nor can I remember in what year



MY SISTERS AND I.

we were there, or why; it must have been on the way to somewhere else, just in passing. But I see Aunt Vicky's wonderful smile. Curiously enough, although it lit up her whole face and her eyes like a light, there was also something of a bite about her smile.

Aunt Elisabeth of Roumania (Carmen Sylva) had also this sort of smile. It was extraordinarily luminous; hers also was a wonderful smile, but if I may so express it, it was more luminous than warm. There was something *voulu* about both their smiles, they were, so to say, "turned on," like electric light. And when they showed great amusement or appreciation, you never felt absolutely convinced that they *were* really amused; there was a little bit of stage setting about it; their smile was too much at their disposal—it had, in fact, become a mannerism.

I may be making a mistake in the Empress Frederick's case. I knew her so very little, but that is how, in my half-effaced memory, her smile "felt."

It may here be added that Queen Elisabeth of Roumania and the Empress Frederick, in spite of the similarity of their smiles, had no sympathy for each other. They were both learned women, with a tendency towards the "blue stocking," rather eager to demonstrate their superiority over commoner mortals. They were both of them ambitious and *tatkräftig*, which is the exact expression I need in describing them, meaning that they were forcible, incisive, penetrating, and that they could always leave well alone.

A more material memory of that passing glimpse, at the Neue Palais, of Aunt Vicky's smile, is a curious soup that was served to us at lunch; it was white and sweet and had raisins in it. We were told that it was a North German soup. We were not sure that we liked it; for some reason it was called "Biersuppe." And then there was the *Kotputzer Baumkuchen*, also a North German product; a high round cake in the form of a tree trunk, with little projections sticking out all over it, which we called "noses." It was covered with a thick, hard, white sugar. The inside was dark brown and supremely delicious. Here once more I have the vision of Aunt Vicky's radiant smile whilst cutting great slices of this cake for each of us. Somehow Aunt Vicky was *too nice*

to you. Her smile had something in it of sunshine when the weather is not really warm. The Roumanians have an excellent expression for that sort of sun, they call it *soare cu dinti*, meaning "sunshine with teeth."

But let me insist upon the fact that I have no reason for thus judging Aunt Vicky's smile; it was simply a child's impression that stuck. But as I once mentioned, I had always all my days a curious instinct for feeling depths beneath depths, reason within reason, a sort of seventh sense in fact.

Certain afternoons during the summers at Osborne were spent at the so-called "Swiss Cottage." This was a place of supreme enchantment, quite one of my dearest recollections.

A little house of dark wood, built in the rustic Swiss chalet style, a low-drooping roof with stones on the top and a balcony round the upper story. This had been the playhouse of Queen Victoria's nine children.

There was a large space all round it where our father, uncles and aunts had each had their little strip of garden, which they were supposed to have planted themselves; long rectangular patches in which both flowers and vegetables grew. These little gardens were still faithfully kept as they were in the time when they had been the playground of an older generation, now long past the "golden age," and probably better kept now than in those days.

To us children these garden plots were the ideal of all childish ambitions, and I remember asking the custodian over and over again which had been Papa's garden, and that bed, of course, although exactly like all the others, was the object of our special interest.

It was here in the gardens of the Swiss Cottage that I discovered for the first time the tall Madonna lily (*Lilium Candidum*). It was a revelation to me. Never in memory had I seen flowers more perfectly beautiful; noble, stately, with that something almost sacred about them, probably because of their association with holy pictures. And then their scent! Penetratingly sweet beyond words, a heady smell that almost made you a little dizzy or faint. There is a whole world in the perfume of the Madonna lily, something biblical, legendary and almost too good to be true. Besides,



LILIES IN MY GARDEN ON THE BLACK SEA.

they are so tall, so graceful and so shiny that their petals seem to exude light.

Ever since I discovered the marvel of those white lilies in the Swiss Cottage garden I have tried to plant them wherever I made a garden. Sometimes I succeeded, and sometimes I failed. Quite lately I have succeeded far beyond my dearest expectations, and that is at Balcic, on a terrace overlooking the Black Sea. Here to my infinite joy they sprang up gloriously, white miracles of light. But although a whole lifetime lies between that lily walk in far Dobrogea and those first lilies I ever saw, in Papa's little garden plot, the scent of the Madonna lily always carries me back to the Swiss Cottage in the Isle of Wight.

How astonishing is the strength of memory! I mention it again, because it is so haunting, that strange force that scents possess, conjuring up as with a magic wand long-forgotten pictures. Pictures of places, of faces, of words spoken, of thoughts thought . . . Visions, beauty, delight.

The charm of memory—but also its sadness and nostalgia for all that is past, irrevocably past, never to come again, and yet alive in one's heart, unforgettable, a treasure one lives with all the days of one's life.

There was also a tiny fortress built in the Swiss Cottage grounds. A wee red-brick fortress with trenches all round representing moats.

Great games were played in this fortress. Brother Alfred was the principal leader. Alfred played a great part during these Osborne holidays, and was the leader and instigator of most of our games. During the "learning" months of the year we saw less of him.

In the lower part of the Swiss Cottage was a museum where each of the nine children had accumulated treasures of every kind, brought home from their different voyages, round the world or otherwise. This museum was an endless source of interest, and here Ducky and I discovered the most beautiful fan shells imaginable. They made our mouths water and we dreamed of what the ecstasy would be were we to find such shells on the Osborne beach. Alas, they were all behind glass doors, not to be touched, a very wise

precaution, for our childish fingers would certainly otherwise have handled these hoarded treasures with too much eagerness.

But when the custodian was in a good humour, like Fanny Renwick on her "fine-weather days," he would unlock one or other of the glass doors and lay the most admired treasures for a moment in our hands. Thus I once held the most beautiful of all the fan shells on my chubby palm; it was a mysterious dark red but marked like tortoise-shell and of all marvels, it was double and had little spikes all over it. It was pure bliss to be allowed to touch it for a few moments.

Here I also saw for the first time those lovely blue Brazilian butterflies, with wings like azure-tinted mother-of-pearl. They always seemed the very quintessence of blue, so to say, the supremest and most perfect expression of that colour which is the sky's and the sea's at their best.

All through my life it was my dream to have live blue butterflies of that sort flying about my rooms. Tame azure butterflies like blue lights! I imagined that I would keep them alive by having bowls of white roses on my tables, on my floor, on my window-sill, giant white roses covered with dew. In the wonderful stories I told myself, and which sometimes even to-day I can imagine with all the ardour of yore, there are nearly always these blue butterflies flying about my rooms, drinking in life off snow-white roses standing in the sun.

One of the great rarities of the Swiss Cottage museum was a flexible stone. Rectangular and sand-coloured, like a large piece of shortbread, it swayed slightly up and down when held at one end. Of course we were never allowed to hold this precious mineral in our own hands; I suppose any too rough handling would have made it break off. But no visit to the museum was ever quite complete unless this miraculous stone was lifted from its place of repose.

I wonder if the flexible stone is still in the Swiss Cottage and if the Madonna lilies, once the joy of nine brothers and sisters of whom only three are still alive, are still blooming in the small garden plots?

Mamma, because she did not like "dressing up," did not much care about Cowes week. But we considered it

supremely exciting and we loved being invited on the *Victoria and Albert*, the royal yacht which Uncle Bertie and Aunt Alix, as far as I can remember, used to inhabit during this week. (Or was it the dear old *Alexandra*?)

Nothing was ever quite so wonderful as an English ship. Man-of-war or yacht, both were equally entrancing and no sailor the wide world over can come up to the British blue-jacket. All sailors are delightful, but the British blue-jacket has that something more which makes of him an *English* sailor. The British blue-jacket belongs to some of the most vivid memories of my childhood and he will appear again in one form or another in many of these chapters.

Cowes was a delightful little seaport town, with narrow streets, wooden-faced houses and what I seem to remember as ravishing shops.

It must be remembered that these reminiscences are of at least forty years ago. I have no idea if Cowes is still to-day what it was then, or if "modern improvements" have changed its face.

One of the chief attractions of going over to Cowes, was that you had to cross on a ferry. At high tide there was always a little water between the bank and the ferry-boat. The horses, especially beautiful Viceroy, called Skitty, made a lot of fuss about crossing this little strip of water, and I can still hear that peculiar splash when the horses were finally persuaded to cross it; and a sort of scrunch that the smooth shingle made under the wheels, then the sound of hollow boards under the horses' hoofs. The carriage gave a lunge that made us fall over one another with shrieks of delight. Then came the sound of the tautened chain when the ferry began to move, also the nervous stamping of horses' hoofs, and Skitty's restive impatience, a jingling of bits, and Robert's reassuring voice: "Woa-woa! old lady, steady there, old girl." And here let it be said that Skitty was not a girl at all, but very much a Viceroy, what the old head of the Royal Mews used to call "an entire 'orse."

Getting off the ferry was the repetition of getting on. A stamping of hoofs, a lunge, a scrunch of pebbles, a splash, and there one was on the other side.

Aunt Alix on the *Victoria and Albert* was as exquisite as

in her ruby-red tea-gown, during the Eastwell shooting-party, but on these occasions she was generally a vision in white.

She always held a Pekingese dog in her arms and my three cousins, Louise, Victoria and Maude, were always hovering somewhere in the background. They were all dressed in white and were impeccably neat with their so-called "sailor hats," which were considered the right thing to wear on board a yacht.

I do not remember how Mamma dressed us for these occasions, but it certainly was not in white.

Mamma had a curious aversion to dressing her daughters in white, and perhaps just because of this, a white dress, was my dearest ambition. I dreamed of myself in a white dress, imagining that it would suit me better than any other colour. I was a somewhat vain little kid and dress meant a lot to me. But as our mother had queer notions of dress for herself so had she also for us. White for some reason was taboo. This so heightened the value of that hue of innocence that I have even envied the little Coburg schoolgirls, when on *Schulfest* days they marched over the Platz to the sound of a brass band, rigged out in stiff white muslin, with white cotton stockings and white cotton gloves. Indeed my *Sehnsucht* for a white dress must have been great if it caused me to envy my neighbour in such guise!

But to return to Cowes week.

Uncle Bertie on his beautiful yacht was a genial figure of rippling good-humour. As impeccably dressed for the occasion as beautiful Aunt Alix, he was royally condescending with his small nieces, would chuck us under the chin, pull our ears in a friendly manner, let off a few jokes at our expense and then laugh in his own special way which, alas, I cannot imitate on paper, but his laugh was a sort of crackle, a burst of good-humour which crumpled his face up into a hundred little lines.

We were never quite sure if we liked Uncle Bertie; he was too patronizing, he lorded it too much over everyone, and we were not yet old enough to come under the influence of his charm.

The three cousins were very kind, but they too treated us as the young things we were then, which made us feel cruelly the inferiority of our five to ten years less.

They used to call me "dear little Missy," and once Cousin Louise (later Duchess of Fife) gave me some sort of little china animal which I adored. It was a kindness I never forgot.

It was a thrilling moment when the cousins took us down to see their cabins, which were full of every conceivable treasure, for in those days there was a craze for collecting every sort of *biblot*. The Wales Family, as we called them, to distinguish them from the Connaught and the Albany and Battenberg cousins, had a special talent for accumulating "treasures."

We would gasp before the magnitude of these collections; animals in bronze, china, stone, whole rows of wee vases, tiny photograph frames, lovely water-colours of gardens and sweet-faced ladies, of fields full of daffodils, of Windsor Castle in a mist, etc. Portraits of favourite horses, favourite dogs, favourite friends, and everywhere, smiling above everybody and everything else, Aunt Alix's beautiful face, even in photograph dominant, triumphant, like sunshine.

The Wales cousins had a special way of adding "dear little" or "poor little" to everybody they talked about. They always, if I can so express it, spoke in a minor key, *en sourdine*. It gave a special quality to all talks with them, and gave me a strange sensation, as though life would have been very wonderful and everything very beautiful, if it had not been so sad.

Why the Wales cousins should have been sad I cannot explain. Aunt Alix never gave you this sensation. To the very end there was about Aunt Alix something invincible, something exquisite and flowerlike. She gave you the same joy as a beautiful rose or a rare orchid or an absolutely faultless carnation. She was a garden flower that had been grown by a superlative gardener who knew every trick of his art.

I especially remember her hands, long, beautifully shaped hands that remained as young as her face, and she always wore a bracelet in the shape of a golden snake which was wound several times round her left arm, I think. The snake

had a coloured stone in its head. So much did this bracelet seem a part of Aunt Alix that one had the feeling that it had grown on her arm.

The deafness she suffered from seemed but to add to Aunt Alix's charm, as did her slight limp.

Her way of coming into a room was incomparable, her smile of welcome lit everything up. All eyes turned towards her, and her sweetness was as great as her beauty. She was faithful and loving, and she cared for the young as well as for the old. Everyone felt happy in her presence. She radiated!

Beautiful, beautiful Queen Alexandra, may your memory be for ever blessed for the exquisite joy your face and your personality was to the world; it has become poorer since you have gone!

I suppose I shall soon have to leave Osborne to go on to other places, but let me mention one more thing, a wonderful prize cart-horse stallion we once saw at Grandmamma's farm.

He was phenomenal as to size, his neck was something tremendous, his hoofs like four rocks. His eyes were kindly and his forelock hung over his face giving him an adorable expression. He was a gorgeous creature, and I loved him with a passionate feeling of adoration. I remember going up to him and kissing his satiny shoulder which I could barely reach.

I can even now remember his name, Hitching Emperor, a name I considered quite unworthy of his beauty, especially as those who showed him off were apt to drop the first letter, which made of his name a poor one indeed. But Hitching Emperor, like the cream-coloured pony which was harnessed to Grandmamma's little carriage, haunted my dreams for many a day, and I invented no end of marvellous adventures in which this elephantine enchanter played a prominent part.

There was another great attraction at the Osborne Farm and that was the Spanish bull. He was a magnificent specimen, stone-grey with gigantic horns. He held his head like a monarch and looked at you with supreme disdain not unmixed with wrath. This regal creature could only be

contemplated from a distance, which added to the thrill he gave us.

Here is another remembrance of Osborne: there was a long avenue of conifers leading up to the house, some of them, if I remember rightly, silver blue. I cannot remember what sort they were, I do not think I was ever told their name; probably in those days I never asked. But what has remained for ever unforgettable were the small bright red cones which grew on their top branches. They stood in rows like soldiers on parade. I never saw anything so entrancingly beautiful, and the contrast of the red with the silver blue was lovely. Never since have I seen them quite like this; I would go and look at them whenever I could; they were indescribably fascinating.

But how shall I ever be able to speak of all the wonderful things that made childhood so extraordinary, made of it every day a new adventure? All things were discoveries, joys, delights, but sometimes also there was pain and bitter disappointment.

Saying good-bye to places or people was ever an agony to me. I am by nature faithful, I attach myself profoundly, my roots go deep and the pulling up of them is a cruel process. I like to move about but not to leave. I even mind leaving places I am not really fond of; somehow it hurts. I think that it is the pain of relinquishing, I do not like passing on, and yet we are for ever doing so. All good-byes have the anguish of death in them.

However great my hope and optimistic my outlook upon life may be, a sort of instinct in me knows and always has known that there is no going back, no living over anything twice. Time rolls on, carries you forward, what is past is past, it becomes but memory, dear, precious, often beautified by distance, but yet a memory; the shadow or the light of a thing that was and is no more. There is no holding fast, neither to days, seasons, years, nor to childhood, youth, nor riper years.

Time is a great enemy when it means sweeping forward when we would pause, but becomes the great friend and healer when it means the overcoming of sorrow and grief.

And I have known more than one uprooting, leaving, passing on. They were all cruel.

When I was about twelve years old my father was made Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, with Malta as head-quarters. This brought a sudden change into our lives.

Eastwell was given up, beautiful Eastwell with its great grey house, its magnificent park, with its herds of deer and picturesque Highland cattle, its lake, its woods, its garden with the old cedar tree which was our fairy mansion. Eastwell, the house where I was born, with its many rooms, explored and unexplored, our nurseries, our schoolroom, and Mamma's cosy boudoir where she read to us of an evening and allowed us to finger the treasures on her tables; the breakfast-room, the drawing-room, and the dear library where the Christmas tree always stood and out of which a passage-like conservatory led into the garden. This passage ran down a flight of steps to a larger conservatory below, which was filled with tree-ferns; anyhow, it was the tree-ferns that impressed themselves upon my mind, as did the bright red passion flowers, a kind I have never since seen anywhere, which climbed all over the roof of the glass passage leading down into it. The flowers were like crimson stars hanging from their creepers by thin stalks, as though purposely suspended just beyond your reach.

Having mentioned the Eastwell breakfast-room reminds me of two people who crossed our lives only to disappear.

One was Uncle Leopold, Duke of Albany; the other was Carlos, Crown Prince of Portugal, who later, as king, was assassinated with his son whilst driving through the streets of Lisbon during some festivity. The Queen and their second son were in the same carriage.

Brave Queen Amélie saved young Manuel by rising from her seat and striking the assassin in the face with her bouquet before he could make a third victim.

We used to come down to the family shooting-breakfast. Mamma, being an early riser, always presided at these meals. She was in fact always at the table first; her punctuality amounted to a mania, for she was always about ten minutes before time. Try as you might you could never be there

before Mamma and were continually being scolded for being late.

So severe was she in her training about punctuality that all my life I retained an anxious and almost guilty feeling about time. The loss of five minutes seems almost a crime to me, and even to-day my conscience never leaves me in peace if I am a minute late.

Uncle Leopold was Queen Victoria's youngest son. He was born delicate and suffered from hæmophilia. He did not live much beyond thirty, I think. But he married and had two children, the second, a son, being born after his death.

Uncle Leopold was my mother's favourite amongst her brothers- and sisters-in-law. Being unable, because of his malady, to become a sportsman, he had become a scholar and was a lover of art. I think that it was his intelligence that endeared him to my mother.

I have but a very faint memory of him, have in fact only retained this passing vision of him in the Eastwell breakfast-room.

Although almost continually a sufferer, he was gay and amusing and fond of joking.

On that morning which I so vividly remember he came down to breakfast holding a handkerchief before his mouth, saying that he had just lost a front tooth.

There was consternation and anxiety amongst the grown-ups seated round the table, because Uncle Leopold's special malady had to do with hæmorrhage, and it was all important that he should in no wise be wounded, fall or hurt himself. Knocks and bruises were also dangerous.

My mother, his hostess, was especially very much upset. She asked him to take his handkerchief from his mouth and let her see where he had lost a tooth.

Uncle Leopold removed his handkerchief, which had large red stains all over it, and there, sure enough, was a big black hole in his mouth, where one of his front teeth was gone. Everybody clustered round his seat, asking questions, suggesting remedies, when all of a sudden he burst out laughing. It was all a naughty farce. The hole in his mouth was black sticking-plaster, the stains on his handkerchief red paint!

Much relieved, everybody returned to their places, but Mamma, full of half-feigned, half-real indignation, gave him a bit of her mind about causing a loving family such emotion, and Mamma never gave a bit of her mind by halves.

There is nothing special to relate about Crown Prince Carlos of Portugal, except that for some reason we took a great fancy to him. He had the fairest hair we had ever seen, almost white and very curly. His face was a healthy red and his eyes extremely blue and already he was getting stout. He joked with us children, and although we were very shy when told that he was a cousin and that we could kiss him, we declared he had nice soft cheeks "like pin-cushions." Why pin-cushions was our expression for soft I do not know, but to concede that his cheeks were like pin-cushions was a sign of approval, and when he told us he had something interesting to show us we flocked delightedly round his chair.

Bending low, almost under the table, he drew from his pocket several cartridges. That was all, but we laughed and were delighted, simply because we liked him, and all his jokes, even the least intelligent, were considered by us excellent.

Curious how certain memories stick whilst others get quite wiped away as though they had never been, but the Eastwell breakfast-room always reminds me of the faces of those two very different guests.

There is one tragic memory attached to Eastwell, and that was Nana Pitcathly's death.

I believe she died of cancer, but it is so long ago that I cannot quite remember, or perhaps I never knew. She was terribly ill but remained at her post to the very end.

Sister Beatrice was then quite a small baby and I remember Nana walking about with her in her arms during the night when the child was restless and cried, up and down, up and down, humming little songs and groaning in between, cruel, deep groans which she imagined we did not hear because she thought we were sleeping. But I shall never forget that tragic march up and down, up and down in a

room where a single night-light burned, with the crying child in her faithful arms. Slave to her duty, she did not wish to give up one day before her strength gave way and she was absolutely obliged to do so.

That must have been in the spring, because sister Baby was born on Easter Sunday. In the autumn of that same year, on the 15th of November (I remember the date), Nana died in our house. She was the first dead person we ever saw. We were taken up to her death-chamber for a small service read at her bedside.

I remember her face, at peace, calm, but terribly severe and fearfully awesome, a stranger, and yet, in a way, still our dear old Nana.

I have no idea what sort of age she was then; to us she seemed old, but I think that she was hardly middle-aged.

We wept and wept so that we had to be taken from the room, and were inconsolable for a long time. The loss of Nana was truly a terrible loss. Mamma never took a real nurse for us after that, only nursery-maids; I was then nine years old, I think.

Sister Ducky always declared that if Baby Bee was such a naughty child, it was because she had never had a real nurse. This is very probably true. But perhaps Baby Bee was not as naughty as we remember her.

She was an out-of-the-way clever child, and Mamma, who adored this youngest daughter, never used with her the severity she had shown us elder children.

I cannot remember in what season we took leave of Eastwell. For some reason I am a bit vague about the connexion between Eastwell and Malta or if anything came in between, and Mamma is no longer here to tell me the details I have forgotten; nor is there anyone else still alive who could tell me except my sisters, and they, being younger, are probably even vaguer than I about it. I must have been going on for twelve years old, I think.

But what I do remember was how Mademoiselle, our governess, persuaded us to give away most of our toys and treasures, instead of taking them all the way to Malta

with us ; this no doubt was wise advice, but it meant great sacrifice and much heart-break.

There were two treasures especially to which I clung beyond all else ; one was the model of a cream-coloured horse which stood on a little board sprinkled with something that looked like steel-dust. This cream-coloured marvel, although, I believe, only made of papier mâché, was the *ne plus ultra* of perfection in our eyes ; beautifully modelled, it was as wonderful as the famous Skitty himself, only *isabelle* instead of black. It had a pink nose and one delicate fore-leg was raised as though pawing the air ; its mane and tail were long and sweeping. It was a faultless creature, might truly have been the Fairy Queen's horse. To part with this paragon really needed both courage and abnegation and there were great consultations as to who was worthy enough to become possessor of such a treasure. Finally for some reason the son of our carpenter Jones was chosen. I cannot remember any other reason except that we liked Jones the father. He was a pale, anæmic man with a dark beard, hollow cheeks and sad eyes, but he was one of the forces that counted in the house. Jones, like all carpenters, was the children's friend. I do not remember anything at all about Jones junior.

My second treasure was of a different kind ; a tiny *bonbonnière* of some metal simulating gold, a round perforated little box set with false turquoises. I suppose it was a real little horror, but I valued it as though it had been from the *trésor* of St. Mark's in Venice.

I had pulled it one day out of a bran-tub at a big London children's party given by some lady or other who lived near Battersea Park.

I remember that party in connexion with a sentence pronounced by the hostess. When we left she said : " Be sure if you ever drive past this way to look in and see us, promise you will ! "

Of course we very shyly promised we would, and ever afterwards when we passed her house (I cannot remember her name, probably I never knew it), I always felt guilty, because we did not stop and keep our promise, imagining that the lady would be dreadfully offended. I considered



"AUNT ALIX"; THE PRINCESS OF WALES (QUEEN ALEXANDRA).

the promise we had made a binding one: I was also sure that the lady had seriously meant her invitation. I even tried to avoid that street so as not to pass her threshold in case she should see our infidelity.

I cannot begin writing about my Malta recollections without first speaking of Clarence House in London, which was the Duke of Edinburgh's town residence, and which was not given up at the same time as Eastwell Park, but only much later, when my father died.

It is also necessary to mention one thing which explains the curious duality of our lives which, after Malta, were spent between England and Germany.

The Prince Consort, Queen Victoria's husband, was the younger brother of Duke Ernest of Saxe-Coburg.

Of Duke Ernest I shall speak more later on, for he was an interesting personality and belongs already so completely to history that I shall feel justified in telling many a queer little tale about him; but here it need only be mentioned that he had no children. It was therefore decided between the English and the German branches of the family that the second son of Queen Victoria and of the Prince Consort should become heir to the Duke of Coburg.

This was of course settled, so to say, over the head of my father by his parents; he was not consulted as to whether this arrangement was pleasant to him, it was simply decreed by both families that this should be. Therefore it was also decided that our only brother Alfred should be educated in Germany as he would later become a reigning prince in that country. This explains why we were so often separated from Alfred, who did not follow us about in all our peregrinations between London, Malta, Osborne, Russia and Coburg, which were, as can well be imagined, detrimental to steady and systematic education.

Alfred's head-quarters were Coburg, where my father had built a house, which was called Edinburgh Palace, and where my brother quietly pursued his studies under the care of a German tutor, of whom more will be said anon.

This arrangement separated us a great deal from our brother, who was certainly given the opportunity of learn-

ing more systematically than his sisters, but who missed all that joy of travelling which fell to our share. It may here be added that our education was somewhat haphazard because of these many *déplacements*, as it always meant beginning all over again with other teachers and other methods, even in other languages and never for long at a time. My education was, in fact, more than sketchy, and I have a feeling that none of the masters or mistresses I had was very efficient and none of them fired my love of study. Anyhow, when I married at seventeen the weight of knowledge given me on my way was not heavy!

But travelling taught us much that no lessons on a school-bench could ever have taught.



“GRANDMAMMA QUEEN”; QUEEN VICTORIA.

Chapter III

CLARENCE HOUSE, SCOTLAND AND RUSSIA

AS children we thoroughly disliked London and each time it was a grief when the season came for leaving Eastwell and the joys of the country for Clarence House, for smuts and smoke and gloomy walks in the Green Park, which we abhorred.

Clarence House forms one block with St. James's Palace and shares with it a broad strip of garden overlooking the Mall.

One of the miseries of London was the mess one always got into because of the smuts. Any fall on London soil meant great black stains on clothes, knees or stockings. There was also about it a special greasiness I cannot forget.

We dearly loved, for instance, being taken to play about in Buckingham Palace gardens, instead of walking in the dreaded Green Park, but the mess we made of ourselves was so great that smocks were always taken with us and put on before our games began, and taken off when we recrossed the road on the way home.

Buckingham Palace gardens were huge and had delightful mysterious corners in them, besides quite a large lake.

One of our favourite haunts was the part where a big aviary stood on a sort of little hill overgrown with incredibly smutty bushes, which hid it from sight. This hill was the dirtiest, blackest part of the whole garden, the many birds living there adding greatly to its messiness.

But there was a charm that never palled about this grimy spot. We called the aviary hill the Alps, and blissfully imagined that we were mountaineering, which consisted of climbing its black greasy sides or sliding down them till we became filthy beyond description. Besides this it

was the covert of birds of every kind, peacocks, silver and gold pheasants and every sort of duck and goose which used to swim about in the lake. Wonderful feathers were found upon our "Alps," enchanting treasures of indescribable colours, but none outshining the peacock's feathers, which always remained the most fairy-like and astounding, with their marvellous eye and divine colouring.

I have only a shadowy recollection of the games we played, but they were wonderful and exciting and had a whole story woven into them and each season they were taken up anew. We were imaginative children and each had a part which we played as conscientiously as possible. I must confess that I never accepted a minor part, I was always one of the principal if not *the* principal figure, and certainly if there was a queen in the plot I always played that rôle.

We loved dressing up and my idea of a queen was having a very long train dragging behind me over the floor. But here on the "Alps" other parts were played, trains being out of place. We were robbers and explorers, pirates and path-finders and what not else! But I remember my indignation which had specially to do with "trains" when I was told that the peacock, who strutted about so victoriously through our smutty domain, was the male, not the female. According to my imagination the peacock was the queen of the bird world and the beautiful tail he carried behind him was Her Majesty's court train; what use could a man, even a bird-king, have for such a magnificent train?

When, later, Rostand wrote his celebrated "Chantecler," I was much amused to see that, imbued with the same feeling about the logic of dress, he made his *fésane* wear her lord and master's plumes.

Clarence House garden was much smaller and far less interesting than Buckingham Palace garden. It was tidy and had no mysterious corners except quite at the far end where a certain old Prince of Leiningen and his daughter Feo had a studio for sculpture. This part of the garden belonged to St. James's Palace and not to Clarence House, but there was no division between the two except a few scraggy trees masking the wooden *barraque* of the studio.

This was a world for discoveries where you could pick up marvellous chips of marble that looked like hoar-frost covered snow, and where you could flatten and blacken your nose against large panes of glass, peeping in upon the mysterious work going on behind the windows.

Here we discovered extraordinary figures, some in clay, some in red terra-cotta, some in marble with little black spots all over them, and some swathed in dirty sheets or towels which made of them haunting apparitions. There was also a special smell of wet earth and plaster, not pleasant but irresistible, because we felt that it *meant* something, exactly *what* we did not know, but there was something of "creation" about it, something to do with the eternal "potter potting with his thumb."

Although we only realized this vaguely, subconsciously we felt that this "something" had to do with the clay which from all ages has been used for "creation," for modelling shapes which had secret life in them. Perhaps Pygmalion might have explained, but he, alas, was not of our times, and the old Prince of Leiningen, master of these premises, although some sort of uncle several times removed, was not a welcoming personality and did not encourage us to poke about in his field.

Clarence House was not without charm, though it was hopelessly smutty and everything you touched made your fingers black. It had an odour all its own, a mixture of fog, oakwood, cigarette smoke and a certain Russian scent Mamma used for burning in the rooms. There was also a particular perfume peculiar to Mamma's own apartment, a most satisfactory fragrance of Russian leather and cedar wood which had something to do with the furniture she had brought with her all the way from St. Petersburg.

The greatest attraction was a shadowy corner in Mamma's bedroom where she had hung all her holy images.

With the utmost reverence, not unmixed with curiosity, whenever we dared we would creep towards this corner of mystery and contemplate the many wonderful icons.

Three of the most venerated were crowned by diamond rays that were fixed above the heads of the saints like small

suns. Each sun had a wonderful gem at its centre, a large sapphire, ruby or emerald. The glamour of these holy pictures cannot be described; all Russia's gorgeousness seemed to shine from these incredibly brilliant diamond rays, fixed above the saints' heads. The corner the shrine stood in, being dark, made it all the more thrilling.

And here a little lamp always burned beside the pictures of my mother's parents on their death-beds, burned like a steady eye watching over mysteries small children might feel but not fathom.

Besides the icons there were also two pictures in Mamma's bedroom that enthralled us; one was of a lovely woman, also evidently a saint, carrying a little catacomb lamp in her hand, the light of which was thrown up on her face from below making it look unearthly and transparent. The other, also hanging in a very shadowy nook, represented a corner of the San Giovanni degli Eremiti Cloister of Palermo. It was just a few columns with a pumpkin plant growing over one of them and a big pumpkin resting on part of the balustrade. The sunlight on the picture was wonderfully done, bringing out the difference between light and shade in an astonishing way. This picture had a special fascination for all of us children; there was something deeply mysterious and satisfactory about it. I think that it is my sister Ducky who to-day possesses this picture.

I have never forgotten certain pictures seen in childhood, they have remained for ever impressed upon my mind.

One I would like to speak about to-day as I can still see it as vividly as I did then when I was quite a small girl.

If I remember rightly it was in an annual picture exhibition at Berlin. Why we were at Berlin, a town we hardly ever went to, I cannot explain, and all the details have remained perfectly hazy. I cannot even recollect with whom I was, or who took me there, and I only remember two pictures.

One picture was of a small child in poor clothing, stroking with infinite compassion a dead deer hung up against a wall. On the child's face was an expression of loving

pity and somehow I felt, when looking at that picture, exactly what the child was feeling.

But the other, the unforgettable picture, was a large-sized Italian water-colour with the title "Mia Povera Maria"—you see I even remember the title.

It represented a sort of bare chapel all in rough stone, perhaps the fore-part of a church, in which a flower-covered bier had been stood. A dead girl lay upon the bier. Her face was waxen, her hair black, and one could just see her folded hands amongst the flowers.

A young man in peasant dress lay, face hidden against the coffin, in an attitude of overwhelming distress. In the background crouched an old, witch-like woman warming her hands over a brazier, watching the man's grief with eyes too tired to express sorrow.

The picture took hold of me utterly. I could not be moved from before it. There was a world of grief in it which stirred me to my very depths; besides, it was certainly the painting of a great artist. It is a picture that has haunted me ever since. Many years later I found somewhere a photograph of this picture, but never, alas! did I see the original again.

There was never anything morbid in my nature, but all pictures of grief or of dead people moved me strangely, especially the pictures of *silent* grief, and I would always buy these pictures if I could.

I remember taking tickets for a lottery in that exhibition with the ardent hope of winning "Mia Povera Maria" although it was probably not in the lottery at all. But for years I dreamed of what would have been the joy of possessing that wonderful water-colour.

But now back again to Clarence House.

Over the principal staircase hung the large head of an elephant my father had shot, in India I think; his trunk almost touched one as one passed, and in the hall stood a bear on his hind legs, a huge, savage-looking beast holding a small tray between his front paws on which visitors left their cards for the gentlemen-in-waiting. All the corridors were full of trophies of different shoots in distant

countries, and there was also a figure in Japanese armour, with a grinning mask. We did not like this ugly fellow with the empty eye-sockets. But what we dearly loved were the two official drawing-rooms which were not often used. One was called the Chinese drawing-room and was full of curios Papa had brought from China, beautiful old weapons and bronzes, ivories and embroideries, and also, as far as I can remember, a few precious jades.

Papa was a great collector of antiques and also quite a connoisseur. When he died, his collections unfortunately did not come to us, but for some reason were taken over by Uncle Bertie, then still Prince of Wales.

The second big salon was full of treasures Mamma had brought from Russia, all sorts of objects carved from the many semi-precious stones from the Urals: dishes and vases, bowls and cups, Easter eggs and whole writing- and toilet-table sets, in particular a valuable collection in the much-prized Orletz, an extremely hard stone, dark pink with streaks of grey.

We loved fingering these treasures, but it must be added that we were generally severally enjoined not to touch. I cannot, however, affirm that we always respected these orders, the temptation was too great.

Memories of London are of several periods. The Buckingham Palace garden times were when we were very small, and these glorious gambols were severely interrupted by days when stiff walks in the Green Park (which was quite near Clarence House) were *de rigueur*.

We loathed these walks with an absent-minded governess who was as bored as we were. Besides, what irony to call it the Green Park when we were severely kept off the grass which was railed off by a black iron paling a foot high. There was no virtue in the Green Park except the virtue of walking in it. No interesting people ever walked on its hard little paths, nothing ever happened, nothing was ever seen in that deadly dull place, only once, by a piece of unexpected good luck, I picked up a wee little bronze idol, about an inch high. That was a tremendous find, and is the only agreeable memory I have of the dreary Green Park. This

absurd little idol is still in my possession. I wonder who could have dropped it there?

Outside, beyond the dreaded confines of this dreary park, almost opposite the entry to Buckingham Palace stood the balloon man. He was an everlasting hope. On days when Mademoiselle was in a good humour she would discover pennies in her pocket and then we would march triumphantly home with airballs of different hues, a small procession of happy little people crowned with globes of colour. But these were rare days, generally Mademoiselle's pockets were as empty of pennies as her heart was of mercy for our boredom.

What extraordinary joy these balloons gave. I loved the pink ones best. There was a delightfully nasty smell about airballs, irresistibly nasty, so that we were for ever rubbing our noses against them. And how curiously warm they were to the touch! And when you drew your fingers across their taut surface they gave out a peculiar sound, half squeak, half groan.

Of course we always dreamed that our balloons would be long-lived, but they were inevitably as ephemeral as butterflies. There were three mishaps peculiar to balloons; they would burst or die away gradually, becoming thin, limp and wrinkly, or they would escape out of your grasp and fly up to the ceiling where they would float, mocking you from their height, the symbol of happiness just beyond reach.

But blessed be the memory of these balloons! They only cost a penny, but there was a whole fortune of joy within their frail globes. Pink, blue, green, orange, red, violet, they were bubbles of enchantment, representing the *summum* of our desires, beckoning to us from just beyond the gates of the Green Park, the unloved.

Belonging to this period was also a curious fear we suffered from, for children have strange fears.

The Clarence House stairs were very steep, rather like the back-stairs at Eastwell. Papa and Mamma gave occasional dinners; many people came to these rather rare feasts which were an occasion of excitement to the nursery authorities.

We used to be packed off to bed, and then Nana would steal away to the head of the stairs and peer down upon the procession of guests going in or coming out of the dining-room, or climbing the stairs towards the drawing-room after the meal was over.

The beauty of the ladies' dresses and the magnificence of their jewels were a special source of interest, and were commented upon for days afterwards.

But we children, left in our white cots to go to sleep like good little girls, suffered tortures from some sort of cruel hallucination that Nana was going to fall over the banisters whilst looking down upon the guests.

This idea tortured us. It became indeed a veritable nightmare, till occasionally we would, like Wee Willie Winkie, steal out in our nightgowns to assure ourselves that the terrible disaster had not taken place.

When we caught a glimpse of her alive and well, looking down, deeply interested in what she saw beneath, we would scuttle back to our beds again like frightened white mice.

Nana was kind but severe. Her face was of the heroic type, with clear-cut rather hard features of a somewhat imperial cast. Like all self-respecting nurses of the old type, she ruled with a rod of iron and kept us in almost military subjection.

Nana had invented an instrument of torture called "the strap," which was nothing but a strip of leather the end of which was cut into many fingers. This strap was used for whipping, or was *supposed* to be used that way, but I cannot remember its ever having been really used, but it always hung on one or other of our beds as a warning to the unruly.

There were two "straps," a brown and a black one, and for some reason we decreed that the black strap was much the worse of the two; it was the chief bogey.

Nana was also of the days when medicines were not made pleasant to take. They had to be accepted in all their unalloyed nastiness and three of these have remained nightmare memories. There was, first and foremost, castor oil, which used to be taken out of a warmed silver tablespoon, for none of Mamma's castor-oil pills ever found their way

to the nursery. Then there was Gregory powder, which was a gritty, orange-coloured rhubarb mixture and used to be stirred with horrible deliberation in a small wine-glass; it was a loathsome concoction and the imbibing thereof was a tragedy that never went off without scenes of revolt.

The third of those remedies was called "Grey powder," which was bad enough but all the same the least of the three evils and would be given in a spoon sweetened by red currant jelly, which has made that particular jelly impossible to me for all time.

Ah, but I was forgetting another gruesome mixture which was called Syrup of Squills, which was inflicted upon you when for some reason it was considered necessary that you should be sick. Syrup of Squills never failed to produce this probably salutary but certainly unpleasant effect.

Nana, presiding over the medicine chest, had the grimness of the Fates deciding over human destinies.

How clearly I still see her, and also the black and brown "straps" hanging as sinister warnings against any insubordination at the foot of our beds.

Outside our night nursery, in the corridor, stood an old grandfather clock which played a chime each time it struck; that, with Big Ben booming out into the night, are two sounds peculiar to nursery days, to its joys and fears, its hopes, tears and revolts.

And dear old Nana Pitcathly was the grim goddess of the nursery, as Mademoiselle was tyrant of the schoolroom, whom we loved less than Nana, though, looking back, I believe that Nana was much the severer of the two.

My memories of the Clarence House schoolroom are of several sorts. It was a long-shaped rather narrow room with a flat open fireplace at one end, and faced Stafford House, then inhabited by the Duke of Sutherland.

I do not remember much about our lessons, but I remember having experienced a real London fog in this particular room, a fog so thick that one could not even see the fire burning at the farther end of the not very large room.

Mademoiselle wore spectacles, she turned her feet out when she walked, she was highly religious and was *too* good friends with the lady-in-waiting, a certain Lady Emma

Osborne ; a super-refined, unmarried gentlewoman, prudish, protesting, and, I am afraid, in league with Mademoiselle to disapprove of the Duchess's foreign ways and ideas.

I remember two things about Lady Emma, her most exquisite hands, very pale and white, with tapering fingers, and a special dress she wore of violet velvet trimmed with swansdown of the same colour ; we much admired this dress. Her greatest virtue was that she smelt deliciously of some excellent scent that was particularly agreeable to my fastidious nose ; it had something to do with verbena, I think.

But Lady Emma, being a spinster, disapproved of children in general and of us in particular and was for ever coming out into the corridor to scold us for making such a noise. Unfortunately her room was on the same landing as the nurseries and schoolroom and she spoiled many of our games, especially as she and Mademoiselle were such strong allies.

One sad little schoolroom incident must be related as it has to do with education and has also a moral in it.

We each of us kept a so-called scrap-book in which we stuck our Christmas and Valentine cards (for in those days one still sent and received Valentine cards, nice shiny ones with pansies or forget-me-nots on them and with edges of paper perforated to look like lace), and a pot of paste was kept with which to stick in these cards.

There was something special about this paste. First of all it looked so appetizing that you felt inclined to eat it, but it was its delicious perfume that endeared it to me. There was an exquisite odour of bitter almonds about it that for some reason was infinitely satisfying to my nose. The fat pot with this treasured paste stood in a small cupboard.

There was a certain hour in the evening when we had to prepare our lessons for next day. Occasionally we were put into separate rooms so that we should not be tempted to talk instead of working.

One evening I was alone in the schoolroom puzzling over some dull problem, and ever and again my thoughts wandered towards the cupboard with the pot of paste.

Ever greater became the attraction, it was like a magnet drawing me towards the cupboard. If only I could take one sniff at it, I was sure my brain would clear; besides it would be liberation from an obsession which left me no peace.

Children have curiously delicate consciences. After all, it was not such an awful misdeed to get up and take a sniff at a pot of glue, but somehow I felt that it belonged to those things that were "not done." But alas! after having manfully resisted for some time, I rose from my seat; the magnet was drawing me with a force I could no longer deny, so I crept like a thief towards the fatal cupboard, opened the door with trembling fingers and plunging the fat brush into the still fatter pot, I filled it with thick white paste, and, shutting my eyes so as to lose none of the ecstasy, I took a long, soul-satisfying breath of the perfume I so adored.

Steps in the corridor. . . . Mademoiselle! As one committing a crime or theft I hastily laid down the fatal brush and dashed back to my seat, putting on, as the door opened, as innocent a face as possible.

But I suppose I was a bad actress, sincerity, not ruse, was my speciality. Mademoiselle felt, guessed, smelt that something was wrong. She looked at me, she stared at me; I felt that I was blushing but I tried to go on with my work as unconcernedly as possible, my nose close to my book, as though nothing had happened. But in vain.

"Princesse, qu'avez vous fait?"

"Rien, Mademoiselle."

But Mademoiselle was not so easily put off. Her bespectacled eyes searched the room, up and down, the floor, the ceiling, the furniture, the walls . . . and suddenly with a pounce she was beside the cupboard, its door was ajar.

She pulled it open, and there, on the clean white paper of the shelf, lay the revealing brush, fat, heavy, sticky with paste. Not in its pot as it should have been, but, of all dreadful things, on the nice clean white paper. Ugh, what a mess!

Drama followed. I did not try to deny my misdeed. I *had* left my seat. I *had* sniffed at the precious paste, it

was I who had laid the brush down in a hurry, yes, on the paper instead of in the pot. If only I had had the presence of mind to put it back into the pot there would have been no proof against me, but the world is full of ifs.

The long and the short of it was that the crime, for some reason that even to-day I cannot fathom, was considered great, and as punishment I had to stand before Mademoiselle with outstretched palm and was given three cuts with an ebony, brass-edged ruler, which was both painful and humiliating. It was in fact the only time in all my life that a rod was ever used in my education.

According to my ideas, the "punishment did not fit the crime" and the remembrance of this chastisement still rankles.

Probably Mademoiselle was in a bad temper that day. Moral: governesses must avoid being bad-tempered, but little girls must not care overmuch for sweet scents, there is the seed of perdition in this weakness, nor must they at the wrong moment lose their heads and deposit sticky paste brushes upon clean white paper, instead of back into the pot.

Anyhow it is a sad story and I hate the very memory of that black ruler with the four shiny edges.

But there are also pleasanter remembrances of the Clarence House schoolroom. It was there that I had my first taste of toffee, and it was there that "Les Malheurs de Sophie" and many another enchanting book was read to us.

It was also from this room that we used to hear the Life Guards or the "Blues" pass on their way to change guard.

They passed with a jingle of metal which could be heard even when the window was shut. But what a torture it was to remain glued to your chair instead of jumping up to look down upon their extraordinary perfection!

From afar one heard the tramp of horses' hoofs approaching. They were coming. Nearer, nearer, now one could hear the champing of bits, the sound of metal against metal, the clinking of chains, and by their very sound one visualized how bright and shiny they were. Nearer, nearer! Now

they were just under our windows, the narrow street reverberated with their tread. Then fainter and fainter would the glorious tramp become, they were moving away . . . away . . . they had come, passed and gone.

To the later London period belonged the rides in Hyde Park, a wonderful advancement.

At Eastwell we had possessed one pony for all three of us, a fat, irresistible animal called Tommy. The three of us shared Tommy, taking him in turns.

Our rides on Tommy had been most unscientific, crudely instructed by a groom or coachman, but they had from the first taught us the "feel" of a horse, taught us to be fearless and above all given us the idea that we *could* ride, and this is half the battle.

In London an absurd old riding-master, called Mr. Lumley, had been excavated from somewhere and he it was who polished up our knowledge, first round and round Clarence House garden and finally, to our delight, we were allowed out into the field of our dearest ambitions, Rotten Row. It was old Lumley who provided the horses for these rides.

I cannot exactly remember what age we were then, anyhow we were small mites and our joy and excitement was huge.

Never shall I forget the sensation of gleeful enchantment it was starting off on these rides, accompanied by the careworn Mr. Lumley in top-hat, with something of the air of an anxious hen about him. A fearfully correct old hen, though, correct with the correctness that can be attained solely by riding- or dancing-masters.

First came the opening of Clarence House gateway, presided over by the dear old porter, Mallet, I think, was his name, and past our private policeman who was a great friend of ours (or was the policeman's name Mallet?). This was followed by the sound of our horses' hoofs on the wooden pavement of the street, luckily for us beginners a very quiet by-way; there was the turn into the riders' road leading down to the Mall, past the Green Park, and all along its hated paling opposite Buckingham Palace garden wall, through the archway at the end. Then came the most ticklish part of the

whole business, the part which made old Lumley the most anxious, the safe steering across Hyde Park Corner into the Park itself, and finally the reaching of the precious Row with all its expanse of sand, opening out before you a real paradise of hope, an endless promise of gallops not unmixed with just a thrill of apprehension to make them more exciting.

Ducky and I had decided, so that there should never be any discussions or quarrels, that once and for all she, being the taller, would ride the bigger horse, I the smaller, never matter what their looks might be. In this way she sometimes had the better horse and sometimes I. As far as I can remember, Sandra, as we called our third sister Alexandra, used in those early days to ride Tommy, the safe, reliable, irresistible Tommy who also followed us later to Malta.

Those rides in Hyde Park were bliss. Old Lumley was sometimes cross and always absent-minded, but he could not damp our spirits. His legs were thin, his face looked mummified and his meagre grey hair was brushed forwards under his top-hat to hide his sunken temples. Old Lumley was in fact rather a pathetic figure.

I think he must have given lessons right into his ripest old age, for many years later, when quite emancipated from riding-lessons, I met him again in the Row and greeted him with a shout of recognition. He looked at me with a blank stare as though we had never shared the joys and the cares of the Row together. I suppose I was more changed than he was. In his days I was a wee girlie, now I do not know exactly what I was—*Nicht Fisch und nicht Fleisch*, as the Germans would have said. But I was sadly mortified to be cut dead by my old riding-master. His face was more careworn than ever, he had perhaps become just a little drier and thinner but otherwise *he* had not changed at all.

Into this period enters also a certain amount of theatre-going. This joy fell but seldom to our share but when it did it was a tremendously exciting event.

The very smell of a London theatre and of the beautiful bouquets we would find in our box when we arrived, what joy! There was a kind of dark velvety red rose very wide open, with rounded petals, specially characteristic of these

bouquets. In Paris these roses are now sometimes given to me, but they immediately carry me back to the London theatres and to that glorious sensation of excited expectation before the curtain went up.

One of the plays I best remember is *Macbeth*, with Irving and Ellen Terry, a wonderful representation; but the apparition of Banquo's ghost was so appallingly well done that for nights afterwards we could not sleep without a light in our room.

Ellen Terry, with her long red plaits, was a lovely incarnation of Macbeth's fierce queen, especially in the scene when, all in white, she came down the stairs walking in her sleep and trying to wash the blood off her hands.

But my mother could not stand Henry Irving and my father disliked him still more and tried to make us see his affectations, especially his stage limp and his snarl in the scenes when he simulated anger or rage. In spite of these criticisms, we children had a sneaking liking for Irving, even at his worst.

I shall never forget what living interest the gallery in England took in any drama; the villain was always hissed or whistled at, whilst the hero was applauded not for his acting but for his actions.

We also saw Irving in a very sentimental piece about Charles I; all to the advantage of Charles I, of course, and we, naturally being stout Royalists, loathed Cromwell with all our souls.

But our hero of heroes on the stage was "Lord Harry," played by Wilson Barrett, who was, according to our ideas, the very incarnation of all that was most perfect, man and hero blending into one. Wilson Barrett *was* Lord Harry.

This piece was also of the sentimental kind. Lord Harry was a brave, virtuous, beautiful, self-sacrificing Cavalier, splendid enough to satisfy our dearest dreams of perfection. He ravished us so completely that for years we cherished the memory of this play, and whenever asked what we would like to see, it was always *Lord Harry*, till finally Mamma, although she too was an admirer of Wilson Barrett, sent us to see *Charley's Aunt* instead.

This gross farce made us laugh till our sides ached, but

all the time we regretted *Lord Harry*. No allurements could drag us away from our ideal, and this no doubt was provoking to our elders who knew that there were plenty of other fascinating plays to be seen besides *Lord Harry*.

We infinitely preferred drama to comedy and although we laughed with all our hearts when taken to the latter, we considered it a waste of those rare and precious theatre treats, if we were taken to a funny play instead of to something heroic, in costume.

Shakespeare was appreciated and accepted from the first, as was in later years Schiller at the Coburg Theatre, both, I fear, more for the story and fine display than for any beauty of language or verse.

Later the opera cut out even the drama.

Before I leave London I want to mention some of the servants, for servants always play a big part in children's lives.

My mother had two, what in royal households are called "pages," one of whom was old Hutchins, an old-fashioned servant with clean-shaven chin and long whiskers. A pompous old fellow was Hutchins, but entirely our slave. The other was called William Smith. He was of the "Haw-haw" kind, clean-shaven, smart, over-good-looking in a massive, florid way, probably a lady-killer in the steward's room, and I should say inclined to be vulgar in private life, which we children instinctively felt, especially after having found a drawing made by William of a lady who showed more leg than was the fashion in those more ceremonial and polite days. This drawing gave us a shock and William was, I remember, much upset at its having fallen into the royal children's hands.

The butler, or steward as he was called in our house, was a gentle, soft-voiced man with the name of Gardener, but he has remained very shadowy in my mind; I only see him hovering in the background, pale and refined, holding the string of his pince-nez between his fingers, a pince-nez he only put on when reading small print.

William the hearty and Hutchins the bewhiskered were much the greatest realities in our lives.

When we were a little older, it was *we* who did the looking down over the banisters when there were big dinner-parties and Nana who held on to our dresses from the back for fear *we* should come to grief.

Hutchins looms large in my recollections of these occasions. When the guests had gone into the dining-room we would creep down into the two favourite and seldom-used drawing-rooms, where all the Chinese and Russian treasures were accumulated, and there, with impatience, we would await old Hutchins who stole up between the courses to bring us exquisite tit-bits from the feast downstairs. Mamma had instituted on these occasions the Russian "Zakuska," which was a great success. Delicious crumbs from the rich man's table found their way through Hutchins to our greedy little mouths. Once, however, he made the mistake of bringing us a little piece of toast with caviare. This was termed "disgusting stuff," and I regret to say was disposed of in a manner we afterwards never dared confess. We threw it down from the top of the back-stairs upon a cupboard which stood on the lowest landing! I do not know how long that piece of toast and caviare lay mouldering undiscovered on that cupboard top. We could not see it from so far up, especially as the cupboard had a sunken top.

Wonderful games were played in those two drawing-rooms before the guests came up. Here was a moment when I could be a queen to my heart's content. I would find some bright-coloured curtain or table-cover, which, fastened round my waist, would trail gorgeously behind me over the ground, and for some reason I liked to call myself the Queen of Spain: that name had about it something both historical and adventurous, which sounded well in my ears—it was grand and dignified, and had a smack of *les châteaux en Espagne*.

Ducky usually played the part of my husband, my son or my horse, or all three in turn, according to the necessities of the game.

Ducky always played the heroic, brave, self-sacrificing parts, and was almost always a male. There was something heroic about Ducky, even at that early age; something a little sombre. She was the one who espoused causes,

she was the "fore-fighter," the one who discussed and resented, who allowed no nonsense, and had no patience with frauds. She immediately spotted any insincerity and let nothing pass. Tall for her age, she was strong and rebellious, but like the strong she was also a defender of the weak and oppressed, and sometimes she even espoused lost causes with a bravery that we less heroic ones admired without imitating.

I on the contrary was always inclined to let well alone.

As for sister Sandra, she was in those days a fat, harmless child, sweet-tempered and fair-haired, who followed her elders' footsteps, eager *mitzumachen*, but humble before reproof.

We two elders treated her with a certain imperious off-handedness which had no unkindness in it, but which overruled her timid desires, offering her the parts she was to play in such wise that she could not but accept them. Later she chose her own parts, but not then. She was, however, also permitted to be a queen, and perhaps in self-defence, on those special evenings, married old Hutchins, which gave her a feeling of security and enabled her to hold her own against the Queen of Spain with her husband, her son and her horse!

It was a glorious game in which each played her part seriously, actually becoming the personage she was impersonating, but Sandra had often to relinquish the support of her "husband," who had to hurry down to serve the next course.

Well before the guests (ladies first) came up to the official drawing-rooms, we were hurried off to bed.

Music had no great part in our education. Mamma confessed to me later that her one desire had been to have a *Wunderkind*. Her ambition was that one or the other of us should have some startling talent, music, painting, singing, dancing, mathematics, anything, so long as it were tremendous. When none of us showed any disposition to become anything out of the ordinary she gave us up as lost causes and disappointments; it was no good, therefore, educating such little nonentities in any special way, so our ear was

never formed and for a long time we had execrable taste in music.

But all the same I can remember the shiver of real joy that ran through me when Mamma sometimes sat down at the piano and played.

She had white, plump, short-fingered hands ; her touch was exquisitely soft and velvety. Her playing was like running water. I remember especially a Romance of Rubinstein and a posthumous Prelude of Chopin which used to melt my heart within me. So I must all the same have "felt" music even at that early age.

Ducky, and later baby Bee, were the musical ones of the family. I had talent only for drawing and painting, a talent which my other sisters shared, but there was a time when I was first in this art.

It was Mamma who initiated us into the joys of Grimm and Andersen, especially Andersen, whose fairy-tales are *the* fairy-tales of the world.

Mamma read beautifully, and could read by the hour, but she never allowed us to sit with idle hands, we had always to be working at something or other, crochet, knitting or drawing.

We loved above all the story of "The Little Mermaid," we wept rivers of tears over that eternally pathetic tale, and no matter how often it was read (for children always want to hear stories over and over again), each time it moved us in the same way.

Andersen has remained my ideal for all time, and to-day, when I myself try my hand at fairy-stories, I always try to write them *à la manière d'Andersen*, who better than anyone else knew his art and can wring both smiles and tears from the stoniest heart.

Mamma always spoke English with us. She would never teach us Russian, declaring that she did not wish to hear her beloved mother-tongue mutilated by her own children. She adored us, gave up her life to us, but for all that she had little faith in us ; that was the strange, strange thing.

We were not *Wunderkinder*, so, even in later years, when each developed some humble talent of her own, although she encouraged us, it was always patronizingly and with a touch

of contempt. She never took us seriously, we were of a younger generation, nor had we been educated as perfectly as she had been ; and above all we were Protestants, and therefore some parts of our souls were shut off from hers.

Beloved, big-hearted, generous Mamma, built on grand lines, but always a seeker, restless in her own soul : one who, in looking for complete perfection, often almost unjustly overlooked what might have been true sources of joy, had she not always been hankering after an ideal implanted in her by those who brought her up.

Like all human beings, she was full of *Sehnsucht*, but she need not have been so lonely had she only trusted her children a little more.

One summer was spent in Scotland instead of at Osborne. This was the only time I ever went to Scotland and my memory of it is full of enchantment.

Grandmamma Queen, the all-powerful, had lent us a wee house called Abergeldie Maines, where we spent the first part of the summer with our governess. Later, towards autumn, Mamma came and we moved to a rather bigger house or cottage called Birkhall. I have but a vague vision left of this house, but it cannot have been a very big one as we all three, Ducky, Sandra and I, slept in one huge bed. This was exciting if not particularly comfortable. Two slept with their heads towards the top of the bed, the other with her head against the foot, her feet separating the other two sleepers. Why this arrangement had been found necessary I cannot explain, as I have no vision of the inside of the house except of that one bedroom.

But all the "outside" impressions have remained clear and luminous. We simply adored Scotland, with its low, undulating, heather-covered hills, its moors and burns, its mists and lochs. There was something infinitely poetical and just a little mysterious about it which touched some special chord in me. Much, much later, having discovered the books of Fiona Macleod, I loved them with the same intensity as I loved Scotland the only time I was ever there. There was something enveloped and hazy about it, something legendary, which powerfully moved the soul within

me, something kindred to my spirit, if I may so express myself.

Curiously enough, extremes draw me. I *feel* the almost mystical charm of Scotland and at the same time I simply adore the South with its profuse luxuriant "gloriousness," and its occasional aridity. My heart is, so to say, torn between the two; different currents in my nature are attracted. Malta and Scotland are most fundamentally different lands, and yet both are almost painfully kindred to my soul. I *feel* them both, they almost torture me with the love they inspire in me.

No striking event marks that summer in Scotland, everything in my memory is hazy with a haziness akin to the Highland mists. Half-tones; browns, buffs, purples, grey, every possible tint of these, and the hills in the distance blue, that special blue which distance alone can attain, the blue of dreams, the blue of hopes floating on the horizon of one's consciousness.

And into these half-tones long rambling voyages of discovery over moor and hill, along quiet dales and beside the brown burns, brown with the brownness of certain hazel eyes that have in them a green light, and these little burns were full of red-spotted trout. Underfoot, stones, heather or moss; great soft cushions, grey and elastic, forerunners of swampy places. How we loved these lichen-coloured mounds of moss; we would endeavour to uproot them without breaking them in two, but when the difficult feat was achieved they were always too heavy to carry home. But there was something quite special about that grey moss; there were wide and often boggy stretches of it which gave the soil an eerie look, as though it were coated with mildew in great lumps, and this mildew colour blended softly with the horizon; there was no line separating the two; the whole world was hazy, indefinite, nebulous, it was as though you were advancing into a grey dream.

But above all there was the heather, that wonderful rolling carpet of purple, with an undergrowth of rust, which added that warmth of colour which so completely satisfied the beauty-loving eye. Over hill and dale, as far as gaze could reach, purple; a grand spread of violet, a royal mantle extended over this northern world.

There were also foggy days that covered you with a million tears, weighing your eyelashes down with heavy moisture, spreading a haze of dew over whatever you wore. Then too were dream walks in a world that had no definite shape, no definite colour, just spheres of cold vapour, with an occasional lifting of the veil, revealing shadowy flocks of sheep, phantom shapes moving over phantom worlds, with a spectre going before them slowly leading them into the land of wraiths.

Wrapped in their grey plaids, their collies at their heels, those gaunt Highland shepherds were indeed the spirits of the mist.

Grandmamma came to Balmoral in the autumn, if I rightly remember. This was the home of her heart. She dearly loved her "Scotchies," almost every inhabitant was a personal acquaintance and even the royal apartments were hung and upholstered with Balmoral tartan; carpets, chairs, curtains, everything was striped with greys, reds and black. This form of decoration was more patriotic than artistic and had a way of flickering before your eyes and confusing your brain.

Here also, though the life led in the Highlands was more cosy and homelike, less official and severe, Grandmamma spread that atmosphere so peculiar to her, here too her presence was felt in all things, even when she was not actually seen.

Queen Victoria! Even then she was becoming an almost legendary figure; how much more so, therefore, to-day when looking back upon her! She had lasted so long that one could hardly imagine the world continuing to turn without her.

In a way she was the arbiter of our different fates. For all members of her family her "yes" and her "no" counted tremendously. She was not averse from interfering in the most private questions. She was the central power directing things. Even Mamma, who, according to us, was omnipotent, had to count with Queen Victoria, had to listen to her, and if she had not exactly to *obey*, had anyhow to argue out all differences of opinion. But as she was strong-willed and autocratic, I can imagine that these arguments were tough.

The grand little old lady in her white widow's cap and her flounced black silk gown, who seldom raised her voice, except when accentuating certain words, was a tremendous, sometimes almost a fearful force.

Right into their ripe years her sons and daughters were in great awe of "dearest Mamma"; they avoided discussing her will, and her veto made them tremble. They spoke to her with bated breath, and even when not present she was never mentioned except with lowered voice.

Looking back upon Queen Victoria, especially from these days of negation, I cannot help marvelling at the prestige she possessed. There was something fetish-like about it. I sometimes wonder if she realized this tremendous effect she had upon others, if she was conscious of that atmosphere that emanated from her, if it was *really* due to her personality or to the religious "hush" others created around her.

It is natural that children should be awed in the presence of one who was like the earth around which satellites circled, but that this should affect great and small alike is wonderful. Was it the times she belonged to, was it because she had lasted so long? Was it because she lived so shut away from the world, surrounding herself with that atmosphere of mournful abstinence from all joys of life? I do not pretend to be able to answer these questions, I was too young then, and later, when grown up, I saw too little of her. The fact remains that she was a tremendous presence, if not personality, and her places, whilst she breathed within their walls, had something of shrines about them, which were approached with awe not unmixed with anxiety.

There was also a quite special thrill when from afar you saw Grandmamma's outrider come trotting down the road ahead of her carriage. Grandmamma never drove without an outrider.

Solemn-faced, in a livery as impeccably black and neat as the clothes of a bishop, mounted on a stolid dappled grey, groomed to the superlative perfection only English stables can attain, this forerunner of the Royal Presence would appear round the bend of the road. Trot, trot, trot, trot, the very sound made your heart beat with expectation. That

black-coated rider with a face that never smiled, never in fact expressed anything but almost magnificent reliability, was more uniquely royal and effective than any flare of trumpets or bright-coated military escort could have been. Trot, trot, trot, trot, and here was her Majesty's carriage drawn by greys as superbly sleek and well-bred as the one who had heralded their coming; and seated within the open barouche, a wee little old lady with an exquisitely old-fashioned hat and antediluvian, sloping-shouldered mantle, black, with sometimes a touch of white. Nothing showy about her, no attempt at effect of any kind, the whole turn-out simple, unadorned, but what a thrill the passing of that simple carriage gave you.

Trot, trot, trot, trot, deep curtsies, the waving of hands and handkerchiefs, smiles on every face, a responding smile from the little old lady in the carriage—only just a glimpse—but how the memory remained with you. Trot, trot . . . a diminishing sound. You stood staring after the carriage, the horses, the outrider, trot, trot . . . fainter, fainter . . . till it died quite away. . . .

Grandmamma Queen!

We did not see much of Grandmamma during that autumn, but I remember one drive with her to a far-off loch amongst the hills, called Due or Dhu Loch.

Grandmamma's drives were a very essential part of her well-regulated life. She drove out every single day, no matter what the weather and almost always in an open carriage. No rain, storm or cold stopped her, her drives were as inevitable as sunrise or sunset, no event good or bad, not even a catastrophe seemed to make any difference to Grandmamma's drives. And into the bargain they were exceedingly lengthy drives.

Round about Balmoral Queen Victoria had had small stone houses built at the different spots where she was most fond of driving, and tea was often taken at one or the other of these little houses. She then returned home, if possible by another route.

The only time in Scotland I remember having been honoured by an invitation to drive with Grandmamma was to this far-off Due Loch, and my excitement was great.

I have but a vague memory of the road leading to the Due Loch, but the loch itself I can still see perfectly well. A small, dark, rather sinister-looking loch, lying deep amongst more or less barren hills, stony and grim. Legend would have it that the sun never shone on the Due Loch: that was why it was so sombre, so sad-looking, like a face that never smiled. I stood before its gloomy waters and stared at it with awe. It fascinated me, I felt that all sorts of stories could be woven around its secretive-looking gloom.

“Due” means mournful, and certainly some sinister tale was attached to this lake, but no one told it to me then and now I have no one to ask; the grown-ups probably never realized how much I would have liked to *know* why the sun never shone into the Due Loch! It is also probable that I never asked; children are often curiously reticent in asking for explanations about things that interest them, particularly when they have only overheard a conversation, and its story had not been especially told to *them*. They are afraid of making fools of themselves, not quite sure if they had been supposed to listen or not.

All my English uncles and aunts were curiously absent-minded. They only occasionally seemed to wake up to the consciousness that you were there at all; they also had a disconcerting way of seeming to draw you into a conversation, and when you responded, their minds had already wandered far away, and your timid answer found itself lost on the air, a poor forlorn and ashamed thing, suddenly despised and homeless.

There was no intentional unkindness in this, it was simply that at one moment you existed for them and at the next their thoughts had already taken such an entirely different channel that they simply felt and saw you no more.

But children want to be very much seen, felt and heard, and those who make you feel thinner than air humiliate you terribly.

Even our father had this absent-mindedness, characteristic of the family; he sometimes simply looked through you.

Mamma had one great joy at Balmoral. There were quantities of mushrooms, or at least what Mamma called

mushrooms, but which people in England contemptuously termed toadstools. All Russians are great connoisseurs of mushrooms and in their country exquisite dishes are made of them. There is an especial kind with thick, stony stems and brown-grey heads. In Germany these are called *Steinpilze* and are a great delicacy. The kind Mamma gathered in such quantities at Balmoral were second cousins to these, poorer relations, but just as delicious when well prepared with a cream sauce spiced with a certain herb. This species has a predilection for growing under birch trees.

Mamma would bring home basketfuls of these, but to her great mortification the royal cooks only admitted the well-known common white mushrooms which are pink inside; all others were suspicious and nothing would induce them to serve up that "Russian stuff" on the Queen of England's table.

It was on this occasion that I first heard the expression "toadstool," which was certainly a most disdainful way of denominating Mamma's precious gatherings. She had much fun with Grandmamma over this, and finally, I believe, the royal kitchen was prevailed upon to cook these uncertain-looking vegetables and everybody, even the most insular inhabitant of the court, thoroughly enjoyed them.

In Russia, mushroom-picking is a veritable science, there are no end of good mushrooms (or call them toadstools if you prefer), and at an early age Mamma had made real experts of her children. We could, without the slightest hesitation, distinguish the good from the bad, the harmless from the poisonous.

Mushroom-hunting is good fun, but it was never my speciality. Ducky had inherited Mamma's passion for this form of amusement, and my daughter Elisabeth in her turn has continued the tradition, she can spend hours hunting for mushrooms. Somehow I was awkward about finding mushrooms, which was a great humiliation to me. I would bring only three or four to Ducky's dozens, and this I felt as a really painful inferiority, an inferiority that was well rubbed into me. I even remember a comic-tragic scene in connexion with one of these mushroom-hunts; but this was at Coburg, not at Balmoral.

Mamma had a Russian diplomat friend called Count Lamsdorf (nephew of the famous Count Lamsdorf), an exceedingly well-mannered, pale, fair, nice-looking young man. We little girls were not quite sure if we liked Count Lamsdorf; over-correct and rather effeminate, he was a frequent guest in our house, but his correctness never melted into anything more than tepid joviality.

One day we had all gone mushroom-hunting in a wood well known as good ground for that special kind of sport. Elegant and polite to a degree even out in the woods, Count Lamsdorf had also been enlisted amongst the ranks of the mushroom-pickers.

Everybody had found quantities except me, who seemed to have no eyes in my head. It was quite like searching for Easter eggs and I positively seemed to have been smitten with blindness. At certain moments the searchers came together from the different ends of the forest to compare their finds, but each time my basket was empty.

By degrees I was growing exasperated, but was for a time able to mask my discomfiture with a smile on the wrong side of my mouth. Little knowing how near the end of my patience I was, everybody began to tease me and I felt deeply humiliated.

Finally a signal was given that the search was at an end and everybody flocked together to examine each other's harvest. Mine was poor—I had hardly anything to show and the teasing began anew. Count Lamsdorf, who had been lucky, added his few polite words of mockery to the louder raillery of the others. But this was just too much. His innocent words made the cup of my bitterness overflow and to the horror of my mother and the discomfiture of my sisters, like the real little fool that I was, I burst into tears.

Dismay on all sides! I even managed to bring out a few words laden with resentment which I hurled at the head of the much-abashed count who, for some reason, had become in my eyes the chief offender. I am afraid that I was even thoroughly rude, for I was no longer mistress of my emotions.

Mamma used all the tact she could trying to pooh-pooh the stupid fuss I was making. The much-puzzled guest,

full of remorse, pronounced words of humblest repentance, but I stolidly maintained my absurd attitude of offence.

Finally, taking me kindly by the shoulders, Mamma pushed me towards the mortified gentleman :

“*Va, ma chère, embrasse le Comte et que tout soit oublié.*” *Embrasse le Comte!* Kiss him! Consternation. He was not a cousin nor an uncle; he was only a disconcertingly ceremonious gentleman with pale cheeks and paler hair, and much too polite to be looked upon as a friend. Kiss him—I was dumbfounded.

“Child, go on, don’t make a fuss!”

And there, with the whole forest as witness, with my sisters gaping at me open-mouthed but full of pity, I actually had to kiss that pale and over-correct gentleman, who, almost as shy as I, took off his hat—(Oh, I well remember that taking off of his hat!)—so as to meet worthily this scene of reconciliation.

But was it reconciliation? Ah, there’s the rub. It was an unheard-of happening, but reconciliation?

I am afraid that from that day onwards, poor Count Lamsdorf was a thorn in my flesh, and each one of his visits was a torture to the foolish little girl who was never again able to forget that, one day, with all the trees of the wood looking on, she had had to kiss him, an over-polite gentleman who was neither uncle nor cousin. . . .

In childhood your parents’ friends play a great part. Some you admit directly, they know how to gain your confidence, they become your friends too. Against others for some reason you nurse a certain prejudice, probably most unfairly, but you simply cannot like them, they do not fit in.

Then there are those precious few who, even if they pay no particular attention to you, are passionately admired and adored from the first moment, sometimes simply because you admire their looks, and sometimes just because there is that strange inexplicable affinity between you and them, that magnetism which attracts beings to each other for no apparent reason—it just *is*.

All through life I was inordinately attracted to a beautiful face, and I remember certain guests who were received at

Eastwell that shone with a star-like radiance that I never again forgot. They were real events.

Two women, very different in type, belong to this category. One was Lady (Georgina) Dudley, the other was Lady Randolph Churchill.

Lady Dudley, as also Lady (Helen) Vincent, has always remained my ideal of typical English beauty. There was a perfection about Lady Dudley's loveliness which is unforgettable though I saw her but very seldom.

Lady Randolph was a more flashing beauty, and might almost be taken for an Italian or a Spaniard. Her eyes were large and dark, her mouth mobile with delicious, almost mischievous curves, her hair blue-black and glossy, she had something of a Creole about her. She was very animated and laughed a lot, showing beautiful white teeth, and always looked happy and amused.

For some reason she and my mother were very good friends: I was much too young to know what attracted them to each other, because they were certainly very different, but we used to see them often together, and we entirely approved of Lady Randolph.

Mamma would play duets with her on the piano in the big Eastwell library. We were often in the room during the time, occupied with our own games, the two ladies absorbed in their music quite forgetting our presence. It still makes me smile to remember how one day Ducky and I were amusing ourselves with a pair of mechanical frogs which had been given to us, green tin monsters that when wound up, crouched, hesitating awhile, then made sudden, most disconcerting leaps at the moment you least expected. These frogs were an endless source of amusement.

I cannot recollect which of us hit upon the idea of setting these springing creatures under the chairs of the two music enthusiasts, but what fun it would be!

We well realized that, carried away on the wings of melody, they were entirely oblivious of our existence. From time to time, one or the other would exclaim at the difficulty of certain passages, there would be a second's hesitation, a little apologetic laugh, and then they would be off again as though their lives depended upon their fingers.

Softly we two miscreants stole over the floor, as quiet as mice, no sound revealing our nearness, and set our jumping freaks under the chairs of our betters. No two Red Indians could have made a more wily approach.

The springing creatures crouched, hesitated and sprang, right upon the heels of the piano players! It had been superbly calculated, the effect was instantaneous and complete.

Shrieks, laughter! And of course a scolding. But the scolding was drowned by the laughter and I remember Lady Randolph's white teeth and Mamma's apology for her children's misbehaviour.

Another peculiarity of Lady Randolph's was a special sort of comb that she wore at the back of her chignon, a light tortoise-shell comb decorated with little round knobs. This comb I admired tremendously; it certainly added to that Spanish look she had and was just exactly the sort of comb she should have worn.

Certain details of dress used to strike me at an early age and they still remain sticking in my memory whilst more important facts have been entirely wiped out.

There was, for instance, a ruby-red bonnet, oh yes, a *bonnet*, because in those days that was both the smart and correct thing for married ladies to wear. There was a great difference in my childhood between what a young girl and a married lady wore. In our times, the Granny can easily be seen in the same dress, or *almost*, as her granddaughter, dancing at her first ball! If I am exaggerating, forgive me, but I do not think that I am far wrong.

This ruby-red velvet bonnet that I remember was worn by a certain Frau von Königseck (who shall be spoken of later) when one day she came to meet my parents at the Coburg station. It was a quite flat affair with a broad bow on the top and was fixed by a piece of red velvet ribbon under her chin. Queen Alexandra was photographed in bonnets of this shape.

Frau von Königseck was neither elegant nor pretty, but her bonnet was, according to my childish appreciation, lovely, and has remained unforgettable to this day.

But there was especially a certain dress worn by an aunt

during the time of Queen Victoria's first Jubilee that I still have in mind. The aunt was Louisa of Coburg, wife of Uncle Philip of Coburg-Kohary, brother of King Ferdinand of Bulgaria. She was the eldest daughter of King Leopold II of Belgium and one of the *Grandes Élégantes* of her time. Her love for dress, in fact, was what the Puritans would have called sinful, and was certainly ruinous and did much to make of her a difficult wife.

Otherwise she was a good-natured if somewhat foolish lady who loved to be paid attention, even if it was only to be teased by others. In fact, she was very much disappointed when one forgot to tease her. She wanted to be teased about her clothes, her habits, her ideas, her flirtations. She loved to be considered somewhat eccentric, which she was in a way that was innocent enough, had it not been so expensive.

We children called her Aunt Philipa, which, according to us, cleverly united her and her husband's names, Philip and Louisa.

Aunt Philipa was, because of the exaggerated number of her clothes, a grand source of interest to us younger ones. It was like going to the theatre. Even when she only came for a few days, she would bring so many hats that no cupboards sufficed, so she generally pinned them all the way up the curtains, as far as her arms could reach.

There was a memorable occasion at Reinhardsbrunn when two of her hats were burnt on a stove and one was eaten up by the dogs! Aunt Philipa was very fair and had the small eyes and long nose of her father, but all the same she was a decorative person in a showy sort of way and dress helped her greatly, though Mamma of course thoroughly disapproved of the eccentricity of her fashions.

She had a killing way of laughing, her nose playing a great part and her eyes nearly disappearing during the process; it was besides a slow laugh which began gradually and went on for a long time increasing in volume, even after everybody else had finished their laugh. She seemed to relish, so to say, the physical pleasure of laughing.

My parents poked fun at her all the time and this used to make her expand with a sort of childish glee. Her absurdi-

ties were discussed and everybody made a point of inquiring with exaggerated interest how many dresses, hats, cloaks, tea-gowns, etc., she had brought with her. Clothes in fact were her very *raison d'être*.

She would change her attire at every hour of the day, and there was always a little bag, or so-called reticule, to match each dress, and goodness only knows with what these mysterious little bags were filled; powder and paint, mirror, scents and sachets, smoking pastilles, nail polish, cigarettes, and so on. She was always fiddling about in her little reticule.

During the Jubilee she was our parents' guest at Clarence House, and her toilettes were the excitement of the whole household from the scullery-maid to the lady-in-waiting. The memorable dress in question was an astonishing creation; one mass of small beads shimmering between fire-red and sapphire blue. I had never before seen anything like this dress nor perhaps since! It was a "stunner" as the school-boy would have said; it knocked you down and, as it was in the time of the bustle, it was not only astonishing as to colour, but complicated as to shape. She received ovations from all sides and, much gratified, started one of her slow long laughs that went on and on increasing in volume, whilst she screwed up her small eyes till they almost vanished.

Later on Aunt Philipa disappeared out of our lives and her end was less gay and brilliant than her beginning. Poor Aunt Philipa!

Before I begin describing our time at Malta, which is the happiest memory of my life, I would like you to follow me on a flying visit to Russia, that great, mysterious, stupendous Russia of the Tsars, now so tragically a thing of the past, but which was Mamma's Russia.

You must forgive me if at first I show it to you as I perceived it through my childish vision, with all its phenomenal prestige and grandeur. A formidable erection of power and splendour, comparable to nothing else except, no doubt, the Far East which I have never seen.

Russia! My astonished child's eyes see gigantic palaces, wonderful parks, fountains, gardens. They see astounding



“GRANDPAPA EMPEROR”; THE EMPEROR ALEXANDER II.

family gatherings, military displays, religious ceremonies in churches all glittering with gold. They see jewels so fantastic that you can hardly imagine that they are real, quick trotting horses with flowing manes and tails, and their flanks so shining that you could mirror your face in them. They see whole regiments of Cossacks, wild-looking, but so picturesque that they could fit into the most fantastic tales. And some of these same Cossacks, standing in long red coats, high fur caps and armed to the teeth before the doors of their masters; their breasts are barred with cartridges stuck into silver braid, their heelless black boots have many folds around the ankles and pervade the atmosphere with a pleasant fragrance of Russian leather. My eyes also see long corridors, and, so to say, over-life-sized halls and drawing-rooms, opening out one into the other, and our feet patter timidly over wide expanses of floors, so vast and so polished that we have the impression of walking on ice.

And everywhere a quite special odour; a mixture of turpentine, Russian leather, cigarette smoke and scent, uniquely characteristic of these Imperial palaces.

Imperial is indeed the word, fantastic, fairy-like, legendary, *mille et une nuits*; all superlatives are suitable and permissible in this Russia of the Tsars, this glamour-filled Russia that is no more.

And it is Mamma who is leading us little English girls by the hand, leading us into all this; Mamma who came out of it all, who belongs to it still, Mamma who makes the sign of the Cross in her own chapel of the many images, which is but a tiny reflection of the huge glory of Russia's churches which once were hers.

Because *all this was* hers, before she came to sober England. That giant with the grey hair and closely cut whiskers, with the rather forbidding face but kindly eyes and mouth, is her father, the Emperor, and those younger giants, so many of them that you get quite bewildered, are her brothers and cousins and the other older giants are her uncles. They all bend down to kiss you in turn, they have far to bend because they are tall like trees, and they all smell deliciously of Russian leather, cigarettes and the best sort of scent. I remember them always in uniform, and they are altogether wonderful

and unbelievable, quite like people out of fairy-stories that you did not imagine really existed till you went to Russia, Mamma's Russia, the home from which she came.

And everybody loved you and spoilt you and gave you good things to eat or hung lovely little crosses or lockets set with precious stones round your neck. The servants kissed your hands, and at every corner there was some old friend of Mamma's who burst out on you and hugged you and made the sign of the Cross over your forehead. And when you finally reached your own rooms, there on the centre table stood two dishes, one with sweets, the other with biscuits. These biscuits and sweets were renewed each day. The sweets were varied and nowhere else in the wide world were they as good. Long-shaped fruit-drops wrapped in white paper with little fringed edges of blue, red or yellow, according to the sweet inside. Flat cream caramels too luscious for words, these also wrapped in thick white paper, double fondants of coffee, and also those little paper baskets of fresh strawberry sweets already described as one of the "ecstasies."

Then other sweets were brought in big boxes, round slabs of fruit paste, a speciality of Moscow, and dried fruit and berries preserved in white flour-like sugar, a speciality from Kiev.

And when you went out for walks in the park, there was a sailor or two who went with you, specially deputed to look after and amuse the royal and Imperial children during their walks. These sailors became your most cherished friends and companions. Each day when you stepped over the terrace down into the garden there they stood all smiles with some little surprise ready for you; a bunch of wild strawberries, a wonderful stick half peeled as though a white ribbon had been wound round it, a little wooden flute, a hoop and what not else. The youngest of us, not yet able to walk any distance, was solemnly pushed about in a perambulator in the shape of a silver swan. There were lakes and sand-heaps, wee Russian cottages, and a tiny farm with a real live cow, which belonged to Mamma as a child. (The farm, not the cow, which was certainly no longer the same.)



“GRANDMAMMA EMPRESS”; WITH MY BROTHER ALFRED AS BABY.

Those are my first visions of Russia. Emperor Alexander II's Russia, Grandpapa Emperor—Mamma's father. But in my earliest childhood he vanishes from the scene to give place to Alexander III, Uncle Sasha as we called him, Mamma's eldest brother.

It was in London that Mamma heard of her father's assassination. I remember quite well our being brought down to her room and the terrible shock it was to find Mamma in tears.

Mamma weeping, an overwhelming, unheard-of cataclysm. It was something which upset all our ideas about the natural order of things. Children wept, but grown-up people! That was something fundamentally unnatural, something that shook the very basis of our beliefs.

Of course there was consternation in our ranks and a hurried departure was arranged, Mamma, as far as I remember, taking us with her.

But this is all such a long, long time ago, and I was so very small then that I may be mixing things up. But curiously enough I still have a dim recollection of standing at a window of the Winter Palace and seeing an endless and gorgeous funeral procession pass by, but was it Grandpapa's or Grandmamma's funeral? I really do not know. All this is in a haze.

But I do still remember Grandpapa. There are three pictures which remain to me of him. One is of a family breakfast outside on a terrace at Tsarskoye Selo, Grandpapa at the head of the table, I think, and we, as tiny mites, running round from one guest to another with little sand-cakes on the palms of our hands and Grandpapa pretending to taste them.

A rather clearer picture is of Grandpapa coming into the big night-nursery (this was also at Tsarskoye), where we were down with measles. I was the last to catch the infection and Grandpapa was still able to kiss me.

I can still see through the mist that time is spreading over these remembrances, Grandpapa bending towards me, the tall, tall man to the wee little girl, and how absurdly proud I was that I could still be kissed. But when he came

next day I too was amongst the invalids, and I no more than the others dared ask for a kiss.

The third picture is of Grandpapa in a small carriage driving a wonderful trotter, coal-black and as shiny as a shield. Mamma is seated beside him and I am standing between his knees. That is all, and even that is so blurred that it might have been only a dream.

Of Grandmamma Empress my recollections are still more vague. On a journey somewhere we were brought to her in the train. She was lying on a very low bed that was all draped in sky blue. I have the hazy vision of a pale emaciated woman with a thin, waxen face and long, white, beautiful hands. I remember we had been taken away from our tea which did not please us very much, and we stared "non-understandingly" at the very sad-looking woman in her blue-curtained bed.

I think that she was being transported somewhere to the South of France. She had already been an invalid for several years, and, as I have heard since, had more reasons than ill-health for being sad.

That is my only recollection of Grandmamma Empress, Mamma's Mamma.

Chapter IV

RUSSIAN MEMORIES

LATER pictures of Russia are clearer, and yet they are so hazy as to be enveloped in a glamour so great that in looking back it all appears dreamlike, almost unreal, and I have to make an effort to realize that I was actually there and *lived* it all, not merely imagined it.

Tsarskoye, Peterhof, Krasnoe, St. Petersburg, that was the setting, but the pictures I see are detached, merge one into the other, pass before my mind in little bits. Dates, circumstances, the whys and wherefores are all vague, entirely vague.

The family was a large one. My mother had five brothers living: Alexander, Vladimir, Alexis, Serge and Paul. Her eldest brother Nicolas had died at Nice as quite a young man, of consumption I have been told. Four brothers were already married in the days I am speaking of. In addition there were no end of other uncles, aunts and cousins, so many of them in fact that I never quite made out who they all were, especially as they were of several generations, two or three great-uncles and aunts being still alive. Some were of less importance, uncles, aunts and cousins several times removed, descendants of side lines, but for all big occasions, for feast days, for parades and church ceremonies, the family would flock together, and there would be huge family meetings, a regular review of uncles, aunts and cousins near or far removed, as numerous as trees in a wood.

This was most interesting, but also very confusing, as we came almost as strangers into this great family gathering and everybody exclaimed about how much we had grown, etc. etc.

Nothing could have been a greater contrast than the English and Russian uncles and aunts. I must confess that

in my childhood the Russian uncles were surrounded by a much greater glamour. Our admiration for them was not unmixed, however, with dread; they were so formidably tall, big and splendid, and besides, they were inveterate teases.

The English uncles were absent-minded, they looked through you; the Russian relations never looked through you, in fact, they were if anything too aware of your existence and teased you mercilessly; always, on all occasions, public or otherwise, they teased you.

It would carry me too far to begin to describe them all, but some of their faces are still so vivid, so full of interest for me at least, that I must draw some of their portraits, make them live once more as I saw them.

There was Uncle Sasha, Emperor Alexander III, a giant of a man, broad, powerful, good-natured, kindly, less terrible than some of the uncles in spite of his crown and of his "over-life-size." He had a chestnut beard and kindly blue eyes, his way with us children was jovial and encouraging, and I remember him particularly in connexion with some special fun he had imagined would amuse both the young and grown-ups.

In the garden stood a mast on which his sons learned how to climb and handle ropes and sails, still an essential part of ships in those days. To guard against bad falls a net had been stretched beneath this mast.

Uncle Sasha loved a good laugh, so he had come upon the absurdly delightful idea of taking his guests out after lunch to this net and making them run and jump about on it. I can remember no game that ever made us laugh as much as this one, and the fun reached its climax when giant Uncle Sasha, whose weight was formidable, climbed on to the net himself. This was the superlative moment of excitement that we children always waited for with a delight not unmixed with fear. Uncle Sasha would pursue us over this net, and when he had cornered you he would jump up and down and his weight made you bounce like a ball. Higher and higher you bounced as though you had no weight at all, and you had hardly come down to your



“AUNT MIECHEN,” MARIE PAVLOVNA, GRAND DUCHESS
VLADIMIR OF RUSSIA.

feet than there you were, up in the air again, up and down, up and down, shrieking and laughing, terrified and enchanted; a game for the gods.

That was Uncle Sasha as *we* saw him; I leave it to history to make whatever other portrait it chooses.

Aunt Minnie, his wife, was Queen Alexandra's sister. Without having her beauty, she had Aunt Alix's charm. She was deliciously amiable and much loved, but she does not play a great part in my memories though she is the only one of that huge family circle still alive as I write these lines. She was a devoted mother and wife and truly the centre of her world, both at home and as Empress.

In those days there were five cousins, Nicky, Georgie, Xenia, Misha, and Olga, who was quite small. Nicky we always loved and admired, although, being older, he was rather beyond our reach in those days.

Already, at that early age, he had that gentle charm and that kind, caressing look in his eyes, which was his all through life till the day of his tragic death. Kindly and peace-loving, he did not seem cut out for a fate so horrible.

Georgie, like my mother's eldest brother, died of consumption as quite a young man, somewhere in the Caucasus I believe. Xenia was a dear chum, being a year older than I was. The other two, Misha and Olga, were younger than we.

But it was with the other cousins that we were more intimate, the children of Uncle Vladimir and Aunt Miechen.

Uncle Vladimir was my mother's second brother. He was the dark-haired one of the family, exceedingly good-looking but a little less tall than his brothers. Aunt Miechen, his wife, was born Princess of Mecklenburg; although not a regular beauty, she was one of the most fascinating women that ever crossed my path.

There was, I believe, a certain rivalry between Aunt Miechen and Aunt Minnie, and less friendship and good understanding than was politely played up to during those big family gatherings I so vividly remember.

Here there were four cousins, three boys, Kirill, Boris and André, and one daughter, Ellen. They were the most beautiful children imaginable and our friendship outlasted

our youth. Much later in life sister Ducky married Kirill, but that will be spoken of in its right place.

Uncle Alexis, Mamma's third brother, was the bachelor of the family. He was of the type of the Vikings, and would also have made a perfect Lohengrin, as Wagner would have dreamed of him. Fair beard, blue eyes, enormous, a superb specimen of humanity, he was besides a sailor, and had a true sailor's love for all the good things of life and of beautiful women in particular.

There was an aunt several times removed who was his "adored" for many years although she was not free. Zina was her name and she was terribly fascinating. Her eyes were enormous, her jewels beautiful, her skin creamy white, her lips cherry red, and dark circles made her wonderful Oriental eyes still more dangerously languorous.

There was a photograph in Papa's room of Zina in Russian court dress with a *cacosbnie* on her head. I was irresistibly attracted by this picture of lovely Aunt Zina of the mysterious eyes, and I could never make up my mind if it was her eyes or her stupendous jewels that fascinated me most. She too belonged to Russia's splendour, a characteristic product of the world she lived in. Aunt Zina, who was a sister of the celebrated General Scobelew, and married to a Leuchtenberg, was never considered quite one of the Imperial family. She would have made her fortune on the screen as a "vamp," and was, I believe, what our Uncle Paul used so amusingly to term "naughty and imprudent," but her good-nature entirely belied her vamp-like appearance.

It was the sailor uncle who paid me my first compliment and I assure you that I have never forgotten it.

It was at Peterhof and we children came rushing over the lawn to where Mamma was standing in the sunshine with Uncle Alexis. I was leading the onrush, and as we came, Uncle Alexis exclaimed: "Ah! voici la jolie petite!" I was "la jolie petite" and from then onwards I never forgot this!

But the couple who fascinated me most were Uncle

Serge and Aunt Ella. She was the angelic beauty of whom I have already spoken. They were newly married in those days and her beauty and sweetness was a thing of dreams.

Uncle Serge was the brother nearest in age to my mother. She had been brought up with him and Uncle Paul together. In contrast to the three eldest, who, although hugely tall, were broad and thick-set, this uncle was as tall and slim as the proverbial fir tree. He was by far the most frightening of all the uncles, but for all that was our chosen favourite. The extreme "adorableness" of his wife had perhaps something to do with it, but anyhow, Uncle Serge meant a great deal to us.

His name in history will, I fear, remain as that of a fanatic and reactionary, his death was violent and fearful, but I have nothing to do with Grand Duke Serge, Governor of Moscow, who was blown up by Nihilists; the Uncle Serge I have to do with was severe, kept you in awe, but he loved children, although he was not destined to have any of his own. He scolded us and never let an offence pass unnoticed, but whenever he was able he came to see us in our bath (a concession that, for some reason, all children try to obtain from their elders) or to tuck us up in our beds and to kiss us good night.

Uncle Serge wore a close-cropped fair beard; his lips were thin and closed in a firm line that was almost cruel. Especially in the long dark green tunic, baggy trousers, high boots and small white astrakhan cap of his full dress uniform, he was a magnificent though somewhat forbidding figure. As abrupt of movement as he was short of speech, he had a particular way of holding his hands in front of him, the fingers of one hand clasping the wrist of the other, making a chain bracelet he wore continually jingle against his cuff. His eyes were steely grey and his pupils could narrow like those of a cat, till they became mere pin-points, and then there was something almost menacing about him. But oh, how handsome he was, so inconceivably upright, with such a magnificent figure, though no doubt there was in his face something of the fanatic that he was at heart.

But when I looked up at him with the confident, adoring eyes of a little girl who knew naught of the hard, cruel and

unkind things of this world, his steely eyes would soften for a moment, though perhaps his look never became really warm or reassuring.

I must admit that even at his sweetest moments, there was nothing soft nor particularly encouraging about Uncle Serge; there was a tyrant within him, ready at any moment to burst forth; there was something intolerant, unbending about him; instinctively one felt that his teeth were clenched.

Dry, nervous, short of speech, impatient, he had none of the rather careless good-humour of his three elder brothers; he was, in fact, completely another type. But for all that we loved him, felt irresistibly attracted to him, hard though he could be.

Few perhaps cherish his memory, but I do.

In contrast to her severe lord and master (and in this case these terms may be taken literally) Aunt, or Cousin Ella, was all sweetness and feminine charm.

By birth, though a good many years our senior, she was our first cousin, being the daughter of my father's second sister, the late Grand Duchess Alice of Hesse. By marriage she became our aunt and as we were much younger, at an age when a few years makes a difference, we generally gave her her dignity of aunt.

Uncle Serge was often abrupt and severe with her as he was with everyone, but he adored her beauty. Being very young and innocent when she married him, he had something of the schoolmaster attitude towards her and I can still see the adorable blush that would suffuse her cheeks when he reproved her, and he did this often, no matter where or before whom.

"Mais Serge . . ." she would then exclaim, and the expression of her face was like that of a schoolgirl detected in some fault. Only to remember her still makes my heart melt within me.

She too had wonderful jewels, and Uncle Serge, who worshipped her in spite of his scoldings, would invent all sorts of reasons and occasions for giving her magnificent presents; she had besides a special talent for wearing her



“UNCLE SERGE;” GRAND DUKE SERGE, FOURTH SON OF ALEXANDER II.

clothes, in a way quite her own. Of course everything suited her, for she was tall, slim and incredibly graceful, and no blush rose could have competed with her complexion.

There was also something of a lily about her ; her purity was absolute ; one could never take one's eyes off her, and when parting from her in the evening one longed for the hour when one would behold her again next day.

The Russian court dress was exceedingly picturesque, and was donned for all bigger occasions. It consisted of amply cut velvet robes over a *tablier* of white satin ; the shape, with its train, and wide, long-hanging sleeves, had something mediæval about it. These robes were heavily embroidered in silver or gold and were of every colour of the rainbow ; the richest of all were of cloth of gold or silver.

A halo-shaped *cacosbnic* with a veil hanging from beneath it inevitably accompanied this costume, so that every woman appeared to have been crowned. This unity of attire made all Russian court gatherings uniquely picturesque, saturating them with colour and brilliance unlike anything else ; veritable pictures out of the "Thousand and One Nights," Byzantine in splendour, with all the mysterious gorgeousness of the East. In those days the processional entry of the Russian Imperial family into festive hall or saint-haunted church was a picture once seen never to be forgotten.

Aunt Ella on these occasions was so fairy-like an apparition that I would like to dip my pen in colour so as to be able to make her live again, if only for a moment, because eyes that have never beheld her will never be able to conceive what she was then.

Here she comes ! With that divine smile curving her perfect lips, with a blush on her cheeks only comparable to almond blossom and an almost bashful look in her long-shaped, sky-pure eyes. She is holding in her hand a few sprigs of lily-of-the-valley, her favourite flower ; her gown, heavily embroidered in silver, is a colour which is neither blue nor green, the colour of glaciers or of aquamarines.

Her *cacosbnic* of emeralds and diamonds is truly a halo to her angelic face, and the gorgeous gems covering arms

and throat have, when she wears them, the aspect of gifts piously offered to some beloved saint.

Tall, slim, graceful and infinitely gracious, a vision, a joy for the eyes, for the soul, for the heart. Yes, a vision! One feels like kneeling down when she passes in the hope of being able to touch, if only for a second, the hem of her gown.

Aunt Ella! Beautiful, beautiful woman, may something of that love I felt for you reach you in that far country where you lie in a martyr's tomb.

You are now at rest in the Holy Land, victim of a world too dark for your light, but for all that, victorious eternally, for nothing can tarnish your memory. It was only your earthly beauty they were able to do away with, but the memory of your charm, your goodness, your loveliness live with us for ever like a star in the night.

I was but a child when I so worshipped you, but your face was a revelation; the picture I still have of it is one that no ugliness of life can ever efface. Your end was tragic, abominable, not to be thought of, a blot upon the history of humanity, but you did exist *once*, and blood cannot wipe out the vision of you passing before me like a blessed apparition in your gown the colour of glaciers, colour of aquamarine. . . .

Family gatherings, parades, banquets, church ceremonies, these are the pictures of festive Russia that, when I look back, flicker before my astonished, child's eye.

Great fields with troops standing in endless rows, flags flying, music, trumpets, and the Tsar riding slowly down the front. He says some magic word to each regiment as he passes and, as response, a thousand, thousand voices mount towards the heavens with a shout of joy.

Behind him come innumerable Grand Dukes, generals, military followers. Uniforms of every colour, and especially conspicuous, the bright red, caftan-like coats, silver braiding and enormous fur caps of the Cossacks of the Guard; a wonderful regiment mounted on small, dishevelled, wild-looking horses whose heads are held curiously high by their riders seated on their saddles as if on thrones. They

are certainly by far the most picturesque of all the troops, and have about them an air of the steppes. There is something fierce and at the same time curiously gentlemanly about them, well in keeping with legends of waste lands and rocky mountains at the end of the world.

Closely following the Emperor and his suite comes the Empress in an open carriage drawn by four horses *à la Daumont*. All in white, she smiles graciously in response to her share of the cheers. A Grand Duchess or an honoured guest sits beside her. I have seen two Empresses in succession driving thus down the front.

The sun shines golden on the resplendent array, it lights up in my memory a picture of might and splendour, of pomp and power, that has for ever passed away.

And if I close my eyes I can hear the deep and heart-stirring strains of the Russian Anthem swelling towards Heaven like a prodigious hymn. Of all National Anthems the Russian was the most solemn, the most impressive, the most compelling; it made you catch your breath, stirred you to the very foundations of your being; some deep emotion thrilled through you from head to foot.

And here I am in church, a wee bit of a child, staring with wide-open eyes at the fantastic gorgeousness of the sanctuary in which the Imperial family has come to petition or to render thanks unto God.

Gold everywhere, hundreds of lighted tapers, and before me the mysterious threshold over which a woman's foot dare not tread, the Holy of Holies shut off by a rood-screen of gold, shielding from my uninitiated gaze mysteries in which I have no share. I am full of reverence, but feel small, of no consequence, almost an intruder; all the others are at home here, but I am a little stranger, one to whom none of this is familiar. And as though to spread a veil before my eyes, clouds of incense float like a mist between me and all I see.

Whilst I gaze enraptured at all this glory, transported into a world of enchantment, stupendous voices fill the vaulted roof with chants so solemn and so beautiful that they make me tremble with some unknown emotion. There

is especially a bass so powerful, so resonant, that instinctively you hold your breath. Is it possible that human voice can reach such a volume? It is like a deep bell, the church seems too small to contain its vibrations, it is almost as though it would burst its walls to allow the sky to look in!

Furtively I peep around me; what are the others feeling? Those who belong here, those to whom all this fantastic splendour is nothing new? Shyly my eyes search every face. Was there ever a nobler, more imposing company, men more huge, women more beautiful and more gorgeously attired, and where in the whole wide world could one see such jewels?

In the places of honour stand Uncle Sasha and Aunt Minnie—in those days Emperor and Empress. Her golden robe is all covered with silver embroidery, and she is crowned with a tiara of sapphires so large that they resemble enormous eyes; cascades of pearls and diamonds hang round her throat down to her waist. She is the only one amongst the royal ladies whose gown is barred by the blue Order of St. Andrew, whilst all the Grand Duchesses wear the red ribbon of St. Catherine.

Close behind the Empress stands Aunt Miechen. More gorgeous than the sunset is her gold-embroidered orange gown. Each time she moves the pear-shaped pearls of her diadem sway gently backwards and forwards. She is not thin enough for classical lines but she wears her clothes better than any other woman present; her shoulders are superb and as white as cream; there is a smartness about her that no one else can attain. And there beside her stands my mother, curiously at home in that radiant assembly, much more at home than she is in London or Windsor. Her gown is deep gentian blue, trimmed with sable, and the rubies she wears are like enormous drops of blood.

Aunt Ella the angelic is clothed in "old pink" and silver and her perfect face is crowned with diamonds like flashing rays of light.

There are also many more aunts and cousins, some old, some young, also some little girls and boys of my age, but their faces are less clear than those of their elders.



ZINA, DUCHESS OF LEUCHTENBERG, PRINCESSE DE BEAUHARNAIS.

Amongst the several ancients, Aunt Sani, a chip of the old block, stands like a proud pillar of the past generation. Mother of Olga, Queen of Greece, she is a magnificent presence. Clothed all in silver, as upright as a tree, she is tall and imposing; age has not bent her shoulders, nor bowed her head. The diamonds on her white hair are like hoar-frost on snow. She wears more pearls than anyone present; they fall in thick cascades over the red ribbon of her order, she is quite aware of what suits her, is indeed a proud old ancestor amongst those so much younger.

And what an array of uniforms! How tall are all my uncles and cousins! I am almost afraid to look up at them, but how superbly handsome some of them are! There are, it must also be confessed, one or two really ugly old uncles amongst them, but they are outnumbered by the others, are but shadows heightening their brilliance. My eyes drop them immediately to take possession once again of those who fascinate me like so many figures in an incredible dream.

How intent they all are, how full of worship, how reverent! God for them is a reality; however crowned their heads may be they bow them humbly before a Presence recognized as greater than theirs.

The curtains are drawn back from before the altar doors, priests old and young file down the steps. Dark, fair or grey, their hair is long and extraordinarily glossy as are also their beards. They are as gorgeous as the rest of the picture, their vestments are of gold and silver, superbly woven with ancient designs, the jewelled crosses on their breasts flash like living lights, and their faces strangely resemble the icons before which they bend—St. Nicholas, St. Andrew, St. John. . . .

The church is full of the fumes of incense, and I am getting a little giddy; unaccustomed to stand so long, my feet begin to ache. I catch Mamma's eye, she smiles at me encouragingly, but puts a finger to her lips: "Patience," she seems to say. Little Protestant that I am, I must not disgrace her; then, turning again towards the priests, as one enraptured by some great revelation, fervently she makes the sign of the Cross.

Mamma is at home here; Mamma belongs to them; her soul is theirs, Mamma is part of Russia—Mamma . . .

And one summer's night, a dream passed before my eyes; so wonderful was its beauty that, in writing it down, I have almost the feeling that I am inventing one of my own fairy-stories.

It is the Empress's Name's Day. Name days play (or must I say played?) a great part in Russia.

Like Mamma and myself, Aunt Minnie's real name is Marie; that is to say, she was given that name when she became Orthodox. Originally as Princess of Denmark she was christened Dagmar in the Protestant Church.

The day of St. Mary Magdalen, our patron saint, luckily falls in the middle of summer, so great outdoor festivities could take place.

The morning would begin with one of those big church ceremonies I have just described; then, if I remember rightly, there was a parade, and in the evening the lakes and fountains of Peterhof would be lit up and a ballet arranged on one of the islands. This, anyhow, was the programme of that *jour de fête* I remember so many years ago.

What adds to the haziness of my memories is the fact that the evening festivity took place at an hour when we were generally in bed, so to my astonished eyes it was in every way a magic scene, a night that had nothing to do with everyday realities.

The Imperial family did not inhabit the big palace at Peterhof, but smaller houses they had had built for themselves, the chief being called "The Farm."

The big palace of Peterhof is a magnificent building of the time of Catherine the Great, its chief beauty being its gardens and fountains which descend in broad terraces to the water's edge in the style of Versailles.

The palace faces the broad lake, which is in reality an arm of the Baltic Sea.

On this memorable night the fountains were illuminated with different colours. The gold and the ruby-red were an especially fantastic sight, but the climax of the evening was to be the ballet on one of the islands.



"AUNT ELLA THE BEAUTIFUL"; GRAND DUCHESS SERGE OF RUSSIA.

I remember that embarking for the enchanted isle ; verily it was as though we were embarking for the Isle of Cytherea, the classical isle of love. The night was still and clear, almost light in fact, as are those northern nights at mid-summer.

Smooth as a giant mirror reflecting the lights of the fountains as well as the shadows of the boats moving over its surface, the great lake was a sea of mystery. It was like setting out upon the wings of fantasy ; a grey, sweet dream in which all voices and faces are unreal but friendly—happy faces, faces of goodwill, and voices that could pronounce kind words only, or sing songs of love.

Splash, splash, the soft sound of oars alone broke the silence. Seated side by side we children held our breath so as not to awake out of the ecstasy that held us enthralled. We wished it would go on for ever and ever.

But finally the enchanted isle was reached, an oasis of trees, and against this lovely green background a fairy masque, light, exquisite, ephemeral ; dancers floating in and out, elves, fairies, nymphs. Colours deliciously blended, rhythmical movements to the strains of meltingly sweet dance music. Shadow shapes, ethereal, immaterial, naiads, will-o'-the-wisps, dream figures, bodiless, soulless . . . illusions of the brain.

Did I really see it all or did I not ? So vaporous is the memory that it might have all been illusionary, but no, no, it was real ! This also was part of Russia, of the Russia that was, of the fantastic, gorgeous Russia, almost Asiatic in splendour, a pageant of might and power. An illusion, a house of cards, a thing that was, a thing that crumbled, a thing that is no more.

But now for a change, the picture of a more substantial figure, one that has nothing to do with dream shapes, naiads or will-o'-the-wisps, but the picture of Countess Alexandrine Tolstoy, Mamma's old governess, one of the bogies of our youth.

A mighty old lady was Alexandrine Tolstoy. She had been mighty in my mother's youth and was still so in our time. Her physical peculiarity was a series of double chins

which had become, with age, flabby and limp like emptied leather sacks. Her face was large, but her nose with its wide open nostrils was somehow too small for it. Owing to some accident she had lost the middle finger of her left hand. This had given her a nervous tic and she kept rubbing the points of her two other fingers together over the stump of the missing digit, and then she would pass them along the side of her cheek and nose as though scaring away a fly. This nervous movement was repeated indefinitely.

“Old Countess,” as we called her, had been a tremendous authority in Mamma’s young life and remained so even after she was grown up and had become mother of a family. She continued playing the autocrat also with the younger generation. Her potent personality pervaded the house when she came to visit her former pupil, and we children were eternally being put through our paces for her approval, or perhaps, more correctly, for her disapproval, because the grand old teacher was indeed difficult to please. She was in a great part responsible for that uneasy feeling Mamma was never able to shake off all through life, that feeling I have spoken of before, of never having attained the degree of excellence others had expected of her.

When being severe with us young ones, sounding the degree of our ignorance or spotting any lapse in *our* education, she was in reality still continuing *Mamma’s* education, still keeping a heavy hand over her former pupil, prolonging that atmosphere of pained reproof over the Grand Duchess’s imperfections. Her appearance in our midst, in Russia or elsewhere, was as a trumpet call to order. During her “occupation” of the house (for no other word rightly expresses her attitude), everybody would be on their mettle, no lukewarmness was tolerated or even possible. Whilst she was there she used, so to say, to make you sit up, be on parade, at your Sunday best; no shilly-shallying when old Alexandrine Tolstoy was anywhere near.

But I believe that although in awe of her, Mamma loved her old governess very dearly; she was a strong link with the past, with the beloved home of yore. She too was a “chip of the old block,” a remnant of the good old days;

a veteran of the Old Guard. Inflexible, not to be mitigated, no half-perfections ever sufficed *her*. Her standards were high, Imperial standards, nor to please anybody would she budge an inch from any attitude she adopted.

Perfection was only that which *she* decreed as such; she overruled every argument, no other voice had any weight when she spoke. Enthroned on the best arm-chair in Mamma's drawing-room, dealing out wisdom to old and young, there was about her something of the Pope.

Always dressed in black, with a bow tied under her chins, so as to conceal their too great volume, she smoked innumerable cigarettes, whilst the fingers of her left hand kept twitching in the way I have described. She was also inordinately fond of her food, she too must certainly have had a "Russian digestion," and the cook, like all other inmates of the house, was kept at his highest level during her stay.

I think she had a heart of gold; she loved us dearly and I can still well recall the sensation of being buried, so to say, in her ample chins, whilst she clasped us in a grandmotherly embrace to her bosom.

Like most children we loved butterfly-hunting, and I remember her indignation when she saw us impaling our newly captured victims on the crown of our stiff straw hats. She declared that they were still alive, that she could see them turn round and round on their pins. She called us barbarians, which, if her accusation was true, we certainly were.

Old Countess Tolstoy lived to a very old age, which was just the sort of thing that she would do!

I shall return to Russia again later, once while still under the reign of Alexander III, and then to the court of Nicolas II, but to-day, so as to proceed with a certain amount of order, and according to the years, I must move on to Malta, the Paradise of our childhood.

Chapter V

MALTA

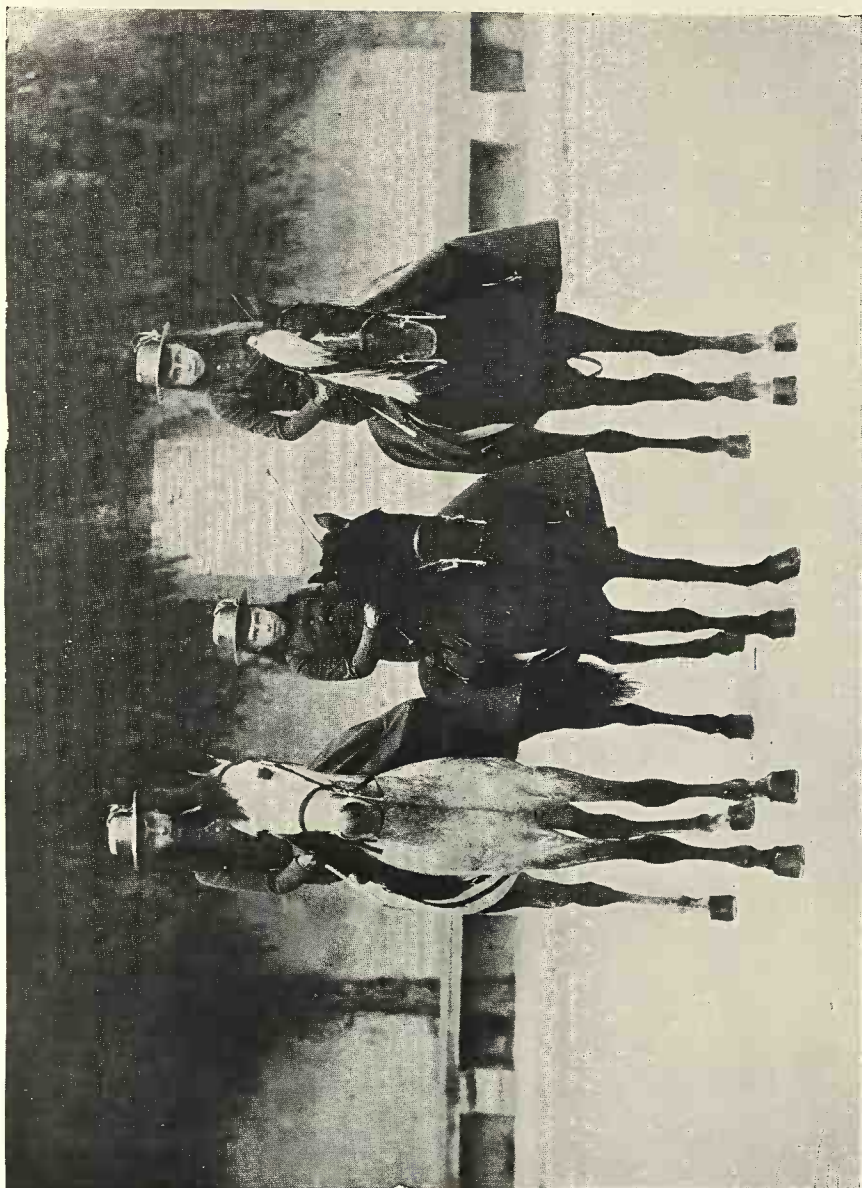
WE embarked for Malta from Marseilles in October 1886. Grandmamma Queen had lent us for that voyage her yacht, H.M.S. *Osborne*, a beautiful boat, but not particularly steady in a heavy sea, and we had rough weather all the time, a three or four days' crossing, if I remember rightly, but what I remember distinctly is that nearly everybody was very sick!

Mamma, although she disliked the sea, was an excellent sailor. In those days I was sometimes very sick, but never prostrate; there were hours between the outbursts when I was perfectly well and happy. Ducky, my inseparable comrade, was, on the contrary, a hopeless sailor, whilst little Sandra was chirpy enough.

I do not remember much about sister Beatrice in those days, for she was the baby, and had a department all her own. To her three sisters, though she is now a mother of three big boys, she is "Baby" even to-day, and it is thus that we still call her.

My birthday was celebrated on the *Osborne*, the 29th of October, our arrival being fixed for next day. I was very proud to have a birthday on the sea, and without mishaps was able to get through a tea offered to me by the officers on that occasion. Otherwise I do not remember any special incident during that crossing, except the excitement of the waves washing over the decks. Curiously enough I cannot even remember who was in command of the yacht in those days. But what I *do* remember as though it were yesterday is our arrival at Malta. It is one of those pictures impressed upon my mind for all time—a wonderful picture, unforgettable, to be cherished to the end of my days.

It was at the hour of sunset that we steamed into the



WE THREE SISTERS ON HORSEBACK AT MALTA.

beautiful old fortified harbour of Valletta. A gorgeous pageant spread before our eyes. As background the mighty battlements partly hewn out of the rock itself, and at their feet the whole Mediterranean Fleet in festive array. In those days ships still had masts, which added to their beauty of line, and on the yards, one above the other, stood the blue-jackets in long lines, cheering for all they were worth. All the bunting was out and as the *Osborne* advanced slowly down the double row of battleships, each separate band struck up "God Save the Queen."

The sky was burning red, as if on fire, and the water caught up its reflection as did the rocks on the harbour. Earth, heavens and sea were ablaze, a stupendous illumination Nature had arranged for this festive occasion, the arrival of four little girls with their mother at the enchanted island of Malta, where for three blessed years incredible days of delight were to be lived.

Sky and sea a glory of colour, the earth all aglow, music, flags, cheering and, when anchorage was reached, Papa waiting for us, Papa at the height of his career, at the height also of his good looks. Papa with his deeply tanned face in which his eyes shone extraordinarily, fascinatingly blue. A sailor in every sense of the word, a sailor, an Englishman, a prince!

On the quay, surrounded by his military household, flanked by a red-coated guard of honour, stood old Sir Lintorn Simmons, Governor of Malta, Viceroy of the island, sovereign in Her Majesty's stead.

Old Sir Lintorn was the typical Englishman dear to foreign imagination; red-faced, portly, with white whiskers, strapped into a tight scarlet uniform, crowned with cocked hat and white feathers, a cheerful, hearty gentleman with an optimistic outlook upon life.

A rapidly descending dusk had wiped the orange radiance out of sky, earth and sea, and it was in the gathering shadows of evening that, in solemn procession, we drove through the soldier-lined streets of Valletta. Up the winding fortified road leading from the harbour to the inner town, passing over the drawbridges, under the mighty porticoes, and then finally along Strada Reale, the capital's chief street.

Then out again on the other side, over more drawbridges, under a second lot of porticoes—for Valletta is a fortified town—with cheering crowds all along the way, the balconies full of people, but night coming on so that everything was getting dim.

It was quite dark by the time we reached San Antonio, the Governor's summer palace which had been given over to us during our stay.

San Antonio, beloved house !

Oh, the incredible joy of awaking next morning in a new world ! Everything had been dream-like and indistinct the evening before, the long road from the town to the country house, the drive along the final avenue, the entry into the large walled-in court-yard, the stopping at the front door, the broad stairs, the huge stone-paved rooms. Night had been spread over all those first impressions, and added to that, the fatigue of the long journey, the excitement of the glorious reception. All the floors heaved under our feet ; after those several days of rough sea we still seemed to be pacing decks that went up and down. Our heads were giddy, our eyes stiff from want of sleep.

But next day a veritable revelation, an awakening into a magic world. There was enchantment in all things. It was our first contact with the South, almost the East in fact, because Malta resembles the Holy Land more than anything else.

Our bedroom opened out on to a wee stone flight of stairs leading into the garden. Half-way down those stairs was a little flat roof on to which you could step. The first look down from that roof into the San Antonio gardens belongs to the "ecstasies" I can never forget.

A walled-in oasis, Eastern and secret-looking, a maze of trees, mostly of kinds quite unknown to me, and, running through it all, a criss-cross of glazed paths. Beyond the encircling walls, more trees, a world still to be discovered.

Here there were no tidy beds as in the gardens I had been accustomed to, but large pieces of ground divided only by paths, and in these, everything grew higgledy-

piggledy, a lovely mass of colour saturating the whole place with exquisite fragrance. Over this medley of flowers hovered a thousand bees and butterflies, and there was a faint buzz in an air which seemed alive with a million wings.

There was jasmine, large-flowered and sweet-scented, and tree-high geraniums, verbena, roses and large clumps of feathery white chrysanthemums, tumbling in snowy cascades right over the paths, strewing them with a thousand petals; there were violets, narcissi, anemones, besides every sort of flower unknown to northern climes.

An enchanted world indeed. . . . Fairyland!

Hand in hand Ducky and I stood looking down upon all this, amazed, speechless. It was a revelation, its perfect beauty actually made tears of emotion well up in our eyes.

Slowly, almost reverently, we descended into this paradise, taking possession of it by small degrees, wandering through its beauty as in a dream.

Oranges, yes, actually oranges! Not yet quite ripe, but there they hung under the shadow of their thick shiny leaves, small, round balls of future sweetness.

We discovered that it was a quite modest-looking white flower which saturated the whole air with such exquisite fragrance, there were bushes of it everywhere. I believe it is called mock-orange. And growing up against the high walls, whole quantities of magenta-coloured bougainvillæa, a stupendous sheet of colour, and quantities of roses; large, pale yellow, and many-leaved, they seemed to be laughing down upon us, aware that they were safe from our plundering hands.

Oh, the sweetness, the beauty, the enchantment! And still all those gardens beyond, beckoning to you from behind high walls. Stepping through small openings from one to another, you advanced into joy, and everywhere flowers, fragrance, sunshine, and the buzzing of a myriad wings. Unknown worlds to be discovered. Mystery. Shady groves and little canals of water running beneath dark evergreen branches, and what violets! Light blue double ones, larger than any we had ever seen, and others deeply purple, half

hidden amongst their fragrant leaves. Oh, the joy, the joy, the joy!

Beyond the gardens was the large court-yard which we had dimly perceived last night on arriving. Pepper trees, somewhat resembling thin-leaved willows, grew against its exceedingly high walls, which on two sides had a promenade along the top. One of these separated the court-yard from the public gardens, which were large and beautiful and open to anyone who wanted to saunter through their shade.

Opposite that wall were the stables, a department which played a great part in our lives, for we were ardent horse-lovers and passionate riders, now entirely released from old Lumley's tutelage. Skitty and his glossy companions had already been installed before our arrival, also Tommy, who was now entirely Sandra's horse.

Another high wall, pierced by two wide arches, divided the big court from a smaller one before the front door. Here too there were those silvery pepper trees with their loose grapes of pale pink fruit, hanging in long clusters that each breath of wind tossed to and fro.

Everything was a surprise, a revelation. The house itself was enormous with spacious, stone-flagged rooms without end, and long covered galleries running out into promenades upon the top of the high walls, which separated the gardens from each other. The architecture was fascinating, well adapted to a hot climate, and we were always discovering new possibilities. The roofs, being flat and on several levels, were also an exciting ground for discovery, as you could walk all over them, climbing up and down and peeping into the different gardens beneath, having a bird's-eye view of San Antonio's topography. This was indeed a world all to itself, intricate, exciting, an endless source of interest.

Mamma's private boudoir was a long, deliciously cool room with a little stairway leading into one of the gardens, the smallest and the most shady of them all. A glazed path ran right through its centre and at the farther end was a tree unlike any I have ever seen since. It was a thick-set, wide-spreading tree, something the shape of an

oak, and its flowers bloomed an ardent orange before its leaves were green. These flame flowers were large and somewhat the shape of a giant salvia flower. When in full bloom it really seemed to be on fire, a beautiful sight! It had also this peculiarity, that when you shook its branches honey poured down upon you in showers.

In this garden Mamma had allowed the gardener to build a miniature grotto for each of us, in a sponge-like stone peculiar to the island. The Maltese had a special art of building these queer little grottoes which had somewhat the shape of an old-fashioned bee-hive, but more squat, and open in front. There was something indescribable about these ridiculous little grottoes, we considered them veritable works of art; besides, they were halls of shady mystery. According to our idea, we added to the mystery by placing a little earthenware dish of water in the centre of each. These represented enchanted pools and we had wee gold-fish, the smallest that could be found, swimming about in these dishes.

My favourite fish, which was absurdly tiny and spotted red and black, I had pompously called Mephisto. Mephisto was a great pet and I loved him with a sort of ecstasy, weaving all sorts of stories around his frail existence. For a day or so Mephisto was happy enough in his little dish, but then he took to standing on his head, nose pointed downwards. And thus would he remain with disconcerting persistency, having quite given up swimming about, till one morning I found him dead!

Poor little Mephisto, black and red and so short-lived. Child-like I managed to make quite a tragedy out of his untimely demise, for is not the death of a pet each time a deep tragedy to a child? How many of these tragedies have there not been all through my life? And nevertheless each new pet was received with the same enthusiasm and the same hope of eternity!

Thus did each of the San Antonio gardens have its special significance, its special charm, its special story, and there were five of them, without counting the public and the kitchen garden.

When I returned to Malta about forty years later, the

son of the old gardener of yore showed me with great pride the Russian violets H.I.H. the Duchess of Edinburgh had planted during our stay at San Antonio the beloved.

My father and mother were very popular at Malta and San Antonio became the centre of hospitality.

Many guests went in and out of our house and we received a giant share of their attention. We made innumerable friends, mostly among the naval officers; the Fleet was, so to say, at our disposal, and we were continually visiting one ship or another, H.M.S. *Alexandra*, Papa's flagship, being our great favourite, her midshipmen becoming our particular chums.

But it was especially our rides and riding-parties that played the biggest part in our lives.

Mamma knew how to be severe and there was no pardon for certain misdeeds, but she also knew how to give us splendid liberty for harmless amusements.

She had resigned herself to what she called "our insane passion" for riding and each of us was allowed a horse.

Horses were all important in Malta, for this was, of course, long, long before the days of motoring, and nearly everybody in Malta possessed a horse. There was polo, and racing, and innumerable riding picnics to far parts of the island.

The horse peculiar to Malta was the Barbary Arab. You often saw real beauties harnessed to the simplest carts, spirited, blue-blooded little creatures. The characteristic Maltese vehicle is a small, flat, two-wheeled carriage, with a mattress or carpet spread over it and no seats; the wheels are very high and the driver either sits or lies on this mattress, unless he is seated on the shafts when his cart is full. They drive at a great pace and take enormous pride in their horses and even in their harness.

The more civilized carriages were four-wheeled and four-seated and shaded by a white, fringed awning which shook backwards over your head according to the bumps of the road. These are drawn by a pair, whilst the go-cart is a one-horse vehicle.

The large carts, which are also two-wheeled, are painted

bright scarlet with gay patterns all over them, and are exceedingly picturesque and colourful. Enormous mules are harnessed to these; the Maltese mules are the largest I have ever seen anywhere and are placid, patient, unemotional creatures, whilst the horses are small and fiery.

Mamma gave one of these Barbary Arabs to each of us elder sisters, whilst Sandra remained sole possessor of trustworthy Tommy, who exactly suited her size and temperament.

The first horses found for us were not a success, for they were tricky or unreliable or had other defects. One was a grey called Gordon who had a nasty way of trying to crush your legs against the high stone walls that border every Maltese road. There is no road in Malta that is not bordered by walls.

We were of course in ecstasies over each horse brought to us, but after having had a few failures, Robert the coachman found an adorable, high-spirited chestnut which became my own special mount. His mane and tail were cream-coloured, he had a wicked eye and his legs, though spindle-like, were hard as iron. He could be something of a beast, being a stallion, but I loved him with a jealous passion and called him Ruby.

Life at Malta was marvellous, but Malta with Ruby *en plus* became Paradise; Ruby was the culminating enchantment of that blessed isle.

Ducky, after having first possessed a grey called Stuart, and a lovely but unsound golden chestnut called Scout, was given a handsome bay which she christened Fearless. Ruby and Fearless became the centre of our lives, and our love for them was ecstasy to ourselves, but often an irritation to those who considered our passion exaggerated. It was difficult to keep us out of the stables and we were often found elbow deep in bran mash, helping the stable people mix this delicious mess for our favourites. The groom, who accompanied us on all our adventures, had the cheerful name of Hobbs, which was entirely in keeping with his round, rosy face. Hobbs was always smiling, he never discouraged us and was never indignant at our pranks.

Our ideas about riding were anything but civilized. We

were entirely fearless and our chief pace was full gallop, quite regardless of the ground. The only soft ground in Malta was the race-course called the Massa, where we went almost daily except Saturdays, which were picnic days.

These wiry little Arabs had legs of steel, and I never remember Ruby having had anything the matter with him except once when I rode him through a pool of lime, entirely unconscious of the hellish qualities of that deliciously white mud.

We had, alas! a predilection for mud in those days. It seldom rained at Malta, but when it did it was in deluges and the Massa turned into a lake of mire. I am sorry to say that this was the moment when we liked it best. Truly horrible riding-competitions were then organized on the race-course with our young midshipmen friends, not excluding a few more advanced in rank but foolish enough to enjoy our mad pranks, in which Hobbs the cheerful also took part. The object was to tear madly through the muddy pools, seeing who could splash the other most. The result may easily be imagined! We were one and all unrecognizable after one turn! Luckily, as before mentioned, it rained very rarely in Malta.

We were wild girls, but entirely harmless; our amusements were most innocent even if they occasionally included mud, and Mamma was wise in that she let us, within certain limits, of course, enjoy ourselves as we would. There was a glorious and blessed freedom about that Malta life, a freedom which had to do with the sunshine and the general good-humour of the people, young and happy, and who had no *Hintergedanken*.

But one can never remain quite undisturbed even in Paradise, and soon a voice was raised in protest against the too great freedom our mother allowed us. How could we be permitted to ride alone on the race-course in the company of a dozen young men? This voice was that of an elder lady of the family, one who, alas! "saw through a glass darkly"—and who, not being harmless herself, was unable to recognize harmlessness in others, nor did she care what heartburn she caused.

Mamma disagreed with her point of view, but her voice



PAPA IN HIS OLD RUSSIAN COSTUME.

was too loud to be ignored and Mamma felt obliged henceforth to send her daughters out in the company of their governess. This was a dreary arrangement for both parties. Mademoiselle could not ride (that at least was a mercy) and the Massa was both shadeless and hot. Nevertheless she had to inflict her unwelcome company upon us, bumping backwards and forwards after us to the Massa in a local carriage, and installing herself as best she could under a red cotton parasol somewhere, whence she could oversee our movements if not the expression of our faces or our conversation.

I cannot say that these interested her overmuch; hunched up under her scarlet protection which, we declared, made our horses shy, she would soon be deeply absorbed in her book, becoming oblivious of all else. We only regretted that she sat too far away for us to be able to splash the offending parasol as we galloped past! But it was against the lady from England that we most greatly raged, against that voice so jarringly raised in our Garden of Eden. It was an attitude worthy of old Alexandrine Tolstoy herself.

As may have been observed, our lessons did not weigh heavily in the plan of our lives, though there were certain hours of study which, according to us, disagreeably interrupted our freedom.

The first year it was Mademoiselle who was the schoolroom Cerberus, who had to see to this less pleasant side of life. She herself gave us lessons, but the second year, owing to ill-health, and a want of loyalty towards our mother, she was replaced by a German lady, much younger and of good family, seemingly very charming, but who later played a none too happy part in our lives. She, alas! became *too* great a favourite with Mamma who, in this case, unfortunately misplaced her trust.

But there was a glorious interregnum when the old authority was at an end and the new one was not yet installed, and this was a period of bliss which Ducky and I arranged entirely to our convenience.

One delightful figure of those schoolroom days must be mentioned: our music-mistress, Miss Butler, who came three times a week to give us lessons.

Miss Butler, though of English origin as her name proves, had with the years almost become a Maltese, and her dress was in accordance with a very southern conception of elegance. Bright colours and plumes played a great part in her attire. She was portly and indulgent and her very much "be-bustled" Sunday best was a mustard-tinted plush with pink ostrich feathers, and as there was a good deal of her, this attire was startling, to say the least. She was also a good Catholic, which was disagreeably evident on Fridays because of the atmosphere of garlic emanating from her whole person.

Garlic was, in fact, the only shady side of Malta the beloved, and a Maltese crowd nearly asphyxiated you with its fumes.

Miss Butler was too indulgent and too fond of us to be an efficient instructor to a trio of unruly children not overblessed with musical aptitude. Like a dear old lady called Mrs. Duget who came to Birkhall in Scotland to give us music lessons, I think her efforts were crowned with no particularly artistic results, but we kept in touch with both till we were all three married and mothers of a family.

I have no remembrance of anyone controlling the progress we made, so we limped through these lessons in the official drawing-room—whose wide glass door opened out upon gardens that were calling us all the time.

Dear old Miss Butler, she was a real friend even if she did not make a Paderewski or Rubinstein out of any of us!

Ducky and I, the two strong-minded elders, entirely overruled sister Sandra, who was seldom allowed a say in any matter, and we so arranged our studies that she was installed at her music during the hours when we two particularly desired to be free. Happy-go-lucky days when the Malta sunshine made all mankind indulgent and we were able, during a blessed interregnum, to arrange our lessons to suit our desires.

The lady from England alone struck her discordant note, but it was not strong nor important enough to mar the household's harmony.

Mademoiselle was *frileuse*, as she herself expressed it, and this was one of her chief disagreements with Mamma.

Mamma, being plump and warm-blooded, loved fresh air and open windows, whilst Mademoiselle was skinny, bloodless and always shivering.

Papa belonged to the period when the English and the French had not yet made the Entente Cordiale, and he thoroughly objected to poor Mademoiselle who, it must be said, had little with which to charm the stronger sex.

An amusing little incident can be fitted in here.

The Governor, Sir Lintorn Simmons, was giving a costume ball at the Governor's Palace of Valletta. There was great excitement all over the island, everybody was going to the Governor's ball, even Mademoiselle was invited.

"Mademoiselle, quelle costume mettez-vous?"

"Ah, mes enfants, c'est un grand secret!"

"Oh, Mademoiselle, dites, dites!"

"Non, non, mes enfants, ce sera une surprise, une belle surprise. Je puis seulement vous dire que je serai une dame très importante."

And therewith we had to rest content, though there was much speculation as to what sort of costume would suit gaunt Mademoiselle.

The great evening came at last and we children gathered together in the hall with gaping and excited servants peeping through every available door to catch sight of the costumes.

Papa was resplendent in an old Russian costume he had once worn at St. Petersburg. Sapphire blue, trimmed with Mamma's darkest sable, with cap to match, he had a double-headed golden eagle embroidered on his breast. Even his gauntlet gloves were richly embroidered with gold and he wore a jewelled belt.

Mamma, who never liked dressing up, was *simplement poudrée*, but her great friend, Lady Mary Fitzwilliam, an attractive Irishwoman whose hair was already prematurely grey and who wore it short in days when this was most unusual, appeared in a crinolined, dove-coloured taffeta Louis XVI dress, deliciously in keeping with her type.

But Mademoiselle, where was she?

Ah, here she comes!

Oh, goodness! Imagine bony, gaunt, bespectacled Mademoiselle in a skimpy little frock showing much too

much of her skinny legs, a frock striped red, white and blue, representing the French flag and, of all things, the "Phrygian bonnet" on her head!

It was a ghastly moment, no one knew what to say.

Papa frowned, his displeasure was evident, one could actually see the thoughts passing through his mind, for Papa roused was never able to contain his ire or mask his displeasure.

Mademoiselle, become suddenly skittish, perhaps because of her unusually short skirts, whisked about showing herself off:

"Mais, Mademoiselle, vous avez dit que vous seriez une dame très importante!"—we were aghast.

"Eh bien, mes enfants, je suis le drapeau français, je suis la France! en bas les chapeaux!"

Papa's frowns were becoming thunder-clouds, but Mamma, tickled by the humour of the situation, cleared the atmosphere by complimenting Mademoiselle upon the originality of her idea, "si nouvelle, si symbolique, si patriotique," and bundling Papa off before the storm could burst, we were left alone to express our disappointment. What a sell! An important lady indeed! We had had visions of Mary Queen of Scots, of Boadicea, Cleopatra, la Reine Isabeau, Charlotte Corday, the Queen of Hearts and what not, but *le drapeau français*.

What a come-down! And how thin her legs were and her "specs" under that absurd, unbecoming cap! Really it did not suit her at all. Thoroughly disgusted, we were finally driven off to our beds.

Just now, in describing the different costumes, I mentioned Lady Mary Fitzwilliam. She was my mother's dearest friend and remained so to the end of her life, being one of the few who outlived Mamma.

She was an Irishwoman of the Butler family and had all the wit and vivacity of her race, also something of their instinctive antagonism to all things too truly British. Without being a beauty she was full of charm, very clever, a delightful companion, amusing, gay, well-read, and for ever on the go, although her health was poor. Men were attracted

by her, and she had always an adorer or two sighing at her heels: they were generally the men we children did not care about—the intellectuals, *les beaux parleurs*, *les grands mondains*, those who had in them a touch of cynicism in their make-up. She dressed in an original way, harmoniously in keeping with her “marquise” type. Her short grey hair was her outstanding originality. Mamma often used her as lady-in-waiting, though she never officially occupied that position.

Mademoiselle detested Lady Mary, declaring that she had a too great influence over our mother and not a good one at that. She loathed her success, her affectations, her originalities, and these were always expounded to us in the school-room in a way which was not at all in keeping with the Christian principles she endeavoured to instil into us. She had, in fact, an ugly way of poisoning our minds against Mamma’s great friend, making her appear in our eyes as a grasping woman sponging upon our mother’s bounties and misusing her kindness. I am certain that this was a most unfair appreciation of the vivacious, entertaining lady, but she managed to sow a seed of mistrust in our hearts.

Lady Mary had a worthy but dull and rather deaf husband who was generally left at home, and three sweet little daughters; Mab, Elsie and Ena, one for each of us sisters, and almost exactly our age.

Mab was a real beauty. Elsie was thin and lanky with over-large, very dark eyes. Ena was a chubby infant, fair, blue-eyed and slow. Lady Mary and her three daughters had the peculiarity of not being able to pronounce an “r” which was replaced by a “v” or “w.” Everything was “vevy nice” or “vevy funny” or “vidiculous, weally vevy vidiculous.”

Lady Mary’s daughters were invited to spend a winter with us at San Antonio, and high times we had together!

Our friends were more delicate than we, who were as robust as little savages, but like all English children, they were good sports, and loved out-door exercise and our games together were wild and full of fun.

Ducky and I had a great predilection for climbing trees. No tree was too high, nor too difficult, we scaled them all,

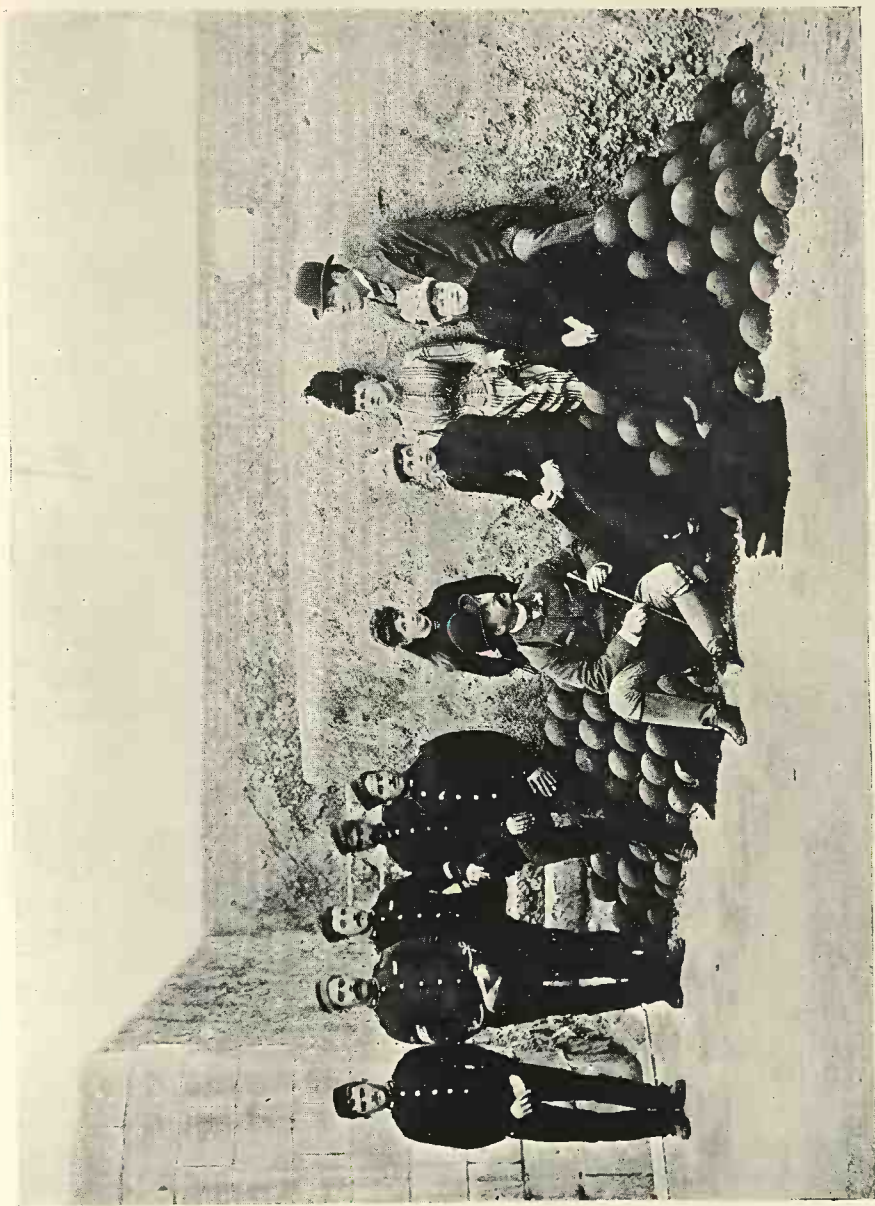
taking possession of their most unreachable branches whence we seemed to dominate the whole world, and to look down upon all common mortals beneath.

We had invented a game which was an endless source of amusement; Mab and Elsie were our monkeys, exotic animals we had acquired at some Eastern market and the climbing-competitions between masters and pets were splendid occasions to measure our skill.

The delight of sitting enthroned upon the very crown of the highest tree, well out of reach and beyond the grip of authority, was indeed a sensation of most regal freedom.

Our monkeys were obedient, which added greatly to that glorious feeling of being masters of the world. We had also made humbler homes out of certain orange trees and here we did our so-called "cooking." Amongst other things we had obtained some old sachets belonging to Mamma. These were emptied into wee earthenware pots, most exquisite little Maltese peasant pots, round, rough and crooked. Mixed with water this sachet powder made a most appetizing paste and the pots were then fixed between convenient branches and the paste left to dry. For some reason it turned a very attractive old mauve colour, but finally, to our great disappointment, became sour and mildewed and would not lend itself to being kept as long as we desired.

There was a funny, flat-roofed little tool-house in that rather remote part of the garden, beside which a giant castor-oil plant grew. We used to take possession of this roof, and the castor-oil seeds, which were snow-white, were the basis of most of our pseudo-feasts. They grew in groups of coral pink husks rather resembling those of sweet chestnuts. The castor-oil plant is most decorative and has large, star-like leaves which are often beautiful and marked with red. These were our plates and our chief guest was an adorable little lizard with broad, tyre-like toes, who would come zigzagging down the hot walls of the tool-house when I whistled him an invitation. I believe that these broad-toed lizards are correctly called geckos. This one was really tame and actually *did* respond to music as his kind are supposed to do. But one day, to my horror, when I was trying to catch my little reptile friend, part of his tail remained between



A PICNIC AT ONE OF THE MALTA FORTS.
MY MOTHER, CAPT. BOURKE, COL. SLADE, MY SISTERS AND I.

my fingers, which also confirms the legend about their tails coming off. But although the little gecko had lost his tail, he continued coming when whistled for and was often a timid witness of our castor-oil feasts.

Blessed days when everything was joy and all things possible, though so strangely full of mystery and undiscovered possibilities !

Saturday was *the* picnic day and great riding-parties were organized to some distant corner of the island. St. Paul's Bay, Verdala, the Inquisitor's Palace and to other places the names of which I have, alas ! forgotten. Mamma would follow in a carriage with one or the other of her friends.

The start for these picnics was exciting to a degree, and full of clatter and noise. Our horses were fresh, prancing, ready to be off, difficult to hold. We, in our fearlessness, which amounted to unconsciousness of any cause for fear, enjoyed their pranks which would have horrified old Lumley and all orthodox riders, and our first gallop, which was always down the walled-in avenue by the court-yard, was a most unruly proceeding. We were more like a troop of swooping Red Indians than civilized little girls. Our horses being stallions were all too ready with their teeth, and would often get a good grip of each other's tails, and thus, one behind the other, we would dash down that hard avenue, shrieking with laughter, our naval friends pounding after us whilst our horses were doing their best to buck us off. Our friends had horses as unruly as ours, although most of them rode with more science and decorum. We never realized that ours was a rather wild way of riding. We just let our spirits get the better of us, our companions encouraging our foolhardiness, but luckily there is a god who looks after the innocent.

Amongst our group of very young naval friends there was a certain Lieutenant Allenby, a round-faced youth, all smiles, good-humour and recklessness. Though his years counted more than ours, he was not a day older than we as to tastes and habits ; there was plenty of health in him, but little wisdom. When Allenby was one of the party it was sure to be a day of adventure, frolic and merrymaking, a

day also of anxiety for the elders. He was allowed "in small doses" only, because our association was not *de tout repos*.

I remember how one day, after a series of more than usually wild pranks, his horse and mine both took their bits between their teeth and ran away, this on the high road, if you please! For awhile we kept alongside of each other, but after a time it was either he or I leading, and each time we came abreast of each other, both would call out: "Can't you stop your horse?" "No, I can't!" and again one or the other would shoot on ahead. It was a perilous and exhausting race, coming to an end only when our horses themselves gave up for want of breath. I cannot say that this experience did not give me a bit of a fright!

We called Allenby "Full Moon" because of the excessive roundness of his cheerful countenance.

Among our special friends there was also Colin Keppel, Cecil Colville, Anson, Streatfield, Eric Back, Rumbold and David Beatty, these last four at that time midshipmen in the *Alexandra*. Beatty was my special friend and was already in those days a splendid rider and good polo-player. He has said since that I brought him luck.

Colin Keppel was our father's flag lieutenant. He was as wax in our hands, but was considered a safe companion and we were mostly entrusted to his care. He was as faithful as a dog and we entirely approved of him. Colville was always full of fun but a little supercilious. The most serious and steady was Anson, too serious in fact, so that he was dubbed "Old Anson" with a touch of pity in the epithet. The rides with "Old Anson" were just the opposite of those taken in Allenby's company and were considered somewhat in the light of correction.

Colin Keppel once had a most uncomfortable ride on a horse from our stables called Zulu, who ran away and did all sorts of other uncomfortable things. Colin lost his hat, and tore his clothes, but took it all in perfect good-humour whilst we little savages considered it roaring fun and laughed till we almost fell off our saddles.

Young Midshipman Rumbold was a good musician, but in those days we were quite unworthy of good music, and I remember how we hooted at him when he proposed to play

classical music to us. No classical music for us! We always insisted on a certain Turkish March that had taken our fancy on account of its cheerfulness. I am afraid that we martyred poor Rumbold with that trashy Turkish March.

Amongst the army officers there was a certain Colonel Slade who was a friend of ours. He was, however, already a more serious acquaintance and was married. He had a beautiful horse called Tulba which we adored, and which he later took with him to England where we saw it again at Hampton Court where the Colonel was then living.

But the greatest of all our friends, so to say our hero, was Maurice Bourke, at that time commander of our father's yacht H.M.S. *Surprise*; Captain Bourke must have a page all to himself!

Captain Bourke! How we loved him! He had every quality needed to make him the ideal of three little girls with high spirits and a desire for hero-worship.

First of all he was Irish in the best sense of the word, dark, with blue eyes, gay, humorous, witty, with a delicious smile over extraordinarily white teeth, a smile that had something delightfully crooked about it and that at the same time seemed to draw his eyebrows right up under his raven-black hair. His hair had a wave in it that any woman might have envied. He was as sunburnt as our father and his eyes just as startlingly blue. Blue eyes in a sailor's sunburnt face have something specially luminous about them, like lakes when the sun shines on them.

A broad-minded, warm-hearted, genial gentleman was Maurice Bourke, with a humorous way of seeing the good in his neighbour and of excusing the bad. Generous, amusing, he allowed each man his due, and knew how to plead for a culprit; besides, who could resist that crooked, white-toothed smile of his?

For us Captain Bourke had extraordinary "prestige," he was able to arouse in us complete and undiscussed allegiance. I for one, to quote a poet's undying words, loved him "with the passion put to use in my old griefs and with my childhood's faith."

We would have gone through fire and water for him.

He could make us listen, obey and submit as no one else could. His word was magic. All revolts could be appeased by Captain Bourke; he could make us yield to any rule, and accept even those things we most violently opposed.

I remember a tragi-comic scene when Captain Bourke was sent to us because we had revolted against our skirts being lengthened! We smelt danger, a trap! We did not want to grow up, life was too exquisite as it was, we feared any change, anything that might curtail our glorious liberty and independence. We had a subconscious knowledge that there could be no going back. Lengthening skirts was a sign of certain restrictions to our wild ways, it had something to do with the clipping of wings and the putting on of chains, and we were prepared to oppose this innovation with all the strength of our wills, which could become steel when rebellion rose within us.

Mamma, who was at her wits' end, sent our beloved "Captain" to bring us to reason. This was indeed a wily move, no deputy could have been better chosen. I cannot remember what argument Maurice Bourke used, or in what way he beguiled us to submission, but he did carry the day and from then onwards we wore our dresses the few inches longer considered in keeping with the growth of our limbs.

Each time there was rebellion in the air, Maurice Bourke was the one deputed to talk reason to us, and such was our love for him that he could obtain from us the most difficult concessions.

Whenever he was away, Captain Bourke would write long and amusing letters which we faithfully answered, and in this way a very regular correspondence was kept up, a correspondence which did not cease till his death many years later, but much too early for those who loved him.

There is a peculiar charm about old letters. They conjure up the past as nothing else; so I think that it would not be amiss here to insert these old missives. Three are from our dear Captain, long, amusing and, I may say, interesting letters in his best chatty style, and one is from my mother.

H.M.S. *Surprise* was the yacht put at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief. My mother often followed the cruises my father made with his fleet. Thus she saw many interest-

ing places. I have chosen a letter in which she describes a visit to Montenegro. She was an excellent letter-writer, and I am sure that this picture of those regions which have now changed hands will be interesting to anyone who reads it. All this, as can be seen by the dates on the letters, was a very long time ago.

TENEDOS.

Monday, September 3rd, 1887.

MY DEAR PRINCESS MARIE,

After all, while I was at Constantinople, I had not time to write to you of all our doings, as, will you believe, we were hardly left alone for five minutes. We got up quite safely in the *Surprise* with a tremendous large party on board, for we not only gave passages to many who wanted to see Constantinople but also a team of cricketers who went up to play the English community.

Directly on arrival we had all the swell Turks alongside to welcome the Duke, and then the Duke, myself, and Keppel and four or five officers, all in full dress, went up to the Yildiz Palace where the Sultan came to the door to receive the Duke and conducted him to a small room where they sat. The Sultan understands French very fairly but will not speak so all is carried on through an interpreter. Most of the Court officials speak French or English so there is not much difficulty. The Sultan presented all the Turkish swells to the Duke and we were all presented to the Sultan who shook hands. That night there was a full-dress dinner and again all the Cabinet Ministers and high Court officials. I sat between a fat Chief of the Police and the Director of Public Instruction. The former could speak nothing but Turkish so he was no good, and the latter spoke English but he smelt so nasty that I was nearly ill. He also had a very unwholesome appearance. However, we managed to get on somehow, I confining myself to the weather and he giving forth odoriferous platitudes. I hope I shan't shock you with this description of my neighbour, but he made a great impression on me.

Well, as we had left the Fleet at three o'clock that morning, and I had been on my legs ever since and it was now 11.30 p.m., I was very glad when the audience after dinner was over and we went to bed. "We" means H.R.H., Mr. Keppel and myself. The Duke had proposed living on board the *Surprise*, but the Sultan would not hear of it, so the Duke kindly took Keppel and myself with him. We lived close to the Palace in a smaller house called the Yildiz Kiosk. It was on the whole very comfortable except that my bed was so short that I had to sleep corner-ways with my head in one corner and my feet at the opposite angle. However, I slept like a top. This was all on Wednesday. On Thursday for our sins we had to do a regatta. In the morning we went to the bazaars but there was no fun poking about because we could not,

for notwithstanding all the Duke's requests, we were followed by two A.D.C.s in full dress, a guard of soldiers and four men with big sticks to belabour the crowd. A crowd you can well imagine, and we were followed *en masse* by Jews, Turks, Heretics, and all sorts, of all ages, sex and sizes. Buying, of course, was hopeless and though I saw nothing worth buying it would have been impossible as the prices of course at once became prohibitive. We had not much time to spare as we had to get on board the Sultan's yacht to go to Prinkipo Islands where this regatta was to take place.

We left at 11.30 and sat down to a very good luncheon. The yacht is a paddle yacht and fitted, I should say, as much or more for appearances than comfort. However, the luncheon was good. We of course could not go ten miles in a Turkish ship without something of a disaster happening, so all at once, when about half-way to our destination, with many grunts, squeaks and bumps the whole show came to a dead stop. It afterwards transpired, when all was put right, that they had forgotten to oil the engines, so naturally the engines got hot and they had to stop. As all regattas are mostly stupid I must include this one amongst the "mostly," except, I think, that I ought to put it in the superlative. For four solid hours were we refreshed by the sight of bobbing and struggling humanity in whose personality we could have no sort of interest. We were landed part of the time where the Duke was pounced upon by a proud regatta committee, and I think even looking at the races was better than having to make conversation with the natives of the islands who were doing the honours. We were regaled with drink and food in one, consisting of pineapple and strawberries in champagne. Very nasty, especially as the pineapple came out of a tin pot and the strawberries were much crushed, and oooh! from having been transported roughly in probably a dirty basket. Well, I must say this does sound a cheerful afternoon's amusement.

Well, the old Turkish yacht took us back and we dined in our own kiosk, and after dinner the Sultan sent to say that in his little bijou theatre, which is joined on to the palace, he expected us to come and see conjuring, if you please. The Sultan was there himself and the little theatre very nice, but conjuring, unless very good, palls rather after two hours. However, the man is the Sultan's own conjurer. He is a Frenchman and I may say I learned more about conjuring in that two hours than I ever did before. We were in a gallery well above him so that it was not quite fair, and I saw nearly everything he did. And so bedtime came round again.

Friday is the Turkish Sunday and so a great day in Constantinople. The Sultan goes to the Mosque in state at noon. This we saw very well. All the troops assembled, lining the roads, and with the great officers of state and distinguished officials marching in front of the Sultan's carriage at a foot pace, he passed by to the Mosque which is close to the palace. As he goes by all the troops present arms and they call out as he passes "Padishah chok yasha," which means "Long live the Sultan." After praying for about half an hour he drove himself

back in a little pony-carriage and sitting in a window of the palace received the salutes of the troops as they marched past. We saw about eight thousand go by and although not smartly dressed they are undoubtedly most workmanlike and with good officers are capable of almost anything. They are much improved, both officers and men, as for some years many German officers have been in the employ of the Sultan and have done much for the improvement of smartness and appearance.

After this the Duke went to the Sultan and presented his congratulations on the anniversary of his accession—twelve years on the throne. Curiously enough it was the anniversary of the Duke being thirty years in the Navy, so mutual congratulations passed and after the Sultan came to myself and Keppel, shook hands and spoke to us, a thing he seldom does. I, through an interpreter, thanked His Majesty for his kindness and hospitality and also congratulated him. He is an insignificant little man, very Jew-like, with a long nose and perfectly hideous. That night we saw some very fine illuminations and dined at the Embassy at Therapia about ten miles up the Bosphorus. An awfully long dinner and a huge reception of all the Constantinople beauty and fashion. Fashion, yes, but very little beauty. Madame Nelidoff, the Russian Ambassador's wife, is a perfect nightmare and is, I think, one of the ugliest women I have ever seen. On Saturday we were to have been treated to a garden party at which the Duke was to do the honours and also another full-dress dinner at the Sultan's palace, but unfortunately for us (not for him, poor chap), one of the first cousins of the Sultan took it into his head to die and so we escaped.

I saw the Treasury, which is a marvellous place and contains some most extraordinary jewels, but like all Turkish things it is very badly arranged and there is so little light it is hard to see anything. I also went to the Dolma Batché palace where there are wonderful rooms. There is one in the centre called the throne room which is quite marvellous. Next week they expect the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Serge and the Grand Duke Paul and they will live in this palace. It is very fine and all the outside of marble.

The cricketers won their match and altogether the cruise was most successful. The Sultan insisted on decorating us all and gave numerous presents, sent tobacco, cigarettes, sheep, bullocks and vegetables for the ship. I was given a beautiful gold and diamond cigarette-case which I will show you when you come.

I am so looking forward to next month when the *Surprise* will again, I hope, be your home for a day or two.

Now good-bye as we are just off to Lemnos and other regions of no letters either out or in. Give my love to the princesses and especially to Princess Sandra for her tenth birthday.

Yours very sincerely,
MAURICE A. BOURKE.

CETTINJE, MONTENEGRO.

October 3rd, 1887.

MY DARLINGS,

Here we are in Montenegro and this curious country is so unlike anything else that I think myself in a dream. But I must tell you what we did after Zara. The night before we left that place, we had a ball at the Governor's. I did not dance, as I knew nobody, but had to talk to some ladies who only spoke Italian. We left after an endless supper and next day started very early for Spalato and separated from the squadron, which came on straight to Cattaro. We had the idea of stopping at another pretty place before Spalato, called Trau, and spent the night at anchor there. We saw a very interesting and fine old church there and a most curious small town. In the evening came a frightful thunderstorm, to which we are getting quite accustomed, though they make a terrific row.

Now Mrs. Monson reads to Captain Bourke and myself when we have free time and he sticks in all the things in the scrap-book of our cruises. It is getting quite interesting and Captain Bourke does it beautifully. Photographs, menus, invitations, newspapers, sketches, all go in and our kind Captain is so pleased to have this occupation in his free hours. He is a wonderfully practical and kind man, thinks of everything and makes our life very comfortable and pleasant. At Spalato we saw the most interesting remains of Diocletian's palace, into the middle of which is built the town. The cathedral is an ancient Roman temple. In the afternoon we went to see the remains of the old town of Salona which are just being excavated, but it began to pour with rain and before we got home we were almost drenched. When we had to cross from the shore to the ship there was such a downpour that we could hardly distinguish the *Surprise* and got on board at last all dripping.

The weather being so bad, we decided to start only next morning. It was blowing hard then, but as we had to travel the whole time between the islands, we did not feel it and anchored again at night in a small bay, to arrive at Cattaro next morning and not in the dark. I got up before six, to be ready before we began to toss about, and we had a few nasty hours before we got in to the wonderful Bay of Cattaro. It is exactly like a big lake surrounded by immense mountains. We took an hour and a half before we reached the end of it where the small town of Cattaro is situated. We found there the whole squadron. Next day, Saturday, we went to a picnic given by the officers of the *Alexandra* on the shores, in a small bay. It was great fun, they had all sorts of games, races, jumping through the water and got all very hot and dirty. Some even played various instruments and were like a lot of children.

Yesterday morning we started from Cattaro at eight and had a magnificent drive of six hours over the mountains. You never saw such a splendid view and such a magnificent road. George¹ went with us and we had besides Mrs. Monson, Captain Bourke and Mr. Keppel. Un-

¹ King George V.

fortunately we got into a mist and could not see the marvellous view from the very top. At the Montenegro frontier the Prince met us and we were very pleased to see him, as he is a very old friend and such an amiable man. He had prepared a luncheon in a small house belonging to him and we were very hungry after the long drive. The Prince himself and every man in the country wears the beautiful national dress. They are such handsome men, even the common peasants, and so very friendly and respectful. They all have excellent manners, come running to the road to make their bow and the Prince is like a real father amongst them all. But curious enough it seems to us hardly ever to meet a woman in the streets. They are very modest and stay at home, but the men walk about and in the evening dance a very curious war dance, much wilder than the Scotch reel. They sing to it some wild song which sounds so curious in the stillness of the night.

Before we reached the town of Cettinje, we were met by the Prince's eldest son, a very pretty boy aged sixteen, very tall and dark, with most excellent manners and such a bright, clever look. He was on horseback at the head of a cavalry escort, all mounted on very small, strong ponies. They cantered round us, some racing wildly along, over stones and rough ground. At the house we were met by the Princess and her daughters, all in national dress. I used to know the two young ladies when they were in Russia, but now they are quite grown up and such nice, lively girls. They amuse George very much and he is great friends with them. They laugh and talk and he gets on in French and does not mind it. There is also a dear little boy of eight years, dressed in lovely costumes; he comes in, making beautiful bows, and kisses one's hand. He is called Mirko and his father simply adores him but does not spoil any of them. In fact he is very strict and everybody obeys him in a wonderful way and is devoted to him. Only imagine that they all walk about with loaded revolvers, even all the servants when they wait at dinner.

On the Tuesday we went on an expedition to the lake of Scutari and it was lovely scenery. We first went by road, then down a river in a small steamer and into the lake, with grand mountain scenery. The Prince is building a small house on a peninsula, and we had to land on the rocks and go up a steep hill, which I did not like much in the heat, but the good people pull one up with such energy that one has to get on without stopping. We had lunch out of doors. On the way back the Prince killed a very poisonous snake that was going to get up on its tail. We returned to Cattaro yesterday for luncheon with the Prince and his son and they visited most of the ships; then Papa gave a big dinner on the *Alexandra* and they left this morning.

I was so pleased to get news twice from you here. I hope Sandra has been to the dentist, as she ought soon to take off her plate. Arrange a nice birthday for Alfred. But how sad to be far away on mine! I send you all many kisses.

Your old
MAMMA.

I am so pleased Mademoiselle liked her presents.

ROYAL PALACE,

MADRID.

Sunday, June 17th, 1888.

DEAR PRINCESS MARIE,

It was so nice of you to write to me so soon and I am very glad you liked getting my letter. I hope the nougat did not taste of matches. Now I must give you some details of Madrid. The Queen was not at all well when we first arrived last Tuesday but it was only a little fever from the great heat she found at Valencia after she left Barcelona, and by Thursday she was well again. We have all been working so hard whilst we were here. There is the Infanta Isabel who is sister of the late King, and lives in the palace. She is very nice and kind but is so strong and *never* gets tired. The result you may easily imagine for one would hardly think it was possible to see so much in such a very short time. You know how strong the Duchess is and how impossible it is to tire her. I think the Infanta must have heard of this and it seemed to be a trial which should be worn out first, but I can tell you it was more than the Infanta could do to tire your Mamma. Now I will give you just short accounts of our different days.

We left Alicante on Monday afternoon, having arrived there in the morning from Malaga. The party consisted of the Duke and Duchess, Prince George,¹ Lady Mary, Mr. Keppel and myself. There were two very comfortable saloon carriages put on to the train and the Duchess and Lady Mary went in one and the remainder of the party in the other carriage. We took the picnic tea-basket as well as some meat and strong drinks for later on. And we had *Nics* in the train. We stopped at a little station called La Encina at about 6.30 where in as many minutes we had five hot dishes with bread and cheese stuffed down our throats. I could not manage this meal, which consisted of tough meat and heaps of garlic in five different forms. So I left my portions on my plate and I dare say somebody else ate them after instead. I am sure I wish them joy for I expect he or she must have smelt horrid for a week, but I must get on for the train is just starting for Madrid and it would be a bore to be left behind. By the by, at about ten o'clock Horton the footman was wanted to get some hot water for the Duchess but he could nowhere be found. My servant knew that he had got out of the train but did not get in again. It seems really that he got into another carriage but we thought he had been left behind. However, when he turned up again the general impression was that he had missed the train but that as it went so slow he was able to run after it and catch it up. So much for Horton. We arrived in Madrid at 8.45 and were received by Swells and Guards. The Infanta Isabel was at the station as well. We had to dress in the train—of course no bath, and all out of a very small basin with very little water, which was quite black when it was finished with. However, with the help of

¹ King George V.

our best clothes we managed to look pretty decent about the face and hands.

Tuesday afternoon was spent at the museum of pictures. Talk about a collection! It is the most marvellous thing in the world. There are over two thousand pictures in the gallery and comparatively speaking hardly any trash. The Velazquez collection is, of course, unrivalled anywhere, for Philip IV of Spain made him paint almost entirely and solely for him. In fact he used to live in the Palace and was made a member of the King's household. We were only two or three hours there and, of course, were only able to see the best properly. So on Tuesday night we went to bed early to prepare for Toledo next day.

We left Madrid at ten in a special train with the Royal saloon carriages. We had a capital breakfast in the train and arrived at Toledo at noon. There we found two carriages, each with four mules with beautiful harness all covered over with little woollen balls and bells, and away we went. You can't think how well the mules go along; directly they come to a hill away they go full gallop. Amongst other wonderful sights and relics of the ancient Moors I must mention the Toledo arms factory, and the church, built in the most perfect and purely Gothic style by Ferdinand and Isabella, who, as you know, were the King and Queen who conquered Granada, the last stronghold of the Moors in Spain. At the arms factory, which has been celebrated for the excellence of its steel sword blades and daggers for many centuries, we saw all the different departments in full working order and the men carving the blades and inlaying the steel with gold and silver. We were all given specimens. I got a very fine large knife, which will be excellent for a hunting knife should occasion offer and it is made sharp. The Duchess has many very pretty little inlaid things which you will see when she gets to Coburg.

The Duke's A.D.C. here is the Marquis de Sierra Bullones who was in England at the time of the Queen's Jubilee and attached to the suite of the Infanta Eulalie. This good man insisted on presenting the Duke with a sword which he admired. It is a copy of the sword of Don Fernan de Gonzales de Cordova, called and known as "El Gran Capitan." He was a very great general at the conquest of Granada. After this we saw a review of the military students belonging to the Academy which is located in the old Royal Palace, a magnificent building of the reign of Charles III of Spain. Unfortunately it has been twice completely gutted by fire and now is about to be again restored. The Cathedral is fine but not in any way magnificent; the really curious thing about it being that, in a separate chapel, is still held the Muzarabic rites. This was an ante-Catholic faith which was held to be the true one during the occupation of Toledo by the Moors. It was tolerated by them at the time of their holding Toledo and when they were finally driven out was the subject of very serious dissensions, all sorts of miracles being attempted to prove which (the Catholic or Muzarabic) was the true faith. I don't know enough about it nor have I space, but you

ask Fräulein or Dr. X. to look it all out for you as it is most interesting. At last, at seven p.m., more dead than alive we got into the train and returned to Madrid. We had dinner in the train, which was more comforting, the only other refreshment through the day of seven hours on our feet being some beer and ices in a disused but most curious old Jewish synagogue. Madrid and bed and profound sleep brings us to Thursday. Again we are turned over to the energetic and indefatigable Infanta. First to the armoury.

Now one understands by this word a collection of armour but this collection is quite unrivalled, for it is not the armour and arms of Tom, Dick or Harry, but absolutely the collection of armour for battle or tournaments on horseback and on foot of all the kings of Spain, commencing with Charles V and Ist of Spain. The swords of every king and great general, trophies from Lepanto, where in Philip II's reign Don John of Austria defeated the Turks. The sword of Boabdil, called "El Rey Chico" or the Little King, who was the last King of Granada, and a host of other things too numerous to mention or my letter would become a sort of indifferent Murray's guide. After, we went to the Royal Stables. These are beautifully arranged. They have here now two hundred and seventy horses and fifty mules. Some of the ponies are quite beautiful and I thought of you and Princess Victoria and Sandra and how you would have liked to give them all some sugar. But there were so many I am afraid you would have to have a donkey cart full of sugar so that each one might have some. One little white pony, a great duck, was had out and trotted round and he is an ambling pony; you know what that means, but if you had seen the pace he went, it is the most extraordinary thing you could imagine. There is also a most curious white horse, all over black spots, not an ordinary piebald, but each spot quite distinct. We also saw a very smart four-in-hand that the Queen drives and also the Infanta Isabel's four-in-hand of Spanish ponies and Spanish harness and bells. At one we went to lunch with the Duke and Duchess of Fernan Nuñez. We had a most excellent luncheon and as the newspapers say "the choicest wines." A beautiful house with beautiful things in it, and we saw all over it.

In the evening, five to eight p.m., Sir Clare Ford, the English Ambassador, gave a party where all Madrid assembled. There were some very pretty ladies, but I was not so very much struck by the beauty of Spain. All the ladies powder their faces here so much and it has a very peculiar effect, making them look so white and then their very dark eyes shine out and look darker than ever. That evening the Queen was quite well again and was at dinner. Friday the news was so bad about the poor Emperor Frederick that the Duke did not come but the remainder went to the Escorial again by special train. This is the largest palace, I think, in the world and was built by Philip II, son of Emperor Charles V. The style of architecture is the most severe I have ever seen, for in all the huge mass of building there is absolutely no ornamentation. The Royal Chapel is huge and very fine. In the crypt below lie the remains of all the kings and queens and children and Royal personages,



"CAPTAIN DEAR"; OUR GREAT FRIEND, MAURICE A. BOURKE, R.N.

commencing with the great Emperor Charles V. It is very fine but rather melancholy and the idea is horrid, I think, to go and sit with ancestors' bones close by, which have been dead some of them for three centuries.

Returning from the Escorial at four o'clock we came back to the palace, there to hear the sad news of the death of the Emperor. Of course all parties were put off, so we could not go to a garden party at the Duchess of Alba's; she is the daughter of our former host and hostess, the Duke and Duchess of Fernan Nuñez. She married the Duke of Alba, and they have a magnificent house. Neither could we dine with the Russian Minister who had arranged a party for the Duchess, and so we come on to Saturday which was spent quietly seeing the Palace at Aranjuez, a charming place with a lovely park and avenues of trees for miles.

The Palace was built by Charles III of Spain and is a fine building, though there is nothing inside. We went all over it and had luncheon under the huge plane trees with the river running close by. After, we were driven for miles and miles by the Infanta Isabel with her four ponies, through the beautiful avenues in the park. We saw all the little foals and horses they keep there. There are about four hundred altogether. There is a tiny, tiny donkey that came from Africa; he is not bigger than Sandy¹ and the Queen can carry him about in her arms. We saw too such a nice little black pony. I think the Duchess would very much like to have a pair of Spanish ponies and she has been asking about getting a good pair. The best come from Navarre. I have tried to persuade her that if she gets the ponies she ought also to get the real Spanish four-in-hand harness and then you could learn to drive four-in-hand and the harness is so pretty, with all the little red woollen balls and the bells. The animals are so covered, especially about the head and neck, that you can hardly see them. The Infanta Isabel drives quite beautifully, and it would really have made you hold your breath to see some of the corners and narrow places she turned round often at almost full gallop. She speaks English and French, but she talks so fast it is most difficult to understand her, especially if you are not able, through the noise of the train, to catch all her words.

To-day we are to see the tapestries which, owing to want of space, are not always hung up. However, they have been all put up on purpose and this afternoon we shall have the real treat of seeing this wonderful collection. Alas, Sunday, to-day, is our last day and so will end one of the pleasantest, and quite the most interesting week I have ever spent. Don Antonio, an Infante d'Espagne, has also accompanied us in all our expeditions. He is the husband of the Infanta Eulalie and they were in London for the Queen's Jubilee. To-day the Queen has taken the Duke and Duchess and Prince George to lunch at the Infanta Eulalie's house. Unfortunately she has been laid up the whole time we have been here, and has not been able to join in any of the expeditions. To-night we

¹ Our collie dog.

start at 7.45 in two saloon carriages and arrive at Valencia at 10 o'clock to-morrow morning. The Fleet will go to Port Mahon and we in the *Surprise* run up and see Tarragona and then on to Mahon. From there I hope we may take the Duke and Duchess to Palma and visit some wonderful caves at Arta. On the 23rd the *Surprise* leaves Port Mahon for Marseilles and the Duchess arrives at Coburg, probably on the 20th, so *there* is a red letter day for you to look forward to.

Lady Mary was quite ill for one day on account of the fatigue of running about but she is all right again now and able to travel to-night.

Now I must wind up my long story which, I hope, may amuse you. Recollect that it will be the greatest pleasure to receive a letter from you, for it will always be of the greatest interest to me to hear of and about you all and you must write now and again. We went to a chocolate manufactory near the Escorial and the Duchess is taking a large boxful of chocolates which we saw being made.

Now good-bye and with my love to Prince Alfred and your sisters, and a fat kiss for the "Koorosity."

Believe me to be yours very sincerely,

MAURICE A. BOURKE.

PETERSBURG.

Monday, January [?], 1890.

MY DEAR PRINCESS MARIE,

I would really have written before but somehow or another I never seem to have had a moment. Anyhow I must tell you what fun I have had. In the first place I don't find it nearly as cold as I expected. I am told it is often the case that when one first comes here one hardly feels the cold at all. There is a Prince Belosselsky who is attached to the Duke who is a very nice man and who takes care of Lady Coke and myself. He lives in a very nice house on the border of St. Petersburg, and we have been there to luncheon and he has taken us out in his ice boat and we have also done some skating. It was very cold, though, for skating and all of Lady Coke's toes got nearly frost-bitten, and she had to go into the house and have her toes rubbed with spirit to bring back the circulation. She said it hurt her awfully.

Another really grand amusement here is the ice hills. Sitting on a small sledge you go down an awfully steep incline and then dash along the flat part of ice at oh ever so many miles an hour. I began by being conducted down, till gradually I plucked up courage to go by myself. I got on capitally the first day and only got the most ordinary fall, but the second day I went I started at once by myself, and being too bold or too stupid, I found myself flung about in a sitting position on the ice in the most comical manner. At last I went down and of course upset, but this time I managed to give my thumb a hideous sprain and it hurt very much, so I had to sit that night with my thumb bandaged in ice and arnica to get the swelling down.

Another thing I have accomplished is being shot out of a sledge. You are always buttoned in by a great bearskin rug. Well, I did not know this dodge and I was driving very comfortably along talking to one of the Embassy men with whom I was going to the ice hills when the sledge caught a stone and gave a bump sideways, and out I shot, spread-eagled, like a great turtle in the road, my hat one way and my legs the other, and all wrapped up in my fur coat, which, of course, got covered with snow. However, no bones were broken, and besides I laughed very much and so indeed did everyone else.

Last Thursday Mr. Morier, the English Ambassador's son, and myself went off in search of bears which he had heard of. He had never been out before and of course neither had I. We took food and a man from the Embassy to speak Russian. We started off from here at 3 p.m. and went down the line about eighty versts, which is fifty miles. This journey took us six hours, so it proves that I think one could almost run and kick your hat along the line as fast as the train went. Well, after the train we got into little, low, country, basket sledges, and off we went in a procession of four of these, one in each, the servant in the third and the luggage last.

After three hours' bumping and hopping up and down we arrived at and stopped in a village; I must say my first impression of sledge-driving was not particularly pleasant but I think it was a great deal my own fault for I had not learnt the way to make myself comfortable. After tea in a log hut we started off again, this time for a six hours' journey. Again I did not succeed in making myself as comfortable as I afterwards learned to do; however the result was that I did not sleep a wink all night. I managed all the same to keep very warm notwithstanding that it was snowing all night and there were ten degrees Réaumur of frost. The snow bothered me a great deal, for it kept falling and melting on the end of my nose which kept me constantly employed wiping and drying it. However after some breakfast of fried eggs and stuff from our provision basket, we went off in search of bear number one. He wasn't at home and I don't think ever had been and so we were sold.

However, we were to drive on another twenty miles for another beat. This we did and were rewarded by being excellently well placed, and after the beaters were also in place, out came a fine bear. Mr. Morier fired first and knocked him over but he got up and went on. I got a long shot and broke one of his hind legs. We were unlucky, for there not being much snow, the bear was able to go so fast, which he did, and also the trees were very thick, so, alas, he got away. We followed his tracks for some distance, but had to give it up and, moreover, we could not wait to pursue him further as we had to get back to Petersburg for the big ball. But I hope they will bring up the bear to us, for we heard from the trackers before we left that we should have easily got him if we had stayed another day, so we asked them to bring him to St. Petersburg if they managed to get him.

It was a most delightful trip, and sledging through these forests

both by day and night is quite the most fascinating thing in the world to do. I am hoping to get some more, though this week Lady Coke and I, with Mr. Solovieff, are going to Moscow, which of course we must see.

I am not particularly struck by the Russian ladies for beauty, but many of the men are very handsome and the uniforms in the palace on big functions are magnificent.

There was a ball to two thousand people last night which was magnificently done; at supper the whole two thousand sat down together. There will be a regular course of balls now right into Lent.

Now, dear Princess Marie, I must send you all my best love. I wonder if the box addressed to Fräulein, with the picture in it, ever reached. Perhaps you would ask her.

Good-bye, with best love, from
Yours very sincerely,
MAURICE A. BOURKE.

In his uniquely humorous way Captain Bourke would also paint his future portrait as that of an old red-faced admiral with thick, curly white hair and jovial smile. He never lived to become an admiral, alas, and the latter part of his career was darkened by a terrible naval disaster, the loss of H.M.S. *Victoria*.

Well do I remember receiving the news of that disaster, a few months after my marriage, whilst I was struggling amidst the difficulties of adjustment in a foreign country. My mother telegraphed the loss of the *Victoria*, but that Maurice Bourke, thank God, was amongst the saved. The shock was terrible, but I remember my tears of gratitude because nothing had happened to "Captain dear" as we called our great friend.

No British heart will ever forget the loss of H.M.S. *Victoria*, proud flagship of Admiral Tryon, and first Dreadnought of her time. The whole Mediterranean Fleet was making some manœuvre near Tripolis on June the 22nd, 1893; Maurice Bourke was captain of the *Victoria*, and the Admiral-in-Command, Sir George Tryon, was on board. Tryon gave an order that, according to Maurice Bourke, it was impossible to execute. Bourke protested and tried to prove that the desired manœuvre was impossible owing to the too limited space; Tryon insisted upon the movement being carried out, with the result that the smaller of

the two warships in turning ran into the *Victoria* and cut her in two!

In five minutes the proud vessel sank, in sight of the whole Fleet, turning right over, nose downwards, man and mouse going down with her. Owing to the colossal churning of the waters and suction of the sinking ship, few boats could approach sufficiently near to save those who were drowning.

Bourke was amongst the few saved. He had gone down with the rest, but the sea by some strange chance threw him up again, whilst Admiral Tryon, with many hundreds, was drowned.

Owing to the loss of his admiral, Bourke was never quite able to clear himself, for the man who had given the fatal order was no longer there to speak, or to admit his responsibility for it, and "Captain dear's" lips were sealed, for who can accuse the dead?

A cruel fate, one that broke our brave captain's heart! Maurice Bourke never got over this terrible tragedy, he was never the same man after it; his health went to pieces and he died much before his time.

I still possess his letters, so full of life, so full of humour, so full of fun, and on days when the present feels heavy and I want to make the beloved past live again, I take those precious letters out from their resting-place and read them through one by one.

I can honestly say that Maurice Bourke was my first love. He was indeed a hero to me, and I have even known fits of agonizing jealousy when I was afraid he might care for one of my sisters more than for myself. To him I was but a nice little girl with fair hair and high spirits; he made no distinction between us, but to me he was a sort of god come down into our midst.

"Captain dear," precious friend of our childhood, you are no more of this world, but your memory is green in my heart and my thoughts will ever turn to you with love and gratitude. The remembrance of you is pure joy, I delight in calling up before me your face, your smile, your delicious humour, your wide-minded, unstinted kindness and understanding: they are so many treasures of which

time cannot rob me. You were indeed a hero to three little girls on the brink of life, may your memory be blessed for ever, a thousand, thousand times blessed!

There is one strange little incident in connexion with the sinking of the *Victoria* that I would like to relate. It is one of those small unexplained miracles that come to pass.

Captain Bourke kept all the letters we children wrote to him in a special box which followed him on all his voyages. When the sea had finally calmed down after the complete disappearance of the proud ironclad, different bits of wreckage were rescued from the water, and amongst other flotsam this box with our letters was found floating on the surface. The bottom of the box was gone, but it had turned over on its lid and not one of the letters had been lost! And floating alongside of it were two things my mother had given him; a silver bowl and, of all things, a walking stick with a Russian stone egg top to it!

Strange coincidence that just those three things, dear mementoes of the happy Malta days, should have been saved! To us it appeared like a sign that nothing could break that perfect friendship which bound us together.

Chapter VI

MORE MALTA MEMORIES

THERE was also another great friend in those Malta days of innocence and that was Cousin George. Cousin George, though ten years older than I, was also very young in those days and not a bit too grand and grown up to be happy in our company.

I do not think he was even called the Duke of York then, but simply Prince George. He was also in H.M.S. *Alexandra*, under my father's command. Both my parents were very fond of him, and there was always a room ready for him at San Antonio when he was not on service.

Cousin George was a beloved chum. He too was able to keep the unruly trio in order. He called us "the dear three," but I proudly remember that in the case of Cousin George I was a decided favourite, there was no doubt about that whatever. What fun we had with George, what delightful, harmless fun! He used to drive us in a high, two-wheeled dog-cart; the horse he drove was called Cocky, a steady brown cob. One of us sat beside him and the other two at the back. Those at the back were generally kneeling on the seat and chattering for all they were worth with the two in front.

There were also glorious rides with Cousin George who had a horse called Real Jam, a beautiful glossy bay.

In Malta everybody was interested in his neighbour's horse; they so belonged to the life there that they were like part of the family. Real Jam was a perfect creature and was taken back to Sandringham by his master when the Malta days came to a close.

Whenever he could Cousin George joined our Saturday picnics, and he was fond of declaring that the "dear three"

were much better behaved and less unruly when he was leader of the wild horde.

It was certainly Allenby, or "Full Moon," who was the most irrepressible. The days when he was one of the party were days of high jinks.

I have found old letters from George expressing a hope "that Allenby has been behaving himself"; George preferred being first-in-command on the days when rowdy Allenby was not one of the party.

But neither Cousin George nor boisterous Allenby was at a certain picnic to which a sadly humiliating remembrance is attached. We had ridden to some far-off part of the island and there Mamma, Lady Mary and her daughters had joined us by carriage for tea. It was a beautiful sunny day and we were a cheerful party, Mamma very proud of a new bay she had discovered on the farther side of the island. Mamma loved voyages of discovery. The last bit of the road down to the seashore was steep and we were all on foot, as it had been considered risky to follow such a precipitous path on horseback. On the way up again, Mamma proposed that Lady Mary, who was delicate and easily tired, should, so as not to fatigue herself, ride up the steepest part of the climb on Tommy's back.

Tommy was a sturdy little beast and well up to the weight of one as frail as Lady Mary, but Mademoiselle's insinuations against Mamma's friend had made their mark and lay festering in our minds. Mamma's quite innocent proposal suddenly made our resentment against her burst into flame. Our horses were sacred to us, we were idiotically jealous about them and no one was ever allowed to get on them except ourselves or the groom, so we noisily proclaimed that "poor" Tommy could not possibly carry a grown-up person on his back.

Mamma, ashamed of her ungracious little girls, swept our objections aside and quite rightly insisted upon the very much perturbed Lady Mary getting on to Tommy's back, which she finally did. A disgraceful scene followed. Entirely carried away by our rage, whilst climbing the hill behind Mamma, Tommy and his burden, we vituperated Lady Mary to her daughters who were walking beside



“COUSIN GEORGE” ON “REAL JAM”; THE DUKE OF YORK (GEORGE V).

us, and goodness knows what unforgivable things we said to our three little friends about their mother. All Made-moiselle's unfounded accusations against Lady Mary came all unconsciously from our lips.

When the top of the hill was reached, Lady Mary got off and Tommy was given over again to his rightful mistress, and we all three remounted.

Mamma, to mark her pained disapproval of her offending children, drove off without a word and without even casting a look behind her. This was as fuel to the flame of our wrath. In floods of tears, like three God-forsaken little savages, giving rein to our horses, we dashed full gallop after the carriage, roaring with rage and sticking our tongues out as far as they would go, whilst we hurled at Lady Mary's head all the ugly epithets of which our somewhat limited vocabulary could boast.

No doubt there was also a comic side to this most reprehensible scene. It must have been a fine sight to see three ill-behaved little Amazons tearing full tilt along the high road, behind that well-turned-out, sedate-looking pony-cart in which sat two ladies who could only save their dignity by pretending to ignore that they were being pursued by a trio of weeping little furies with their tongues stuck out!

Many years later we found an old letter addressed to our brother in which Ducky had made a sketch of this scene.

There may be at certain moments in life a bitter satisfaction in letting your temper get the better of you, in revelling in your wrath, but the "afterwards" is all sorrow and mortification. Restored to your senses you see how pitiful and futile was your outburst and the exultation of your fury gives place to shame and humiliation.

All this and more was experienced when we reached home about half an hour after Mamma. Lady Mary had retired to her own apartment to repair her shattered nerves, but on the threshold of her room stood Mamma like the angel with the flaming sword.

Oh, terrible moment of retribution when, with hanging heads, red noses and swollen eyes we stood facing her

righteous indignation. As can well be imagined she did not spare us. She said we were to ask God to forgive us, because *she* could not, that she was ashamed of having to call us her children and other equally hard things that penetrated to the very marrow of our bones.

We all three finally collapsed on some small stairs leading from Mamma's boudoir to her dressing-room, a dark little corner where our humiliation was hidden in shadow. There we lay, three little heaps of misery, faces turned towards the dusty carpet, which was quite in keeping with our abasement, crushed by the enormity of our sin, overcome by Mamma's bitter reproof, feeling that we deserved every word of her upbraiding.

But words were not sufficient chastisement. Our outraged parent hit upon a really effective punishment. Our beloved horses were banished for a whole long week from the royal stables and to our public shame were conducted to the "Ditch," which was the name of the big stables where all our naval friends kept their horses. It was called the "Ditch" because it was built in the large moat encircling Valletta.

This was a cruelly well-chosen penalty, as it was a way of letting all our riding-companions know that we were in disgrace.

Cousin George was very kind on this occasion. He was truly sorry for "the dear three," though of course he could not approve of what we had done. But even to-day I can feel what a delicious relief it was to lay my humiliated head upon his shoulder, and to weep my heart out, my face hidden in the mass of my "yellow" hair. I believe that Cousin George's handkerchief was also very welcome on this occasion, because does one ever at such tragic moments find one's own?

"Poor dear little Missy," said Cousin George, "poor dear little Miss," and Missy learned at that hour how very sweet the big, grown-up cousin could be!

The island of Malta is full of charm for those who have eyes to see; full of interest too for archæologists and historians.

We were too young to take a scientific interest in any of its treasures. In those days, alas, old churches and Phœnician ruins meant little to us, and the ride to get there, or the narcissi growing among the fallen stones, delighted us more than the monuments themselves. But we were intensely aware of the fascination of the island itself, so curiously stony, in a way so secretive, keeping its beauties hidden behind stone walls.

In Malta everything was walled in. At first sight the whole island appears to be nothing but an ocean of rock and stone, with occasional patches of fields of clover, beans, or artichokes; I have no remembrance of seeing wheat, barley or maize fields, but that was perhaps because we were there during the autumn, winter and early spring months only. But those fields of clover and beans, how I remember them! The clover was of giant growth, knee-high and intensely ruby-red, with strong leaves and stems which we would steal for our beloved horses; I can still hear the satisfaction with which they crunched that luscious green. And what sweetness there was in riding back of an evening, all the air saturated with the scent of those beans.

That, and a smell of coffee in the villages and also of a certain herb (or was it the fuel with which the peasants cooked their food?), were the characteristic Malta smells, to be met with all over the island.

The women were fond of brewing their coffee in the middle of the street on small transportable charcoal stoves made of sandstone. In Malta, villages are more like small closed towns, the streets are narrow and twisting, the houses are high, with balconies jutting out, and one gets sudden delightful glimpses of patios or inner courts, full of flowers and colour, full of dazzling light and deep shade, mysterious retreats, very Oriental or Spanish-looking.

This was one of our chief enchantments, trying to peep through secretive-looking doors into these hidden corners of beauty.

Strict orders had been given us not to gallop through the villages. It sounds rather extraordinary that such an order should have been necessary, but on horseback we

were like a horde of invaders, real little Huns taking possession of conquered ground.

As before mentioned, every road in Malta is bordered by high stone walls, so that sometimes you come quite unexpectedly upon the villages. The entry to the village is marked by a large scarlet line painted on the wall. This line was a signal that we had to set our horses to footpace. At the beginning we used to enjoy scaring the women and children by our sudden mounted invasion. With shrieks the mothers would rush to the rescue of their infants, trying at the same time to save their precious little stone stoves. There would be much noise, amidst a fluttering of dusty hens' wings, a smell of coffee, mingled with the perfume of that special herb; there would be laughter and much chatter, for the Maltese are kindly and full of words. They never seemed to be angry with us. I suppose we filled the world with our youth, our good humour and our *joie de vivre*; anyhow I never remember a cross face even before the order had been given that there was to be no galloping through the villages.

Almost every community, even the smallest, has a huge cathedral-like church built mostly in baroque style and of yellowish sandstone. On feast days there is a great ringing of bells and all the inhabitants flock together in the church square. There is a lot of blue about the rough stuff the men use for their coats, butcher blue, a very pretty shade which does not fade in the sun, whilst the characteristic of the women is the "faldetta," a sort of black silk mantle they wear over their heads which is whaleboned on one side and makes it curve out. No other country has this head-dress, and the legend goes that the women of Malta adopted it after the island's occupation by Napoleon's troops, as a sign of mourning for all the indignities its women had to submit to during that period. They can hold their "faldetta" in such wise that it can entirely conceal their faces, and it is a very efficient protection against the sun, but when it is windy, which is often the case in Malta, the "faldetta" bulges out like a black balloon.

The Maltese language seems to be a mixture of Italian and Arabic, and has curious guttural sounds in it. Like



CHARACTERISTIC VIEW OF MALTA.

the Italians the islanders are very fluent in conversation. They are very much the same type as the Neapolitans and the women love to sit chattering on their door-steps. They are only good-looking when quite young; later they become stout and heavy. The children are often curly-haired and lovely with huge dark eyes; the streets of the villages seem alive with them, their happy voices or quarrelsome cries reverberating against the high house walls.

There are many large villas and forsaken palaces scattered about the island, remnants of days of wealth and grandeur; one often sees monumental portals surmounted by huge complicated coats-of-arms carved in stone, proud mementoes of past glories, nowadays often leading into nothing more than a farmyard or forsaken habitation.

Every garden in Malta is shut away behind high walls. This adds to the delight of discovery and it is only on days when the front porch or door has been left open that one gets glimpses of these secluded paradises. It was a continual excitement to try and discover these lovely retreats, and when I returned to Malta so many years later and drove in a motor through the narrow, twisting streets of the villages, I was seized by exactly that same sensation of ill-repressed eagerness to peep behind each closed door, feeling certain that there were beauties hidden away beyond my reach.

We found this feeling of mystery everywhere. The formation of the ground itself helped to add to this sensation that there was in each place something to be discovered. There were deep valleys, small canyons cleft out of the rocks. Often one end was quite shallow, and you hardly realized that you were on the path to these deeply hidden oases. By degrees you went down, down, ever farther down, till you were walking between two walls of rocks, and here below there was a green world of olive, carob and loquat trees, mixed with bamboos and sometimes orange groves. These deep valleys were a source of inexpressible enchantment, their secretiveness had something to do with the spell they threw over you. Here there were also wonderful flowers, vast stretches of double narcissi, white and yellow, incredibly sweet-scented, anemones,

asphodels, and all sorts of other flowers for which we had no names.

I shall never forget our ecstasies over an olive grove discovered one Christmas Eve, which was entirely carpeted by these fragrant narcissi. We jumped off our horses and gathered great bunches of them which we brought triumphantly back to Mamma. On Christmas Eve, that was a miracle in itself! Their only drawback was that a sticky slime, extremely detrimental to clothes, oozed from their stalks.

A lover of beauty as I was even then, certain corners of Malta have stamped themselves for ever on my mind. Sudden revelations that came to you like pictures bursting on your mind.

I remember a ride to a far corner of the island, to a place where we had never before been. We had dismounted from our horses, and Ducky and I were running hand in hand, jumping the low walls separating one field from another. Beyond lay the sea, a blue glory woven with silver. We came to a series of orange groves, planted in flat terraces one above the other leading gradually down to the shore; narrow stone canals of water kept the place moist and beneath the orange trees were plantations of huge, pale blue Parma violets. The place was one of the utmost secret enchantment. We ran and ran, our joy lending wings to our feet; the world seemed to be a garden of beauty planned for our delight.

All of a sudden we came out from under the shade of the orange trees and there before us lay a square reservoir of water in which the sky reflected its azure face; beyond, the sea had the same colour, only deeper, more intense, and all around the edge of the tank lay huge orange pumpkins, painting violent blotches of colour against all that blue. The air was full of the song of larks, full of the fragrance of violets and orange blossom. Oh, beautiful world, full of ecstasy! We stood still and drank it all in; there was revelation in it, something almost holy which made us long to fold our hands and give thanks.

One of those deep little canyon-valleys I have spoken of we called the Happy Valley. It was with "Captain

dear" that we first discovered it. And one day we planned a donkey-ride through its mysteries.

Passionate riders though we were, we imagined that a donkey-ride would be excellent fun. Malta, like all Eastern countries, is of course full of donkeys, delightful little beasts with every quality and defect natural to donkeys.

The Happy Valley was too stony to be approached on horseback, so donkeys were quite the thing. Mamma made no protest, so innumerable small donkeys, grey, brown and black, were commandeered for us and our friends. This donkey-ride was a complete success. I selected a small black donkey that proved a good choice, for he was quick and willing, and to my great delight I was able to keep ahead of the party most of the time. I was always fond of leading and in those days it was a great humiliation to be beaten by anyone else. We all rode bare-back of course; the donkeys were somewhat bony, but if you sat well back as the peasants do, you could get along with comparative ease.

The green oasis hidden in the heart of the Happy Valley heard glad laughter that day, voices gay and young that awoke many echoes amongst its rocks. Mamma and the more sedate elders followed on foot and their laughter mingled with ours, because donkey-rides are always full of humorous incidents. Allenby was of course one of the chief actors on this happy day.

Verdala, the Governor's summer palace beyond Città Vecchia, was also one of our favourite playing grounds. The house stood high, and was a mighty square, thick-walled building of ochre-yellow stone. There was something fortress-like about it, a deep moat running all around, in which herb gardens had been planted.

Dominating its surroundings, it had a superb sweeping view from its front windows, and a narrow, stone-paved road ran down from its lower gardens in a straight line, through a deep dale to a place full of shade called the Boschetto. Here there was a sort of grotto with a fountain in very ornate Italian baroque style. Fine trees grew in this place, and there were also orange, olive and loquat groves and little oasis-like valleys running out from it in two directions.

Beyond the valley, on another eminence, stood the Inquisitor's Palace, a gaunt, bleak building, silhouetted against the horizon. Its name alone suggested mystery, gloom, and its isolated situation did everything to heighten this grim impression.

The grounds of Verdala were to us an inexhaustible source of discoveries; they were typically full of Malta mystery, beginning with the moat and descending by a gradual decline to the deep, shadow-filled valley below. This gradual descent was fenced off terrace-wise by those loosely heaped stone walls, so easily demolished when you wanted to break through into a field. Here we were allowed to run wild and there was no end to our enchantment.

Every nook was like fairy-land, and one day to our joy we discovered a wee rounded hut of porous stone, very much the shape of the bee-hive grottoes in Mamma's garden, only large enough to harbour us all and entirely overgrown with bush ivy. This adorable little building was probably a shelter for those working in the fields or amongst the orange groves, but it was always empty when we were there and became the basis of all our rambles.

On my return to Verdala, forty years later, I still found this enchanted shelter exactly as it was then! For thus do even the simplest things men build outlast the hands that built them.

There is something about Malta which was, so to say, in touch with my inner being. Somehow I *felt* it, was *one* with it, and when returning after so many years, a whole lifetime lying between, it clutched at my heart exactly in the same way. It was ecstasy, almost pain; something in the line, the colouring, the way a thorny cactus grew like a spiky monster beside a square, flat-roofed house where orange pumpkins lay drying in the sun; the way a carob tree would lean over a wall, the way the water in a wee aqueduct would run with a little gurgling sound under the shade of an orange grove with the sea shining blue beyond, the glimpse you would catch of a garden all white with huge round daisy bushes. And everywhere that strange feeling that there was something hidden, not yet explored,

worlds of beauty, gardens of enchantment you could stumble upon at any moment. Nothing that I have seen in later life has ever had exactly that same charm, has ever meant quite as much to me; it is pure bliss even to live it over all again in my mind.

I know that our age had something to do with the glamour of those Malta days, we were just between childhood and girlhood, when everything is revelation and all dreams reality. A thick curtain lay over good and evil, no unhealthy curiosity disturbed our peace of mind; there was as yet no desire towards the fruit of knowledge, all was enchantment, no sad blight had ever entered our Garden of Eden. People had faces, not masks, and when they smiled it was because they were happy; we never could have imagined that a smile could mean anything else. We sounded no depths, worried over no problems, the world lay open before us and the future was far off. . . .

In a word, it was the age of innocence—the paradise one never can enter again when its threshold into the world of reality has once been crossed. . . .

But I dare not linger too long in one place, even in Paradise. Life rolls on, so my pen must leave even my Garden of Eden to turn towards sterner things.

A last look back . . . and I see the faces of all those who played a part in that, oh most happy phase of my life. Some were to disappear for ever, some to follow me closely, some at a distance, some to become but hazy memories lost in the mist time gradually spreads over the past.

There were all the Maltese servants; Beppo who followed all our picnics with the tea-basket and Russian samovar; Tony the local policeman, pale, tall and dark, and utterly devoted to us children; then there was Beppo No. 2 the stable boy, and the gardener with his assistants, not to mention the innumerable humble friends scattered about the four corners of the island, who, with broad smiles and guttural exclamations of good-will, would consent to our invading their gardens or fields, allowing us to plunder their oranges, loquats or violets, demolishing with their

own hands their crumbling walls to let us pass. Genial, kind-hearted peasants, with whom we talked by pantomime gestures only.

Above all there were our dearest chums and followers, the flagship midshipmen: Beatty, Streatfield, Rumbold, Back and others, companions who were not above enjoying the same wild games as the "three little princesses" at San Antonio. And those cooking parties on the *Alexandra* when we fried eggs and bacon for tea, when we washed our hands at the midshipmen's chests, each in the basin of her own special friend, Beatty being in those days my elected favourite. And what climbs down the docks when the ship was being repainted or cleaned, rather like scaling the pyramids, so huge were the steps. What fun, but how detrimental to our clothes! And those wild games of follow-my-leader through the San Antonio gardens, or all over the different levels of the great house's roofs.

The rides on the Massa, or the thundering gallops along the hard high-roads, the picnics by the seaside or in some forsaken villa-garden, or in one of the forts guarding the four corners of the island.

And all the different captains and officers of the many men-of-war under the Duke of Edinburgh's command, the tea parties on board, certain faces more in evidence than others, but all friendly, welcoming, pleased to see the three little sisters: Captain Le Strange, Captain Fellows, Sir Charles Cust, Hedworth Lambton, Fortescue, Colville, Keppel, Neville, Gamble . . . and others whose names I have forgotten.

There were amongst our lady friends Miss Blundell, who afterwards married Colin Keppel, whose fresh beauty I admired with youthful enthusiasm, Mrs. Barron, oh so charming, Mrs. Slade, Lady Hely Hutchinson and also little Countess Iguanez from amongst the Maltese aristocracy, whom we only saw now and again. My mother knew and appreciated many other Maltese families, but as in those days we were too young to go out, we met them less. There was also little Gladys Fetherstonhaugh, the only little girl play-fellow I remember, a lively child full of fun and imagination. Faces, many faces, and all are smiling and kind, each

loved in their own way, some more, some less, according to the parts they played in our lives.

And after three years all this had to be left! Papa's command in the Mediterranean was over, a page had to be turned; one act had been played; good or bad, the next must follow; sad or joyful, time would not be held back, the world was turning, not standing still . . . *tout passe!* . . .

So the cruel day of parting came; it was indeed like death, death to a time that had been sheer, unclouded joy and happiness, a time without disappointment or disillusion with never a discordant note.

I shall never forget the unbearable sadness of seeing the rooms being dismantled by degrees, of visiting for the last time each beloved haunt, of taking leave of places and people, of rooms and gardens, knowing all the time that it was for ever, that there was no coming back, never, never, that it was over, done with, was to be entirely wiped out. *Tout passe.* . . .

And what a terrible good-bye on the deck of the *Surprise*, the Commander-in-Chief's yacht that was to take us to Naples. All our friends had come for the last time; tears were shed, promises exchanged, touching little presents were secretly pressed into hands clasped for the last time. It was as though our hearts were being torn into little pieces. Subconsciously we understood we were leaving the best of our childhood behind us, that the doors of Paradise were being closed upon us, we were being driven out, we were setting our faces towards another fate. . . .

Thank God the dearest friend of all, Maurice Bourke, was to be with us still awhile. Being commander of the *Surprise* it was he who was to take us to Naples.

All the same that was a wonderful trip; we stopped at Palermo, Syracuse, Girgenti on the way. We were shown the marvels of Monreale and the Capella Palatina, we trod the shady cloisters of San Giovanni degli Eremiti, of which Mamma had the picture in her room. We rode up the Monte Pelegrino on donkeys, and saw St. Rosalia in her grotto, hung all over with the many ex-votos pious pilgrims brought her from afar. We saw the noble temples of Gir-

genti, the beautiful ruins and deep rock valley of Syracuse; and finally from Naples we went to Pompeii, and in the evening singers would come in boats to warble "Santa Lucia," "Mia Bella Napoli," and "Funiculi-Funicula" into the open windows of our cabins.

In those days I only *felt* art without understanding it. Nature meant more to me than things built by the hand of man. Only vaguely did I realize that Nature's beauties received a peculiar value by being the setting for titanic temples, dim churches and nobly-lined palaces looking down upon their gardens like ancient kings reigning over belongings which would not have been so regal had they not been there to possess them. Sea, rocks, frowning hills, were a background, an accompaniment, one heightened the value of the other. But poetry lived in my soul already at that early age. Beauty touched me, sank into my being. All the pictures I saw lay dormant in my mind, unforgettable, creating a nostalgia that drew me back to those places, a longing that would have to be satisfied one day.

Wonderful experiences, picture upon picture, treasures for the eyes, but all saturated with the melancholy of parting, of being torn away from a period that was to be set aside for something new, something different. And what was being torn from us was so beautiful that we did not want anything new or different; with futile hands we were trying to clutch on to that which was already past . . . which already denied us—there *was* no holding fast! *Vorbei . . . vorbei . . .* it was the end. . . .

The last tearing asunder, the last renunciation of all that had been so unutterably precious, was the good-bye to the *Surprise* and to Captain Bourke.

The last evening, as was his pleasant habit when in his ship, he came to say good night and to tuck us into our little white bunks.

"Good-bye, Captain dear!"

"Good-bye, little girls, be good, so that 'Captain dear' can always be proud of you. Never forget that you are a sailor's daughters and that you have the best mother in the world."

"No, Captain dear, we will not forget."

And we put our arms round his neck and kissed him, for the first and the last time, but at that agonizing hour of parting it could only be a kiss. . . .

"Good-bye, Captain dear, good-bye . . . good-bye. . . .!"

The official parting was next morning, but that was the real good-bye, the good-bye that counted, the good-bye in our precious white cabin, when he bent over us like a beloved elder brother and made us promise to be good.

Little did we know then, Captain dear, what pitfalls life has and how difficult it is to be good.

Part Two
YOUTH

Chapter VII

THE COBURG YEARS

WITH the relinquishing of Malta a new phase started in our lives. We were growing up by slow degrees and the Garden of Eden was gradually fading into the background, and those who in these days had to do with our education managed to cast a certain blight over those last years of home-life.

I have set myself the difficult task of being as fair as possible in these pages, of trying to see questions from all sides ; I want to keep all passion and resentment out of the recording of facts. So as not to be judged, I mean to judge with the extremest impartiality, but above all I must strictly stick to truth. I wish to speak ill of no one, but there are two people who, during these Coburg years, played a none too happy part in our lives and these were Dr. X., Alfred's tutor, and Fräulein, our governess.

They had great power in the house, especially as in those days, having to follow up our studies more seriously, we were often separated from our parents and left to their care.

Eastwell having been given up, there was no longer a country home in England, so from then on much more time was spent at Coburg, where Alfred was being educated. It was decided, so as to separate us less from our brother, that henceforward we sisters should also study with German masters and even be confirmed in the Lutheran instead of the Anglican Church.

Mamma, as I have already mentioned, had never felt altogether happy in England, and Coburg was very dear to her because of the simple life she could live there in that small town where *Gemütlichkeit* played a greater part than elegance.

Brought up at the most gorgeous court in Europe, Mamma had nevertheless the most simple tastes and was able in her

German home to live entirely according to her desires, uncontrolled by Grandmamma Queen and uncriticized by those who were inclined to find her ways foreign and out of keeping with British traditions.

Having lived my life of difficulties in a land that was also foreign to me at first, I can now understand things that in my youth I was inclined to criticize. Mamma found real independence at Coburg; there she was sole arbiter of her own fate, no tribunal sat over her, weighing all she did or left undone. There she was her own mistress; it was a small kingdom perhaps, but her will was undiscussed, she took her orders from no one, and could live as she wished.

Coburg was a wee town with picturesque old parts and an ancient fortress looking down upon it from a hill which could be seen from miles around. A town of simple burghers, uncritical and loyal, and in those days ruled over by old Duke Ernest, brother of the Prince Consort of England.

Uncle Ernest had his peculiarities which I shall later describe, so that his court was less rigorous than most of the small German courts, but it was omnipotent for all that, as all German courts, even the smallest, were in those "good old days."

There was an old-world simplicity about Coburg; it had the ways, habits, tastes of most wee German capitals, little centres of importance that did much for the prosperity of Germany as a whole. Looking back, I understand how cosy it all was, and how happy it might have been except for the over-great influence of two people who (perhaps all unconsciously) destroyed much of its harmony.

Dr. X. and Fräulein had wormed themselves entirely into Mamma's good graces. Their word became law, in all things their advice was taken, their insinuations were listened to, their ironies and criticisms admitted without discussion.

Dr. X. was a most intelligent man and won Mamma's favour by his extreme erudition. Being exceedingly cultured and well-read herself, she found in this clever man a fund of wisdom and learning. But he was German "Kultur" at its worst, arrogant, masterful, overruling everyone else, turning the best into ridicule, laying down the law, intolerant, tyrannical. But worst of all, he hated everything

that was English, and this is what brought conflict into our lives. His object was to uproot in us the love of England and to turn us into Germans. We resisted this with all our might, pitting our wills against his with that magnificent courage of children when their gods are attacked.

But so as to give each dog his due, I will say this of Dr. X. : he could be an excellent companion. No one could be more amusing, tell an anecdote so well, so successfully arrange an excursion or organize some fun. He could discourse masterfully upon any subject—history, geography, botany, religion, art, politics, social questions ; he was always better informed than anyone else. But he had the unpleasant attribute of never allowing the other man a chance. His arrogance was complete and with sweeping assurance he would set aside or turn into ridicule any opinion opposed to his.

Alfred was entirely given over to him. During all our time in Malta, Dr. X. had been our brother's sole companion, except during the Christmas holidays which Alfred spent at Malta with us. Dr. X. was tyrannical with his pupil, impatient, intolerant, but worst of all, he liked to ridicule him before others, seeming to delight in making him blush and feel a fool. We sisters resented this with fierce indignation.

Dr. X. awoke in us all the feelings of rebellion that tyrants awake in the hearts of those they overrule. We dared not outwardly revolt or stand up against him, but with joy would we have planned his downfall.

Fräulein I might liken unto a south wind. Her voice was soft, her ways ingratiating. She seemed all kindness, sweetness, full of the love of humanity. No one could use more honeyed language ; to quote a popular expression, you felt as though " butter would not melt in her mouth." At first we fell entirely under her charm. She was a pleasant contrast to Mademoiselle, that dry, shivering spinster ; she was younger, better-looking, more of a lady ; she came from a big family of impoverished aristocrats and had such interesting stories to tell about them all and their ways and about the old castle that was her home. Her gentle ways were captivating, you felt she would defend you, uphold you through thick and thin. Thus we were without defence before her and also without suspicion. Mamma had also been entirely won

by her suave, engaging ways and language. She very soon became not only a favourite, but an adviser and one who was always consulted and listened to in preference to anyone else.

It was only by slow degrees that, with the sure instinct of children, we began to discover that she was something of a wolf in sheep's clothing, that her words were there to mask her thoughts, that her soft language was a covering for an irresistible, I might almost say instinctive, desire to undo those around her.

The stories she told sounded harmless, and you listened to them without mistrust, for they were amusing, well told, sometimes even touching, but there was poison in every word; there was also poison in her insinuations, and especially was there poison in her reticence and in the things she never quite said. She would seem to be pleading for someone whilst in reality, with almost diabolical cleverness, she was tearing them to pieces, leaving not a shred of their reputation, destroying them in your imagination for ever, much more surely than if she had done so with angry words.

Looking back upon her, I can only compare her to a miasma, to something invisible that, when you were most off your guard, lured into security by her sweet ways, tainted the air, made it unbearable. Her influence was uncannily pernicious. It destroyed good feeling, awoke enmities between those who loved each other most, made each man suspicious of his neighbour. She was as destructive as a dangerous bacillus.

Those who have not known her cannot picture to themselves how perfectly she could counterfeit the guileless, almost innocent girl telling a harmless little story to amuse the Duchess. She could put on an air of almost absent-minded simplicity. She spoke without accentuating her words, she made them smooth, like beautifully woven silk, and I can even now see the way she moved her lips whilst doing so. Little by little we came to loathe this gentle relating of innocuous stories; we knew to perfection the very airs she put on and were immediately on our guard, knowing that someone's reputation was going to be attacked, some servant was going to lose his place, some friend was going to be undermined, some master shown up in a false light.

It was torture to watch her ways, torture especially because Mamma never discovered till too late, how fundamentally, almost organically treacherous she was.

She had wormed herself into every part of the home's organizations; her advice was always asked and mostly taken; it was *her* appreciation that had weight, *her* report or version which was taken into account.

And as a last link to the chain of her power, Dr. X. fell in love with her; she became his fiancée, later his wife, and the two together were a terrible force against which no old, loved influence or habit could stand.

The life at Coburg had its own special charm; it was simple and easy, though lessons in these years played a big part and we had some earnest masters who took us more or less severely in hand, trying to put some wisdom into us. We had many friends and the people in general were kindly and very delighted to come to or be associated with the court, which played a preponderant part and was the centre around which all desires and ambitions gravitated. Our house in town was called "Palais Edinburg," a cosy, spacious house of indifferent architecture, looking out upon the grand *Platz* or square, and facing the Ehrenburg which was the big official residence of the reigning Duke, but where he never resided.

The Schlossplatz was the central attraction of the town. Here on Sundays the band played and church-parade was held, the burghers strutting about in their best clothes, the chief swells being the officers of the local infantry battalion who paraded about in their best uniforms, mingling and yet not mingling with the crowd. Imbued with the importance of their cloth, they were a sect apart, had special privileges and received the consideration of high and low, ourselves not excluded.

All the children of Coburg used to assemble upon the Schlossplatz for their games and I can still hear the sound of their voices reverberating against the walls of Palais Edinburg, of the Ehrenburg, of the Hoftheater, of the Corps de Garde and of the great stone riding-school, which were the chief buildings fronting the huge square. These children's

voices were the characteristic sound of the Coburg Schlossplatz and would penetrate through our open windows to the farthest corner of our rooms, the accompaniment of our hours of study and also of our hours of rest. Joyful, noisy and persistent, it seemed inherent in the square.

Though the town house was cosy enough, it was the Rosenau, our country castle, which was the real love of our hearts. It was an unpretentious little *Schloss* lying on a hill, comfortably false Gothic in style—a square building plastered ochre yellow, with a high roof and two pointed, crenellated façades. A naïve tower was stuck on on the garden side in which was a broad winding stair, the only stairs of the house.

When our parents took over Schloss Rosenau, it was full of incredibly old furniture, more or less Empire and Georgian, attractive but delightfully unpractical, and still more incredible old pictures, mostly of the florid romantic school, decorated its walls. We loved these pictures, they were full of poetry, their subjects were intricate and puzzling, and mostly remained mysterious, having never been explained. There was one especially, depicting a scene out of Chateaubriand's "Atalie," I believe, which attracted me extraordinarily. It represented an exquisite, milk-white maiden, enveloped by the wealth of her golden tresses, expiring in the arms of a distressed-looking Red Indian. Both the fair maiden and the romantic Indian were none the less tidy and exquisite for being out in the wilderness in such tragic circumstances. The grown-ups had a tolerant ironic smile for this china-smooth oil-painting, but when unobserved I would slink back to the dark corner where it hung and allow the poignant romance of it to thrill me through and through.

There was a glorious loft under the Rosenau's immense roof which was an endless source of delight. It was high, shadow-filled and thrillingly haunted by bats. During the daytime these spooky creatures dangled in neat rows from the rafters like loathsome black flowers with withered petals that some philtre-brewing witch had hung up to dry for uses of her own best not inquired into.

When, during some wild games with our friends, we invaded these closed regions, these ghoulish growths, slowly

unfolding, would take life and fly about in noiseless agitation, their moist, cold wings uncomfortably near to our faces. This black horde gave just the last touch of the uncanny to our voyages of discovery, adding their vampire-like ubiquity to the already eerie atmosphere of the loft.

Little by little Mamma civilized the Rosenau. She put in baths and made the rooms cosy and comfortable, without spoiling its old-world atmosphere. She hung up many of her Malta pictures, but she would never allow electric light, considering it out of keeping with the quaint old place.

The inner architecture of the Rosenau was naïve and artless. Two long corridors ran down the middle of its two stories and all the rooms opened out into this passage, which had door-windows and small balconies at each end. On the ground floor there was a white stucco-marble *Saal*, or hall, rather floridly Gothic, and vaulted, but not wanting in dignity. This large room opened out on to a gravelled space bordered by a field-like bed of unpretentious, old-fashioned but sweet-smelling roses, in which we daily scratched our legs and hands and tore our clothes.

Mamma, to our great delight, allowed us to take possession of the small room at the top of the round tower. This was quite a *Märchen* room, just the sort of chamber in which the Sleeping Beauty must have pricked her finger on the witch's spindle. This room was on a level with the loft and had three deep window-embrasures of which Ducky, Sandra and I each took one and arranged with love and care as though each nook had been a separate little room. All three of us had the home instinct to the highest degree and we loved arranging rooms. From earliest times I remember having had some wee corner which I arranged as my very own, and if I could not have a corner to myself, then it had at least to be a table.

This love of feeling at home in whatever place I may be has stayed with me all through life, and no matter where I am, hotel, train, ship, or guest in a strange house, I always make my own corner, indifferent how wee or simple it may be. I do not need precious things for this, an old piece of stuff, an earthenware jar, a handful of flowers, the absurdest little curio picked up, anything will do as long as colour, shape and line please my eye. This instinct for arranging

rooms or corners is one that has given me some of my greatest interest and pleasure in life. It is an irresistible instinct, or shall I call it urge, towards beauty. I *must* have something about me that satisfies my eye; quite indifferent to whether it is precious or not, I can make delightfully pleasing arrangements with the simplest means.

The Rosenau belongs to the lost loves of my life. It is one of the places to which my heart yearns back. There was an atmosphere of homely simplicity about it which was unique, that peaceful exquisiteness inherent in old houses. The Rosenau had all the old German ingenious simplicity, it was quite the sort of *Landschloss* described in German novels.

Mamma had laid down straw mats instead of carpets, which gave a special odour to the whole house, which, whenever I smell it anywhere else, brings the Rosenau vividly back to me. That odour of straw-matting and a certain sound of splashing water from the fountain on the front terrace, are special characteristics of the old place.

Holding my breath it seems to me that I can still hear that splashing fountain. . . . The blinds are drawn down because it is hot outside . . . everything is still, rather somnolent, but beyond there is that water always splashing and also the sound of the old gardener raking the paths between the formal little flower-beds grouped round the fountain . . . that old fellow who seemed to be eternally raking the already too tidy little paths. . . .

And behind one of those closed doors sits Mamma in her fresh and fragrant boudoir, with the Malta pictures hung on her walls and all about her the many souvenirs brought from there. We can still live some of the Eastwell-Malta traditions over again here, here somehow Dr. X. and Fräulein have not pervaded the atmosphere with their destructive desire to abolish what had been. . . .

And Mamma's rooms were so full of flowers, for it is from Mamma that we all inherited that great love of flowers. She had planted great fields of sweet peas and carnations in the big kitchen garden below the *Schloss*, a little way off. Mamma was not a gardener, but a *lover* of flowers—of simple flowers; she did not care for complicated innovations, she

liked them fragrant and old-fashioned. I cannot imagine her without her scissors and some sort of flowers in her hands. She was incredibly active; an early riser, she was always out and about the place before anybody else. She adored having meals outside, and our breakfast, tea and supper beneath the big apple tree near the lawn was a characteristic part of the Rosenau life, and we also lunched outside when the weather was not too hot.

Mamma was always the central figure; she liked to have her hours of solitude, as she was a voracious reader, but her eye was on all things. She did not personally take part in many of the amusements and activities, having in a way aged before her time. She had let herself grow stout and never went in for athletics of any kind; but she was the animator, the heart of the whole thing. She hated idleness, and loved to see those around her continually on the go, rejoicing over other people's pleasure. Though tyrannical, she was an excellent hostess. Her personality was dominant and she was never out of humour; her wit keen and quick, no one better than she could preside at a dinner-table and make conversation flow. She was deliciously amusing, but she would tolerate no nonsense, and hated all affectations. She rather intimidated the young by her caustic remarks and sharp questions. Her eyes were penetratingly keen, you felt that nothing escaped them, and her humour alone saved her from being uncomfortably severe.

Outwardly placid, she was nevertheless of an anxious disposition; she took things to heart and worried over them, thereby also often worrying others; generous and almost masculinely intelligent, she had great tact and a heart of gold, but she could not always leave well alone.

She hated all things bad, wrong or ugly, and her desire towards perfection could occasionally make her intolerant, even unfair. She had no indulgence for the foibles of humanity. Herself deeply religious, she was righteously indignant against those who were lax in their beliefs and careless about church matters; it was best not to start religious discussions at her table, for you always got the worst of it! Clinging to the principles, habits and manners of her youth, she was completely out of sympathy with all modern ideas;

if it had been in her power she would have ordered the clock to stand still, and would have repudiated every innovation, even those that furthered her own comforts. I never met anyone who stuck so pugnaciously to her old habits and convictions as Mamma; she was ready to defy the whole advancing world.

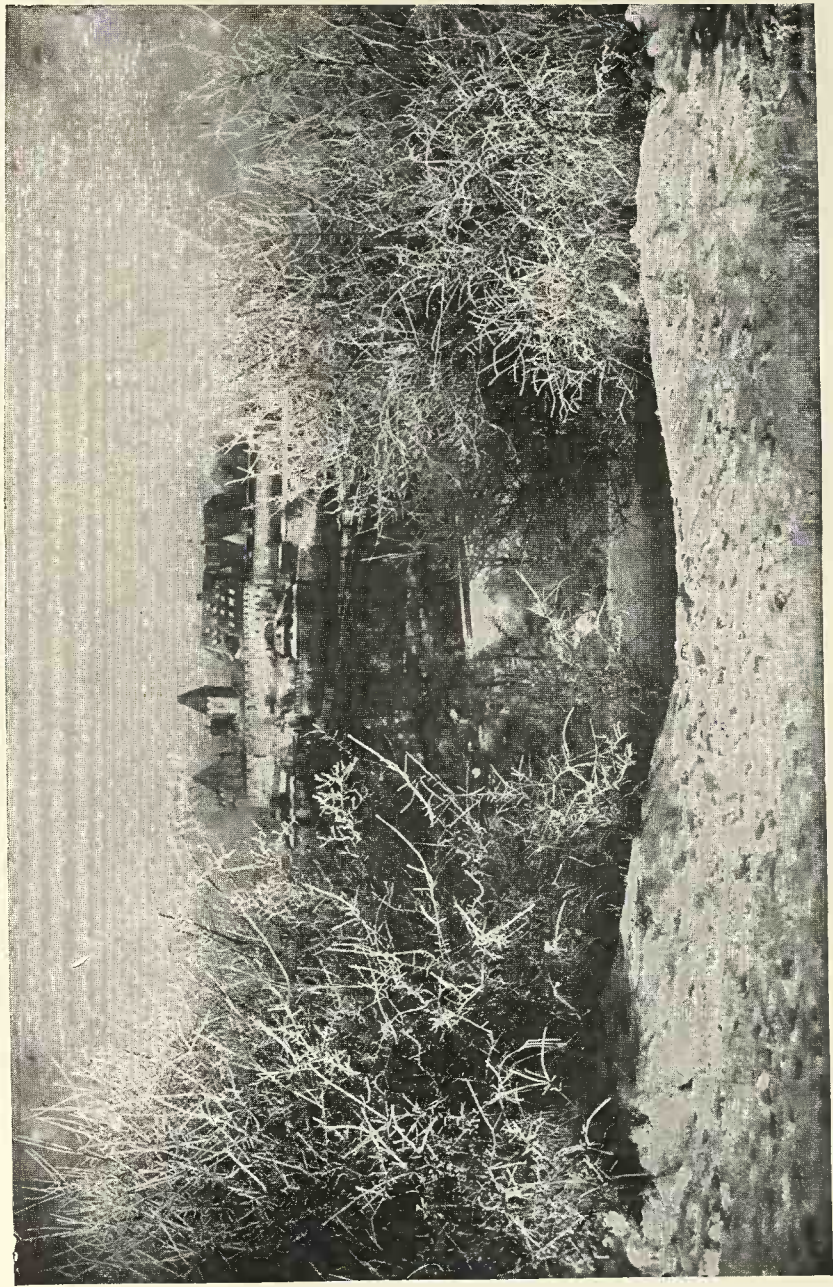
In later years this attitude isolated her much from the rest of her kind. Being at war against modernism, as years advanced she became more and more of a recluse and remained entrenched in her own fortress where she could live as she would.

One of her peculiarities was her extreme contempt for medicine and anything pertaining to hospitals, doctors or nurses. Of an iron constitution and never ill herself, she treated all medical innovations as "modern fads" that we were quite able to get on without in our days; she repudiated the bacillus theory, disinfectants were obnoxious to her and absolutely taboo in her house. She positively hooted at those who took their temperature, or blood pressure, had themselves auscultated or who followed a regime. It was absurd to put iodine on a cut or make injections against typhoid fever. As to operations, they were simply a sinful interference with Nature such as God had made it. Medicine was never discussed in our home and I set out into life entirely ignorant of its most elementary principles.

But for all that Mamma was very fond of recommending remedies such as phenacetin, aspirin or saliperine, and was indignant if anybody explained that they might be pernicious if not given with discrimination.

In fact Mamma was a chip of the old block, a type now no longer to be found. Autocratic, conservative, hardened against sickness and pain, proud, courageous, uncomplaining, one who held fast to her old ideas and ideals, abhorring progress if it meant change, abhorring sport if it meant bad manners, abhorring emancipation if it meant licence, abhorring free thinking if it meant ignoring religious principles.

Kind, liberal and tolerant with her servants, knowing the family history of each, she would joke and be almost familiar with them, without, however, allowing them to overstep an inch of that distance which separated the castes from each



THE OLD COBURG FORTRESS.

other. Imperial and at the same time democratic, she loved simplicity. Her cupboards full of Russian sables, silks and satins, real lace, marvellous linen, she preferred wearing homespun, thick linen and worthless pelts, because those treasures shut away amongst camphor and lavender were part of the put-away Russian splendour, a thing that had no place in her chosen life. No one was better judge or connoisseur of antique furniture, old silver and china, of which she possessed no end, but she would amuse herself buying modern imitations for everyday use. One had sometimes the curious feeling that she was taking a sort of revenge upon former glories and sumptuousness, crushing them underfoot, making a clean sweep of what belonged irretrievably to the past; if with relief or regret it was difficult to guess.

A curious mixture of tyranny and extraordinary kindness, she could undo at a blow years of patience and tolerance by a sudden hard and often unjustified rebuke which one felt that a quite small effort of self-control on her part could have avoided. There was, I think, something of that mysterious Russian irresponsibility in her nature, an elemental exasperation against all things and even against herself, which other nationalities in vain try to understand. There was a fundamental impatience beneath all her virtues, some urge to overthrow, to destroy with open eyes, even what she most appreciated, needed or loved even, an impatience quite inexplicable except to those who knew the very basis of her nature, disciplined to the verge of torture by those who brought her up. It was a kind of rending asunder of bonds that were irksome, although, even to herself, she had never admitted that they were.

Mamma more than any other being I have ever known would cut off her nose to spite her face!

I must now describe someone else, and on setting out to paint his portrait I feel almost as though I were delving down into the delicious licence of the fairy-story or legend writer who can model his monsters according to unrestricted imagination.

The personage I am about to describe is Duke Ernest of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, our great-uncle, and brother of the

Prince Consort of England, whose smug little duchy our father, by family arrangement, was to inherit.

The figure of Queen Victoria's beloved Consort, our grandfather, is well known to most of the world, specially since Lytton Strachey's interesting summing-up of his character, of his good looks, his intelligence, his patience in a situation which needed almost superhuman tact, of the love his wife had for him and of how she mourned for him to the last day of her life. But his elder brother, though he too was a man of vast intelligence and played a rather important political part in Germany round about the seventies, is little known beyond the German frontiers.

Ernest, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, was a type of sovereign that has quite disappeared from our modern world. (If ever his kind reappears it will be amongst *nouveaux riches* or financial potentates, but not amongst princes, I trow.) He was even in those easier days a curio not often met with, and it is just as well that he should be rare of his kind.

Uncle Ernest was a tyrant, ruthless and indifferent to the feelings of others; he might almost, had I been writing a fairy-tale, have been an ogre, if you can stretch your imagination to conceive an ogre buttoned up into a correct, if old-fashioned, frock-coat, for it was always in a frock-coat that he appeared twice a year to pay our mother his official visit.

Try and picture to yourself an elderly man, over "life-size," heavy, ponderous, but at the same time an old beau, squeezed into a frock-coat too tight for his bulk and uncomfortably pinched in at the waist. A sallow face marred by liver spots, a lean, waxed moustache curving down over the corners of his mouth, the ends turning up again. The jaw of a bulldog, the lower teeth protruding far beyond the upper and with a pair of bloodshot eyes alive with uncanny, almost brutal intelligence.

A formidable old gentleman, ceremonious, emphatic and deliberately jovial, admirably counterfeiting a sort of burly geniality. He would appear, top-hat in hand, with lemon-coloured gloves squeezed into its rim and a rosebud in his button-hole. This rosebud was never missing. We children, who were always sent for to assist our mother on these festive occasions, had been trained to bring forward the most

solid chair in the room as his abnormal weight would have been detrimental to any lighter form of furniture.

He would sit down, after having laid his top-hat on a table, his knees widely apart, snort, look about him with a roving eye, accepting our timid politeness with loud but absent-minded expressions of approval, chucking us, to our dismay, under the chin, and inevitably exclaiming: "*Ach die herrlichen, die lieben, die süssen Kinder!*"

These periodical invasions of Mamma's drawing-room by the local potentate were looked forward to with a certain fearful enjoyment in which both dread and excitement had their place.

The truth about Uncle Ernest was not known to me in those days, when all *risqué* conversation was strictly kept from our ears, and to us he was simply a rather terrible, but amiable, bulldog-like uncle, who inspired us with both fear and enjoyment, but later all his peculiarities were related to me and they are worth recounting.

For state reasons he had married a certain Princess Alexandrina of Baden, sister of the then reigning Grand Duke. She was a mild lady, perfectly virtuous, perfectly colourless and resembling her sister-in-law, Queen Victoria, only by her unlimited (and in her case) inexplicable adoration of her lord and master.

He treated her with abominable, insulting indifference, and was known all over Germany for his never-ending and often none too dignified amorous adventures.

Because of these peculiarities his court was hardly respectable. It was composed of adventurers who were useful in all sorts of ways perhaps best not too closely inquired into. These rather doubtful gentlemen were married to second-rate actresses of compromised reputation and all sorts of semi-cultured, semi-respectable persons of nondescript types. Occasionally there were a few intellectuals and artists of real talent, for Duke Ernest was a man of great learning, but these better elements diminished more and more as he advanced in age.

His excesses of course cost him a lot of money, so added to the rest, he was uncomfortably in the hands of very shady money-lenders to whom he was obliged to show a certain

consideration which did nothing to heighten the prestige or tone of his court.

Because of this state of affairs my parents avoided any court festivities and there were, I believe, uncomfortable wrangles about this, but all that was so much before my time that only rumours of it reached me long after old uncle's days had passed.

Once a year, however, the old tyrant gave a family dinner at his Castle Kalenberg, a residence somewhat after the style of the Rosenau, but more pretentious and palatial. The Kalenberg was also situated on a hill and has been mentioned once before in connexion with a cake. The Kalenberg cake, however, never appeared on Duke Ernest's table.

For some reason we children were always invited to these yearly repasts. I believe our innocent presence kept the dissolute old gentleman within bounds. Before starting out, we were well coached as to our behaviour and severely enjoined not to have laughing fits, or to give way to any signs of discourteous hilarity however amused we might be.

Uncle Ernest, owing to his bulk, would sit throned far above all his guests, a terrible figure we could not keep our eyes off. Whatever his real feelings may have been, he played to perfection the genial host and would look, with a "haw-haw," round the table like an ogre counting the morsels he would later gobble up, but that he had set out to charm first. Also on these memorable occasions, we were loudly proclaimed "*süsse, herrliche Kinder*," whereupon we would stuff our handkerchiefs into our mouths to keep from guffawing.

I believe that his conversation could be most coloured and interesting, if not always strictly proper, but we were too young then to enjoy it.

Two rows of high silver candlesticks were invariably the chief decoration of his board, the flowers were stiffly arranged and each guest had a small glass with a tight little bouquet in front of his plate. I remember a certain pink flower always to be found in these old-fashioned nosebags, which had an extremely unpleasant odour. When unobserved we would extricate this special bloom from amongst its companions (no easy feat because of the tightness of the posies) and secretly pass them to each other under the table,

which was another occasion for nearly dying of suppressed laughter.

Poor, humble old Aunt Alexandrina sat opposite the tyrant, mutely nodding approval to each word the terrible one spoke.

Dear old Aunt Alexandrina! I remember her as a drooping, sad-looking old lady in shabby black, a large cameo brooch with the effigy of her husband holding together a cashmere shawl, with a flat and stayless body. A weak, grisly beard covered her chin and two kindly bleared eyes protruded above a depressed-looking nose, hopelessly pear-shaped. She had a nervous way of blinking continually which added to the distressed look which was her chief characteristic. A sad old figure, whose one and only love was the terrible old gentleman who treated her as no one else would dare to treat a servant. She too is a type our modern times have done away with, the saddest, most depressed form of the dutiful wife; of man's plaything, servant-maid, victim.

Even in her early youth she must have been wanting in beauty, but defeated, boneless, castaway hunk that she was, she too had a day she loved to remember, a memory that had remained like a shining light. This we discovered when visiting the humble apartment she occupied right up under the roof of the Kalenberg, into which one seldom penetrated. For some unknown reason in their early wedded days the ducal couple had made together an excursion into the desert, a rare undertaking for those times. Dear old Aunt possessed a faded photograph which she cherished beyond all her belongings. She showed it to us that day. The fingers that held the old picture trembled and the always lachrymose eyes shed real tears of emotion when she took it from its sheltered corner and laid it between our hands.

There she stood in a be-crinolined riding-dress with corresponding hat all droops and feathers and with the classical thin little whip in her hand. Beside her, the beloved despot, he too rigged out according to early-Victorian conceptions of sports-clothes. Arrogant, domineering, sure of himself even in that photograph, he was gazing over her head whilst she gazed up into his face with the eyes of an adoring spaniel. As setting, the desert, the classic desert; sand-dunes, vast

horizon, a tent, a palm tree and even the picturesque Arab leaning on his over-long gun—there was no faking, it was the genuine thing.

Yes, there she was in the desert, a quite young wife; she had the picture still, pathetic memento of an illusion that, at the moment when she lived it, was to her at least real enough. She too had had her day, that day which she had lived, romantically, under the ardent African sun—desert, tent, palm trees, nothing was missing, not even the illusion of love.

And in her cold old age, relegated to a stuffy little room under the roof because it cost little to heat, she would still sit before it remembering. . . . A whiff from the Rose of the Garden of Eden came to her still. . . . She too had once been young and had dreamed a dream out in the desert at the side of the man who to-day was a dissolute old reprobate, but whom, oh, miracle of the human heart, she still loved.

Duke Ernest was a mighty hunter, even if not “in the sight of the Lord,” of wine, women and song we may add, stags, roebucks and chamois. A great part of his revenue was used to keep up enormous shooting areas and he had beautifully situated shooting-boxes in the four corners of his picturesque little realm. He was surrounded by a horde of gamekeepers and officials of different degrees and with different titles in keeping with their green cloth, for in Germany all *Jäger* are clothed in green.

The old tyrant's last lady-love was a sister of one of these green-frocked gentlemen who for that reason was in high favour. I only mention this so as to be able to add a last touch to the picture of Aunt Alexandrina's conjugal devotion.

When the despot died at a ripe old age, his excesses having in no wise shortened his days, “serenely full,” the epicure would say: “Fate cannot harm me—I have dined to-day,” his broken-hearted widow took this young woman under her protection and went as far as to declare the little villa her terrible lord had used for his revels with this and other ladies must neither be touched nor inhabited by others, “because it was there that her beloved Ernst had lived such happy hours!” . . .

Greater charity shall be found in no woman. . . .

Chapter VIII

EDUCATION AT COBURG

A WORD about our masters. They were of course an important factor in our lives just then, as we were supposed to imbibe all the knowledge necessary for well-educated little princesses, though in those days no complicated instruction such as algebra, the classics, mathematics or philosophy belonged to the programme. I was neither a good nor an eager scholar, preferring all my other occupations to study. I was not ambitious and grudged the time the lesson hours stole from the thousand and one other things I longed to do. Ducky and I took our lessons together. She had decidedly more aptitude for learning than I, was quicker, had a better memory; spelling came easily to her, whilst I never could learn how to spell correctly; even to-day I cannot, so to say, "see" my words, but only the vision of what they represent. For instance, "garden" for me is not just g-a-r-d-e-n, but trees, flowers and fountains, green lawns and shady corners, and only occasionally I wake up with a certain astonishment to discover how the word looks on paper in plain writing.

Sandra, being younger and therefore less advanced, took her lessons alone; she was the slowest of the three. Later on sister Baby was a much better scholar, more ambitious, with more modern conceptions about what a girl ought to know. I was entirely satisfied with geography, history, arithmetic, botany, literature, religion, natural history, painting, French, music and gymnastics; no more complicated knowledge ever attracted me, nor were we aware that our education was of the sketchiest. We had no one to measure ourselves against.

Professor Rieman, our history and geography master, was an earnest, brown-bearded man, the polite, rather formal

type of German. We tolerated, without really liking him. He did his best to make us understand the map of the world and remember the names of rivers, towns and mountains, and he tried hard to give us a general idea of history and of how the countries were connected with each other through the ages; how their faces and dimensions changed; which were the fundamental events that *must* be remembered, and how one period followed another with its wars, its growth and decline. But my untrained brain was not really receptive and not much remained to me of all the wisdom he tried to impart to us in long and sometimes weary hours when so many tempting voices called to us from beyond our open windows.

Professor Rieman had a son with magnificent musical talent, who is to-day a professional artiste.

Our chosen favourite amongst our professors was Professor Beck. He had a fine head, with an eagle nose, a mop of untidy hair, a deep voice and a sense of humour. On our "school-plan" his lessons were dubbed *Deutsch* which included literature, composition as well as purely grammar and dictation lessons. We liked our lessons with Professor Beck, though his outlook was far beyond ours and he often forgot that he was speaking to two very innocent little simpletons and would run off upon a line of his own, far beyond our mentality; passing his hand absent-mindedly through his mop of unruly brown-grey hair, he would talk and talk, and his eyes no longer saw us, lost as he was in his own visions. He would hold an incisive forefinger along the side of his eagle nose, half shut his eyes and tell us things we did not understand, gladly drawing from the depths of his knowledge, quite oblivious of the two little girls who liked to hear him perorate, but did not even make an effort to follow his flight of thought. Vaguely, however, we understood that he was deeply interesting, had we been really able to understand what he was talking about.

Ducky, though, was fond of arguing out a point, and seldom accepted anything wholesale, but I was an entirely uninteresting pupil, and I am sorry to say that no clever or amusing sayings of mine from those days can be quoted.

I had, however, from the first a certain talent for composition and loved to be given a free rein to "invent" my own subject. I also wrote a very good hand. But my memory was entirely untrained; I could, for instance, remember a story but never a date.

I do not think that lessons were as well understood then as they are nowadays. They were not made really *begreiflich*; they were not, if I may so express it, "visual" enough; they did not excite your imagination, nor were you really taught to grasp the meaning, trend or plan of things. The deductions, the reasons why, the gradual logical development of things were not sufficiently put before you. At least that is what I feel when looking back upon the many hours wasted in learning so little. But it may also have been that, having been kept by our very religious mother so entirely ignorant of all realities, our unploughed minds simply could not receive the seed of knowledge as the very basis of everything was wanting.

Dr. Heim taught us natural history and botany. He was fat and sallow, with pale eyes protruding behind glasses; buttoned up into the classic frock-coat, there was about him a fusty odour of shut windows, stale cigars and unaired clothes that our noses resented, nor were we ever quite sure that we approved of the knowledge he tried to impart to us. We had an instinctive horror of anything describing inner organs, we thought it had an air of butchery about it that was not quite decent, and we were nearly sick when one day, full of enthusiasm, he brought us an ox's eye so as to demonstrate the marvels of the optic organization. No, decidedly we were not of the modern school which unblushingly inquires into every detail of the human mechanism.

Botany was better, it was much more in our line, though I always preferred a flower in its natural form rather than vivisected to explain to us its why and wherefore.

Poor little Professor Neuman, our arithmetic master, had the worst time of all; sums and numbers, additions and subtractions, the rule of three and all the rest of that tortuous category of study was elementally foreign to my somewhat romantic and careless mentality. Professor Neuman's

dark chestnut beard was in queer contrast with his china-pink countenance, and when worried he looked almost absurdly pathetic.

Mr. de Schaek, the successor of stout, kindly, complacent Edouard de Morsier of happy Osborne days, was Alfred's second tutor and gave us French lessons. He was an elegant young man who wore spats and well-cut clothes, who was bored with our youth and could not mask his absent-mindedness, for Mr. de Schaek was a Latin from the crown of his head to the tip of his toes, and was in love with the only well-dressed woman in Coburg. This interesting damsel was the daughter of the Herzoglicher Oberstallmeister and had the distracting habit of sallying forth over the Schlossplatz just at the hour of our French lessons. Secretly in sympathy with our enamoured young master, we immediately recognized by his evident signs of disquiet when this hour was approaching. He would get up from his chair, pace the room, one eye squinting out of the window, whilst he tried to give us our *dictée*. The lady in question interested us also, for she was undeniably chic, and we felt that she was not the sort we should ever get acquainted with, having taken root amongst the "undesirables" of Duke Ernest's court.

Painting and music were taught us by two worthy spinsters of vastly different types: Fräulein Anna Messing and Fräulein Helferich. This last-named really managed to give me a solid basis in the principles of drawing for which I am grateful to this day. Though her style was cramped and old-fashioned, she knew the fundamental rules of her art and the anatomy of a flower even better than the worthy Dr. Heim. She was a caustic, ironical old dame with a sharp nose and advanced social ideas. There was in her the foundation of a real democrat, she was something of a free-thinker, her opinions were independent in an age when it was not the fashion. She bowed down to no class. She was in fact my first contact with the "Vox Populi."

Old Anna Messing, on the contrary, loved all that had to do with royalty, and was well versed in the "Almanach de Gotha"; she had a beak of a nose, hard, glassy blue eyes, and teeth only comparable to those imagined by a

Frenchman when portraying the Britisher abroad. But she was angelically patient, taking infinite trouble to initiate me into the mysteries of an art for which I had no talent. None of her energetic "ein, zwei, drei," alas, ever taught me to strum even the simplest little tune in time, and when playing duets with sister Ducky I always chose the bass as it was mostly accompaniment instead of tune, and more in keeping with my poor possibilities. This did not mean that I did not love music; on the contrary, it moved me strangely all my life, though my real musical education was given me much later by Carmen Sylva, the old Queen of Roumania. But in those early days I was a hopeless little barbarian in all concerning that most divine of all arts.

Quite above our level was the person to whom our religious instruction was entrusted. To us, religion was a fact, an essential; not a question of theology. We were in those days quite unworthy of any higher or wider explanation of this fact. The Trinity was undiscussable, the Credo was our belief, we pondered not at all over its assertions and we hated to be told that Adam and Eve were symbols and that God had not created the world in six days. Evidently there were differences of creeds, but that could not be helped; we were Protestants, Mamma was Orthodox, and beyond our inner circle there were Catholics. These went to a church Luther had denounced because he considered it scandalous that in Rome priests should sell tickets for Heaven. This same Luther had, in the Wartburg (or was it in the Feste Coburg, for this prized fortress had also once had the honour of harbouring the great reformer?), thrown an inkpot at the head of the Devil who had come to try and tempt him. The black stain could still be seen on the wall.

Luther was certainly right to denounce Rome and her errors, but it could not be denied that there was a more poetic atmosphere about the Catholic churches, even if they were too crowded with painted saints, than about our reformed ones. Mamma's church was saturated with mystery and gave you inexplicable thrills. The artist within you approved of the icons *à fond d'or*, the incense perturbed

your senses, the shut-off altar made you feel that revelations were hidden from your sight. Yes, there was greater mystery in unreformed churches, they attracted you but were alien all the same. There was an honest sincerity about our English hymns and solemn German *Kirchenlieder*; you felt you were on solid ground. But we did not worry our heads about these differences and their meanings; in those days we were only too delighted to leave well alone, and to accept religion as it had been presented to us by our nurses or governesses, and each morning and evening we faithfully said our prayers.

Herr Obersuperintendent Dr. Müller, chief ecclesiastic of Coburg, was a fine old minister, deeply learned and a magnificent preacher. We were in great awe of him and reverently accepted him as a tremendous personality, and tried with all our hearts to follow his expounding of deep truths far too intricate for our undeveloped minds to grasp. Accustomed as we were to the simple, unsophisticated teachings of English country and naval clergy, he somewhat confused our humble conceptions. Like Professor Beck he fascinated us; his words had wings, we liked the music they made, and accustomed to the pulpit he would soar off into spheres where we could not follow him. Spellbound we would listen, full of admiration for his wisdom, but much too shy to ask questions or confess when we did not understand. Our assenting silence led him to believe that we were absorbing all his teachings, whilst in reality he was confusing our conceptions, even to a certain degree sowing the seeds of doubt in our souls. We venerated him, we admired him, but we never digested his lessons, and I remember how in instinctive self-defence I would allow my brain to become protectingly hazy and safely unreceptive; all unconsciously trying to save my old landmarks, subconsciously understanding that my mind was not yet ready for his deeper teachings which were expounded in a language beyond our years.

He did, however, lead us to our Confirmation, which we approached with a spirit of deep if somewhat unenlightened fervour. We tried to feel and realize the solemnity of the act and to be worthy of the vows we were taking.

But right within my inner conscience I had the shocked sensation of not having felt the full thrill of its mystic importance.

It was never given to me to experience any deeper religious ecstasies. Marvellous music, or a perfect communion with Nature could make me realize God most profoundly; a magnificent view, a deep forest silence, a flower-filled garden, a glowing sunset, the sight of a storm at sea, gave me a clearer conception of the eternal than any religious ceremony. The rites one had to go through with a priest as mediator for me always lacked something; he was too much of the earth earthy, with gestures become too familiar and uninspired by repetition; he never gave me that contact with the great Omnipotence which I felt lived more really in my soul than in any church ritual, or any words of man.

This long preparation and those complicated theological explanations of what I had formerly accepted as facts had made me feel slightly uncomfortable, almost a little resentful; subconsciously, no doubt, but there was a sensation of void somewhere, almost as of having lost something. I know that Ducky, who was being confirmed with me, also felt this, but an inexplicable shyness kept us from confiding in each other and discussing a subject which was more one of feeling than of expression, but I knew that she was undergoing the same rather bewildering experience.

With all our might we tried to hypnotize ourselves into a sort of religious ecstasy, a sort of closer contact with the beyond, but neither of us experienced the real inner thrill which, I believe, is given to some.

We were confirmed in the delightful little village church of Oslow near the Rosenau, a rustically rococo building, whitewashed and simple, with a high, dark and tiled roof. The ancient bell had a solemn voice, the simple congregation was full of fervour, and all those who crowded to church that day, highborn or lowly, were well-wishers, people who loved the two sisters making their first conscious vows before the altar. It was the season of the *Narcissus Poeticus*, the season when the earliest flowers bloom. The chapel was full of them, they were strewn under our feet as we advanced towards the altar, they were bound in

great bunches to the pillars, and ever will the pungent, rather heady perfume of those white, star-shaped flowers with their disk-like yellow centres, remind me of that charmingly simple ceremony in that quaint and seldom visited village church.

The text given me for my supposedly conscious entry into life was: "Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall be called the children of God."

On that day also Mamma presented me with four beautiful rows of pearls, with a ruby and diamond set clasp which her mother had left me for this occasion, as she too in her youth, as Princess of Hesse, had been confirmed in a Protestant Church before she became Russia's Empress and changed her faith.

Amongst the many lessons given us were dancing lessons, and these were delightful occasions for forgathering with our friends, as it was no good having dancing lessons without partners.

The pale, eager, nervous little man who instructed us in this elegant art happened to be a brother or cousin of our cook, with the name of Reinhart if I remember rightly. He gave himself infinite trouble and we enjoyed ourselves immensely but could never be induced to take this, in those days somewhat stiff and ceremonious art, very seriously. *Valse à trois temps*, polka, *schottische*, mazurka, gallop, quadrille and lancers, were the dances the desperate, white-gloved, perspiring little martyr tried to teach us.

Amongst Alfred's friends was a terribly funny fellow called Reinhold Ribbeck, rather impertinent but full of gaiety. Ribbeck amused me more than was considered seemly, but somehow one always managed to take a fancy to those of whom the authorities disapproved. I also remember Ribbeck as chief organizer of the bat chases up in the Rosenau loft.

One of our great games at that time was "Christenvervolgung"—inspired by the lessons upon Church History we were just plodding through. To make our games drastic and realistic we underwent no end of torment, allowing ourselves to be bound up to trees and let down by a rope

into a ruined little tower at the end of the Rosenau terrace, where we would remain imprisoned till those who represented the Christians came to deliver us. We made a lot of noise and got very hot, and the games generally ended with a huge tea under the maple tree, Mamma presiding over a damp-haired, dishevelled company of young ruffians with glowing cheeks and tremendous appetites. Nothing gave Mamma more pleasure than to see the young eat to their heart's content, and enormous quantities of cakes, bread and butter, as well as strawberries and cream, were provided on these occasions. *Topfkuchen*, *Knüppelkuchen*, *Sandtorte*, and *Waffeln* were some of the most cherished delicacies, and they did indeed taste delicious out there under the old maple tree with Mamma encouraging you to stuff to your heart's content.

Life at Coburg and at the Rosenau was much less agreeable when Mamma was absent, which she often was in those days, either in Russia or in England, generally taking sister Baby with her, and we then fell irrevocably under the sway of Fräulein and Dr. X.

Fräulein was nice-looking and "a pleasant-spoken lady" as the steward's room would have expressed it, so the inevitable happened. Dr. X. fell in love with her and they became engaged.

Love has different effects upon different people. In this case it had the effect of making the two enamoured ones see perfection in each other, but none in their pupils. Besides, it was considered expedient for us to learn some of the unpleasanter sides of life. This belonged to their system of education. According to them we had, up to the present, had far too easy a time of it.

We had been brought up to the luxuries and comforts of a well-organized and wealthy English home; now we were severely taken in hand to learn that life was not always nor everywhere so easy and agreeable. We were to get accustomed to German manners, ideas, tastes. Reforms were to be introduced and Fräulein set about to upset all that we had hitherto loved and counted upon.

For some reason, although a lover of fine clothes and elegance herself, she persuaded Mamma that it would be

good for us to learn to wear ugly clothes and harsh linen instead of the fine underclothing we had been accustomed to ever since our supremely refined English nursery days. So nightgowns as well as underwear were suddenly changed into others of coarse calico that irritated our sensitive and pampered skins. Besides, she quickly spotted that we all, and I in particular, were keenly attracted by lovely colours, pretty stuffs and becoming dresses, so it was considered necessary to extirpate this tendency towards self-indulgence by making us wear humiliatingly ugly gowns, hats and cloaks, badly shaped shoes—in fact anything that could “uglify” us in any way.

This was acute torture, and we resented these innovations with an exasperated but silent indignation that the lady in question, we were sure, divined and gloated over.

She had a hateful way of showing us up to our mother in our most unattractive light. Girls of that age are anyhow at their worst, and parents have to be patient with them; but Fräulein found ways of ridiculing and humiliating us before Mamma in a thousand small, treacherous and destructive ways. She also encouraged and stimulated any petty jealousies amongst us, and it was only our real love and sympathy for each other which kept us loyal friends and companions.

The more I think about Fräulein's methods the more do I condemn them. There was something Iago-like about her, insinuating and almost perversely sly. She would, for instance, lead us on by equivocal conversation to ask questions about the hidden mysteries of life and would then show us up to Mamma as nasty little girls with unhealthy minds, whilst it was *she* who was trying to stir us up out of the somewhat torpid but paradisiacal innocence in which Mamma desired to keep us. It was hateful treachery and had Mamma been able to see through it, she would have been incensed. But this clever couple had entirely insinuated themselves into Mamma's confidence and good graces and we were never given a hearing, whilst all unkind little stories about us and all belittling of our virtues were believed.

Besides, Dr. X. stimulated Mamma's criticism of English things in a way that finally did much harm.



MY BROTHER ALFRED AT THE AGE OF EIGHTEEN.

But all this belongs now to past history and I am not going to rake it up, and if I have mentioned it at all it is only because it did much to disturb, if not actually to sadden, the last three years of my life at home.

Of course we were growing up and, having lost the charm of childhood, were no doubt often provoking, but it was a critical age and I am sure that had Mamma known Fräulein's *real* character she would not have entrusted us to her care.

One little incident of that time when the two inauspicious authorities were banded together against us must be related, for it is humorous.

Mamma had left for Russia, and the not-yet-married couple were "mooning" together, inspiring us with the boredom with which we probably inspired them; there was a feeling of non-sympathy on both sides.

From time immemorial, for all unofficial occasions, a large silver cup filled with flowers, or a plant, had occupied the centre of the dining-table. This cup, well polished and set English-wise on a small, dark blue velvet pedestal, was of a certain height, hiding your *vis-à-vis*. In Mamma's absence Fräulein took the head, Dr. X. the foot of the table, and being in love, this silver, flower-filled vase prevented the engaged couple from seeing each other during the meals. They stood this impediment for some time, but one day Dr. X., in that high-handed way of his, ordered the servant to remove the cup from off the table. Irritated as we were against a tyranny we accepted from necessity and not from choice, our accumulated resentment found in this sudden outlet, and all four of us raised a loud protest; this pot had been put on the table by Mamma, it was her desire that it should be there and it was she alone who had the right to have it removed; during her absence we did not admit of its being touched; it was a tradition, we could not bear to sit at the table without it, etc. etc. . . . In fact we made a hell of a row.

At first the irate Dr. X. tried to laugh away our resistance, endeavouring to show us how foolish we were and how absurd our objections. All in vain! We had at last

found firm ground under our feet; here was an occasion when we could score over the oppressor and we intended to maintain our position. Finally, completely exasperated, the angry gentleman burst out: "Well, it is either I or the pot!"

Oh, dangerous words! For at that, sister Ducky, at all times the "fore-fighter," stretched out both arms, clasping the offending vase to her heart, and glaring over it at our brother's tutor, loudly declared: "We prefer the pot!"

Dismay in the ranks of the enemy who, to save his face, had only one thing to do after this, to get up and leave the table, which he did with as much dignity as the absurd situation allowed him to muster. It need not be added that the rest of the meal was a somewhat silent and gloomy affair in an atmosphere made freezing by Fräulein's resentful disapproval.

The misguided couple finally married, and whilst they were on their honeymoon, Fräulein's eldest sister came to look after us, a somewhat aged spinster whom we for some reason called "Louiserowitch."

Louiserowitch had evidently no great love for her younger sister and little by little she wormed out of us all our complaints against Fräulein and Dr. X. which we had up to then kept to ourselves. It happened just then that Papa spent a week with us at the Rosenau during Mamma's absence, an event which seldom came to pass. We soon discovered that the high-and-mighty airs of Dr. X. and above all his anti-British attitude were a thorn in Papa's flesh; and encouraged by the unloving elder sister we raised our voices in complaint against our dual oppressors, thus at last unloading our heavy hearts to our parent.

I believe that a great row ensued. Papa was only too delighted to discover that his children resented the couple he himself detested and I believe that both were for a moment in danger of being dismissed.

This event, however, did not take place. How matters were patched up I do not know, but Mamma, who still believed in them, somehow obtained their absolution, and they were re-installed and were, alas, allowed to continue

their rule, less ruthlessly perhaps, but none the less effectually, though a velvet glove disguised part of their tyranny.

I have forgotten in what form reconciliation with their pupils came about, but our quarrel was somehow patched up with concessions on both sides. The acute epoch of war was over, but a certain feeling of mutual distrust was never quite got over. Mamma behaved with extraordinary tact and did not, as far as I can remember, reproach us for our denunciation; but Louiserowitch, the instigator, was no more invited to the house. I have often wondered since what old score she can have had to pay off against her younger sister by having thus encouraged us to give voice to our complaints.

Alas! we were growing up, there was no denying it! Our dresses were getting longer and longer and there was no "Captain dear" to soften any shocks with the authorities. We were now in less loving hands that were only too glad to show us up; there was no longer that atmosphere of love and good understanding in the house. Power over us had been given to those who magnified our faults and minimized our virtues, and the farther we advanced along this prickly (not to say thorny road, which I suppose would be an exaggeration), the more did Malta, when looking back upon its delights, appear like the Garden of Eden, out of which we had been driven for ever. Fräulein, in spite of our revolt, still held sway over our wardrobe and it was still considered good for our morals to clothe us as unbecomingly as possible, with true German want of taste.

Fräulein, the moment she spotted which was the pattern of stuff we most disliked, would choose it for us with a sort of evil delight. Thus do I remember a certain loathsome green, yellow-streaked check, which was inflicted upon us. I always abhorred checks and this one was the most offensive imaginable. If Fräulein meant to humiliate us she had certainly succeeded, for this abominable attire was indeed a mortification of the flesh; besides, the stuff, being good and strong, never wore out. Revolt filled our hearts each time we had to appear in these dresses; and what was worse, the treacherous lady used to warn our mother that

we were incensed over the indignity of our costume and Mamma would make remarks upon it, asking us if we were not pleased with "those charming dresses," which was adding insult to injury.

We were allowed to go to the theatre twice a week, on Thursdays, I think, and Sundays, because there, unlike England, Sunday was the great day for theatre-going. This we loved.

The Coburg theatre was a self-righteous little institute, full of its own importance and, of course, called "das Hof-theater," as all things in those days centred round the court, and the court gave it a large yearly subsidy. The public, however, was exacting and wished to see every sort of performance, so there was not only grand opera and operettas, but also comedies, tragedies and classical pieces. Luckily there was no prejudice against the theatre for children; it was quite rightly considered educational. Of course all *risqué* and not absolutely proper pieces were severely excluded from our programme, but we were initiated into Schiller, Goethe, Shakespeare, Wagner, Bizet, Rossini, Mozart, Verdi, Meyerbeer, Donizetti and what-not else, because no opera was too ambitious for the Coburg stage. We were still at the age when we preferred opera, tragedy and classics rather than comedy, but Mamma loved *Lustspiele* and could laugh heartily.

Terrible old Uncle Ernest was much addicted to the theatre in every form and when in town was always to be seen in his small box quite near the stage, whence his phenomenal bulk rose almost threateningly from a chair specially constructed to accept and bear his abnormal weight. We would look over towards him from where we sat, rather as one would peep at the cage of the most formidable animal in a menagerie. In the long *entr'acte*, we would be taken over to say good evening to him and would generally find him smoking a strong and very black cigar. Here too he would receive us with the usual exclamations of loud goodwill and we would stare fascinated at this unusual specimen of humanity to which we could never get quite accustomed.

We heard whisperings about his interest in such and

such a lady of the stage; but in those days that sort of talk went in at one ear and out at the other, it meant nothing to us. We too had our favourite actors and actresses, so why should not the terrible old Duke also have his preferences?

Our special favourite was a baritone called Bütner, who was at the same time an excellent actor and the days when he sang were red-letter days. He was a perfect Hans Sachs, Rigoletto, Toreador, Barber of Seville, Don Juan, first-class as Amonasro in *Aida*, enchanting as Wolfram von Eschenbach in *Tannhäuser*. Besides serious opera, he had several delightful parts in operettas, especially in one called *Don César*, where he impersonated a very gay adventurer and sang an irresistible valse then very much in vogue: "*Komm herab, O Madonna Theresa*," which was one of those tunes that once heard you could never get out of your head. This, with Strauss's "*Rosen aus den Süden*," I vainly tried to strum on the piano under Fräulein Messing's energetic *ein, zwei, drei!* But in spite of her courteous optimism I never came to the end of either.

The tenors were generally fat and uninspiring and far from being the ideal heroes they were supposed to represent; Lohengrin especially was each time a bitter disillusionment, indeed he never came up to the mark.

Once we had a great pleasure: a troop of Tyrolese peasants from Chimsee came to play *Oberbayerische Stücke*, local peasant plays, in their own dialect with song and dance. They were first-rate actors and their various representations were a real pleasure; besides, the pieces they played were most touching; taken from everyday peasant life, they were full of simple sentiment which took hold of your heart and stirred your emotions.

On later visits home after my marriage, the Coburg Hoftheater, which at certain seasons migrated to Gotha, the second capital of the Duchy, still played a great part in our lives and had some first-rate actors whom we much admired, but this will be told in due season.

Anyhow, the theatre was a pleasant way of adding to our instruction as many a classic passed thus before our eyes. Schiller's *Jungfrau von Orleans* was our prime favourite; we also

had a weakness for *Die Räuber*, as also we were fascinated by Goethe's *Egmont*, and, a little later, *Torquato Tasso*.

Our favourite operas were *Carmen*, *Der Fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Die Africanerin*, this last-named because our much-admired Bütner played a great part in it as a slave who loved the heroine who, of course, loved someone else. In the last act this interesting lady and the unselfish slave both died by inhaling the poisonous scent of some red flowers falling from an enormous tree which covered half the stage.

The Coburg staging was excellent and these deadly flowers fell most naturally from the tree. What was less natural was that the exhausted and broken-hearted heroine took much longer about dying than the vigorous slave. This, however, was no fault of the stage manager, but because the lady had a longer and more important part to sing. On the demise of the one he had so unselfishly and hopelessly adored, our favourite expired without much more ado, the poisonous blossoms killing him much more rapidly than the delicate damsel. He made a most dramatic exit from this life, his face pressed against the feet of his love. *We* !

There was also a magnificent shipwreck in that same opera, most realistically managed by that small theatre.

The decorations of the Coburg stage were quite celebrated because of a remarkable local artist named Brückner, who also had the honour of painting the scenery for *Parsifal*, in those days only played at Bayreuth.

The operatic and classical pieces were remarkably staged at Coburg because of this artist, but the *Lustspiele* and modern *Schauspiele* were less successful in this respect, the actresses being too poor to dress well, nor was the German taste very good in the staging and arrangements of pieces taking place *dans le grand monde*.

Later, when we were married, it was our joy occasionally to send some of our smart dresses to the actresses who had to play elegant parts.

One charming memory is of a visit to the Passion Play at Oberammergau. On this occasion Dr. X. was at his

best. He could be a charming and gay companion when no obstacles crossed his path, when he was sole leader, and he had no other will to subject, no one to ridicule or belittle. He had *un fond de poésie*, to be found in most Germans, be it in their love for a Christmas tree, for Andersen's fairy tales, or for a *Fusstour* through forests and over mountains. Even the most learned and "Kultur-conscious" German has a simple side if you can get at it; and it is most easily got at when he is away from those he wants to crush by his superior knowledge and his desire to master and tyrannize. On this excursion into the beautiful Bavarian mountains, amongst delightful, simple, warm-hearted peasants who lived for the tradition of this great "Mystery Play," they gave every ten years, Dr. X. put off all aggressiveness and became the most pleasant of cicerones.

There are some who can only enjoy things when they are leading, that is to say, when others are being introduced to something which they have propounded, discovered or sanctioned, whilst they have neither patience nor interest for anything into which another is trying to initiate them. They are then at once ready with their irony and their desire to belittle or ridicule; they cannot stomach any success another may be having; it immediately breeds in them a spirit of opposition and instinctive resentment; they must be lording it over others or their very existence has no further value.

Such was Dr. X. But when all was smooth sailing, meaning that there was no one who in any way challenged his right to be the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-discovering, all-leading, then all was well; he was then full of good humour, fun, jokes and charity towards mankind.

This Passion Play, which these simple mountain folk have enacted for I do not remember how many decades, is the principal reason of their existence. It is their great pride and they look upon it as a sacred mission conferred upon them, for which they must always keep themselves worthy. Even in everyday life each man goes about with the face of the part he is playing, either one of the Twelve Apostles, of Pilate, Caiaphas, Herod, the Centurion, of Mary Magdalen, of the Virgin, the Jews of Jerusalem. Wigs and

paint are taboo, so all through the ten years separating the Passion Plays from each other, they prepare their type, letting their hair or beards grow according to what they are to impersonate.

Their houses are indicated as "Christ's house," or "St. John's," "St. Peter's" or "the Virgin Mary's."

As it happened we lived in the house of the Virgin Mary, the daughter of a simple peasant who kept the modest inn at which we put up. She was a noble-faced woman with the right expression for a Mater Dolorosa.

To play the part of the Saviour was of course the supreme honour, and the one elected as such had to be worthy of that honour in every way, not only as to face but also in his everyday life. If I remember rightly the Christ of that particular play was a carpenter, which added to the proper atmosphere. The one of to-day, as I have been told by a friend who lives in Oberammergau, is a potter, and my friend even sent me some delightful bowls and jugs which he had modelled.

The play impressed us deeply and the whole spirit of the village was wonderful and uplifting; besides, the place itself was beautiful and the spring meadows one mass of marvellous wild flowers. Dr. X. being in the right mood, knew how to heighten and accentuate the meaning of it all most skilfully, so that this particular excursion stands out in my memory as something very impressive and worth while, rather, in fact, like a vision out of another and purer world breaking in upon everyday life.

Also in this German household of ours, certain servants played a special part. There was Wiener, our nursery and schoolroom footman, and old Matilda the housemaid, Rose, our brother's servant, Schaub the *Stallmeister*, and Meister, the Rosenau castellan.

Wiener I have already spoken of in connexion with the Kalenberg cake. He outlasted nearly everybody and finally became sister Baby's factotum. He looked after her with a mixture of a nurse's care and paternal indulgence, but like a parent he could also occasionally scold her; he admired, adored and humoured her and was respectful and familiar

all in one. The only thing that in his long career he never attained to was elegance of line. He was brick-coloured, underset, with a protruding upper lip which always seemed to resent having been shaved, and had also a comfortable paunch which did not decrease with years. He died during the War, I believe, but I never heard if his figure had modified towards the end, during those lean years when rich and poor alike were often underfed, more especially so in Germany for all their having so heroically denied themselves till they reached the very end of their tether.

Wiener had learned a certain amount of English which he mixed up with German, producing thereby a gibberish which was as good as a play. Having an opinion of his own about most things, he was incredibly outspoken and generally hit the nail on the head. His laugh was queer but catching and pleated his "homely" face into many folds. But old Wiener was true-blue for all his want of distinction.

In the days of our childhood he was continually at war with Matilda the housemaid, as their two authorities often clashed, and their love for us made them jealous of each other. Matilda was called "old Matilda" even when she was young. Looking back upon her, I realize that she had a very handsome face but not of the kind children admire; she was of the strong, healthy, peasant type and had been left a widow very young with a son whom she lived for and adored. Matilda had none of an English housemaid's elegance and never tried to modify her square, rather rustic appearance. Her love for the royal children was her very reason of existence, and her indulgence towards our caprices knew no bounds. She too learned an English-German jargon which she used freely, especially when squabbling with Wiener.

In our eyes one of her chief virtues was that each Sunday morning on awakening us she would appear with some excellent biscuits peculiar to Coburg; they were of several kinds and each of us had our favourite. My preference went to a sort of thin, round shortbread of a goodly size glazed over with a transparent covering of sugar flavoured with lemon. She also occasionally produced a marvellous,

sticky white sweet cut into oblong strips about the length of a finger. These were dry to the touch but if absolutely fresh had, when pulled, a way of lengthening exceedingly. This exquisite sweetmeat was called "*Ledersucker*" (Leather-sugar) and is recommended only to those whose teeth are really their own. She also had a mysterious way of producing "sour milk" by shutting up a small bowl of milk in a cupboard. I for one, though, could never touch sour milk.

Coburg would not have been Coburg without Matilda, but I am sorry to have to relate that, some time before I left the old home, Matilda did not entirely live up to her title of "old Matilda," but finally proved she was still young in a way which was carefully kept from our innocent ears, and to our grief was removed from the nursery on the pretext of ill-health. What her most natural malady had been I only learned much later when I had children of my own.

Rose was indeed well-named. His face was one broad, pink and white bloom. He was hugely tall and heavy and possessed the biggest hands and feet ever seen; his countenance was like a smiling full moon. He began as Alfred's valet and looked after him as though he were a baby, humouring his every fad when at eighteen he became a lieutenant and, like all members of that species, was immensely particular about the height of his collars, the length of his sword, the fit of his trousers, the cut of his tunic. Rose smiled at all this but obeyed orders without flinching. He was, finally, a wonderful nurse when Alfred's health broke down and it was Rose's enormous hands that laid him at last in his coffin at the too early age of twenty-four . . . but this tragic event belongs to a later date.

Rose was created to be the confidential family servant. When poor Alfred had left us, Rose became Mamma's page and finally, during the War, her steward, and was with her still when she died. He has now remained to look after the old Coburg home for my sisters. I have not seen him for many years, so I do not know if his face is still rubicund and rotund as formerly, but I suppose years of grief and privation must have left traces even upon his optimistic countenance, so it is better perhaps that I should remember him as he was, than see him as he is to-day!

Schaub, the head of the stables, was an imposing non-commissioned officer of martial appearance. He was a man of "opposition," and the only way of obtaining anything from him was to present our request the wrong way round.

But of all those in our service Meister, the Rosenau "castellan," was the most unique. He was, in fact, a great "original," even a bit crazy, I think. He was for ever inventing something or discovering things, having a clever way of unearthing antiquities in the most unexpected places; each time we came to the Rosenau he had some new find to show us. Mamma, much amused by Meister's absurdity, encouraged his grotesque eccentricities. His face was indescribable; it was round and happy with queer, shiny red spots on nose and cheeks, and his razors certainly were not up to their task. His eyes were small and shy, his nose was snub and inquisitive, and he had one tooth much longer than its companions which made itself indiscreetly evident when he talked, and his hair was always standing on end. A comic figure indeed!

Whenever we arrived at the Rosenau we would hear Meister stumbling hastily down the twisting tower staircase and then out he would rush, full of news and quaint stories, gesticulating with his arms, excitedly relating his latest discoveries and exploits. He had a funny, stumpy way of walking which made his head nod as though eternally expressing agreement; there was something absurdly childish about his walk, as though he were always stumbling over his own toes.

He was occasionally rebellious and had none too good an opinion of his neighbour. Complaint was part of his daily bread; besides, Meister had a chronic grievance, he imagined that he had missed his real vocation, which should have been that of a tenor. Yes, Meister believed that he had a beautiful voice, and would delight us by standing in the middle of the lawn singing Verdi's most passionate arias, especially that of the Troubadour, his great favourite, which would be accompanied by expressive gestures he considered in keeping with the words: "*Du meine Seele, Du mein Glück . . .*" I can still hear and see him, and Mamma laughing to her heart's content, outside in the sunshine before the house. This was all long, long ago, and belongs to

days when life seemed easy, *was* easy, in fact, for us at any rate.

By degrees I believe Meister's poor opinion of his neighbour took the form of cantankerousness; an ever-increasing love for the bottle may have been responsible for his diminishing charity towards others. He sang no more love arias, and the shiny spots on cheeks and nose spread alarmingly all over his face. His patient wife became a victim of his ill-humour. She had formerly believed in his unrecognized genius, had humoured his extravagances and cooked him many a good meal. Had she with age become a less good cook? I was not there to investigate; but the fact remains that Meister became ever more sulky and finally quite impossible, so that his wife had reason to regret that he was not an everyday mortal. Always a bit cracked, I suppose the crack had become a leak. Anyhow, Meister was removed from the Rosenau and another man resembling him in size, but younger and uncracked, was put in his place. But this was after my time.

Many years later my sisters told me that there certainly seemed to be something peculiar about the Rosenau's influence upon its guardians, as Meister's follower also became a bit of an original with time. Had the unrecognized tenor left some germ in his wake? I cannot say, but although several eccentricities were mentioned I believe the gap-filler never took either to song or to the bottle, which was fortunate for himself and for others, and especially for his wife.

Meister had been patron and promoter of certain little huts we built ourselves amongst the trees just below the *Schloss*. Hidden away from the road these little buildings were our great delight.

All through my life I have had a real passion for building wee houses or huts. It is the nesting instinct I think. All through the years large houses have been put at my disposal, palaces, villas, castles, but something within me always drove me to construct tiny, odd little habitations which allowed me to give way to my imagination and that queer urge within me to create; create something exactly according to my own taste and ideas, no matter how humble, how small, how

absurd, how unorthodox. I had this urge as a child and carried it out into life with me where later on it also became the joy of my own little ones. Mamma's little houses played a happy part in their lives. It is only in these last years that I have been able to indulge more completely in this passion ; my huts have grown larger, have even become goodly sized habitations, but each time I begin them with that same impetus, that same spirit of adventure as when building that first hut at the Rosenau. My imagination runs away with me and I see visions before me, castles in the clouds, and yet some have materialized into dear little cottages upon earth.

It was Ducky and I, the inseparable chums, who built this first hut in the Rosenau thickets, and it was actually made out of a cupboard. It was the imaginative Meister who helped us to plan it and carry it out. It was also Meister who secured the cupboard. It was roomy, worm-eaten and somewhat decrepit, but the aria-singer beautified it with a gable and actually fixed up a bell with a horseshoe hanging from its rope for good luck. Ducky and I dyed our cupboard grass-green and painted a large heart on its door. The paint ran whilst we were painting so that our heart became a bleeding heart ! The too great solemnity of this crimson emblem was, however, relieved by small bunches of daisies and four-leaved clover leaves painted as border to the door. At that time we were over-ready with brush and paint, principally inspired by certain quaint peasant furniture Meister had unearthed for us in the villages around.

Needless to say, there was not much space in our hut, besides, the branch of a tree passed through it ; from this branch we suspended a miniature cauldron, but the hut was too diminutive for a fireplace, which was our great regret. The cauldron was therefore used rather for flowers than for food. The chain it hung from was thick and heavily coated with rust.

It must be confessed that when it was finished we never quite knew what to do in our hut ; the chief joy had been its creation. We finally came to the conclusion that we were waiting . . . But waiting for what ? For Fate ? Life perhaps ? Or Love ? . . . Probably ! Only we did not

know this ; but there was a sort of unrest in us, a feeling of expectation as though we must open wide our door with the symbolic crimson sign to some marvellous guest, to someone who would count in our lives, and the vision of many a hero passed before our minds. I do not know if Ducky's visions were the same as mine, for although such fast friends, in character we were very different and we were curiously wordless as to questions of sentiment.

We were painfully shy before any display of feeling. In this we were truly British, the more we felt, the less we showed ; of deeper sentiment, I mean, of things pertaining to heart, soul or faith. Minor emotions like anger, impatience, amusement, joyful excitement were given way to without restraint. We were not unexpressive children and Mamma encouraged us to communicate our impressions, to express our thoughts, our desires, opinions, likes and dislikes ; but she herself was more than sober in all her manifestations of deeper feeling ; almost too reticent in fact, denying herself any spontaneous demonstration either of love, joy or grief. She always had herself in hand, utterly, and hated anything that might have been termed "sentimentality." She trained us to this attitude and all through life this peculiarity has clung to us four sisters ; at moments of deep sentiment or emotion we are disconcertingly dumb.

This has been an asset but also a hindrance in life. In moments of panic and consternation it stood me in good stead, kept me cool-headed, enabled me to become a leader, an adviser when others were losing their heads ; but it made me suffer at times when I longed to show my sympathy, love or affection, because then I become inarticulate, outwardly stiff and disappointingly undemonstrative ; I become almost wordless at moments of great emotion.

Later on, living in a Latin country, I learned to shed some of that outward stiffness which was quite misunderstood and often taken for pride, sometimes even for heartlessness, and which seemed in many ways so out of keeping with my otherwise impulsive, unguarded attitude towards life.

I was born confident, with a ready belief in others. I am naturally impulsive and unsuspecting. I easily express in words what I feel and never try to be sly, clever or circum-

spect with others ; I have no defence against the deceitful, it never comes naturally to me to believe that anyone wants to cheat me or take me in. Almost dangerously outspoken myself, I cannot imagine that others can deliberately set about being treacherous and insincere. On the whole I have got through life none too badly in spite of my ingrained rashness ; there were no doubt occasions when others made their profit out of it, but for all that I feel like proclaiming loudly that, in the long run, "honesty is the best policy," and thereby I stand.

Sister Sandra, who had a truly touching way of always imitating her elders, very naturally also desired to possess a hut, and permission was given to her to have a little house built for herself, just below ours.

This second construction was less primitive, became in fact a wee cottage with a thatched roof and real brick walls, and had room for several bits of furniture which were mostly designed and carried out by Sandra's closest friend, Gretchen Gazert.

This leads me over into the chapter upon friends. Being a large family, we were on the whole self-sufficient and there was no absolute need for close friendships. But Ducky and I, the inseparables, were inclined to leave Sandra, who was two years younger, rather out in the cold, so, sister Baby being too small, she very naturally wanted someone with whom to share her possessions. This was the reason for Gretchen Gazert's entry into our lives ; and Gretchen, having once entered them, came to stay.

How well I remember Gretchen's first appearance. She was the purest specimen of the Germanic type, flaxen, blue-eyed, plump, rosy, sweet-tempered, modest, just a little shy. She was accompanied by a pet lamb beautifully washed and combed and smartened up with pink ribbons. Gretchen and her lamb were curiously suited to each other, they even almost resembled each other, and Gretchen was smiled upon by a broad and very loving mother who, when a little girl, must have looked very much like Gretchen did then. Frau Medezinalrat Gazert completed the picture. She was exactly the sort of mother Gretchen had to have. And the Gazert

house was one of the most hospitable in town; no one made such good cakes and biscuits, dumplings and *Krapfen* as Frau Gazert; besides Gretchen, she also had two grown-up daughters and several sons; Dr. Gazert was her second husband and was a good deal older than she was.

Everybody was busy, smiling, happy and prosperous in the Gazert home, and besides being renowned for its excellent cooking, it was also known as a centre where all minor arts were encouraged: wood-carving, carpentry, poker-work, embroidery and what-not—the Gazerts were always doing or inventing something, or launching a new idea. Gretchen very quickly became indispensable in our circle and has remained so all through the long years. Gretchen is the born friend and helper; unselfish, discreet, modest, self-sacrificing, faithful, devoted, and a hard worker such as is seldom met with.

Life has buffeted her, the War has ruined and made of her a widow, fate has tried her in every way, but Gretchen has remained staunch, unbeatable in her desire to serve, to help, to love, to give; it was therefore her right to be named first and foremost when speaking of friends.

Ducky and I, although inseparables, did not entirely escape that period in life when girls give way to a certain *schwärmerei*, when a certain amount of incense is bound to be burnt. Sisters may love each other, but their love is never blind, nor particularly flattering, nor does it wear a bandage over its eyes. Therefore for a time we each had a bosom friend who supplied all the adoration with which our healthier love for each other never provided us. These were innocent little infidelities, little side-plays which but strengthened our loyalty towards each other.

Ducky's bosom friend was a certain Frieda von Lichtenberg, a somewhat "high-flown" girl full of poetry, whose elder sisters flirted with the Coburg officers; and mine was Margaretha von Hanecken, daughter of the major commanding the Coburg battalion. Margaretha was more stolid than Frieda, but none the less *schwärmerisch*, but in friendship, as in deeper passion, there is nearly always the one who loves and the one who lets herself be loved and I must confess that Margaretha did three-quarters of the adoring whilst I accepted

her devotion with an ease that I am thoroughly ashamed of when I look back.

She had the real German faculty of beautifying her idol, so Margaretha was able to make me feel that I was indeed a very wonderful being, born to be adored.

Margaretha loved to clasp my hand in the dark, to steal the roses I wore in my girdle, to gaze at the stars, her arm around my neck, to read me poetry and to exchange rings ; but to be entirely truthful I never really cared for this sort of sentimentality, I rather submitted to it than took an active part, but was all the same flattered that I could inspire anybody with such glorious, high-flown feelings. Although we remained much less closely in touch than with Gretchen, this friendship lasted many years, as Margaretha was a dear and faithful woman, she too becoming an officer's wife. But years loosened the link, I saw little of her later, and she gradually faded out of my life because of distance and the passing of years. Her husband was also killed during the War.

Ducky's friendship with Frieda was brought to a more abrupt close, the authorities considering that her society was not particularly beneficial ; I think the elder sisters had something to do with this !

Friendships at that critical age are certainly not easy to direct or control, it needs a light hand for those at the wheel, and I do not think that Fräulein was a very efficient steersman, for she cared for herself too much and for us not enough. This, however, may be an unfair criticism, for having had daughters of my own I know how difficult is the friendship question.

Another difficulty was, of course, our brother's friends ; this particular sort of complication is, I think, inevitable in the life of every girl who has a brother. Inevitably certain preferences arose, a certain pairing off, certain passing infatuations, innocent enough but which nevertheless had to be kept watch over. We were growing up, and our hearts were expanding together with the lengthening of our limbs, expanding in such a way that they felt empty unless at least partly filled by some sentimental interest ; so it was quite naturally Alfred's associates who supplied that interest, not

because they were in any way particularly handsome, intelligent or wonderful, but because they too were young and awakening to the wonders of life. There was Arend, the dark and mysterious, Löwel, the good-natured giant whom little sister Baby admired, and who blushed like a peony when she slipped her small hand into his; who had two huge dimples which made him look innocent and whose voice was changing so that it had a curious crack in it when he laughed. There was Froman, the supercilious, the best looking of them all and who easily stole the girls' hearts; there was Winter, the nondescript, who was everybody's friend and confidant, but who made no one's heart beat; there was Ribbeck, the clown, always up to tricks, he was the champagne of the company and relieved all situations grown too tense; and finally there was Schultes, the worthy, whom everybody appreciated, but who was no one's "flirt"; names which loomed large and that meant much to us then, but which gradually faded away out of our lives as did the faces attached to them, so that I have to make a slight effort to call them quite back to memory. But when I make that effort I can still review them all and feel like sending them a sign of recognition, a greeting from beyond the long years, a greeting from the days of our youth.

I was the first to leave the old home, and fate carried me off to the farthest end of Europe, so that in my case separation was complete; my sisters may have followed up their different careers but I was unable to do so . . . I cannot even say which are still of this earth!

Alfred never went to school; he followed the same studies as his comrades, with the same masters, but at home. I think it was a pity he was never sent to school. Many hopes were placed in him and much care was expended upon his education which had been minutely planned and carried out, but I have nevertheless the feeling that many a mistake was made.

Alfred was a sensitive boy; he had a heart of gold, but he had too great an idea of his own importance and was easily led astray. School would have given him his level, taught him the measure of his strength against others, and made him see reality in a different way.

I think that he ought not to have been left so much at the mercy of a man such as Dr. X., who liked to wound his pride and to ridicule him in a way which made our blood boil.

As I was married at seventeen, and my brother was but a year older than I, I really knew him very little and when he was grown up he had almost entirely passed out of my life, though he did come twice to visit me in my new home. He died at the early age of twenty-four, round about the date of my parents' silver wedding, which made it most tragic. This will be related in season, and if mentioned here it is only because my memories of Alfred are of a stripling, eager, blundering, a little swaggering, always getting into trouble, always being scolded. He was gay but easily offended, had keen intelligence but a want of balance.

We four sisters loved our brother, helped to fight his battles for him and furiously resented any slight put upon him. He treated us with that off-handedness characteristic of elder brothers, but he was proud of us when we were grown up.

Somehow I always felt the pathos of Alfred, and felt instinctively that he needed defending; he was always getting into trouble and people did not help him in the right way because they had not the patience to understand him. Ducky and I felt this, subconsciously we *knew* it; but we were too young in those days, too inexperienced, too foolish, too preoccupied with our own joys and troubles to be any actual help.

I must here mention a peculiarity in my character; all through life I have had a potent faculty for pity which has been the undercurrent of all my actions, the explanation of that blending of strength and weakness which are like dual personalities at war in my being. Latent but insistent, pity lies at the very root of my "ego."

I always saw the pathetic side of the ridiculous or of the angry, the tragic side of the sinner, the sad side of the wicked, and I always sensed the hopeless mistakes made by humans when judging each other. They never seemed to go to the heart of things, to understand the real inner "reason why"; they kept hovering above truth, their verities and explanations were skin-deep; it was as though they were afraid of the

trouble and complication *real* understanding would impose. They raised formulas, entrenched themselves behind truisms which gave them a moral basis from which they felt they need not move, and which was a protection against the too violent winds of deeper, sterner reality—God's reality!

Far be it from me to pretend that I had all this clearly in my mind in those young days, that my thoughts could grasp it, my brain understand it, but subconsciously at the roots of my heart lay that deep pity which was really *conscience* and which gave me no peace when there was suffering or injustice of any kind.

Not that pity always made me absolutely just, no, not just with a rod of iron! Pity has more than once led me astray, has made me err on the side of weakness, tempting me to be clement at moments when severity would have saved much future trouble and misunderstanding.

As a child, this enormous pity for all things lay like an oppression on my otherwise gay and carefree heart, and this pity grew and grew and is still growing and to-day it is such a weight that my two hands are not strong enough to lift it. "If I look hard enough at anything in this world it brings tears into my eyes"; the words are not mine but they exactly express what I feel. There are tears beneath everything, and if humanity would understand that there is so much more suffering than real wickedness in the world, they would be kinder to each other, more helpful, less impatient, less indifferent, less critical. But we have no time . . . we hurry, hurry, press forward and do not delve down deeply enough to realize the cause or source whence all the harm, the sadness, the strife comes.

I too hurry, life makes me hurry, humanity makes me rush along with it; I try to go more slowly, to pause, to listen, understand, explain—but the great wheel is turning and I shall never be able to get to the end of my thoughts, nor be able to say all that I have to say.

Forgive me this digression, I am coming back again to my story.

As before mentioned, Alfred was always getting into trouble; people were too impatient with him and Mamma,

hoping to find perfection, was often disappointed in her son. Mamma had a supreme horror of the shady side of life and in every way tried to ignore it, and when for all that, it approached her through any member of her own circle, her grief and indignation were extreme. She was never able to talk with Alfred; she thought that severity and religious principles must keep him straight; he found no mercy when he sinned, so he lost confidence in those who might have helped him, and later, when liberated from Dr. X. and home rule, became secretive, led a double life and made a mess of things. But I had very little to do with that sadder period of his life, he was still an innocent, jolly though somewhat touchy boy whilst I was at home, and we were very happy together. Alfred, though not at all good-looking, had charm and knew how to speak to old and young, high and low; there were the makings of a real prince in him, but fate decreed it otherwise. Although I have many good memories of those years, it was not an entirely happy period, a certain unrest was amongst us, the unrest of young birds feeling their wings grow. We did not know that it was this, but Life was already knocking at the door, looking in at the window, the Fate of each was approaching with inexorable tread.

This unrest also came from the fact that we had several households; one at Coburg, one at Clarence House, London, and one at Devonport where my father had been given some naval command. Our mother therefore had to divide her time between these three, whilst we, most of the year, were obliged to be at Coburg because of our studies.

One charming element had been brought into the house in the person of Fräulein von Passavant, the second governess. She was a delightful young girl and a great refuge when Fräulein made things difficult. Sophie von Passavant remained in my mother's household to the end of her days, becoming later on her lady-in-waiting, and because of her kind, friendly ways, was loved by everyone. She died during the War, a few years before my mother.

I have not yet mentioned one of the great joys of the Coburg life—the skating. The winters could be very cold and there were often several weeks of hard frost. Mamma

never skated herself; but she thoroughly enjoyed arranging parties on the Rosenau lake, which was large and curving and the ice kept beautifully smooth. We had the greatest fun on this lake, wild games of hockey, of follow-my-leader, and innumerable other games, all of them exciting, with that small touch of danger about them which added to their charm. As culminating joy Mamma had erected a *montagne Russe*, a sort of iced water-shoot on which, according to the courage of each, you dashed down either on sledges or skates. I was never a very good skater, but I was quite able to negotiate this iced sweep on my skates. The principal thing was to lean well forward so as not to lose your balance. It was a glorious feeling to fly down that steep incline, finishing with a wide sweeping curve out on to the lake.

The crowning excitement was when Mamma organized an *Eisfest*, that is to say, an evening festivity on the lake, with Chinese lanterns, music and so-called *Glühwein*, hot, red, cinnamon-spiced wine to drink.

Our friends of the *Eisfest* days were grown up, the officers of the local battalion having replaced Alfred's schoolboy friends. In those days the uniform had a tremendous prestige in Germany from which we were not immune, and of course each sister had her chosen favourite amongst the officers. Mine was a dark-eyed, somewhat eagle-featured lieutenant of the *beau ténébreux* type, with a dash of the adventurer about him. He interested me enormously, and he cleverly knew how to fire a young girl's imagination, giving my heart many a flutter. Besides, he was full of exciting plans for going to Zanzibar; why to Zanzibar of all places I cannot explain; but these dark plans added to his glamour, surrounding him with a sort of mystery; besides, it kept me always in a state of fear that he might suddenly disappear from our midst to sail forth upon his perilous adventures. I think that those in authority understood that this interesting young man knew how to make the most of his advantages so he was allowed in very small doses.

But I remember one little ball which Mamma gave for us in a funny little old *Schloss* opposite our own house. For once I was allowed a white dress! As finishing touch I had stuck a red rose in my sash, and the black-eyed lieutenant

stole that rose, and this, according to our code, was romance indeed, and a very daring act!

Speaking about balls and dances, I have one amusing little episode to relate. This was in the pre-lieutenant times and the little party in question was given at the end of the dancing-lesson season as a sort of demonstration of how much the patient little dancing-master martyr had been able to teach us. Cotillions were much *en vogue* in those days and were the supreme excitement of the evening. Of course each did her best to pair off with her chosen favourite, but with the eyes of authority severely on the look-out, our innocent combinations did not always succeed. Failure represented much heartache and not a few tears shed in secret. Little souvenirs were given at the end of the ball, flowers and also keepsakes of the most modest kind, but when these humble objects were offered by "him" they forthwith became exceedingly precious.

On the occasion I am speaking about, the cavaliers offered their partners large gingerbread hearts hung with gay ribbons. The heart I was given that evening was entirely satisfactory; it had a pink and white face and was hung by a ribbon exactly the right shade and above all it was offered to me by the right boy. When I went to bed that night I hung it above my head on my little camp bed which stood in a row with my sisters'; each bed exactly the same shape and size, lined up in a cheerful and airy room, which we still called the night nursery.

Many a night did I sleep peacefully beneath the shadow of this pink and white gingerbread heart. But one night, a few weeks later, I awoke with a start; there was a funny, gnawing sound quite near my ear. I hastily sat up in the dark; I thought I heard something like the scurrying of wee feet . . . after that silence.

But on awaking next morning I noticed that the precious heart had slightly changed its shape, it looked thinner somehow, but I did not think much about it. The following night, however, I was again awoken by something wee and light running over my sheet close up against my face. This was decidedly unpleasant and I lay quite still, holding my

breath, half scared but also in hopes of discovering what it was; then I heard crunch . . . crunch . . . again that gnawing sound . . . I moved . . . a frightened scurry of tiny feet . . . then silence.

Suddenly I understood. Mice! Mice were at my heart. My precious gingerbread keepsake, sentimentally attached to the head of my bed. Pink ribbons and all it had finally to be removed; I could not endure those nightly visits; besides, the heart was rapidly diminishing, soon nothing would be left of it; for such is life. *Tout passe!*

My mother had a theory that princesses must marry young. "When they are over twenty," she would declare, "they begin to think too much and to have too many ideas of their own which complicate matters. Besides, an unmarried princess has no position at all. Princesses *must* marry." And when Mamma said "must" she meant it.

I am not going to enumerate our admirers or suitors; anyhow, Mamma's theories gave her no difficulties; in those days there seemed to be no end of young princes looking for wives and I believe Mamma had only to pick and choose. But we knew nothing about this, as our clever parent knew her daughters well enough to surround whatever plan she had with sufficient romance to make it attractive, for we were at a sentimental age and none of us would have accepted with open eyes a so-called *mariage de raison*.

At an early age we were therefore taken about, at a too early age, I think, because our appearance on the scene disturbed the plans of other royal mothers who disapproved of daughters being brought out so soon. Besides, we were in no hurry to grow up and did not at all like being thrust into the company of older cousins who resented our untimely intrusion into the world when, according to them (and quite rightly), we should still have been in the schoolroom. But the young princes seemed to be of another opinion and before I was sixteen more than one gave me to understand that I was entirely to his taste.

No names need be mentioned, but as this is the story of my life, it must be told that there came a period when my heart was touched by two suitors of the same name but

belonging to far different corners of Europe, and I knew many a pang because each in his own way let me feel that it was in my power to make him either happy or miserable . . . for they too were young. I did not want to make anyone miserable ; but the heart is such a troublesome organ and at that early age anything definite seemed so far off. Besides, one could not make up one's mind all by oneself !

I am aware that this way of looking at things does not fit into the ideas of to-day when young people have taken so much into their own hands, when they are almost wiser and certainly more advanced than their parents, and when their knowledge of facts is complete.

We were brought up in a Fool's Paradise, carefully guarded from reality ; our world was delusion and our mother was horrified if anyone dared to lift for us, were it but an inch, " this painted veil that those who live call life." Yet Life was knocking at the door. . . . Ever more insistent was its knock, and with it came that unrest, chief characteristic of awakening youth. But if marriage was in our thoughts it was only as a distant goal ; all roads finally pointed that way, but it was a long, long way off. So when we were brought together with princes who, according to our mother's ideas, were acceptable, we were quite at our ease, enjoying their company and their attention without worrying our heads much about their intentions. The sentimental visions they evoked were vague and unprecise. But the song of love is both sweet and torturing and I remember looks and allusions as well as whispered words that might have meant more than they actually said and which I hugged to my soul, repeating them over and over again ; they made my heart flutter, for all was romance in those days, mystery and discovery, but strange as it may seem to the girls of to-day, none of my flirtations ever went as far as a kiss. (This perhaps was because I was so young.)

So many voices seemed pressing in upon one, so many eyes had messages and one never doubted the truth or importance of any word of love.

Sister Ducky was more austere, more unbending than I was. She was always the monitor ; the one who would tolerate no nonsense, who admonished or cautioned. Her

advice or reproof was listened to and there was a steel-like rectitude about her which commanded respect. I remember an exceedingly funny little episode in which Ducky stands out clearly in her mentor's attitude.

Our Rosenau gardener had a nephew. The nephew had large, languorous brown eyes; being painfully shy, there was something awkward, even ungainly about his movements, but he was decidedly good-looking though his excessive timidity made him seem sulky. Wordless and constrained, he had nevertheless, through the mysterious telepathy of youth, made me understand that in spite of his being nothing but the gardener's nephew, and I a blonde little princess, his heart was aching with love for me. It must have been his eyes which made me understand this, for it was certainly not his tongue. Ducky, for ever on the alert, had discovered this little by-play and was half sympathetic and half contemptuous, but the boy's exceeding timidity had something touching about it, in addition to which he was so perfectly harmless.

Finally I confessed to this critical sister that I wanted to give some little keepsake to the languorous-eyed youth, for Eve-like, his evident admiration had not left me unmoved. Ducky was gracious, and putting our heads together it was finally decided that, as I was apt with my paint-brush, I should paint him something. But what? Ah, a good idea, Easter being near I must paint him something for Easter, it would make the gift more plausible. After much reflection we decided that I should paint on an ostrich's egg. I happened to possess just such an object, globular, thick and polished like ivory, mellow of tint, smooth to the touch; and on this pleasant surface, with much care and love I painted little bouquets of mauve pansies. How well I can still see those mauve pansies! The egg being round and slippery, it was difficult to hold and I had the greatest trouble not to smudge my flowers whilst painting. To complete this artistic treasure, two holes had, with excruciating anxiety, been bored at the top and at the bottom of the egg, so as to be able to pass a ribbon through it from which it could be suspended. The ribbon was mauve, matching the flowers. Ducky took as much interest as I did in the creation of this

Easter offering, and finally a propitious day was fixed upon which the gift was to be offered.

Although in the same class with Alfred's friends, being the gardener's nephew he was not (for these were pre-democratic days) amongst those invited to our parties, and could only be encountered in the large Rosenau kitchen garden on high days and holidays when he visited his Uncle Terks, the royal head gardener. Terks was tall, dark and taciturn, he grew wonderful flowers but it was not his smile which made them bloom. Terks never smiled. We were rather in awe of Terks, as, probably, was also his nephew, and both parties divined that Terks would have no sympathy with his nephew's sentimentalities.

Ducky, well aware that two is company and three is none, decided not to preside over the actual offering of the precious Easter egg, but to walk about amongst the flowers, close enough at hand to be able to interrupt the *tête-à-tête* when she considered it had lasted sufficiently, for neither she nor I was quite comfortable about this interview over which the Herr Obergärtner Terk's frown hung like a threat.

The young man accepted my gift with the shamefaced timidity which was to be expected of him; his eyes indeed were eloquent, but his attitude sheepish and even tinged with resentfulness. For all that his hands received the frail offering with that special tenderness characteristic of the strong and artless. Few words were exchanged, but I felt a certain elation in the silent scene; then, full of dignity, Ducky sailed down upon us through the flowers like a black swan out to protect her brood.

But there is an epilogue to this simple little story. Not very long after this sentimental episode I returned home after a short absence, engaged to a prince from a foreign country; from that day onwards the gardener's nephew no more saluted me, and when he met me he would turn his head another way so as not to have to take off his hat.

I wonder how long he kept the Easter egg.

Chapter IX

DEVONPORT—BERLIN—BETROTHAL

BEFORE I relate those events which decided my fate, I want to mention Devonport, that fair sea-haven, one with Plymouth, which was for a short time something of a home to us.

This was to be our father's last naval command; after this he would have reached the top of the ladder and his career as a sailor would be over; besides, Duke Ernest of Coburg, whose heir he was, was getting very old and at any moment the Duke of Edinburgh might be called to other duties.

As a real Englishman Papa dreaded the change which stood ahead of him, for he was thoroughly British in taste and habit and bitter was the prospect of expatriation.

Devonport was a sort of interlude, and in my own life it stands out as a last taste of all I was soon destined to leave and give up, England, home and the beloved Navy.

Devonport never came up to the enchantment of Malta with its southern sun and mysterious eastern atmosphere; but there was the sea, there were Papa and Mamma, there were many friends and there was also that beautiful county of Devonshire, so enchanting with its hills and dales, its rivers and forests, its steep roads and high hedges, beautiful gardens and, in places, quite southern vegetation.

Owing to our studies at Coburg, we three elder sisters spent less time at Devonport than sister Baby, from whom Mamma could never bear to be separated and whom she took with her wherever she was obliged to go; so my recollections of Devonport are tinged with a certain vagueness.

At first we did not much care for Admiralty House. We considered it a very uninteresting house. It looked out upon a wide and equally uninteresting square and it had very

little garden to boast of, only an oblong piece at the back of the building where we used to play quarrelsome games of croquet.

Opposite us stood the house of the General-in-Command. This was a much finer habitation with a large garden full of trees and that atmosphere of shaded mystery which means so much to children and that our garden entirely lacked.

Fortunately General Harrison and his family were most hospitable and welcoming. They had three daughters, May, Violet and Evelyn, whose ages fitted ours exactly, and with whom we very soon became friends, so that much of our time was spent in their grounds, where, although we were rapidly growing up, wild and romping games were played. The garden overlooked the sea, and if I remember rightly, ended in ramparts. Unforgettable are the excellent teas offered us in the Harrisons' house when kindly Lady Harrison called us, heated and exhausted by our games, into that cosiest of meals which is England's speciality. This friendship with the Harrison daughters was one of the chief features of our Devonport life. With the eldest daughter, May, who later married a clergyman, I am still in correspondence but the other two have dropped out of my life.

It is strange how there are periods in one's existence which have become hazy in one's memory, whilst others stand out clearly in every detail. Devonport belongs to the hazy memories. As I said before, it was an interlude.

I remember certain things quite distinctly, others have been partially effaced like a smudged pastel.

All things pertaining to the sea played a great part at Devonport, rowing, sailing and wonderful swimming: our amusements were healthy and impregnated with that feeling of good-fellowship peculiar to the Navy. As at Malta and at Osborne, the sailors were our great friends. But strangely enough no one particular face stands out clearly; I remember the things we did, the places we went to, more clearly than the people who were with us, and those whom we visited.

When high tide permitted we would steam in a rapid launch up the different rivers, enchanted excursions into unknown lands of almost fairy-like beauty. I remember glimpses of wonderful parks and gardens running down to

the water's edge with stately houses blinking down upon us from afar; I remember the joy, the excitement, the gleeful sensation of adventure, but I have mostly forgotten the names of the places we went to, as too I have forgotten the faces of those who received us at the end of our travels.

At all times passionately fond of gardens and flowers I remember a picture which burst upon us during one of these enchanted excursions: a garden full of orange, yellow, pink and coral azaleas, grouped in gorgeous masses against a tropically green background of trees. In cascades of colour they came spilling down the velvety slope as though eager to mirror their many-tinted loveliness in the water upon which we were floating by. With a sort of ache in my heart I longed to hold fast that fleeting vision of beauty, but it slipped away and was gone. . . . Upon my mind, however, that picture stamped itself for all time. *Tout passe.* Yes, but there are certain visions that cannot be wiped out; whenever I look back, I can re- evoke the enchantment of those flowers reflecting their beauty upon the face of the waters which bore us all too quickly away.

There was also a memorable excursion up one of the celebrated Devon "gullies"—I think they used to call them; deep, wooded valleys through which gay streams rushed, singing their own little songs beneath enchanted shadows. On this excursion I fell into the water and was rescued by the miller's son, quite like in a fairy-story, and had to change clothes with the miller's daughter who lent me her dress to go home in. This was a great event for the miller's family, and when I married soon afterwards my kindly rescuers offered me as wedding-present a large framed photograph of their mill, a picture still in my possession to-day.

Devonport and the surrounding neighbourhood seemed to appreciate the presence of a member of Queen Victoria's family in their midst; my father and mother were well-loved and most hearty and courteous hospitality was offered to every one of us.

Many, many years later, when, after the War, with my husband, who had become an allied King, we paid an official visit to the country of my birth, Plymouth and Devonport

asked me to come amongst them once more and gave me a huge and touching reception in memory of the days when, as one of four happy sisters, I had lived amongst them, blue-eyed, fair-haired and unsophisticated, an innocent, unsuspecting little maiden with no knowledge whatever about life.

It was a heart-stirring occasion which made me live over again the treasures of the past. I clasped many a rough hand become shaky with age, and looked into more than one eye dimmed by the passing of years, but one and all remembered little Marie, the Sailor Prince's fair-haired daughter who, at such an early age, had left the beloved Old Country to go to a foreign land. . . .

Beyond Devonport harbour lay Mount Edgcumbe, a marvellously beautiful country seat belonging to a courteous old lord of the same name. He had opened wide his gates to us, and Mount Edgcumbe became our dearest playing-ground, to which we went nearly every day. Suspended above the sea, it had lovely drives through beautiful woods and over undulating downs, a noble estate which became as familiar to us as though it had been our home.

In parts the vegetation was almost that of the Riviera and you could drive through whole avenues of evergreens, and there was also a laurel walk with a marvellous view over the sea. But our favourite haunt was the Italian Garden. Planted on the water's edge, it was easily reached by boat from our side of the harbour; a shady retreat full of poetry, it had terraces, colonnades, flagged walks and secret-looking pools. It also had the classical "orangery." Flanked by beautiful woods, it was there that I picked my last English primroses and I have an enchanted remembrance of how they grew in pale, fragrant clumps all over the banks and up in amongst the century-old trees.

Lord Mount Edgcumbe possessed another lovely place, an old historical manor with the name of Cotheal. It lay farther inland, surrounded by magnificent woods; it was haunted and mysterious, with a magnificent old stone hall, dim and twisting stairs, narrow corridors, tapestried chambers; a place full of atmosphere which gave us many a thrill.

We loved going to this secret old place, it attracted us irresistibly ; it had all the romance of the past blended with that mellow perfection and sweetness which English country houses alone possess.

I visited Cotheal again during that memorable reception given me at Plymouth in 1924 and thought it even more wonderful than I had remembered ; besides, the present Lady Mount Edgcumbe had done much to beautify its gardens and make the quaint old house homelike and cosy.

My parents made many friends and entertained a good deal. I have a faint remembrance of dinner-parties given at Admiralty House, and a clearer one of tea-parties in different houses out in the country ; everywhere we were charmingly received but for all that, as I said before, this part of my life has remained hazy, probably because of the big event which about that time sealed my fate and which overshadows all the rest. But before this took place we went once again to Russia and this time for a very sad reason.

It was at Coburg during the autumn of 1891 that Mamma received news of the death of Uncle Paul's young wife.

Grand Duke Paul was the youngest son of Alexander II and our mother's favourite brother. Hardly three years before he had married Alexandra of Greece, eldest daughter of King George and Queen Olga ; and now "Alix," as we all called her, that sweet young wife and mother, was dead ! The news came like a thunderbolt. Two lovers, full of their young happiness, they had filled our quiet home with their joy. A daughter had then already been born to them and it was at the birth of their second child, little Dmitri, that Alix had died.

What a cruel, unnatural event. Alix was dead ! Our guest so recently, that sweet, gay, happy young creature, she was no more. It was unbelievable. Could happiness be so quickly torn asunder and destroyed ?

Mamma decided on a hasty departure for St. Petersburg and that Ducky and I, the two eldest daughters, were to go with her. She wanted to be at the funeral, but above all she wanted to be with the brother she so dearly loved.

How well I remember that funeral when young Alix

was laid to rest alongside those who had gone before her. She was buried in the great church of the Peter and Paul fortress where, since Peter the Great, all the Tsars and their kith and kin had been interred. The fortress of Peter and Paul—what a sinister sound it has. All through history, terrible tales are attached to its name. Tales of crime, fear and suffering to which the Bolshevik reign has added a hundredfold.

Side by side, in impressive rows, under plain oblong blocks of white marble, lie all those great men and women of the past; one tomb exactly like the other, austere symbols of how death levels all things; pomp and glory, joy and pain at an end; dust to dust. At an end also sin and crime, hope and fear; each stone guarding its own secret, the secret of those different lives, many of which had ended in unspeakable tragedy. The last of these was Grandpapa. There he lay, the size and colour of his tomb exactly like all the others; heavy white marble plainly engraved with his name, and beside him Grandmamma. She had died a year or two before him in her bed, a broken-hearted woman, her health all gone to pieces, a woman who had hidden away her suffering behind a proud, dignified bearing. Never did her narrow lips open in complaint, no one knew if she was aware of what all the world knew. But he, "*le Tzar libérateur*," as he had been called because it was he who liberated the serfs, had been carried to his grave mutilated; his legs torn from his body by the bomb that the Nihilists had thrown at him whilst he was returning from some ceremony.

Two bombs were thrown; the first had not touched him, but being a brave and also a kindly man, he had stopped his carriage (or was it sledge?) because, having heard the explosion, he himself wished to see who had been hurt. A second bomb was thrown, and that for him was the end of the road. . . .

Grandpapa Emperor, Mamma's father, a man with liberal ideas who had trusted his people! It was after his violent death that the era of repression began again, Alexander III considering it dangerous to follow up his father's more advanced political conceptions. When the Nihilists' bomb

put an end to Alexander II's reign he had been on the point of giving a Constitution to his vast Empire ; his son, however, did not consider Russia ripe for such innovations.

And here we were, all gathered together in this great, gloomy cathedral, to lay a young wife and mother in her untimely grave. Full of the pomp and splendour characteristic of all Russian ceremonies was that funeral. Stupendous chants rose to the vaults, echoing again from the fortress-like walls ; there were thousands of lighted tapers, fumes of incense, and those thundering bass voices of the cantors which always made me hold my breath, wondering how human lungs could sustain such an effort without bursting. Clad in deepest mourning, with long black veils on their heads, stood the Empress, grand duchesses and princesses, their dull black slashed by the bright ribbons of their respective orders, blue for the Empress, red for the grand duchesses, making their sombre apparel appear all the darker by contrast ; and there was huge Uncle Sasha, surrounded by his enormous brothers, cousins and uncles, and as chief mourner, Uncle Paul, a little in front of the others. Frailer than his brothers, though just as tall, and marvellously slim, Uncle Paul was a different type ; darker and more gentle, he had soft brown eyes and the beautiful hands of his mother. In the white tunic and silver helmet of the *Garde à Cheval*, there was indeed something knight-like about him. I cannot remember if he wore this particular uniform at the funeral, but it was thus that I best remember him, long and slim like a slender marble column, with his caressing voice and luminous eyes. A man full of human kindness and understanding, a man who always defended those who were being attacked, who was always fair towards others, a charming companion, gay and intelligent, it was not astonishing that of all her brothers Mamma loved Uncle Paul best.

I can still see him bending over the bier upon which his lovely young wife lay with crossed hands, against which leaned a small holy image we all had to kiss in turn, and with a thin white veil over her face. I remember the tears running down his cheeks and how Uncle Serge, his favourite brother, took him in his arms when he made a desperate



"UNCLE PAUL." MY MOTHER'S YOUNGEST BROTHER.

gesture of protest when at last they laid the coffin lid over the sweet face he had loved.

It was indeed a scene which made a deep impression upon the very young girls that we were then; the grand setting, the flickering tapers, the flowers, the impressive chants, and above all the grief of that young husband who had to be torn away from the coffin of his bride. *Tout passe . . .*

Many years later Uncle Paul married a lady not of his caste. Morganatic marriages were not sanctioned by the Emperor and it was a long time before Uncle Paul's wife was received or recognized by the family, my mother, in spite of her love for her brother, being one of those who held out longest in protest against her plebeian sister-in-law.

The Emperor (then Nicolas II) even banished his uncle for several years from Russia. Later, however, he was forgiven and his wife was received, but never on an equal footing with the grand duchesses. She was given the title of Princess Paléy and was a most devoted wife, adored by her husband, and she finally made heroic but unsuccessful efforts to rescue him from the hands of the Bolsheviks.

Uncle Paul was one of the four grand dukes murdered by the Reds in the winter of 1919, and, strangely enough, he met with his cruel death just within the walls of the Peter and Paul fortress, close to the church where so many years ago he had buried his young wife.

How strange, indeed, and sometimes awful, is man's fate.

Royal funerals are occasions for great family meetings, of kings and queens, princes and princesses, uncles, aunts, cousins of every degree, local as well as those of foreign lands.

It was several years since we had been in Russia, and a few years make a great difference at that early age. We were all growing up and stared at each other shyly, no one wanting to make advances for fear of rebuffs. Young people are not always merciful to each other, they are nearer Nature than their elders, are inclined to form clans so that outsiders are occasionally made to feel thoroughly uncom-

fortable ; it was tremendously interesting to meet so many relations, but it was not an entirely pleasant experience. The boys and young men were inclined to like you too much and the girls were ready to snub you. We were at the horribly self-conscious age when you imagined that every look was a criticism, every word ironical ; you suffered because you were so young, so awkward and completely unable to cope with what uncomfortably resembled a family court of justice.

There were large meetings in Cousin Xenia's rooms. Xenia was the Emperor Alexander III's eldest daughter and a year older than I ; her especial chum was Minnie of Greece, the younger sister of poor Alix, whom we had just laid to rest. Having an immense admiration for Xenia, I found her evident preference for Minnie difficult to stand ; besides, Minnie was backed by innumerable brothers of every age. She had not her sister's good looks, but she was animated, clever, amusing, masterful and rather noisy. There was an irresistible good-humour about her, but she also had an exceedingly sharp tongue. Much later in life we became friends, but in those early days I am afraid that we heartily disliked each other, and as none of us was so ready with our tongue as she was she made us feel greatly at a disadvantage.

Nor were we able to appreciate her many brothers, for they were decidedly rowdy and there were too many of them ; there were the Greek Georgie, the Greek Nicky, the Greek André, and they made us suffer. It was they especially who made us feel outsiders, they were so tremendously possessive and so loud.

Another huge family was the one which we called the "Mishels." These were really a generation older than we were, Mamma's first cousins, her Uncle Mishel's sons. Uncle Misha, as he was known in the family, was Grandpapa's youngest brother and a most kindly old gentleman looking for wives for his many sons and therefore extremely interested in his nieces and grand-nieces and so very kind to them all. There was Nicolas, Misha, Georgie, Sandro, Serge and Alexis. Some were closer in age to Mamma's generation, some to ours, but they used to come several strong

to these family parties. They were not as loud as the Greeks, but the greatest teases ever born; they attracted and repulsed you in turns; you could not ignore them, but at the same time you were slightly afraid; the *charme Slave* at its wildest! You shuddered, but all the same you fell under their spell.

I have retained a curiously uneasy memory of those family gatherings. Fascinating as was the charm of all those young men, there was all the same something slightly uncanny about the Mishel cousins; a blending of strength and weakness, kindness and a generosity which almost amounted to lavishness, and yet a touch of cruelty somewhere, undefinable, but you sensed that it was there, dormant, hidden beneath their captivating ways. We too had Russian blood in us, so we were strongly attracted, but the English side seemed on guard, a little hostile, or anyhow watchful, so that we could not blend entirely, nor feel quite at home. And yet I think at that time it would have needed but little persuasion to keep me in Russia altogether.

But strangely enough our mother was strongly opposed to any Russian marriages for her daughters. Did she know her family too well? Who can tell? Or was it really because she did not want to put before us a religious conflict?

In Grandpapa's days the grand dukes had been allowed to marry Protestant princesses, leaving them free to become Greek Catholics later if their convictions permitted. But Uncle Sasha, who was less liberally inclined, had made severer rules; whoever married in his time into the Imperial family was expected then and there to become Orthodox, or the marriage received no Imperial sanction.

In those days the family spirit ruled supreme. In all Royal and Imperial families the head was bowed down to and considered omnipotent, no one dared discuss his decrees or cross his will. That was not so very long ago either; we have indeed lived to see extraordinary changes!

So Mamma kept a watchful eye over her daughters; she was quite equal to holding her own, no matter how autocratic her family might be, and she always had her

say. She played the governess amongst the unruly younger generation, declaring that they were being brought up without any manners. She never spared her criticisms or caustic remarks, which did not, of course, make her very popular. There were no doubt several little side-plays, but of these we knew nothing. Mamma had really succeeded in bringing us up as perfect little innocents (little idiots we should say to-day). We took everything for granted and seldom inquired into the whys and wherefores of events going on around us.

We were, however, soon torn away from these interesting if somewhat perplexing family gatherings, and carried off to Ilinsky, Uncle Serge's country seat not far from Moscow, where poor Alix had died and to which Uncle Paul wished to return.

At Ilinsky we were the guests of Ella the beautiful, and that was supreme enchantment. More lovely than ever in her deep mourning, our feeling for her amounted to a sort of breathless adoration. She was almost too good to be true.

Having been Alix's closest friend she was heart-broken at her death, and it fell to her share to look after the motherless babies, which she did to the best of her ability till they were grown up, even after Uncle Serge's violent end.

Ilinsky was a delightful place on the banks of a large river, and surrounded by many woods. We were quartered in a cottage annexe of the bigger house. It was in the woods, and we loved it especially, as we were allowed to ride to our hearts' content on the excellent sandy ground. There were also wonderful drives and mushroom-hunts in the endless woods.

We also visited Moscow for the first time, and were completely fascinated by its endless churches, its prodigious Kremlin and by that semi-Asiatic atmosphere which made it so much more old Russian than St. Petersburg with all its splendour. Moscow was at that time above all else the "City of the Tsars."

Again let me say "*Tout passe*" . . .

Later, both Ducky and I came back to Moscow for the coronation of Nicolas II and then indeed we were to know

it in all its most Imperial glory, but this will be related in due season.

Russia had an extraordinary glamour for us in those days; an enormous world of a thousand splendours, of a thousand possibilities, with a feeling of dark mystery as background, something unfathomable and rather awful, a secret no one really possessed. . . .

Although thirty-six years have gone by since that event which decided my fate, my pen seems to tremble in my hand when I set about recounting it. It is as though the difficult decision were again put before me. A sort of giddiness comes over me when I but think of it. Perhaps I feel it even more in looking back down the long road of knowledge, than I did then at that early age. Now, because I have lived it, I know all too well what it meant, but then I did not, for I was young and foolish and brave, like all beginners of life when they are idealists.

The first time I met my future husband was at Wilhelmshöhe, near Cassel, a beautiful old eighteenth-century château where Kaiser Wilhelm was residing during the *Kaisermanöver*, a yearly event of great importance in the Germany of my youth.

The Imperial couple had invited Mamma to come with her two eldest daughters, although Ducky was then only fifteen and I sixteen, indeed rather an early age to be brought out into the official world. Our feelings were complex, a mixture of shyness and protest to which we may, however, add a certain percentage of flattered excitement. We were a bit awkward, no doubt, but though innocents, we were not exactly stupid girls. We had always been accustomed to see people and had been brought up to be able to talk in several languages and make ourselves agreeable in any company; besides, we were gay and full of the joy of life.

The only person we knew at Cassel was Prince Friedrich of Hohenzollern (King Carol of Roumania's younger brother), General-in-Command in that town, who had been more than once our guest at Coburg, where military duties occasionally called him. In those days we three sisters had been entirely fascinated by his quiet, friendly manner. Although

he had the eagle nose characteristic of the Sigmaringen Hohenzollerns, it was set in a smiling, friendly face which had none of King Carol's forbidding austerity. *Onkelchen*, as we called him, was really *gemütlich*, the only word which rightly describes him. His voice had a soft drawl that was very attractive, and though not really ironical he had a twinkle in his eye which put the young at their ease at once.

All three sisters had absolutely fallen in love with *Onkelchen*, and it was a great joy to find him here at this rather formidable Imperial court. Besides, *Täntchen*, his wife, whom we met here for the first time, was just as delightful as her husband. Small, thin and childless, she loved the younger members of her family and knew how to attract them, for she had a very big heart in her diminutive body.

There was nothing formal or pompous about this couple, and later on, when I had become one of an overstrict and unbending family, they were often a refuge to those weary of formulas and political routine. And on a visit to this uncle and aunt, King Carol of Roumania had sent his nephew and heir, it being considered necessary that he should have a change of atmosphere. He could at the same time follow the *Kaisermanöver* which would improve his military science. King Carol never did anything without the very best of reasons. Thus it was that we first met at the Kaiser's table.

Kaiser William was our first cousin, his mother, the Empress Frederick, former Princess Royal of Great Britain, being our father's eldest sister. William was, of course, much older than we were, and though an interesting personality, he was not a favourite cousin. He was no doubt full of good feelings, but his attitude towards his family in general was brusque and at the same time boisterous.

He did not exactly intimidate you, but he "put your back up" the moment he addressed you in his overloud and deliberately *bourchicose* manner; you felt all prickly with opposition, there was something about him that roused antagonism.

Empress Augusta Victoria, his wife, was, I believe, full of the milk of human kindness, a woman of high principles, a good mother, a good and also patient wife; but her amiability had something condescending about it which never

rose to the height of cordiality or ease; there was effort in it. Somehow her smile seemed glued on; it was an official smile.

But she seconded Germany's ever-restless ruler with really laudable abnegation, bearing him six sons and one daughter, true to her post, through thick and thin, through good and bad, and always with that smile which she seemed to put on daily with the gorgeous, if somewhat tasteless gowns she was fond of, a smile that finally, as years advanced, seemed actually carved into her face. Was she ever tired of the eternal round? Who can tell? She never gave sign of weariness, but went on bravely, year in, year out to the very end . . . a tragic end.

All those who go on and on untiringly, whether stone-breakers, kings or cooks, awake in me a feeling of admiration; it is the ceaseless effort, the eternal "same thing" which needs the greatest patience and stamina. These virtues were Augusta Victoria's to the full.

Many years later, when my husband and I were their guests officially at Berlin, her hair was white, but she was still turning on the wheel of her duties. Her smile was as brave and impersonal as it had been in her youth, and looking at her with a certain involuntary admiration I suddenly saw her as an automaton, wound up by duty which death alone would unwind.

Much of that visit to Wilhelmshöhe is now hazy, whilst certain unimportant details stand out clearly, such as the mauve colour of our festive gowns worn for the big court dinner, and even the orchid I found in one of the Imperial vases the same shade as my dress, which I pinned on to my shoulder, very proud of this improvement to my attire. I also remember Mamma's raised eyebrow when she remarked my affectation, not quite sure if she approved, but letting my little vanity pass as such whilst she impressed upon us how important it was not to be tongue-tied at dinner. "A princess who does not talk to her neighbour is a nuisance to society," was one of her maxims.

If I remember rightly, I was seated beside the Crown Prince of Roumania on this occasion. He was a good-looking, shy young man who tried to overcome his timidity

by laughing. He spoke no English, was evidently very pleased to be in Germany again, and told us nothing about Roumania, nor did I ask him any questions as to that far-off country, being rather vague about its place on the map. But both Ducky and I liked this unpretentious young prince who went out of his way to be amiable to us. Besides, was he not the nephew of *Onkelchen* and *Täntchen* Hohenzollern, who both were so charming?

Whether the poor young fellow had been told that we were marriageable princesses, I do not know. In those days girls were kept in ignorance of the marriage plots of their parents, but not so the princes, I suppose, as the proposing (poor things) fell to their share.

I wish I could remember more about that visit to Emperor William's court, but it is a picture that has been effaced, except for the beautiful situation of the *Schloss*, its splendid, formal gardens and the glorious beech forests which formed its background; that and my mauve-coloured dress, Augusta Victoria's smile, the young prince's laughing (not to say giggling) timidity, and *Onkelchen's* comfortable, drawling voice full of fatherly encouragements.

Was it all a plot? Were they all in it? I do not know; that first meeting, in *my* mind, anyhow, was without importance.

Was it in the autumn of the same year or the next that we were invited to visit our cousin, the Hereditary Princess of Saxe-Meiningen, eldest sister of the Kaiser, at Berlin? I do not well remember. Anyhow, we three elder sisters were taken there for a week, I think.

"Charly," as we called our cousin, was an exceedingly fascinating and intelligent woman. For many years she played a large, finally a too large, part in my life. A good deal our senior, though our cousin, she was more Mamma's companion than ours. She was often our guest at Coburg, where she was close friends with Dr. X. As children we adored her with that fervour young creatures bring to their loving. Like most young married women she was flattered by our admiration, and she could be more charming than anyone I have ever known. She was small and inclined

to be plump (a tendency which she always fought, much to the detriment of her health, for she was nearly always ailing), and she was one of the few women of those days who wore short hair. She was neat to a degree and always beautifully dressed, somewhat imitating Queen Alexandra, whom, like everyone else, she much admired. Never have I heard a softer, more melodious voice; there was a purr in it which would have disarmed an ogre. She was an inveterate smoker and always diffused around her a delicate odour of cigarettes and Hammam. Not really a beauty, her face was most attractive, the lower part having a slight twist, and when she talked the tip of her small and well-shaped nose moved slightly downwards.

Yes, I remember her every peculiarity, down to the way she laid her fingers over the lid of her precious cigarette-cases before she opened them, and the way she would tap her cigarette on the table before fitting it into its holder, because once I loved her very dearly, and though she was later no longer my friend, I am still grateful to her for the delight she was to me in those early, unsophisticated days. Each time she arrived at Coburg, or at the Rosenau, was an occasion for excitement and rejoicing. Her movements were deliberate and gentle, like those of a cat, like a cat also the soft way she touched things; each of her gestures was a caress. She knew many things, though not as many as she gave you to believe; she spoke always as a connoisseur, be it about horses, music, flowers, cooking or army equipment, and for many long years I bowed down before her superior knowledge till I discovered what she really was. Amongst her many passions was also that of politics. Capable of lifelong friendships, of generosity and even of abnegation, she was, for all that, one of the most fickle and changeable women I have ever had to do with. She had what my mother used to call "*des engouements*," and when they were over, it was as though she had never even known the person, place or object which, the year before, had been a dominating, all-absorbing passion.

If I describe this lady so minutely it is because for many years she played a large part in my life, and not always a happy one. To this fascinating princess our mother took

us, following up, I believe, the plan she and Charly had conceived together, for I learned, many years later, that it was through Charly that Mamma had got into touch with King Carol and my husband's parents, who were looking for a wife for their second son, destined one day to be Roumania's king.

Charly, in her own house in Berlin, was quite a different person from Charly, our beloved Coburg guest. Here she was one of a gay and exceedingly worldly set and we were too young to have our place amongst such sophisticated company. They all had their own joys, their own mannerisms, their special language, their loves, enthusiasms and abhorrences.

We looked on and suffered the cruellest pangs of jealousy, watching our idol exposing a side of her character we had never before dreamed of; whilst for us, uninteresting *Backfische* to whom she had promised a glorious time, she had hardly a word or a look.

Bitter disillusion! That week spent in Charly's Berlin house belongs to one of the most painful memories of my young life.

The Crown Prince of Roumania was amongst the many young men this gay cousin received almost daily, and if we had continued meeting in her house I do not think that to-day I should be where I am, for it was only too natural that the grown-up German prince, happy to be back in Berlin, should be much more amused in her exhilarating company than searching for topics of conversation in keeping with our *Backfisch* innocence.

In all countries the "smart set" is cruel to outsiders, but there was a special flavour about this Berlin atmosphere that Charly and her *chic* friends spread around them, which I remember with acute suffering.

Many years later, as grown-up women, when Ducky and I compared notes, living over again our memories of that Berlin visit, tears of resentment still came to our eyes, so acute had been our humiliation and disillusion.

But nevertheless, through it all, we clung to our love for Cousin Charly, for the young cannot shatter their ideals all at once. It needed years entirely to destroy my feeling

for her, and even after I had discovered what a false friend she was, her soft, purring voice could, if I shut my eyes, occasionally awaken again that old sensation of delight she had given me when I was a child. I could see her again arriving at the Rosenau with little presents for us children, filling the quiet house with her delicious perfume of cigarettes and Hammam, and ravishing our adoring eyes with her lovely clothes and beautiful jewels, because Charly loved jewels almost beyond anything else.

Only on horseback we could never stand her; even then her theories and criticizing superiority made a torture of that favourite sport. Charly belonged to those beings who, with a single word of disdain, could shrivel up your ardent enthusiasm, make your dearest possession appear worthless or rob your closest friend of her charm, and this with a voice, soft and gentle like a caress. Charly's appreciation and depreciation of things was a decree.

This is a characteristic little story :

It was in the days when to please Charly was my supremest ambition, and praise from her lips had the value of rubies. She had been raving about a certain classical piece of poetry; it was the most beautiful poem ever written; the poet was a genius, etc., and whilst pronouncing this verdict her voice became deep and emotional so that it stirred your very heart-strings. Forthwith I decided to learn that wonderful poem by heart. It was long, in the most difficult classical German; I never learned easily by heart, but all for the love of Charly I struggled through every part of it till I mastered it completely, and, like a lover, awaited Charly's return so as to cast my humble offering at her feet.

Charly reappeared next season like the sun rising at its appointed time, and of course I was ardently anxious to recite my poem. For this it was necessary to lead the conversation into literary channels. This I finally succeeded in doing, but when, with a beating heart, I mentioned the celebrated poem, what was my consternation at hearing my beloved declare: "Oh, that old stuff, no one reads *his* poems to-day!" Yes, that was Charly all over.

But to Charly's honour let it here be mentioned that towards Mamma she was, I believe, loyal to the very end.

Even after thrones had crumbled and known worlds with their traditions had fallen to pieces, when new times stared the two old friends in the face, Charly, a shadow of her former self, would still go to Coburg to visit my broken-hearted mother, who lived to see the destruction of her kith and kin in Russia, Germany humiliated and all she believed in torn up by the roots.

Finally it was Charly who died a year before my mother, died cruelly of cancer, the same illness of which both her father and mother had died so many years before.

The next meeting with the Crown Prince of Roumania was at Munich. Springtime—a feeling of mystery and excitement in the air! This meeting, I believe, had been carefully arranged, but of course my sisters and I did not know this. We were thrown together as much as possible. My mother combined excursions, drives, the visiting of picture galleries, shops, exhibitions, theatres. Munich is the town of towns for this sort of thing.

The young prince was excruciatingly shy and laughed more than ever to mask his timidity. Curiously enough it was his extraordinary timidity which attracted me most; there was something so young, so suppressedly eager and just a little helpless about him. It gave you a longing to put him at his ease, to make him comfortable; it aroused your motherly feelings, in fact you wanted to help him.

I was much too young myself to have any positive conception of things, besides, our education had been according to the ideas of those times. We had been kept in glorious, but I cannot help considering dangerous and almost cruel, ignorance of all realities; in fact our education had been based upon nothing but illusions and disillusionments and a completely false conception of life. There was perhaps a serenity about it which the girls of to-day will never know, a sort of stupid happiness, but for all that it was cruel, yes, cruel is the only word which really describes it; it was a sort of trapping of innocence, a deliberate blinding against life as it truly is, so that with shut eyes and perfect confidence we would have advanced towards any fate.



“COUSIN CHARLY”: THE PRINCESS OF SAXE-MEININGEN.

But we were both young, there was love in the air, it was springtime and Mamma had a happy, expectant face.

There was a bouquet of pink roses, a little chat near the open window whilst the moon rose slowly above the houses of the town, an hotel room, anything but a romantic setting, and yet . . . love in the air.

That is about all there is to relate about that Munich meeting, no other remembrance of it remains to me; a few snatches of conversation without any special interest, a bouquet of roses and the moon . . . not enough to make a good story, nevertheless the beginning of many things.

And then a little later, "*im wunderschönen Monat Mai*" came our engagement, and of all things in the Neue Palais at Potsdam, under the approving eye of Kaiser William and beneath the benignly conventional smile of Augusta Victoria, whom the family pleased to call Dona.

Mamma was radiant and it was, I believe, Charly who had actually led the timid prince up to the crucial moment. How he ever had the courage to propose is to-day still a mystery to me; but he *did* and I accepted—I just said "Yes," as though it had been quite a natural and simple word to say. "Yes," and with that "Yes" I sealed my fate, opened the door upon life, a long life, the story of which I am setting out to relate; and to relate as fairly as possible—at least such is my intention.

That same evening Kaiser William gave a huge banquet in our honour, on the Pfaueninsel, a lovely island in one of the Potsdam lakes. In a characteristically eloquent speech the Emperor announced our engagement. A setting both regal and military; champagne, "*Hochs*" and congratulations. But I remember few details of that festivity. I was excited, believed that I was very happy, but beneath all the noise, glamour and glory there was a feeling of *angoisse* which made Ducky and me clasp hands with something like apprehension.

There was already a foretaste of parting, of tearing asunder of beloved ties, it was a door open upon a future all unknown. All was mysterious, undiscovered land. We

hardly knew my future husband, and none of his family except *Onkelchen* and *Täntchen* and we had once had a glimpse of his father, Fürst Leopold of Hohenzollern, one of the most charming men of his time. But Uncle Charles or Carol, and his far-off country, Roumania, all that was hazy, must not be too clearly thought of or one might become afraid.

And above all there was Ducky, Ducky, dearest of companions and comrades, however should we have the courage to part? Subconsciously I realized that she was full of resentment; I felt that she could not understand my easy consent, that simple-minded acceptance of an almost unknown man; in her heart of hearts she disapproved of this "Yes," which had been so quickly, too quickly said. It meant separation, it meant the beginning of something new in which she would have no part; we had always shared everything, and now here was something I was not going to, could not, share any longer.

That evening we met the first Roumanian who had ever crossed our path—Colonel Coanda, my bridegroom's A.D.C.—a tall, amiable, good-looking man in a strange uniform, who was beaming with delight, for the Roumanians were very anxious that their young heir to the throne should marry according to the country's desire.

It seems that a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, a princess whose uncles and cousins sat on many thrones, was just what they all wanted, it was what they called "*un beau mariage*"; one which opened out a new future to a still rather unknown country "somewhere in the Near East," for this, let it be confessed, was how, in those days, we looked upon my now so beloved Roumania.

Colonel Coanda knew how to demonstrate his joy. He spoke in French and expressed himself with much greater facility than his shy young prince. He found many words in which to tell us how delighted the King and the people of Roumania would be, what a splendid reception they would give the young bride, how beautiful was his country, how romantic the scenery, how picturesque the peasants. He said the people "would carry their future Queen on their hands"—I well remember his using that expression—



MY BRIDEGROOM, THE CROWN PRINCE FERDINAND OF ROUMANIA.



that they would build her a sweet home; that with her fair hair and blue eyes she would be considered as a good fairy from beyond the seas. Oh yes, Colonel Coanda knew how to say pleasant things; Ducky and I stood hand in hand, listening to him, and visions, tempting visions, passed suddenly before our eyes. . . .

Chapter X

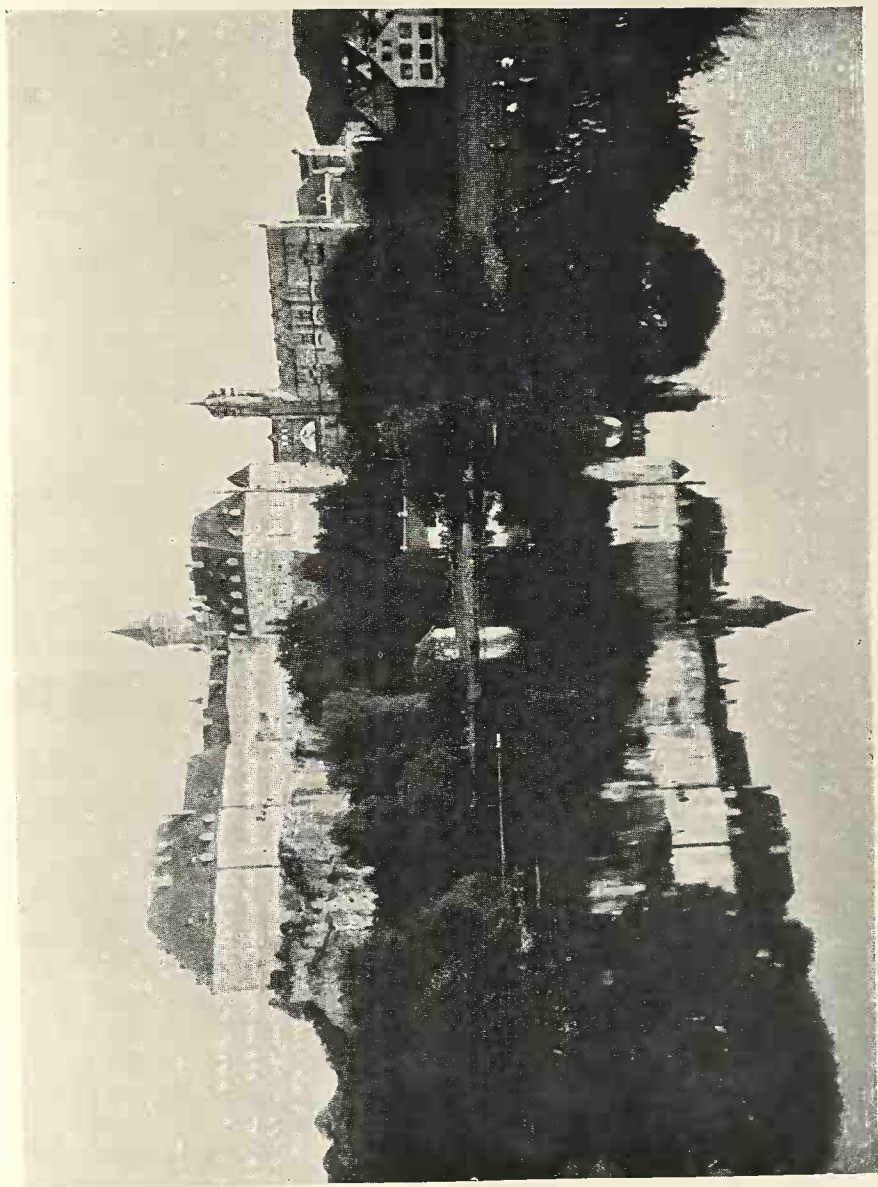
PREPARATIONS FOR MARRIAGE AND NEW RELATIONS

THE times which followed were feverishly full of excitement, a blending of joy, anxiety, apprehension, hope and regret. It was all so sudden and so many different sides had to be faced. It was all very well saying "yes," and having a shy, good-looking young man to adore you, but things did not stand still at that.

What would Papa think about it? Papa had not been there at the engagement and somehow my conscience was not quite easy; I felt, almost knew, that Papa had had other dreams. And then there was Grandmamma Queen, she would have to approve of my future husband; none of her granddaughters married without her approval. We should have to go to Windsor and be inspected, a rather formidable ordeal; but most weighty of all, there was "Onkel Karl," King of Roumania, to face. You could not be long in the company of Ferdinand, Crown Prince of Roumania, without discovering that "*der Onkel*," as he called him, loomed almost oppressively large in his life. When he spoke of him something very like anxiety and not far removed from dread came into his eyes; one felt that a shiver ran down his spine. *Der Onkel* was certainly a cold wind to his nephew, rather than a warming flame. . . .

It was decided that the first move should be to Sigmaringen, the birthplace and home of the Hohenzollerns, and to Sigmaringen would come Roumania's ruler, to sanction his nephew's choice. No doubt the bride probably had been the stern King's choice, but this I did not know; I lived in the castle of my illusions and in my happy innocence had no idea that everything had not been the romantic play of chance.

So to Sigmaringen we went. Sigmaringen, that snug



THE CASTLE OF SIGMARINGEN.

little town so far removed from the wear and tear of large centres, with its superb feudal castle looking down upon it, like an eagle enthroned upon a rock.

Several centuries old, this ancestral stronghold mirrors its walls and towers in the limpid waters of the Danube. Here but a small stream, quite near its source, it is nevertheless the selfsame river which rolls its mighty waters through that far-off country over which one of Sigmaringen's children was called upon to rule. From west to east, through several lands and over thousands of miles, it is as an ever-broadening ribbon binding the old home to the new. A curious coincidence, the beginning and the end . . . almost symbolic, in fact, to those who like to ponder over the intricacies of human destinies.

Sigmaringen, with its cosy little town nestling like a flock of well-fed geese beneath the shadow of the old castle, was a perfect picture of the Germany of that time; a self-sufficient, self-sufficing little place, living in happy respect of its *Fürstliche Familie* which was the centre, the pride, the very *raison d'être* of the whole country.

That first visit to Sigmaringen was all sunshine; I still remember it with a happy feeling of gratitude. Sadder and less loving times were to follow, but that first glimpse of the lovely place and that first meeting with a family which welcomed me with open arms, was all sweetness and warmth.

They had all gathered together for the occasion, my future father- and mother-in-law, with Nando and his two brothers, *Onkelchen* and *Täntchen*, and also dear Grandmamma Josephine, widow of the late Fürst Carl Anton.

Carl Anton, Nando's grandfather, had played an important political part in his day. He was a man of wide views and liberal ideas, in advance of his times.

So as to promote Germany's National Unity, on the 7th of December, 1849, Carl Anton of Hohenzollern Sigmaringen, in common accord with Friedrich William of Hohenzollern Hechingen, his cousin, renounced their sovereign rights in favour of the King of Prussia. This renunciation took place with an official ceremony in which the Prince released his troops of their oath towards himself, whereupon they were sworn in to Prussia.

On accepting the sacrifice made by the elder line of the Hohenzollerns in favour of the younger branch, the King of Prussia left sovereign rights to the Fürst of Hohenzollern Sigmaringen, including the right of conferring their own House Order.

Recognizing Carl Anton's remarkable political abilities as well as his staunch patriotism, the King of Prussia in 1852 made this liberal-minded prince Prime Minister of his Government, and later he was named Governor of the Provinces of Rhine and Westphalia, with residence at Düsseldorf.

Towards the end of his life this energetic prince was lame, and for several years had to be wheeled about in a chair, but his brain remained unclouded and masterful to the end of his days. In fact, I believe he ruled his family with a rod of iron.

Of his four sons, Leopold, Charles, Frederick and Anton, it was certainly Charles who inherited his father's political ability, and with it his iron will. Anton died a soldier's death from wounds received at the battle of Sadowa, during the war in 1866 between Prussia and Austria.

But the eldest son, Leopold, my future father-in-law, has also a curious page in history. In the year 1868 there was a revolution in Spain in which Queen Isabella was dispossessed of her throne, which was offered to Carl Anton's eldest son, Leopold. This offer was energetically refused by father and son, nor did the King of Prussia look upon it with a friendly eye, fearing complications with France. Spain then offered the throne to Frederick, Carl Anton's third son; this was also refused. These categorical refusals were principally due to the feeling of personal friendship existing between Napoleon III and the House of Hohenzollern. Carl Anton's mother had been a Murat, which explains the sympathy between the two families.

Political intrigues, however, did not stand still at this, and if those chiefly concerned stuck to their refusal, others had not ceased their underhand machinations.

In Spain the campaign was fostered by Marshal Prim, who, since the Mexican disaster, nursed a grudge against Napoleon III. But in Germany it was Bismarck, that man of iron, who was pursuing his plan of isolating France and surrounding

her with enemies. All these underhand intrigues were however carefully kept from the knowledge of the two Hohenzollerns till the plan should have ripened.

In June, 1870, Bismarck managed to gain over to his point of view the King of Prussia, who thereupon called together a family council at Berlin during which, under pressure and much against their will, Carl Anton and his son Leopold were finally persuaded to accept Spain's offer.

Upon this followed the well-known scenes that those who have studied their history books of that time will probably remember, though events are moving so quickly and so much has happened since that it is being forgotten.

At Ems old King William, who was taking a cure, on the 9th of July, 1870, received Benedetti, French Ambassador to Prussia. Benedetti pressed the King to give orders to his relations to refuse the throne of Spain. The King replied that he was not ready to do this unless it was acceptable to Carl Anton and his son. On the 11th Benedetti renewed his demand and the King gave the same answer. That same afternoon news was received that Prince Leopold had renounced his claim. Gramont, French Minister of Foreign Affairs, demanded an official renunciation, subscribed to by the Prussian Government. Benedetti asked for a third audience with the King, in which he pleaded for this and also that the King should make a declaration (which he could telegraph to Paris) that the King would in future oppose any future candidature of Leopold to the throne of Spain. This the King refused.

On the afternoon of the same day Benedetti asked to be received again. With every form of politeness the King declined to see him, but those desiring war knew how to make the King's refusal look like an insult to France, whereupon Benedetti received orders to quit Germany, and Werther, Prussian Ambassador in Paris, was asked to leave France. On July the 19th the French Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin handed in France's declaration of war on Germany. Thus had Bismarck pulled the strings according to his deep-laid plot.

Many of these incidents may have either been unknown or forgotten, therefore, whilst speaking of the Hohenzollern family I thought it useful to bring them back to memory.

Certainly Fürst Leopold had in no wise the appearance of one whose acceptance or refusal of a throne could promote a great war, for a sweeter, more peace-loving gentleman could not be conceived. It was he who was now the head of the family. He was married to Antonia, Infanta of Portugal, daughter of Queen Maria da Gloria, whose consort was also a prince of Coburg, second cousin of Queen Victoria's husband. Besides Ferdinand, they had two other sons, William, the elder, and Charles, the younger.

William, though a dear, kind-hearted fellow, had none of Ferdinand's good looks; he was inclined to stoutness, had snub features and the characteristically eagle nose of the Hohenzollerns was conspicuously absent from his rotund and jovial face. He was full of the milk of human kindness though none too happily married to a niece of the Empress Elisabeth of Austria. This not very united couple had a two-year-old daughter and wee twin sons. The daughter was the wife of King Manuel of Portugal.

Ferdinand's youngest brother, Charles, had no lack of good looks. He had a beautifully slim figure, of which he was inordinately proud. In fact, he was inclined to be too pleased with himself and stalked about with something of a peacock's strut. He considered himself as clever as he was handsome, and I was often astounded at the way he managed to lord it over Ferdinand, who was not only his elder but his superior in every way.

A year or two later, Charles, whom the family called Carlo, married his first cousin, Josephine, Princess of Belgium (sister of Albert, the late King of the Belgians). Accustomed to admire him as a child, she continued to do so all through their married life, though she too was by far his superior. She may have had moments when she realized this, but she never showed it, so his vanity increased with the years in a way most provoking to his family. A greater contrast than the two brothers, Ferdinand and Charles, can hardly be imagined. Ferdinand was almost painfully modest and unassuming, whilst his milk-fair, wasp-waisted brother was just the contrary, and into the bargain Ferdinand was inexplicably humble before his brother's assumed perfections.

But at that first meeting I looked upon them all with

uncriticizing eyes, ready to take each man at his own valuation.

As I mentioned before, my father-in-law, Fürst Leopold, was one of the most charming princes of his day. Clever, cultivated, good-looking, he had something of Ferdinand's modesty, though he was much less shy and the most perfect *homme du monde*. I have never met a more unselfish man. He lived entirely for others, spending his life and energies rushing backwards and forwards between the different members of his family, wearing himself to pieces over the care he took of his delicate wife and of his adorable old and very deaf mother whom he dearly loved.

Antonia, or Antoinette, had been one of the great beauties of her time; one of those old-fashioned, classic-featured beauties, whom one associates with the crinoline. Her profile was Grecian, her shoulders sloping, her hands long and delicate, her feet very small and useless. But her figure somehow could not fit in with the clothes of the day, there was a disproportion between the bust and the legs. The crinoline was missing. Superbly aristocratic, she moved slowly with a curious swinging of the hips. She loved fine clothes and jewels and, though leading almost an invalid's life, was always very smartly dressed.

For several years already her health had quite broken down, and I never knew her except as an invalid who mixed only at certain hours with the other members of the family.

Our reception at the station was extremely official. Although small, the Sigmaringen court was wonderfully well run and even slightly pompous, with a good deal of ceremony. The carriages were perfectly turned out, the horses big and uniformly dark black-brown, the liveries were smart, but with all that there was a *Gemütlichkeit* about Sigmaringen which was very charming and which quite delighted Mamma, who loved all things German.

Mamma adored my father-in-law; they got on beautifully together, he was so exceedingly amiable and thoughtful and had such perfect manners; besides, he was highly cultivated, well-read and a very expert art connoisseur. All these qualities my mother appreciated to the full. Altogether

Mamma was enchanted with everything, and this aristocratic and yet kindly German family was entirely to her taste. Everybody was simple and friendly, the only one who had any stiffness was Fürstin Antonia, the invalid.

Quite the most fascinating member of the family, besides Fürst Leopold, was his charming old mother, born a Princess of Baden. Small and frail, she had exquisite features framed in veils and laces which heightened their delicacy. Her gowns and cloaks were just as they should be . . . she always wore gloves much too long in the fingers, which she had not had the strength to pull on properly. Being stone-deaf she had expressive little gestures indicating when she had understood your pantomimic conversation ; she liked a good joke and had a sweet way of lifting her hand and covering her mouth when amused or pleasantly shocked. Dear old Grandmamma Josephine had the most lovely nose I have ever seen ; it was one of God's perfections.

My future mother-in-law's looks were a great disappointment to me. Having heard that she had been a great beauty, I was all eagerness to see her, but I could not reconcile myself to this pale-faced, pale-lipped, Grecian-nosed woman with the too small bust and too long legs. These proportions can occasionally be beautiful, but in her case, the hips being enormous, there was something about her figure which made you feel positively uncomfortable. Had I been older, I would no doubt have understood how handsome her features still were.

She was most loving and charmingly kind to me, which I later realized must have been somewhat of an effort, because, being an ardent, not to say fanatical Catholic, it was a great distress to her to have a Protestant daughter-in-law.

This, however, had not been purely a question of chance. Roumania was a Greek-Orthodox country, so its people quite naturally desired that their future king should be of their own faith. It had been one of the conditions accepted by King Carol when he became their sovereign, and knowing that a Catholic princess would never submit to this, he had married a Protestant wife, and willingly or not, Ferdinand was to do the same. Having found a bride to his taste, he did not grudge the sacrifice he was making, although being more

strictly religious than his uncle, he was not sure that he was not endangering his soul, especially as his mother was persuaded that he needed the forgiveness of the Church for having overstepped her decrees.

Ferdinand was her favourite son, there was a great affinity of character between the two; besides, as is often the case, distance had minimized his faults and magnified his good qualities. For his sake I was accepted with open arms and with many demonstrations of affection; besides, I was so young and such a confiding little innocent, that I probably disarmed even those whose reason did not really accept me.

Mamma had brought all her family with her to Sigmaringen, Alfred and all four sisters, even Baby Bee, then about eight years old, who immediately became a great favourite as she was always a most amusing and clever child. If I remember rightly, Dr. X. and his wife were also with us, Dr. X. highly approving of this exquisite German atmosphere.

There is so much to relate about this time, so many events, so many impressions, that it is difficult to choose what to put down and what to leave out. I shall try to remember what impressed me most so as to give a true picture of my sixteen-year-old mentality.

My future father and mother-in-law did not inhabit the old castle but a house in the lower part of the town which, at the rear, looked out upon a large garden and park, a house which had been theirs when their parents inhabited the old *Schloss*. Now it was the turn of the younger generation to take up their abode in their grandparents' quarters; this is generally the way with royal families; a sort of *chassé-croisé*, skipping one generation.

Both the old *Schloss* and the Fürstenbau, as my parents-in-law's house was called, were full of beautiful things. Fürst Carl Anton, the grandfather, had not only been an able statesman, but also a great lover of art, and it was thanks to his energy and knowledge that the Sigmaringen castle possessed an exceedingly interesting little museum with a valuable collection of old pictures, sculptures, missals, glass, majolica and metal-work. His sons, brought up in the love of antiquities, continued to enrich this magnificent collection.

And on her side, the Infanta Antonia had inherited some beautiful old Spanish and Portuguese objects from her father, furniture, china, glass, ancient statuettes and some magnificent old silver. She had great taste and had set up her treasures to their best advantage; I would wander about amongst them enjoying their mellowed perfection, though it was many years before I really understood their value or knew how to distinguish their style and periods.

My mother-in-law was an interesting, if not altogether a lovable personality. She was profoundly artistic, an excellent painter, and deeply learned on certain subjects, such as botany, biology and natural history. But in other ways she had remained very narrow and her religion cramped instead of widening her heart, mind and sympathies. She was one of those people who knew no forgiveness of sinners unless it was imposed upon her in the confessional. She was a curious mixture of dignity and childish futility, vain, self-centred, small in her judgment of others; she had no wider sympathies. Life, with its broader human understanding, lay outside her field of comprehension. She lived in a small circle of rules, prejudices and conventions which she considered perfection. It was her love of beauty in general and of flowers in particular that made her congenial to me. But I never dared touch upon general subjects; human conflicts she was unable to grasp, she lived so protected, so out of the world, hedged in by her Church, nursing her delicate health, everybody serving her, caring for her, spoiling her, that she was more like an old and very exigent child than a woman who had lived a real woman's life, with its temptations, conflicts, doubts, joys, passions and pain.

This I learned little by little as the years went by, for our natures were made to clash, but at that first meeting, she was merely an unexpectedly impressive, middle-aged lady who showered upon me every kindness and attention. I really think she liked me then, but there was also something else in this; I was to be shown off as favourite so as to spite Mädi, her eldest daughter-in-law. Of course then I had no idea of this, or I would have been less flattered by her manifestations of affection, but little by little I was to learn that Fürstin Antonia was a woman who could hate and resent in a way

little in keeping with her religious principles, and the unfortunate Mädi was one of those who had known how to awaken her most lasting dislike.

Mädi, or Maria Theresa, born Princess Trani, was of the race of the Bavarian Wittelsbachs, and had some of their eccentricity; though exceedingly blue-blooded and occasionally even fascinating, there was something a bit odd, and not quite to be reckoned with about Mädi. Life threw us little together; she showed me neither affection nor dislike. If I had known that I was being used to emphasize the disfavour in which she was held I should have done everything to make friends, for my whole soul would have revolted against being unfairly played off against her.

Ever so many years later, in the only heart-to-heart talk we ever had together, she confessed to me that she had imagined that I had been conscious of the way I was being used to humiliate her. This was a horrible revelation to me, and by the pain I felt I think she was convinced that I had been utterly unaware of my mother-in-law's tactics. But the harm had been done.

Later I myself went through the process of being the fallen favourite, when Fürstin Antonia raised Josephine, her third daughter-in-law, to that short-lived position. How long she occupied it I cannot say, for there was no fourth son to get married and in later years I went more seldom to Sigmaringen, anyhow never for long periods; besides, I had other, deeper troubles to face.

Somehow, Mädi could not fit in with the Hohenzollern family; she seemed actually to take pleasure in shocking them whenever she could. To all outward appearances her husband was patient and long-suffering, but they drifted apart, as their characters were fundamentally different. Mädi, without being good-looking, had what the French call *beaucoup de race*. She was exceedingly thin, with pale blue eyes and a pathetic voice. Her health was not robust and she was quite an invalid, wheeled about in a chair, before she died at the age of forty-two. In those days she hardly ever came to Sigmaringen, and the saddest thing of all was that she saw very little of her children, to whom she was mother in name more than in fact, which made them rather sad and

lonely little creatures. Mädi's one great love was her mother, Countess Trani, sister of the Empress Elizabeth of Austria, of the Queen of Naples and of the Duchess of Alençon. Countess Trani had the same wonderful figure as the Empress, tall, upright and incredibly slim; she was, however, much less beautiful. She too was a lover of solitude, somewhat of a hermit, living far away from her kind, proud, original, aristocratic, but difficult to get on with, a peculiarity her daughter had inherited.

Poor Mädi, she was a pathetic figure that but seldom crossed my path. We lived too far apart.

The country around Sigmaringen is varied and attractive and the rocky valley of the Danube is even very beautiful.

The afternoon of our arrival we were all taken for a lovely drive through this valley, a drive which ended with tea at a delicious little place belonging to the family called "Inzighoven." This had formerly been a convent, I think. There was an old house no longer in use, a church and several lovely gardens, one of which was enclosed by high walls against which apples, pears, peaches and apricots had been trained. There were also masses of flowers and I revelled in this garden.

How well I remember that tea-party. Fürstin Antonia, who never drove with other people, had arrived first by a short cut and received us at a large round table almost breaking beneath its spread of tempting food. The Sigmaringen teas and breakfasts were regular feasts. I have never tasted better toast and *Galettes*, *Knüppel*, *Käse* and *Ziebelkuchen*—besides no end of different kinds of rusks, biscuits, *Lebkuchen* and *Prätzeln*, than at Sigmaringen. My mother-in-law being, because of her poor health, a capricious eater, every sort of good thing was set before her so as to tempt her appetite. Nothing loath, we fell to and ate with the healthy relish of our age. I can still see sister Baby stuffing for all she was worth and Alfred trying one excellent cake after another, whilst Mamma was being amiable with the elder members of the family. And over this happy scene the spring sun shone in all its glory.

I was learning to call my bridegroom Nando, for it was

thus he was known in the family. He was emotionally enchanted to show me his old home, with all his favourite haunts. Besides, he was shyly delighted to present his bride to all those, high and low, who belonged in any way to the household; old family servants and retainers, functionaries, ladies-in-waiting, former governesses and tutors. But although his heart expanded with joy, all the same I detected a certain underlying sadness; the sadness of one who was already a little bit of a guest in his *Elternhaus*, for had he not been expatriated so as to create a new home in a far-off country in which he was only just learning to live?

I felt this through everything—a certain anxiety, with just a touch of dread. He was beginning to tell me about Roumania, but he had not the gift of expression. All he related was a bit halting, evoked no real pictures, and though I did not understand it then, he spoke of it always somewhat as a schoolboy on a holiday would speak of school. There was a sound of chains about it somewhere. Here at Sigmaringen he felt free, loved, his heart expanded, he breathed freely; what was it that he was trying to make me understand about that far-off country? Was he less free there? Was it not a beautiful, wonderful country, a country of poetry and romance? But always that note of anxiety when he talked about it which stirred something in me I could not understand; it was rather like a sound of warning. Was it difficult to live in a far country?

And as an echo coming back again and again, *der Onkel*,—he seemed to sign each picture, to be at the end of each road, at the core of each plan. . . . Was it perhaps *der Onkel* who inspired this sort of dread?

And in a few days *der Onkel* would be coming; coming all the long way from Roumania to look at Nando's bride. And Nando clung to me as one who sees a shadow advancing which might darken in some way his newly found happiness.

Der Onkel! What would he be like? What would he think of me?

The most sunshiny Fool's Paradise cannot persuade time to stand still. A few blissful days of pleasurable enjoyment amidst people set upon making you feel happy and at home,

and then the dreaded morning dawned; *der Onkel* was arriving to-day.

High and low donned their best attire, Mamma had carefully told us what to put on, and she came herself to see that each detail was carried out as she desired. We felt that even she was just a little excited and nervous. But she tried to cheer us up and give us courage with brave words.

The little town was all astir with distant sounds of music, the pattering of hurrying feet along the pavement, little snatches of conversation, and, looking out of the window, I saw for the first time the Roumanian flag; blue, yellow and red, more cheerful than beautiful, but there it fluttered as though proud of its uprightness; three colours that were to play such a tremendous part in my life. . . .

But the terrible moment could not be put off; we had all gathered together at the station. Nando in his Roumanian Chasseur's uniform, very nervous, very loving. I can still feel the touch of his long fingers on my arm; an anxious touch; Nando had his mother's beautiful hands, but like hers they had something a little groping about them. We looked at each other, he tried to give me a smile of encouragement, but I read again that curious dread in his eyes. And then the train puffed in. . . .

Der Onkel was there! The first impression was slightly disillusioning. I had seen several pictures of King Carol; his dark, impressive, rather austere face, aquiline nose, black beard, and penetrating eyes had for some reason made me imagine him tall and imposing, but this was an entirely wrong picture. King Carol was short of stature and at first sight not at all impressive except for his self-assured, decided and at the same time dignified attitude, and his roaming, all-seeing, rather small and often bloodshot blue eyes. King Carol could see everything without turning his head, like an eagle. One might say that his eyes flickered and snapped.

But this I did not observe at first; he simply seemed to me rather a short man with somewhat incurved knees, his feet in thick-soled boots exceedingly firmly planted on the ground. Unlike his almost nervously amiable brother, the Fürst, who seemed for ever eager to propitiate the world and



MY FATHER-IN-LAW, FÜRST LEOPOLD OF HOHENZOLLERN—
IN THE ROBES OF THE BLACK EAGLE.

all men therein, he was almost exaggeratedly calm and self-contained. His movements were slow and deliberate, with a sort of conscious majesty which had become his usual attitude, the movements of a man who, having himself completely under control, can also control and master others. But for all that, the first sight of *der Onkel* did not at all come up to my young expectations. He looked severe but in no wise imposing. In fact, he was a disappointment.

He embraced me with much cordiality, and was exceedingly amiable with my mother, but there was none of his brother's warm effusion about him; he was above all a self-contained, masterful man, full of his own dignity, and aware of his importance; a self-made man in fact.

Curiously enough I have entirely forgotten who the King had in his suite on that first visit. I suppose there were too many impressions pressing in upon me, more emotions than my young heart could contain. My bridegroom and I were too much wrapped up in ourselves; we were discovering each other. Nando could not bear me out of his sight; after rather hard and lonely times he had found his happiness and he clung to it in a way that deeply touched me. He was hungry for affection, for something all to himself. He always wanted to be alone with me and suffered because of the many others who claimed their share. I was ready to give him all I could, but half of me was hankering after Ducky, the companion of my whole life, and this new love was pulling me in another direction. I felt something of a traitor towards my sister, and this was tearing me in two. All through life that curious sensation has followed me; that feeling of being torn to pieces by the too many who wanted my affection.

I believe Mamma had many discussions with Uncle and my father-in-law about our wedding and all the different arrangements, contracts, plans, etc., with which no one worried me. I was in fact magnificently unconscious that there *were* any difficulties and problems. I was much too young, a child not out of her teens, unsuspecting and credulous, ready to take each man at his face value and believing that all dreams could come true.

Roumania was a land of Romance, a land of Promise, a land of high mountains, deep valleys and ocean-wide plains, a land of song and poetry, of dark-eyed peasants in picturesque costumes, a far-off land near the Rising Sun.

And Nando and I were two loving companions advancing towards perfect bliss, towards plenitude and fulfilment, beneath the kindly, indulgent smiles of those who were going to make our road easy for us and our life all joy. Thus the dream. . . .

We would sit together hand in hand in any corner where we could be alone, and the love I read in Nando's eyes meant nothing to me but a promise of perfect happiness; I was moved by no anxiety and my extreme immaturity did not even make me wish to inquire more deeply into the real meaning of marriage. And whilst I was thus living in a world of the most complete unreality, our elders were solving difficult problems and preparing our future with the deliberation of those whose eyes are no more veiled by illusions.

The religious question was difficult, as the Pope would not agree that our children, if we were to be blessed with any, should be christened in the Orthodox Faith. Nando's marriage with a Protestant was already straining relations with Rome, so the greatest tact was necessary and goodness only knows what deputies were being sent to propitiate the Pontiff of Pontiffs.

And things were further complicated because Grand-mamma Queen wished me to be married in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, according to tradition, all her English grandchildren having been married there; but as there was to be both a Protestant and a Catholic marriage, neither Church would admit that their ceremony should be the second, so the idea of a Windsor marriage had to be given up, much to my disappointment. Being a British-born princess, I would have liked to marry in the land of my birth under dear old Queen Victoria's wing; it would have been a happy send-off. Added to all these difficulties there was still another; the dissolute state of old Duke Ernest's court made it impossible for the marriage to be celebrated at Coburg, so finally, after several months' debate, it was settled that the



KING CAROL OF ROUMANIA

ceremony should take place at Sigmaringen, a solution I personally did not really care about.

Being only sixteen at the time of my engagement it was found necessary to prolong it till I was seventeen, which would be in October; so the marriage was fixed for January the 10th, which would give time for everybody to look about and prepare for the great event. I was well content with this arrangement and in no hurry to throw myself headlong into the unknown.

During our stay at Sigmaringen, it was arranged that we should come together with the Emperor William at the Burg Hohenzollern, *Stamschloss* of both branches of the family. The Kaiser desired to manifest his goodwill towards this elder but no longer reigning line of the same house, and besides it was a pleasant way of meeting the King of Roumania without too great formality.

The Hohenzollern Schloss lies in lonely majesty on a hill rising quite suddenly and unexpectedly out of the flat lands of Swabia. First built round about the years 1061-95, it has but few vestiges left of the original stronghold, and it has been rather floridly restored with much false Gothic, but the position is magnificent and, seen from below, its many pointed towers rise proudly above the woods which clothe the cone-shaped hill its crowns. From above, the view is superb; in proud majesty the fortress looks down upon the plain beneath, remembering, perhaps, the days when it gloriously abused its feudal rights.

Both branches of the Hohenzollerns have equal rights to this castle, erected by their mutual forbears, and this was an excellent occasion for manifesting their reciprocal goodwill, more especially as our engagement had taken place beneath the Kaiser's Imperial roof. Fürst Leopold was always eager to prove that loyalty towards the reigning house of Prussia which his father had so unselfishly promoted. But King Carol was less effusive and his feelings for his young kinsman were never very warm and sometimes even wanting in cordiality.

I do not remember much about our somewhat overpowering cousin on that occasion; fiancés are not very

observant, they have eyes only for each other. One small incident however I shall never forget, as it was characteristic of much which was to follow.

As on that other occasion of our betrothal at Potsdam, speeches were made, but this time less officially, for if I remember rightly we were only a family party. The Kaiser proposed the King of Roumania's health, the Fürst, I think, proposed my mother's; we were of course seated side by side, Nando pleurably elated, as he too had loyal feelings towards the Kaiser, and was amongst those who never ran him down, even when it became quite the right thing to do. *Der Onkel*, superbly aware of his importance in the balance of our destinies, then turned towards us and, raising his glass, looked at his nephew, and with a smile full of meaning said: "Let me drink to your 'honey day'" (*Honigtag*).

"Honey day!" I saw Nando turn pale; he politely raised his glass in answer, but his hand was trembling and from that moment he lost all his gaiety, became silent, abstracted and looked thoroughly miserable. As soon as we got up from table, he drew me into a corner and with troubled eyes and quivering nostrils he asked me: "Did you hear?" "Hear what?" "He said a '*Honigtag*.'" "Well, why not? He seemed very kind and full of goodwill." "Why not? Don't you understand what he means? He means that instead of a honeymoon he will only allow us a honey day! That's just how he is—he does not care for or understand other people's feelings. With Uncle it is all work and no play, year in year out, all through the seasons. He never cared about a honeymoon for himself; he is not made like other people, he is all duty and no weakness and expects everybody to be the same. It's always like that; everything has to be sacrificed. He has no feeling nor understanding for the wants and desires of the young. When it is a question of state he is absolutely pitiless!"

There were actually tears in Nando's eyes. Unable to understand this outbreak of despair, I did my poor best to console him, but he kept repeating: "He means it, you'll see. Uncle's jokes are always bitter earnest." But just then I

could not understand the real suffering which lay beneath the poor young man's words.

Later I understood.

Another difficult moment was approaching, the visit to England, to present ourselves before Papa, before Grand-mamma. . . .

All the time I had a sad little feeling underlying my new-found happiness, the feeling that Papa would be disappointed and perhaps others as well. My betrothed was a complete stranger, and therefore quite foreign to that life that was once mine, a stranger to all the beloved Malta atmosphere, to all, in fact, from which I had sprung. I felt a little bit of a traitor somehow, so that all Nando's loving ardour and Mamma's smiles and reassurances could not make me feel entirely happy.

The moments in life when one has to take absolute decisions have something grim about them. It means clenching your teeth and setting your face towards that which you have chosen, for better or worse, with no looking back or side alleviations ; but there are certain heart-strings that ache for all one's courage. So it was with me ; I had cast in my lot with a stranger, I was setting out upon an unknown sea, burning my boats behind me, quitting the old harbour for a new one of which I knew nothing, and that at the age of sixteen.

There was heartache in it, intolerable heartache, especially as my English family was, and still is, terribly exclusive and only grudgingly opens its doors to strangers unless it can quite absorb them. I knew that in a way my choice set me outside the fortress in which until now I had had my place. But it had to be faced, loyally, courageously faced ; but how cruelly difficult it is to be loyal all round.

This I felt to the point of torture, and it was a torture I could not share with the one who was carrying me off ; he could not have understood it, and if he had, it would have darkened his joy. So I hid my inner desolation as best I could, bracing myself for each new meeting ; Papa, Grand-mamma, all the uncles, aunts and cousins, with George in particular, George, most cherished chum of the beloved

Malta days, and all the naval friends whom I imagined would look upon me as one betraying her original loyalties. Yes, I suffered, but none, except Ducky perhaps, knew to what an extent, but the die had been cast, there was nothing for it but to go straight ahead.

Papa said very little, though his face was rather glum. He busily set about making all practical arrangements, a great alleviation at times when the heart is sore. He avoided talking to me in private, and child-like I was relieved at this attitude. But the old home was no longer quite the old home. . . .

We had arrived in London ahead of the King of Roumania, who was to have his own reception. If I remember rightly, it was at Windsor that we were all to meet. But in those days I had nothing to do with the planning and settling of things, I just did what I was told and seldom discussed or protested or asked for the why or wherefore. I had the feeling of being part of a relentless organization which was sweeping me forward according to a plan not of my own making, nor under my control. I accepted the decisions made for me as I accepted the ruling forces that stood behind me then. I was a trustful, unthinking, though not unfeeling, little innocent, with entirely erroneous ideas about life. But this explains why I only remember clearly those events or episodes in which I was personally concerned; they stand out as separate pictures while the rest has faded away.

Here are a few pictures.

I am standing with my shy bridegroom and other members of the family in the beautiful, broad, curving Windsor corridor so full of beautiful pictures and statues which we delighted in, and where Grandmamma liked to receive her guests before meals. Tap, tap; one could hear the sound of Grandmamma's stick before she came round the corner and also the rustle of her stiff silk gown . . . tap, tap. . . . And there she was, wee and smiling and rather shy, with teeth small like those of a mouse, and a deliciously modulated voice when she addressed the young German prince in his native tongue. I see her looking up at him and asking him about his parents, "Die ich so lieb habe," and telling him that she

always has a picture of his mother in her own private room. "Sie war so wunderschön." And the young man shyly bows and his eyelids quiver and he is terribly on his best behaviour, and, being naturally sympathetic, especially when anybody is going through an ordeal, I understand all his feelings and am shy with him, hot and cold in turns. . . .

Then it is evening, I have my best dress on; again we are in the corridor waiting for the Queen. Other guests have arrived at the Castle, amongst others Cousin George. I believe Uncle Bertie¹ was there also, but I only remember Cousin George. . . .

It is the first time we meet since I have decided for the new harbour; since I have burnt my boats behind me. My heart is beating, all these meetings with beloved old friends are difficult, and I have always that sick feeling at heart that I am in some ways betraying all the things I had loved. . . .

"Well, Missy?" Cousin George is very kind and very sweet and I have a lump in my throat. We avoid speaking of the dear Malta days, for I could not have stood it just then, not at that moment when I had set my face towards a far, far land. . . .

But here is a sweetly comic picture, not meant to be comic, but comic for all that.

Queen Victoria had at that period a great favourite, an Indian, whom everyone called the Munshi. Grandmamma had a great predilection for Indians and all things pertaining to India; was she not Empress of India? Besides, she said that Indians were quite perfect servants, so quick, so noiseless, with soft, deft movements. With a shy little smile she explained: "They are so clever when they help me out of my chair, or into a carriage, they never pinch me!" and which of us does not know how uncomfortable too eager helping hands can be and how often have we not been "pinched" by those imagining themselves most dexterous?

The Munshi was a sort of Indian secretary to the Queen and gave her Indian lessons. Some have declared that his royal mistress treated him with more consideration than his caste entitled him to; of this I am no judge, but the fact

¹ King Edward VII.

remains that the Munshi had an envied position ; a house, a wife, Indian servants and the permission to slaughter animals according to the rites prescribed by his religion. This privilege much complicated the Queen's journeys when she moved with the Munshi in her train, and it can easily be imagined what a superlative annoyance it was to those members of her household who did not appreciate him.

I personally recollect the difficulties raised by this right of the Munshi's to slaughter his food within his own courts, on an occasion when the Queen transported herself to Darmstadt to visit her grandchildren of Hesse (children of her second daughter, Princess Alice, who had died when her children were quite young), and that a habitation had to be found within the boundaries of which the Munshi could observe the rituals imposed upon him by his faith.

The Munshi, having heard that a foreign prince had come to ask for the hand of one of the "Empress of India's" granddaughters, forthwith expressed the desire to make the acquaintance of the honoured stranger, and these are the scenes following upon the favourite's request.

"My dear Missy, the Munshi would like to make Ferdinand's acquaintance."

"Certainly, Grandmamma, when and where do you desire them to meet?"

"In my room, dear child," and as usual Grandmamma shrugged her shoulders, smiled her shy little smile and indicated the hour when I was to appear with my bridegroom in her private apartments.

Punctually, according to the great little Old Lady's desire, my bridegroom and I appeared in Her Majesty's inner sanctuary. She was sitting at her writing-table ; as usual the air was sweet with that scent of orange flowers peculiar to her rooms. And there indeed upon an easel stands the lovely portrait of Nando's mother, Antonia, painted at the period of her greatest beauty. Winterhalter had posed her in profile, doing every honour to her faultlessly classical features, to her sloping shoulders and to the slight pout of the lower lip ; a superb beauty indeed, with her hair drawn away from her low forehead and arranged in a "chignon" of curls at the back like certain Greek statues. I gazed at it, but did not

know in those days how to appreciate that severe type of beauty, preferring the loveliness of Aunt Alix or Cousin Ella. It was because of Antonia's connexion with the Coburg family that Grandmamma possessed this wonderful portrait of her. Graciously the Queen pointed to the portrait, showed her wee teeth in a very captivating smile and said: "*Wunderschön.*" "*Wunderschön,*" repeated my timid bridegroom and the conversation was at an end. A click of a door-handle and there on the threshold stood the Munshi, an Indian idol all clothed in gold, with a white turban on his head, for he had donned festive apparel for the occasion. He did not step into the room but remained framed in the doorway. Putting his hand to his heart, lips and forehead, he saluted us Eastern-wise and then froze into immobility.

In those days I possessed no social ease, I was simply a silly little girl, at home in a garden, on horseback or in a circle of friends, but I had no idea of how to aid shy people; Grandmamma and Nando were hopelessly shy, and the Munshi, of course, was an Oriental; he manifested no sort of emotion at all, simply waiting in Eastern dignity for those things that were to come to pass. But nothing came to pass. Nando had no idea what was expected of him and so simply stared at the enigmatic apparition, standing in dumb golden glory in the doorway, whilst Grandmamma kept hunching up her shoulders and smiling as though her smiles could make something happen. Finally, I believe, it was I who courageously went up to the Munshi and shook hands with him, Nando following my lead, after which Grandmamma, feeling that she had satisfied the favourite's whim by allowing him a glimpse of the royal bridegroom, was only too glad to pronounce the ceremony at an end and to be relieved of the presence of the tongue-tied fiancés, who themselves were only too pleased to escape.

It remains an everlasting regret to me that I never knew Grandmamma Queen more intimately. Having flown from beneath her wings almost as a child, and later being kept very much secluded in the country of my adoption, I had little occasion for knowing her when I had grown to an age of greater consciousness. But talking of Grandmamma's atmo-

sphere I am tempted to insert here two scenes which belong to a later date.

The first, though, leads us back to Osborne, Grandmamma's summer residence.

I was then about twenty, but already had two children, and Grandmamma had lent me one of her small cottages so that my little ones could spend a season near the sea which had been the delight of my childhood.

I will not here mention the extraordinary happiness it was to be back again at Osborne; that can only be understood if one has known exportation. . . .

Here, following her usual "clock-like" habits, Grandmamma took her afternoon drive every day and was always accompanied by a member of the family, if available, or otherwise by a lady-in-waiting. On the memorable occasion I am about to relate, I was the chosen one and it was to be a *tête-à-tête* drive. I believe that some to whom the pleasure of these drives was too repeatedly offered, came to dread them as they were always long and often chilly, but for me they had the charm of rarity and were therefore quite an event.

Well do I remember this drive; I felt elated with the elation of one out on a voyage of discovery, but I was also shy and not a little nervous. I had become almost a stranger to Grandmamma; besides, was she not censor and critic of all our lives, carefully following up the career of all her daughters or granddaughters scattered through the different countries of Europe? I knew that searching questions would be put; Grandmamma would certainly try to learn all about me, and it had therefore been planned that we should be alone together during this drive.

I think that this was the sole occasion when Grandmamma and I had a really intimate talk. At first our conversation was somewhat halting, for we were both shy and I was too tremendously on my good behaviour and dared not treat the royal little Old Lady as though she were a real flesh-and-blood grandmother. In fact I kept wondering how much she could understand of youthful or even everyday human emotions; were not all her woman's perceptions smothered beneath her too great royalty?

Gradually, however, our mutual reserve began to melt

and I found myself answering her questions with animation ; besides, she had a sweet way of laughing at unexpected moments, a silvery, really amused little laugh, and this laugh bridged some of the distance between us. She asked me about the country I had gone to, about the climate, the people, their habits, their politics. She asked about Uncle and Aunt, much interested in Carmen Sylva, the poet-queen, who had once visited her at Balmoral, and of whom she had kept an affectionate remembrance. She asked, of course, about my husband, hoping that I was a good and obedient wife ; she was even interested in the servants. Grandmamma was always exceedingly full of thoughtfulness for her servants, it was a really royal tradition which she expected to find also in other royal houses ; had she not often been served by three generations of the one and same family ? And then turning towards me she suddenly sprang this question upon me : “ Did they give you chloroform when your children were born ? ”

Oh dear, why did she ask me this ? Was she one of those people who disapproved of a woman’s hour of travail being eased, thanks to the inventions of modern science ? Did she believe in the curse of Eve and that through the ages women must submit to it without protest, according to the Ancient Word, no matter how the world advanced ? Or like Carmen Sylva, did she consider that bringing a child into the world was a moment of such poetical rapture that nothing must be allowed to alloy the ecstasy of its pain ?

I felt the blood rush to my cheeks, felt my throat become dry. Courage ! Confess that you had been given a whiff of chloroform, that Mamma and the English doctor had insisted upon this, although the Roumanian doctors were as much against it as their poet-queen. In quite a small voice I therefore confessed that although I had not actually been put to sleep, towards the end the edge of my suffering had been taken from me by that blessed anæsthetic.

And now for the scolding, for the sermon, for the expression of the royal lady’s scorn ; for Queen Victoria, no doubt, was a Spartan and would wholeheartedly despise me for my cowardliness. But what was my astonishment when I heard a sweet, crystalline peal of laughter, and Grandmamma, with

that almost apologetic shrug of her shoulders, declared: "Quite right, my dear, I was only given chloroform with my ninth and last baby, it had, alas! not been discovered before, and I assure you, my child, I deeply deplore the fact that I had to bring eight children into the world without its precious aid!"

I heaved a sigh of relief! She was human, dear little Old Lady! She terrified everybody, spread an atmosphere of awe around her, but for all that she was human, delightfully human. She did not expect you to be a hero every day of your life. Shut away in her regal abodes, surrounded by subjects who always lowered their voices when they addressed her, hedged in by honours, by the ceremonious respect of those who served her as well as by her own desire of aloofness, there was all the same, beneath that outward pomp and unapproachableness, a real human understanding of everyday pain, fear or joy.

Perhaps she occasionally yearned for a more personal touch with people and things: with life . . . perhaps.

And this is the second little incident I also want to relate before returning to where I left off my tale, because this also brings her humanly near; it took place a few years later than that Osborne drive.

Towards the end of her life, Queen Victoria, who, for endless decades, because of her widowhood, had shut herself away from all worldly amusements, began to take a great interest in theatrical art, opera, drama or comedy.

As she never deigned to go to a theatre, the good idea was conceived of organizing private representations in one of the big Windsor halls. In this way, without leaving her own abode, Her Majesty could nevertheless enjoy the very best stage performances, which gave great pleasure to the performers as well as to the royal recluse.

So unspoilt was dear Grandmamma in all things concerning amusements, that her joy and interest in these performances was almost childlike. Of all the audience in the stately hall, no one was more pleasurably excited than the great little Old Lady.

During one of my rare visits to England after my marriage,

I witnessed one of these performances. Being the guest of honour that evening, I had been placed on the Queen's right, Grandmamma throned upon a low arm-chair, her stiff silken gown spread out all about her, her two hands resting upon the jewelled handle of her stick. She was in full evening dress, with uncovered shoulders and many diamonds which glittered and sparkled whenever she moved. So low did she sit that, when answering her questions, I had to lean far down towards her. Shy and self-conscious as I was in those early days, this made me cruelly uncomfortable, especially as I felt the many criticizing eyes of different members of the family heavily upon me. I had become almost a stranger to them, they were on their guard, and were watching me closely, I was being weighed for what I was worth. What had I become since I had gone to live amongst foreigners? I was also almost painfully conscious of the exquisite perfection of Grandmamma's sober but magnificent court and of the guests assembled for the occasion. A more dignified, yea almost terrifyingly irreproachable company could not be imagined. I had left England before I was really "out" and the court to which I had gone, although severe to the point of austerity, had none of this glittering ceremony and magnificence, so I was nervous, never before having been as a grown-up within these ancestral halls, nor as a guest of any importance. Now I was Crown Princess of a foreign country and had to play up to the part under the severe criticism of those I had forsaken, and very keenly was I made to feel that I was now outside the fortress. . . .

The curtain went up. The representation happened to be *Carmen*, an opera quite familiar to me, but which the Queen was witnessing for the first time. We were sitting very near the stage and I noticed that Grandmamma was not only following the music with keen interest, but also the plot of the play. Somewhat bewildered by the passionate story, she kept asking me questions, which were not easy to answer owing to the loudness of the music and the unequal heights of our chairs.

Grandmamma was evidently enjoying it. She shrugged her shoulders from time to time and there was a half-smile on her lips.

The first act over she turned to me for fuller explanations about the story. With a very young woman's diffidence I tried to impart to my grandparent my knowledge of Carmen's rather wild tale. Grandmamma's shy little smile broadened, this was the sort of story that did not often reach her ears. She kept nodding her head to what her granddaughter was explaining, but all the while the granddaughter was uncomfortably conscious of those many pairs of eyes boring into her innocent back. Grandmamma was certainly enjoying the evening more than I was; it was not altogether comfortable coming back to the old home as an official guest.

The curtain went up for the second act. Carmen with her smuggler associates was becoming wilder and wilder. I no longer remember who was singing the part, but her acting was as good as her voice so that she was indeed fascinating to watch. The irresistible "Toreador" made his entry which gave Carmen the occasion to exert her wiles, which were followed by her passionate display of temper when poor Don José hears the trumpet call of duty and tries for the last time to save his soldier's honour. It was all very realistic; most of us in the room had seen it before, but to Grandmamma it was an exciting revelation. Leaning towards me, her eyes full of dawning comprehension, she nevertheless presses me for further explanations which, with flaming cheeks, I give as best I can. Grandmamma raises her fan to her face, she is delightfully, pleurably scandalized, but she understands; leaning towards me, her fan still over her mouth, she whispers: "But then, oh my dear child, I am afraid she's really not very nice!"

Dear old Grandmamma! No, Carmen was certainly not very nice, her morals were abominable, not at all in keeping with your irreproachable court, but all the same how you enjoyed the excitement of being so deliciously shocked!

But now back again to my Windsor of 1892.

The chief event was the arrival of the King of Roumania who was duly received with every honour and given the Order of the Garter. Unfortunately I have no memory of Grandmamma and Uncle together. I wish I had been more interested in what was going on, but I can but repeat that I

was merely a foolish little girl in those days and both Nando and I had but one idea, to get out of all official ceremonies as much as we could so as to have quiet hours together. But occasionally the nephew talked out of school and it was thus confided to me that *der Onkel*, accustomed to uniform, was much put out at having to wear *escarpins* (knee-breeches) for the Windsor dinner. Plain clothes in general were unfamiliar to him, and this special form of dress in particular so much perturbed him that he had declared to his heir that he absolutely must wear woollen stockings under his silk hose, or he would catch cold! Of course we youngsters were hugely amused at this, and when Uncle appeared, correctly attired, with the Garter round his knee, we kept gazing at his legs to see if the woollen stockings were noticeable.

Another great amusement was old Ion Kalinderu in this formal get-up. Ion Kalinderu was head of the Roumanian Crown Domains and first dignitary of King Carol's court, a gentleman in whom the King had the greatest confidence and who was destined to play a large part in our young lives. He served for love instead of money and was therefore treated with great regard by his king. As Kalinderu was fond of royal honours Uncle nearly always managed to have him in his suite on important occasions. Worthy and admirable though he undoubtedly was, Ion Kalinderu was a figure the caricaturist's pencil could never resist. Small, rotund, with a close-cropped beard and a nose of pronounced Semitic proportions, he had a sly twinkle in an eye which was almost too intelligent. Ion Kalinderu was faithful, devoted and hard-working, but he was also extremely aware of his virtues, and this gave him an important, self-satisfied air which was a chronic temptation to cartoonists. Nando's feelings towards him at that period were a queer mixture of grateful affection and nervous respect; for Kalinderu possessed what is termed "the King's ear."

Kalinderu in knee-breeches was a quaint figure indeed and it must be confessed he looked very small in this feudal setting, but he was one of those people who felt at home wherever he was. He, so to say, carried his importance everywhere with him, which made him feel at home even at Windsor, and it was indeed amusing to watch the self-

satisfied little gentleman, taking everything in, weighing, appraising, estimating men and objects with that small, watchful, almost cunning eye of his.

It was a great hour in Ion Kalinderu's life when he was presented to the legendary old lady who was Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India. Although I have lost every mental picture of Uncle and Grandmamma together, I do still see the head of the Crown Domains of Roumania, bending down to kiss her Royal and Imperial Majesty's hand. Even at that impressive moment, Ion Kalinderu's eye still roamed as though looking round the corner for fear of missing anything.

A greater contrast than Kalinderu and the Queen of England's tall, thin and sometimes dry, but uniformly irreproachably turned-out gentlemen-in-waiting, cannot be conceived; but Kalinderu held his own, no solemn grandeur could shake his self-complacency, and when he screwed his eye-glass into his eye to examine the many-centuries-old treasures of Windsor, it was with the superior air of a connoisseur, of one who knows all about precious collections, for was not he, Ion Kalinderu, creating a museum which after his death would be left to the nation, so that his name should pass down to posterity? No one could take *him* in.

Thus was Ion Kalinderu.

Chapter XI

CARMEN SYLVA

AFTER the Windsor visit, the King of Roumania remained a few days in London, where he had not been since his extreme youth, and his time was employed in interviewing important people and in visiting useful and interesting institutions such as the Bank of England, the Mint, the London Docks, etc., and he earnestly pressed his nephew to do the same. But his nephew was in love with his bride and would not hear of the docks nor the Mint, nor the Bank of England. This conflict much amused my mother, and she kept teasing my bridegroom, putting searching questions to him about what really *were* his interests. I can still see the expression of her eyes as she did this; she was not quite certain if she sympathized with the hard old statesman or with the unwilling nephew. She abhorred idleness, but then the young man was in love with her own daughter and that was a point in his favour, although an interest in his bride and in the Bank of England need not necessarily clash. "He never was in love himself," the young man declared, "so he does not understand; I am here to be happy—not to be dragged about looking at State institutions," and of course I considered it quite natural to be preferred to the Mint or the London Docks!

Finally the King of Roumania, having absorbed important knowledge to his heart's content, and seen interesting people, departed to his far country, where his obedient nephew would soon be obliged to rejoin him, whilst we all went off to Devonport where my father still had his naval command.

Everything was now saturated with that sad feeling of leave-taking, each friend became more precious, each place more dear because they were being relinquished.

Roumania was little known in those days, and strange and comic questions were put to me; some even thought that Turkish-wise I should have to wear a veil over my face! I knew that I should not have to do this, but I myself had a very hazy vision of Roumania and could give anxious friends little information about what awaited me in the new home.

King Carol had brought the bride and her sisters some lovely Roumanian peasant costumes; they were the only tangible thing we had from that country in the "Near East." They were marvellously embroidered with gold and silk and we often donned this picturesque garb for the benefit of those eager to grasp where I was really going; but I do not know that these beautiful dresses helped to give them a more precise picture of the map of Europe.

With the eagerness of one whose days are numbered, I threw myself into all the joys of yore, swimming, rowing, boating and those wild romps with our three friends in General Harrison's garden, perhaps not entirely in keeping with a bride's dignity.

Wedding presents came pouring in and everybody united to spoil me in every way and to make me feel how much they regretted my going; there were even timid admirers who gave me to understand that their hearts were slightly broken, and all this kept me in a state of emotional excitement in which smiles were lined with tears.

A sweetly comic remembrance is of a young man who, the season before, had shown me marked attention, and now wanted, at a tea-party given in our honour by his parents, bravely to celebrate my departure to a foreign land, by acting charades. The word chosen was Roumania, which was divided up into syllables, but when the whole was to be represented he found himself in a cruel fix; what and where was Roumania? I can still see him pretending to be a schoolmaster giving a geography lesson in which the name of Roumania was to be pronounced, and it makes me smile to remember his confusion when it came to the crucial moment and after a certain shy confusion he asked his so-called pupils: "Can one of you tell me . . . hum . . . the



CARMEN SYLVA AS SHE WAS WHEN I FIRST SAW HER.

name . . . hum . . . the name . . . of that town in Hungary . . .”

Town in Hungary—oh, dear! Even then I was shocked at that conception of my future country, but I was only aware later of what an insult it was!

To-day I still possess a lovely set of antique silver coffee spoons, the handles of which are crowned with wee silver ships, a wedding present given to me by the artless young man and his family, the father having been an admiral, and whenever I use these spoons I think of that comic conception about Roumania.

As far as I remember the autumn of that last year at home was divided up between visits to the Rosenau, Coburg, and Sigmaringen, but only certain scenes stand out clearly.

As soon as Nando could escape from military and other duties in Roumania he hurried back to his bride, and the last months of our engagement were spent in getting somewhat better acquainted with each other. But looking back I realize that on my side all my feelings, ideas and visions were based upon an entirely erroneous conception of life. I was happy in a slightly troubled way. I was strangely incurious. I did not fear the future, I was too much a born optimist and idealist to fear anything, but it was all so hazy and I was so absolutely excluded from all-important discussions. My mother, according to our present conception of things, was almost absurdly anxious that I should understand nothing about the realities of life. I was to be led utterly innocent up to the altar and in this she succeeded marvellously. Looking back I cannot conceive how it was done. But there were occasional moments when it suddenly came to me that Nando and I had not perhaps exactly the same tastes about everything nor had we been educated in entirely the same way. In my simple acceptance of things, I somehow imagined that everybody was brought up with the same tastes, the same convictions, the same habits and manners, and that Mamma's attitude towards life, religion, education and all the rest, was the prototype universally followed by all royal families. It was there-

fore somewhat of a shock when occasionally my bridegroom and I did not understand everything absolutely in the same way.

My sister Ducky once pronounced a very true word: "To be entirely happy in marriage, the same things must be important to both." A simple word, but a tremendous truth lies at the bottom of it.

All through life I have remembered this word of hers, pronounced when she was quite a young woman. Well, even in those early days of courting, all things were not always equally important to us. We children had been brought up to a certain English feeling about sport and its predominant importance and about fair play in particular. There was something healthy, but also a little primitive, and what the French would term *simplicite* in our outlook. All physical perfections and efforts meant a great deal to us, and we were keen on never being beaten at any game and in never giving in to being tired or discouraged or unable to do as well as others. Our ambitions were perhaps somewhat simple but it went to the making of entirely healthy and upright beings. Physical effort was natural to us, nor did the weather's inclemencies ever keep us at home. *On bravait tous les temps*. We were hardened little savages, and riding was our chief delight. Horses played an over-large part in our lives, and I could not conceive of anyone preferring to drive home in a carriage rather than stick to the saddle because a thunderstorm had overtaken you whilst riding. According to our code, you never forsook your horse, no matter how unkind and disagreeable the weather. Not so Nando. Why should he get wet on horseback instead of sitting snugly under a hood, hand in hand with his bride, if such a thing as a carriage were available? I was very fond of holding his hand, but a horse was a horse and rain ought not to beat you; that was not playing the game, that was not the real sporting attitude towards life to which we had been accustomed.

I describe this trivial incident because it was characteristic of the way we had been brought up, was characteristic also of how the same things were not equally important to us both. Certain fundamental laws, or shall we call

them "canons," were drilled into us from our English nursery upwards and life never extirpated them, no matter where, how and with whom we lived. To-day, having passed my half century, my conceptions are still much the same, they are a fundamental part of my being, all my attitude towards life is based upon them. Of course I have learnt much since then, but the ground I stand on was made firm by those simple and to us undiscussable statutes : the things that were important. . . .

Of politics we knew nothing, nor had we any idea that social questions existed. We were royal little girls whom everybody loved, and who had certain undisputable rights in a world which was peaceful and exceedingly good to live in. Mamma had watched over us like an anxious shepherd, harm had never come our way, we had never looked reality in the face ; in fact we lived entirely in a glorious, happy, healthy Fool's Paradise.

We were not brought up to be prudes, but a certain part of life simply did not exist for us. A *risqué* book never reached our hands, we blushed when it was mentioned that someone was to have a baby, the classics were only allowed in small and well-weeded doses ; as for the Bible, although we were well up in both Testaments, all the more revealing episodes had been carefully circumscribed. All this had combined to make of us healthy, happy, carefree, confident, credulous girls, entirely unsophisticated, entirely harmless, but also entirely unarmed against the onslaughts of life. However cruel this may have been in many ways, I consider all the same that that fundamental conception of honour, duty and fair play upon which our education was based, has, all through life, been a shield and stay to me, something which kept me straight through the storms, difficulties, temptations and arduous duties of a long existence. There was a clean beauty in our outlook that the enlightened girls of to-day can never know, some high ideal that no cruel reality could ever entirely uproot. I did not try to bring up my children this way ; climate, environment, example, our times also, made it impossible ; but certain glorious illusions that we had, have therefore for ever remained unknown to them. Their Garden of

Eden was never quite as sunny and free of the serpent as ours. . . .

I remember another little moment of . . . I had best, perhaps, call it anxiety mixed with pained surprise.

We were at the Rosenau sitting round a table under the shade of the maple tree where Mamma liked to have tea. Charly had come for her annual visit, Charly the irresistible, superlatively well-groomed, charming, enticing, intelligent. My eyes devoured her; she made my crude youth feel awkward, almost boorish. No wonder Nando liked listening to her; I in such company had nothing to say. Nando belonged to the grown-ups, whilst I, for all my new dignity of a bride, was in reality only an uninteresting, ignorant schoolgirl that any cultivated, well-dressed woman could put in the shade.

Charly, with her ravishingly modulated voice, was holding forth in that wise way of hers, whilst two pale grey streams of sweet-smelling cigarette smoke came continually pouring from her small, beautifully shaped nose. How well I can still see her, and looking back upon this scene of about thirty-six years ago I can almost feel again that cruel little ache that seemed to tighten my heart-strings. How charming she was, how fascinating, I too was under her spell, my eyes could not leave her face. Dr. X. was also present, each of them had something funny or interesting to say and they had all forgotten me—even Nando had forgotten me . . . I was only a stupid, ignorant, badly dressed little girl.

It did not end there, however. At a certain moment my person became suddenly the central object of their attention, they were in high spirits and needed, I suppose, a victim for their jokes. They began asking me questions I could not answer; I became shy, idiotic, more stupid than I really was, and it was somehow Charly and Nando who led the onslaught. They were being funny with German jokes, Potsdam, Berlin jokes: I was quite out of it, I felt and looked a fool, and Nando allowed Charly to make me feel a fool. . . .

The poor man was merely being gay, no doubt, gay in

the way of Potsdam and Berlin, the sphere in which they were both most at home, but which was instinctively abhorrent to me. All of a sudden I felt lonely, cast out; something cold ran through my veins . . . something like a horrible little warning that I did not really belong to them, that something in me was fundamentally hostile to those jokes, to that way of being funny and amused, to that Potsdam way. Dr. X. and even Mamma joined in, they all banded together to make me feel small, to show up my ignorance, my English ignorance—at least that is how it seemed to me. . . .

Finally I got up and ran away, ran as far as I could, as though I could run back into the days when I was not a bride, but only Ducky's sister, Ducky's sister who would sit with her in the little green cupboard with the heart painted on its door, sit there hand in hand and wait. . . .

And Nando had not defended me, he had laughed with Charly, they had understood the same German jokes . . . I only mention this scene because, curiously enough, looking back towards that time, it is the one scene which rises clearly out of the past, that past long since dead. Some racial antagonism had been awakened at that hour, and all through life I have hated those truly Prussian jokes. There was something in them that hurt me, and through many years of my later life they and Charly pursued me (Charly who was no more the adored Charly of my childhood), Charly and her German jokes.

But I must hurry on or I shall never come to the day of my marriage, that day which was to begin a new life for me.

Mamma gave me a wonderful trousseau, a real princess's trousseau in keeping with that time of prosperity and abundance. There were also innumerable wedding presents, some magnificent, some beautiful, some humble and touching; this was all very exciting and pleasurable. I was a real daughter of Eve and loved clothes, furs and precious gems, but I was astonished at the masses of dresses, cloaks, hats, handkerchieves, stockings, shoes and fine linen that I was supposed to need. All these manifold treasures

were put out in a large room and I, with my sisters and many friends, used to walk about amongst them, awed by their magnitude. Getting married was certainly a stirring event.

But the greatest emotion I had before leaving my old home for the wedding at Sigmaringen was a talk with my father.

Papa very seldom became confidential, he was a very quiet man, talked little, and was occasionally even somewhat taciturn. In fact, we were never entirely in touch with him, but one of the last days he called me into his room. There, to my dismay, taking me into his arms, he burst into tears, confiding to me that he could not bear to see me, his eldest and dearly loved daughter, go to such a far and unknown country, that he had cherished another dream for me, one which would have very differently shaped my future. He hoped my husband was a good man, but he did not much like the look of the gentleman who had been chosen to be the head of our future household; he could not bear parting from me, I must not forget that I was a British-born princess and a sailor's daughter. He mentioned the dowry he and Mamma were giving me and a few other things I cannot remember. I was deeply moved, cruelly shaken by this quite unexpected outburst from one who, generally, was so undemonstrative and who seemed to look on from afar at our lives. Quite upset I finally fled to my own chamber and wept.

There was a pilgrimage we were to make before going to Sigmaringen for the wedding. I call it a pilgrimage because it is a picture which has remained detached from all others, unique, arresting, a picture out of a strange world in an atmosphere quite different from any we had ever been accustomed to; a visit to Neu Wied to see Carmen Sylva, Queen of Roumania, at that time an invalid and therefore unable to be present at our wedding.

A few words are necessary to explain why Carmen Sylva was in her mother's house and not in Roumania.

There had been trouble at the Roumanian court, and Queen Elisabeth had played a prominent part in the little



AS BRIDE, AGED 16, IN THE ROUMANIAN DRESS SENT ME BY THE
KING OF ROUMANIA.

drama : I must touch upon it here as it is an explanation of much which was to follow later.

Ferdinand had been declared Heir Apparent to the throne of Roumania because his uncle had no son. King Carol and Queen Elisabeth had one little daughter, Maria, who died at the age of four, and since then no other child had been born to them. King Carol had accepted this fatality with the philosophy of one who, on all occasions, is completely master of his passions and emotions. But not so the poet-queen. The death of her child and the eternally frustrated hope of further maternity, had crushed her life and so continually preyed on her mind that, when the cruel hour came for adopting as Crown Prince one who was not born her son, it found her entirely unresigned.

It was old Ion Bratianu, father of the Ion Bratianu of my times, who had persuaded King Carol that the succession to the throne must be assured. Queen Elisabeth never forgot this and to the end of her days nursed a resentment against the man who had brought about this painful decision, a resentment which she carried over on to the second generation and which never allowed her wholeheartedly to appreciate Bratianu the second.

Torn away from the simple joys of Potsdam where, surrounded by comrades of his own standing, life had been entirely congenial to him, Ferdinand found himself suddenly condemned to an existence of semi-seclusion. Friendless, companionless, almost an exile in a foreign country, under the guidance of an uncle whose first and last interest was politics and who, for State reasons, was ready to sacrifice not only his own desires and happiness, but also those of any member of his family associated with him, the young prince was indeed a lonely man.

Having been severely brought up to serve and obey, he was both submissive and dutiful, but he was human and his aunt, although resenting the place he occupied, was sorry for him. She understood his homesick loneliness in surroundings so different from those he had been accustomed to, yoked to an arduous task which at present did not really interest him, and of which he could not yet comprehend the beauty and glory. But Carmen Sylva was a

poet and saw everything through the prisms of her romantic imagination. She was ardent, warm-hearted, of impetuous temperament, but certainly not discerning; seeing all things *en beau*, she had no perspicacity and therefore all through a somewhat stormy and tragic life, fell an easy prey to those who abused her generous credulity for their own selfish ends.

Being childless, she was fond of surrounding herself with a flock of young girls who, fired by her inspired language, sat at her feet adoring every word she spoke. She liked to imagine herself one of those *châtelaines* of old who, at certain hours of the day, assembled around her all the women of her household to spin, sew and embroider. But she was also the soul of poetry, the Muse, the inspirer. To her the world was a great stage, and she was the central figure of all scenes enacted upon it, a tragic figure, but full of benevolence and comprehension of the sufferings of humanity.

Carmen Sylva was indeed a compelling personality. At an early age her hair had turned grey, almost white; her intensely blue eyes had a penetrating look. She laughed often, for her teeth were white and magnificent, but her laugh was in striking contrast with the tragedy of her eyes. Without ever having been considered a beauty there was a rare fascination about her and it was almost impossible not to fall under her spell, anyhow at first. To the young she was a sort of legend come down upon earth. Her voice was extraordinarily melodious and when she set out to charm she seldom failed. She did not inspire passion, but admiration, and that something tragic about her made all men feel they would like to lighten the burden she was carrying, even when they did not quite understand what the burden was. Character is Destiny. Carmen Sylva's character drove her towards self-sacrifice and tragedy. She saw all things as tragedies and therefore dramatized even the simplest events of everyday life.

No two human beings could have been greater contrasts than Carmen Sylva, the inspired poetess, and King Carol, her lord and master, that forbidding man with an iron sense of duty and no sense of humour, for whom existed neither caprice nor relaxation in any form.

And into this unusual household came as third, Ferdinand, the diffident, unassuming little lieutenant from Potsdam, almost a boy in ways as well as mentality, though he too was imbued with all the German sense of duty and hierarchy; soft, kindly, inclined to be sentimental, of affectionate disposition, but distrusting his own capacities. A man easily overruled, and ready to admit the superiority of others, but with all, proud and easily hurt.

Hardly had he arrived before he was of course systematically taken in hand by his uncle so as to be trained for the heavy duties expected of him. Now it was all work and no play. The stern Sovereign, knowing no relaxation for himself, did not admit it either for others. He seemed to consider it quite natural that his young heir should have the same enthusiasm for sacrificing himself as he himself had, nor was he able to take into consideration the difference between their respective ages; he did not pause to consider that the part of follower is not as interesting or absorbing as that of leader. King Carol was at the helm, his nephew was merely an obedient looker-on, obliged to do his share without what I would call "getting any of the fun out of it." So Carmen Sylva became a refuge. Carmen Sylva and the many young ladies sitting at her feet. . . .

The obvious came to pass. Ferdinand fell in love with one of these. He fell in love with the favourite; the chosen one of the lonely queen's heart; the one in which she imagined her child's spirit lived again. . . .

Carmen Sylva knew that King Carol would admit of no marriage for his nephew with one not of his caste. Besides, the Roumanians wished their royal family to be exclusive, they were not to mix with those of the land. The Dynasty was to stand apart, aloof, out of the reach of commoners; they were to seek their wives or husbands beyond the frontiers, amongst those of their own rank. This had been specially stipulated when King Carol accepted the throne. But although Carmen Sylva knew this, her poetical temperament could not resist this romantic development. Besides, had not Ferdinand just selected *her* favourite? Hélène was a remarkable girl and her intelli-

gence was far above that of the average royal princess. Hélène was dark-eyed, hot-blooded, impulsive, she would be a glorious mate for the pale, unassuming prince; she would lead and inspire him, fill him with life, spirit, ambition; they would have healthy children—God would smile upon them. Thus in her heart of hearts argued the poet-queen.

A few weeks, or was it months, of courtship, of somewhat anxious happiness, for Ferdinand's conscience was not at peace . . . *der Onkel* was in the background, a grim figure which represented Fate. But Carmen Sylva lived in an atmosphere of palpitating romance. She idealized the lovers, she threw them together, encouraged, stimulated, helped, glorified them; caring little for the morrow, she lived entirely for the excitement of the moment, hoping that some lucky event would solve a situation which certainly bristled with danger; but in spite of her optimism the crash came!

Absorbed by State affairs, the King had noticed nothing of what was going on beneath his very eyes. Such an unimportant thing as love-making did not come within the sphere of his thoughts. The Queen and he had separate departments; hers was charity, poetry, literature, social duties, they met seldom during the day except at meals. So when all of a sudden one morning his nephew appeared before him to declare his intention of marrying Mlle. Hélène Vacarescu, a tempest was raised indeed, a cold tempest, an icy blast, freezing to its very roots Ferdinand's poor little attempt at romance.

I know none of the details; this sad story was kept as much as possible from my ears, and rightly, for in those days I should certainly have taken it tragically. So I only heard scraps of rumour here and there, piecing them together as best I could, afraid to ask for fear of being hurt. Much, much later, I understood and . . . smiled, and it was I, in fact, who, two years before my husband's death, brought the old friends of yore together again. A whole lifetime lay between. . . . But then the drama was very real. Public opinion made a huge outcry against the Queen who had dared tamper with the country's desires. According



“SISTER BABY.”

to the general opinion she was responsible for what had happened, and so great was the feeling against her that the King felt obliged to let her go to her mother at Neu Wied ; besides, she took the unlucky story so much to heart that her health entirely broke down over it and for two years she was condemned to bed and bath-chair.

Ferdinand then had the choice of throne or H el ene Vacarescu put before him, but in such wise that he could but choose the throne. Brought up to traditions of discipline and accustomed to bow before authority, he chose what was chosen for him, not without pain or inner revolt, but his sense of duty was deep-grained and stronger than anything else, and this sense of duty lasted him heroically through a life of many abnegations. He was sent travelling ; he visited Holland, Belgium ; he went to Sigmaringen, Potsdam, Berlin, Cassel. And at Cassel Fate was waiting for him. But *I* did not know that he was supposed to be travelling about with a broken heart.

But now I must conjure up that strange picture of Segenhaus near Neu Wied, home of the Dowager Princess of Wied, where, far from resigned to her fate, the sorely wounded queen was spending two years of quasi-banishment.

Ducky and I had only been told that she was a temporary invalid who could therefore not come to the wedding at Sigmaringen ; this was the only explanation given us. It was Mamma who took us there.

The snow had come early that year, and it was in a sledge that we drove up to a queer little house in the woods, quite a fitting way to drive up to a house so different from any we had ever seen, and inhabited by people curiously unlike those we were accustomed to. In fact this little episode stands by itself, a strange experience in an unknown world, in an unaccustomed atmosphere.

With a jingling of gay bells our sledge drew up at the front door. On the threshold stood a very old lady in a black gown and with a white veil on her head. But she was very unlike other old ladies. Her forehead was hugely high, rounded and polished like a globe ; a mighty forehead from under which a pair of deep-set eyes, with heavy,

weary lids, looked out upon you as though from a long way off. So deep and so sunken were the eye sockets that they uncomfortably resembled those of a skull. A startling apparition, but all abeam with welcoming smiles. No less startling was the company standing behind her; women of all ages, but not one of them was quite normal. It was as though she had assembled under her roof all the proverbial deaf, lame, blind, dumb and poor of spirit. The old lady stood amongst them as a sort of kindly magician of whom all expected miracles. But it can easily be imagined that we, simple, everyday sort of people, felt somewhat disconcerted. The only man in this congregation of women was an old gentleman with side-whiskers, bleared eyes and cynical mouth, rather a sinister-looking old fellow, or at least so he appeared to us, but he strangely completed the weird picture.

The lame, the dumb, the blind, were presented to us in turn. Most of them were poor relations; the old lady decidedly seemed to have a predilection for collecting the abnormal. Later we learned that she was supposed to have the faculty of a healer and that her house was always invaded by the sick and suffering. She was kind-hearted and proverbially benevolent. In later years Queen Elisabeth related to me many strange things about her mother. She was highly psychical and at certain periods of her life had trances, when her spirit seemed to separate from her body; she would fall into a sort of *extase* and during these trances her body became weightless and she could float above the ground. When in this state it has been said she could even walk over the backs of the chairs or float down the stairs. How much truth there is in this I cannot say. That the strange lady had abnormal faculties there is no doubt; but being outside the enchanted ring of those who are able to live between two worlds I feel unworthy of trying to give any explanation.

On the day when we were her guests, the old lady revealed none of her mysterious faculties, she was simply a woman full of sighs; a careworn mother anxious for her sick daughter, an amiable hostess whose conversation was both interesting and picturesque.

With many kindly exclamations of hospitality we were ushered into a goodly sized hall lined with simple pine-wood. The principal feature of this hall was some panels painted with extraordinarily large and unsubstantial flowers which were in violent contrast with their sober setting. Immediately the old princess explained that these panels had been painted by her daughter. We looked about us, somewhat overcome by the strangeness of our surroundings, a mute question on all our lips: where *was* her daughter?

Finally Mamma made amiable inquiries about the Queen's health. The weary-eyed mother threw up her hands.

"*Ach, Elisabeth, ach! . . .*" It seemed that Elisabeth was a great anxiety to her. Each day her mood changed. It was all very difficult; we were to know that for many months past Elisabeth was lamed, or anyhow imagined she was lamed. She would neither walk nor stand. She painted all day in her bed, she was a restless worker. Sometimes she was wheeled about in a chair. She loved the woods, but for all that it was difficult ever to get her to leave the house. But she was ready to receive us; her mother had been anxious what attitude she would adopt, but to her relief Elisabeth had made no protest about our coming, but one could never tell; yes, it was all very difficult, she was not easy to manage. "*Ach! my Elisabeth is very fantastic, she was always thus, even as a child. Always *bimmelhoch jauchsend oder zum Tode betrübt*, the real poet temperament, inclined to be tragic always, but now, alas, there has been enough to be tragic about, *ach! ach!*"*

Probably Mamma understood what the eccentric old lady was talking about; to Ducky and me, however, it might have been Chinese! Suddenly, turning to me she said: "But she will not be able to resist you, my dear, you are like the blossoms of spring." This was somewhat startling, but everything in this house was startling, the old princess, the grand flowers painted on the walls, and hovering in the background that strange horde of biblical invalids. Then there was also that mysterious queen who could not or would not stand or walk. Where was she?

"Shall we have the pleasure of seeing your daughter?"

Mamma was on her best behaviour, we knew it by her voice; but her eyes were roving all over the place, she was taking everything in; there was no one like Mamma for enjoying strange experiences.

"Ach, Gott, yes! She is prepared, she will receive you, she is painting in her bed, she is always painting. Sometimes it is poetry, only poetry, or then it's music, but now it is painting, and such large paintings, so difficult in bed. But Elisabeth likes difficulties. I hope I shall be able to persuade her to come to lunch in her wheeling chair. One of her strange fancies is that she can only eat cold dishes, tiny little dishes, of many different kinds, but nothing must be hot. Ach, yes, Elisabeth . . ." and again up went the mother's hands in a gesture of perplexity.

Princess Marie of Wied spoke English fluently, but with a broad German intonation. Her voice seemed to come from afar as did the look of her eyes out of those deep sockets so like a death's head.

Finally, after having tidied up a bit, we were led to another part of the house where the invalid queen had her apartment. It was a hushed procession as though we were marching to church. Up wee stairs, then down a few steps; this was a new annexe to the old house, we were told, built according to Elisabeth's desires: "Elisabeth likes small rooms and queer little corners," explained the mother. At last we reached a door. The old lady opened it just a little and in a voice which sounded both anxious and ingratiating asked if we could come in. The answer must have been in the affirmative because, without further parley, we were ushered into a queer little room, the principal part of which was occupied by a large, low bed which was lit from above by a skylight. Upon this bed, propped up by many very white and very soft pillows, lay the person we had come to see.

I would like to do complete justice to that first meeting with Carmen Sylva and to be able to describe exactly the impression she made upon me, for it was very deep and very stirring.

The *mise-en-scène* may have been intentional, certainly it

was effective. The light pouring down from above upon that exiled, white-clad invalid propped up against those many snowy cushions, the sweet voice, the wide gestures of welcome and that smile over flashing white teeth, that smile which left the deep blue eyes to their tragedy. Later, I knew how much Aunt Elisabeth studied her first effects, she has often staged them before me and expected me to play my rather grudging part in them. To her poetical temperament acting came quite naturally. As mentioned before, to her the world was a vast stage, she saw all things as a series of scenes out of a drama in which she had the leading rôle; and to-day, this receiving of one who was usurping the place of the girl she had chosen, was drama indeed. Innocent though I was, I was the rival; the winning rival, and that wide gesture of welcome was on her part a gesture of heroic abnegation; she felt it as such and she meant to act it magnificently, which she did.

I was clasped in her arms, she called me "*lieb Kindchen*" and her eyes were full of pain; she passed her hands over my forehead, my hair, and there was something hungry in the way she gazed at me. Excruciatingly shy, but fascinated from the first moment, I submitted somewhat sheepishly to this unexpected outburst of emotion. I was keenly aware of Mamma and Ducky's presence in the room, for nothing is more embarrassing for the young than to have as silent audience those who are critics and intimates of their everyday life. Mamma was averse to anything resembling a scene, *très femme du monde*, she was austere sober at those moments when others become effusive. On this occasion she tried to lighten an atmosphere she considered too romantic with polite and intelligent conversation; but Carmen Sylva had no intention of being decoyed from the part she meant to play. There was, so to say, a silent passage of arms and one could not help feeling how from the very first there was an almost instinctive antagonism between these women, both so strong, but of such opposite types, an antagonism which did not lessen on better acquaintance. Like flint against steel it seemed to draw sparks on the very first contact. Their attitude towards life, their *Lebensauffassung*, their tastes, habits, way of expressing themselves were

fundamentally different. Nor did the poet-queen make things better when, after having looked at me with that tragically intense gaze of hers, she declared that I had a great resemblance to a classically well-known work of art called the "Liller Mädkenköpf," a celebrated tinted wax bust of a sad-looking maiden, of which she had a copy in her room. Somehow my mother resented her daughter being compared to anything so pathetic, but Aunt Elisabeth looked wise and stuck to her opinion. There was something electric in the atmosphere and it certainly emanated from that broad, low bed under the skylight.

Suspended above her, so that she could reach it comfortably from her reclining position, was a large, black, glazed board upon which the invalid was painting the same kind of unsubstantial, giant flowers as those in the hall downstairs. I was something of a flower painter myself, and these flowers the queen's paint-brush was indulging in upset my every conception of art and botany. Nothing within me agreed with those flowers nor with their hard, overshiny black background. And here I must place on record my first conscious experience of having had to admire something out of politeness instead of conviction. It was a painful experience and one often repeated during my long association with Carmen Sylva. According to my appreciation, good taste was not one of Aunt Elisabeth's specialties, and to make matters worse it was a loud, assertive, eccentric, not-to-be-ignored taste; it met you at every turn, and as Aunt was an enthusiast and very much convinced of the merits of all she did, you were always being called upon to admire and approve. Many a time I have had to implore Heaven's forgiveness for the lies I was obliged to tell so as not to hurt her feelings. These almost daily encounters with my aunt's queer tastes were for many years almost akin to physical pain.

On this first occasion, however, when she had taken my fancy by storm, it was a painful shock not to be able to admire wholeheartedly the work of her hand. She was so fascinating, so charming, the things she said were so sweet, so touching; her voice was music, everything was in keeping with the poetical atmosphere emanating from her, except



OUR FIRST MARRIED PICTURE.

her painting and her pince-nez which was too prosaic an ornament for so inspired a face.

Evidently this first meeting with the bride that the Queen had *not* chosen for her nephew went off better than her mother had dared to hope, for Elisabeth, to the old princess's intense relief, deigned to appear for lunch. All swathed in soft white cashmere, and looking down upon us from the elevated chair a servant had wheeled up to the table, she was indeed a fascinating picture. She was like some sort of high priestess expounding strange creeds too confusing for the ordinary mind, and this hushed, snow-clad house, hidden away in the woods, was a fitting shrine for one who had retired into solitude awhile to forget the injustice of a world too vulgar to understand her rarer essence. And everything seemed to have been specially combined so as to set off that one central figure, everything was in the picture; the anxious, sunken-eyed mother, that weird company of maimed relations expecting miracles, and like a sinister guardian of this houseful of women, that old gentleman with the secretive, unprepossessing face.

I learned much later that Queen Elisabeth resented his presence. He was supposed to be secretly married to the old princess. Anyhow, he was an added source of tragedy to one who dramatized life.

During that memorable meal I could not take my eyes off the Queen's face. I had entirely fallen under her spell; she was a romantic personage and I loved romance.

Before we left I was asked to come alone to her room. She spoke to me about Roumania, about the duties that would await me there. She told me about Nando and about how she had tried to make him happy, but did not mention the drama which had for awhile separated their ways. Her voice was music, but her language often too high-flown for my immature mind; I did not always understand what she was talking about, there was nothing positive I could grasp, it was just music, poetry; her words sang in my brain. A curtain was being lifted, giving me a glimpse into a world unknown to me, where all things had other names, other meanings, an unreal world which

only existed whilst she was talking, and which dissolved like mist when I left her bedside. But she was wonderful, herself a poem, a white apparition, born to be adored.

I can still remember a sledge drive, the woods hushed beneath their thick coating of snow. The strange old princess drove with us, and the white fur cap she wore gave her the appearance of one who had strayed from the Middle Ages into our modern world. She talked a lot, and at moments her language had a slight echo of her daughter's poetical eloquence, but most of what she had to say was solid common sense and Mamma enjoyed her company. She was, it seems, on excellent terms with King Carol and in almost daily communication with him, for he looked upon her as a trustworthy and tactful guardian of the person who had so grievously perturbed the order of his court. There were many sighs, but the old lady gave us to understand that she was equal to her difficult duties.

The object of our drive was a visit to Prince Wilhelm of Wied, Queen Elisabeth's brother. He and his family inhabited a large white house on the top of a hill; a large, low building, standing out against a background of magnificent beech woods, and with a beautiful view over the Rhine Valley.

The Prince of Wied was an almost startling replica of his sister, but less dramatic. Unlike the poet-queen, he assumed a jovial attitude towards life, but one in which, curiously enough, one could also divine a certain degree of pose. He seemed to laugh more than he was amused. Like his sister, he had magnificent teeth, a high forehead under masses of grey-white hair, and the same pince-nez pinched his rather fleshy nose. Even the gestures of his finely shaped hands were the same; there was even the same affectation about the way he laid them before him whilst talking as though himself fascinated by their shapeliness. I cannot say that I liked him. His joviality seemed partly assumed. But there was nothing of pose about his very ugly but exceedingly refined wife, born a Princess of Orange, who had brought a large fortune and magnificent jewels into the somewhat impoverished but very ancient

and blue-blooded family of the Wieds. This lady met with my mother's unstinted approval; she was *très grande dame* without the slightest touch of eccentricity. They had two daughters and three sons, but I cannot remember how many of them we met during that first visit. The house was sympathetic, old-fashioned and full of family pictures.

Queen Elisabeth loved her brother. Only once, many years later, did I see them together, and I must confess that the combined type was rather overwhelming; something within me was instinctively hostile. I could not help feeling that they were playing up to each other and that their laugh, in spite of an enviable show of white teeth, did not ring quite true. All through life I have had a curious faculty of sensing the undercurrent of other people's emotions, even when they were playing a quite different part to the gallery. This is sometimes very isolating. But in these early days I am describing, though I felt when there was insincerity, I could not yet reason it out. Sister Ducky, the most truthful soul I have ever met, has also this faculty.

Chapter XII

THE WEDDING

I CANNOT remember exactly the date of this visit to Segenhaus but it must have been shortly before our final departure to Sigmaringen for the wedding; anyhow, it was late in the season because it was already so cold.

At last the day came for leaving the old home, and we started all together, a large party.

Mamma had her own ideas about travelling which were principally based upon an abnormal, but virulent horror of saloon-carriages. She declared that they shook more than any other sort of carriage and therefore she could not bear them. So every offer of more luxurious transport was always firmly refused and we were all bundled into first-class carriages. These, in those early days, were wanting in the most elementary comforts, not to say necessities. Both Coburg and Sigmaringen were on small side-lines, the rolling-stock was old and rickety and none of the coupés was connected with corridors. So once in your compartment you were cut off from your fellow-travellers; it was therefore most important not to let yourself be boxed up with the wrong companions.

Though the distance was not really great, the connexions were bad and made the journey painfully lengthy, spreading over nearly a whole night and day.

I have a most disagreeable remembrance of that acutely uncomfortable journey in bitterly cold weather, for the winter was an exceptionally severe one. Ducky and I shared a compartment which had only one seat which was not even a bed, so that we slept in turns on the hard, cold and none too clean floor. We did not take this tragically, we were hardened, out-of-door girls, but we *did* resent the washing next morning, the icy water, the want of space, and

that gritty feeling of the carpetless floor, especially as we were to arrive in gala, and wanted to look our best. But two things were good; we were still together and the frost during the night had painted marvellous designs on the window-panes, lovely large thistle branches of exquisite shape. This was a feast for the eye, but did not make us feel any the warmer.

Luckily, just before reaching Sigmaringen, there had to be a change of trains, and this time Mamma could not refuse the royal carriage sent to meet us. This made it possible to give a few finishing touches to our get-up in front of a *real* looking-glass, and we were also given some warm water in which to wash off the last smuts of that comfortless journey.

I have no clear remembrance of our arrival nor of the following days. I was the centre of all attention, and yet I had the strange sensation that in a way I was outside all the events which were taking place. *Je les subissais*, as the French would express it; they went on in spite of my feelings and emotions.

The King of Roumania had arrived with many followers, members of his household, members of his Government, generals, officials; a confused mass of faces passed before my bewildered gaze; I felt small, awkward and lost.

All my future subjects spoke beautifully fluent French. A few knew a little German, but not one of them could talk English. I began regretting that we had been so refractory about learning French; I now found myself at a cruel disadvantage, and the answers I gave all these amiable old gentlemen (for they were nearly all old) were sadly halting; besides, all the amiable things they said to me embarrassed me greatly. I was quite unaccustomed to the fluency of Latin compliments.

There was a Conservative Government in at that time, under old Lascar Catargi, a quiet old gentleman, full of steady common sense, slow of speech, with measured movements. He looked rather like Clemenceau, if you can imagine a tame Clemenceau with no "tiger" about him. There were also Alexandre and Jacques Lahovari, George (Nabab) Cantacuzène, Peter Carp, Generals Florescu and Manu. There may also have been others, but I do not

remember them. In those days they were all like masks to me, and not very pretty masks at that, though one and all were amiable, smiling and full of welcoming words. They seemed to take a fancy to the fair little maiden who was to be imported into their country, though somewhat abashed, I think, to discover that she was quite such a child.

The only really good-looking one amongst them was General Florescu, who had a fine head and wore a pointed beard and huge moustaches in the Second Empire style. Peter Carp had a curiously shaped head, an eagle nose, and an eye-glass which accentuated his humorous, not to say satirical expression. He attracted me, he was less pompous than most of them, and I somehow divined human feelings and understanding behind his irony.

But the one who, because of that strange law of attraction (or is it affinity?), immediately became my friend, was General Vladescu, head of the King's Military Household. Vladescu was the real old soldier; martial appearance, good figure, a conquering white moustache, the ends standing far away from his face; besides, he was gloriously good-humoured and cheerful. He immediately seemed to comprehend that in fact I was but a child who was being torn out of a happy family circle. He guessed my feelings and mentality: so instead of losing time with idle compliments, he set about making my sisters and me laugh heartily whenever he spoke to us. In no man's eye have I ever seen a merrier twinkle. Many a sad hour of my later life did Vladescu cheer, he divined my loneliness in a far, strange land and would often clear the heaviest atmosphere with his cheerful jokes. This friendship, which sprang into being at the first contact, lasted till the day of his death many years later.

Ion Kalinderu was, of course, amongst the most prominent of the King's followers. His attitude at Sigmaringen was much the same as it had been at Windsor. There was a look of sly and yet solemn understanding about him; he always seemed all blown out with secret knowledge, to be the ambulating depository of kingly confidences. His every gesture was a proclamation of the exceptional favour in which he was held. He liked to simulate extreme modesty, but it was modesty "*à la Kalinderu*" which had little of the

proverbial violet about it. No green leaves hid Ion Kalinderu; in spite of his modesty, he was very conspicuous indeed.

Besides this goodly company of gentlemen, King Carol had brought with him two Roumanian ladies; Madame Marie Cantacuzène and Madame Marie Grecianu. The latter was a sweet-faced, elderly widow, chosen to be my lady-in-waiting, of whom I shall have much to relate later on. Madame Cantacuzène was also a widow, but much older and was considered one of the principal pillars of Bucarest society; she was an extremely pleasant and cultivated lady, mother of many married daughters and an only son, already a distinguished scientist and one of Pasteur's favourite pupils. Besides, she was mother-in-law of two eminent politicians, Dumitru Sturdza and Peter Carp, who has already been mentioned. Sturdza was as passionate a Liberal as Carp was a Conservative, and it was only the smiling intelligence of this charming old lady that made family reunions possible, for in Roumania, as I was to learn to my discomfiture, political passions ran high.

In later years, Marie Cantacuzène became one of my staunchest allies, but at that first meeting I was shy and tongue-tied, responding but lamely to her amiable advances. I felt more drawn to Madame Grecianu, whose face was gentler and very attractive. Both ladies had motherly feelings towards me, understanding better than I did then, what a lost and lonely little creature I should be in a foreign land.

Royal guests from several countries had also arrived, and there were continual gala processions to the station to receive each in turn. Grandmamma Queen, not being able to come herself, had sent the Duke of Connaught, or "Uncle Arthur" as we called him. The Tsar had deputed the Grand Duke Alexis, Mamma's good-looking, fair-bearded sailor brother, the bachelor brother, gayest of the gay. The Countess of Flanders, with her son Albert, the late King of the Belgians, represented that country. She was the only living sister of King Carol and Fürst Leopold and sister-in-law to King Leopold II of Belgium, and Albert was therefore

Nando's first cousin. He was extremely amusing and witty and we immediately became firm friends. The Countess of Flanders had a characteristically Hohenzollern profile. As to face she much resembled our dear *Onkelchen*; she had the same kindly drawl in her voice: as to character, however, she was much more energetic and *intransigente*. There was something manly and decided about her. Though handsome, she entirely lacked feminine charm and her clothes smacked of the masculine. Jewels and evening dress seemed out of place on her. Squarely built and forcible, she inspired you with a feeling of confidence, but one sensed that there was nothing pliable nor yielding about Aunt Marie Flanders. There was great affinity of character between her and King Carol, and she was his great ally. He consulted her and listened to her opinion. Her children stood in awe of her, and her tremendous admiration for the kingly brother represented a *summum* of boredom in their lives under which they writhed. Albert was not long in imparting this fact to us; indeed his jokes about "the great man of the family" were more witty than polite; Albert was full of slow fun and did much to cheer the somewhat solemn wedding atmosphere.

The Kaiser had desired to grace in person this important family festivity and the most official procession to the station was to meet the Lord of the Land who came, according to custom, accompanied by an embarrassingly numerous suite composed of embarrassingly huge gentlemen in blazing uniforms. All things pertaining to the Kaiser were large, loud and showy. He liked to assume the attitudes of a tyrant or despot; he never forgot or let you forget that he was first. His followers were enormous and many of them extremely handsome. William changed his uniform several times a day as a smart woman changes her gown. A never-ending scale of colours led finally up to the full dress of the magnificent Cuirassiers of the Guard; snow-white, with huge gauntlet gloves, high shining boots and Lohengrin-like, eagle-crowned helmet. This was the *ne plus ultra*, and I have seen men look indeed like conquering heroes in this garb, even if the Kaiser himself never entirely reached this ideal. One of those who did was Max Fürstenberg, a close

friend of William's who, when young and attired in this uniform, was a goodly sight.

My father, like his brother (later Edward VII) had no great affection for his nephew. None of our uncles could stand his overbearing manner; he was for ever offending them or putting their backs up. Even his joviality had a touch of insolence about it. It was only those who belonged to his inner circle, or catered for his good graces, who really bore with his ways. When in a good humour the Kaiser could be charming, but beneath his boisterous spirits lurked something of the bully always ready to break through. Thus he was continually embarrassing his own relations, and even, what was much more unfortunate, offending royalties from foreign countries. My mother was one of the few who really got on with him. He interested her and her own masterfulness kept him at bay. Her all-seeing eye noted the expression on every face and she was ever ready to step in when there was storm in the air. In this she was magnificently seconded by Fürst Leopold. Peace-loving, amiable, loyal and unselfish, no one could be anything but polite in his presence. He had time for everyone and everything; the attentions he paid the Kaiser did not prevent his being *aux petits soins* for every other guest beneath his roof, even for the most humble and most uninteresting.

For this solemn occasion we had been given official apartments in the castle, whilst Nando lived in his parents' house, it not being considered correct for bride and bridegroom to live under one roof before the wedding. Receptions at the station, festive meals, the receiving of deputations and innumerable people coming to congratulate kept us busy and helped us over those last emotional hours before the wedding.

Thinking back, all is confusion in my mind, but I see the different rooms, the different faces and certain groups which used to form themselves. For some reason King Carol and my brother Alfred took a great fancy to each other. Alfred was of an inquiring mind and not at all shy with older people, and he was, besides, naturally amiable and communicative. Uncle Carol loved talking about his country

and his work; perhaps his family had already listened too often to his tales; to Alfred they were new and full of interest, so he and the King would sit together on a certain little sofa which stood German-wise behind a table. I still have a clear vision of them, heads close together talking and talking; the older man delighted at the young fellow's keen interest in those things which were all important to the royal pioneer; my brother's face upturned, eager, full of life.

In another corner Albert was making my sisters and me laugh at his witty sayings, which both shocked and amused Nando, who would never have dared to be so funny at the expense of his betters.

I see dear old Grandmamma Josephine, the centre of a group that was trying to make her hear what they were saying, her sweet face all smiles, her hands with the too long-fingered gloves thrown up occasionally as a sign that she had understood. I see my mother-in-law, stiff, pale and suffering, having made the great effort of putting on an evening gown and many jewels; I see Papa, rather glum, Uncle Arthur with his fine figure and aquiline profile, very amiable, very elegant and rather absent-minded. I see Uncle Alexis, conventionally polite, supercilious and slightly ironical, as though he were above all this fuss and noise, but amused withal, and trying to tune his thundering Russian voice to the diapason of his surroundings. I see the Kaiser perorating in his brightest uniform. I see Mamma, capable, amiable, watchful, nothing escaping her eye, and flitting here and there, the *trait-d'union* between all these different groups, Fürst Leopold, the peacemaker, the charmer, the man who never thought of himself. . . .

I took a quite childish pleasure in my new dresses and beautiful jewels; Mamma had been extraordinarily prodigal, giving many of her own magnificent Russian gems.¹ It was difficult to realize that they were all mine. It was rather the same feeling that we had had in those far-off days when playing with old Hutchins, when I liked to imagine I was the Queen of Spain. Several times a day I could put on a new dress, but often when particularly smart I felt excruciatingly shy and ridiculously self-conscious, like a child dressed

¹ These have all now been annexed by the Bolsheviks.

up. I was considered pretty, but looking through old photographs of the time I cannot quite understand why I had this reputation; besides, at that time we were wearing those fashions of "gigot" sleeves and stiff bell skirts which to-day appear so absurd to eyes accustomed to easier apparel. Occasionally I felt nothing but a negligible accessory to my voluminous sleeves, in which I almost entirely disappeared. I may have been smart but I was certainly not *chic*. I do not think Mamma considered it quite proper or *bon ton* for a princess to be *chic*.

And then the morning came when I awoke to the sound of bells, festive bells, bells for my own wedding. . . .

We had to submit to a threefold marriage, civil, Catholic and Protestant. The ceremonies took place in the morning and ended with a huge wedding breakfast. I remember it all as though it were a dream, a very far-off dream in which I played a dream part.

My wedding dress was of lustreless, heavy white silk, with puffed sleeves, of course, and bell skirt spreading out into a train. I had a dislike of lace veils, so in spite of all the old family lace, I wore tulle, kept in place by a diamond tiara, inside which a small wreath of orange blossom lay curled as in a nest. I was a thin, flat little maiden with very fair hair frizzled Queen Alexandra-wise on the forehead; my features were immature, my eyes blue, there was not much dignity about me. I looked as absurdly young as I was, and I felt as if I were playing at being grown up. I cannot say that I was very much enchanted with my own appearance, I had more romantic ideas about how a bride ought to look, but Mamma absolutely disagreed with these, so I was decked out according to her taste and wore my rather overpowering finery as best I could.

The Catholic marriage was the chief ceremony and took place in the church adjoining the castle, which was reached through long and intricate passages. Sigmaringen was a real old fortress, with all a fortress's peculiarities. The service was long and solemn with good singing and many priests. Our two *prie-Dieux* were well to the fore and most of the service was listened to kneeling. I liked the some-

what monotonous Latin chants; they enveloped me in a sort of protective trance which calmed fear and allowed hope to filter into my anxiously throbbing heart.

The English Church ceremony took place in one of the big drawing-rooms. We were married by a Naval Chaplain, and to me it was very sweet that it should be someone belonging to the Navy who joined our hands.

I have no remembrance of the wedding breakfast and hardly any of our send-off.

This was not to be a final good-bye, nor was it a driving off from home, so certain cruel emotions were spared me.

It had been decided that we should spend a few "honey days" at a little *Jagdschloss* not far from Sigmaringen, a royal summer residence surrounded by woods. My family remained at Sigmaringen, where certain festivities were to continue; amongst others on the third day there was to be a big ball at which we were to appear.

Krauchenwies was a dear little old house, more picturesque than comfortable, but quite a romantic setting for a honeymoon. But it was winter, we were shy and still strangers to each other and there was absolutely nothing to do. Nando was not a man of high spirits, nor was he imaginative, so he was quite at a loss how to entertain so childishly young a wife. He was terribly, almost cruelly in love. In my immature way I tried to respond to his passion, but I hungered and thirsted for something more; besides, I cruelly missed Mamma and Ducky and felt lost and forsaken. I must confess that those winter days, buried away in that far-off little castle, were terribly long. There was an empty feeling about it all; I still seemed to be waiting for something that did not come. . . .

Once, with a gay jingling of sleigh bells, Mamma and sisters invaded our solitude. That sound of bells was too cheerful, it made my heart ache, it belonged too much to the old home. I confess that I wept. Mamma scolded me lovingly and said I should get accustomed to being a wife; she encouraged me with brave words, but I noticed a suspicious brightness in her eyes, very much like unshed tears. Mamma hated all weakness, she was a Spartan and expected

the same attitude from her children, so not for the world would she have encouraged me to enlarge upon my feelings of distress.

I have no remembrance of the big ball given in our honour, no remembrance of anything more, in fact, but of a few last days we spent at Coburg before the final cruel departure, the breaking away from all that had been.

Mamma tried to make those last days as cheerful and happy as possible; she encouraged skating parties on the Rosenau lake, which were followed by amusing charades in the big hall of the Rosenau Schloss. All my friends clustered round me, made much of us, spoilt us in a thousand small ways, there was laughter, music, dancing, but a farewell feeling was in the air and tears beneath every smile.

One little scene I vividly remember. It was the last evening. On the following day we were to leave; I was not feeling well, was suffering from the effects of too many emotions, probably, and that sick feeling of departure; anyhow, Mamma, who generally never admitted that anybody could be ill, had encouraged me to go to bed early. I was living in the guest's room, no longer having my place in the "night nursery"; my little camp-bed had been removed from the row of three. It had been packed up as I insisted on carrying it away with me, that funny little camp-bed from Russia, which could be rolled up and easily taken from place to place.

The guest's apartment consisted of three rooms, a salon, a wee dressing- and bedroom combined, in which I slept, and a larger bedroom beyond which was my husband's. Mamma, anxious about me, had come to kiss me good night as she had done when we were children. We both tried to be brave; I knew that Mamma disapproved of outbursts of sentiment, or "scenes" as she termed them, so I swallowed down every cry of fear and grief that welled up within me at the thought of to-morrow's farewell. I did give her an extra hug, though, but no word was spoken; that would have been beyond my strength.

I was supposed, like a good little girl, to fall off to sleep immediately, but with such perturbed feelings this of course did not happen and I heard Mamma whispering with Nando

in the next room. She was probably making a few last suggestions, giving him a little advice how to treat his over-innocent, over-childish wife who was being torn out of all she was accustomed to and sent so far, far away. The conversation was not meant for me, nor did I try to listen, but finally, moving towards my door which was ajar, I heard Mamma say: "I must just have a last look at her . . ." and there, peeping round the edge of the door, was her dear face and tears were actually running down her cheeks! Seeing I was awake, she managed a brave smile, and we nodded to each other; I longed to throw my arms round her, to nestle my face against her damp cheeks and have a good cry, but Spartan training made all such effusion impossible. Perhaps it would have done her as much good as it would have done me, but I did not dare, so we simply smiled at each other and of course I was not supposed to have seen the tears.

But for months and months afterwards, devoured by loneliness and home-sickness in that far land, the vision of Mamma's brave face all wet with tears, peeping round the corner of the door, came back again and again, filling me with intolerable pain and *Sehnsucht* so that often I had to smother my mouth in my pillow not to call out with grief and longing—Mamma . . . Mamma . . . Mamma . . . !

But Mamma was no longer there, her dear round face all shiny with tears could no more bravely smile at me, she had been relinquished with all that belonged to the old home.

Mamma . . . Mamma . . .

No agonized heartbeats can make time stand still. The hour of parting came; it had to be faced. I was not however going quite alone, without anyone belonging to the days of my childhood. Mamma had decided that I should be accompanied by Lady Monson, one of her ladies-in-waiting who has not yet been mentioned in these pages, and by a certain Colonel Howard, an officer in the Black Watch whom we had known at Devonport, a charming, intelligent man in whom Papa had great confidence, although we children had never had much to do with him.

Lady Monson was no longer young. Mother of three

grown-up daughters and one grown-up son, she was an exceedingly cultivated woman who lived a great deal abroad. Her special love was Italy, she spoke fluent Italian as well as several other languages, her English was always spiced with foreign words. There was a strange hoarseness about her voice which was not without charm; being extremely animated she gesticulated a great deal with her hands which made the trinkets on her many bracelets jingle in a special way. A great connoisseur of antiquities, she hunted up bric-à-brac shops wherever she went and would always return laden with innumerable quaint odds and ends. Not only her bracelets, but everything about Lady Monson jingled, her châtelaine, belt, beads, chains, etc., which were nearly all of them curios purchased in some foreign land. Lady Monson's husband was equerry-in-waiting to my father and was as calm as his wife was effusive; greater contrasts could not be conceived, but for all that they were excellent friends. Lady Monson was tall and had very handsome, somewhat pronounced features. Her three daughters were lovely, but with Lady Monson herself we children had never been intimate, she was too intellectual for our unripe minds. Our great friend amongst Mamma's ladies was Etta Keppel, *née* Blundel, the young lady I had so intensely admired when I was a child in Malta. She had married Colin Keppel, then flag-lieutenant to my father, later his equerry. Etta was a darling, she had great round eyes and reddish fair hair; we loved her and appreciated her companionship, she was gay and charming and Mrs. Blundel, her mother, was a beautiful woman. Our friendship had started at Malta, and was specially cemented at Devonport, where she was our chaperon, and an exceedingly pleasant chaperon indeed.

But for this official and none too easy mission I think Lady Monson was an excellent choice. She was well versed in foreign ways and her fluency in French was a great help.

The moment when our train finally steamed out of the Coburg station was one of almost unbearable grief. It was as though my very heartstrings were being torn asunder. A feeling of intense despair came over me and it was only the ingrained habit of repressing our emotions which gave me courage not to cry out in my pain. There they all stood

on the station platform—Papa, Mamma, Alfred, Ducky, Sandra, Baby Bee, surrounded by friends and old servants in their state liveries, hats in hand. But they were growing smaller and smaller, I could still just see their hands waving, but could hardly recognize their faces any more. I leaned far out of the window, it was freezingly cold, the ground was covered with snow. . . . Now I could not even see their hands waving . . . everything was a blur. As a last vision, the Feste Coburg, standing all cold against a cold sky; everything was cold, it was winter—Mamma, Ducky, my inseparable companion, my faithful chum—winter, snow, cold, everything was cold, even the old fortress stood shivering against the wintry sky.

Was that a sound of bells, sleigh-bells? Were they the bells of those driving back to the old home from which I had flown? Jingle, jingle, how I loved the sound of sleigh-bells . . . or was it only the sound of the train wheels crunching on the frozen snow?

A hand on my shoulder; I turned round—Nando.

Nando had a kind heart, there were tears in his eyes also. In a way Nando understood, had he not also left his home for a far land not yet his own? . . .

END OF VOLUME ONE



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