

FISCHER
HENRY
WILLIAM

THE SECRET MEMOIRS OF
BERTHA KRUPP

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of Bertha Krupp

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*The Secret Memoirs of Bertha Krupp / From the Papers and Diaries of Chief
Gouvernante Baroness D'Alteville:*

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Henry W. Fischer

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CHAPTER I

UNDER THE WAR LORD'S THUMB

The Real War Lord – Putting on the Screw – The Kaiser's Plot Revealed – Disinheriting the Baroness – A Startler for the War Lord – Bertha to be Sole Heiress – Frederick Makes His Will – The War Lord Loses his Temper – A Base Suggestion

On a bright August day of 1902 the neighbourhood of Villa Huegel, overlooking the forest of smoke-stacks, cranes, masts and other erections that silhouette the town of Essen, was like an armed camp. Its master, Frederick Krupp, cannon king and war promoter, while not entitled to household troops, has an army of firemen as large as the contingent of the mighty potentate of Reuss-Greiz-Schleiz-Lobenstein, and this was pre-eminently the season and hour of military display.

The Krupp warriors resemble Prussian infantry in dress. In discipline and aggressiveness they are second to none serving under the eye of the "All Highest," as the Kaiser fondly calls himself. Give their master a dark look as he passes, and one or more of them will pounce upon you and pound you to jelly before you can say Jack Robinson; reach for your handkerchief or pencil in your back trouser-pocket, where a revolver might be, and they will spit you on their fire-axe.

To-day Krupp firemen were everywhere. They lined the roads, guarded crossings and bridges, looked up at every window, sentinelled gates and doors. They were posted, too, in the tree-tops and on telegraph and signal posts, while indoors, along the corridors of the villa, you met them at every turn. Right royal arrangement that! Yet why at Huegel?

On this particular day Essen was alive with colour. Hussars in green and silver – the Düsseldorf brand – galloping round and round the villa circuit, kept their eyes keenly alert for suspicious characters; in Essen, indeed, every stranger is looked upon as a double-crossed suspect. Dragoons were there, too, from East Prussia, to watch the hussars, for one never knows, you know. And, of course, there were bodyguards – white tunic and breeches, black cuirass and silver helmet, surmounted by the "bird of poisonous glare," as Heine described the Imperial eagle. Many other uniforms, too – uhlands, chasseurs, mounted infantry for the War Lord likes to strut abroad to the tune and clank of a variety of arms. He would have horse marines if he were not

so deadly afraid of Mr. Punch.

Before the library door of the Villa Huegel two giant cuirassiers, sabre in hand, revolver in belt, dull men and dangerous, of the sort that always do their duty not as they see it, but as their superior officer sees it.

Suppose that earthling orders a death-dealing blow for anyone attempting to enter the room under guard. It follows, as a matter of course, that the person is a dead man or dead woman, or maybe a dead child – militarism rampant, but discipline triumphant! Who cares for a corpse more or less?

A much-bedizened personage is standing in the centre of the high-ceilinged, wainscoted room. A gewgawed War Lord; but how unimposing he looks on foot and unprepared to meet the gaze of admiring multitudes! He is not much taller than the average grocer's clerk, and until Father Time sprinkled his straight, wiry hair with grey was a decided red-pate.

The War Lord's clothes are Berlin pattern: all straight and right angles, like the tunics of the impossible marbles that spoil his Avenue of Victory. He wears jewellery of the kind the late mad King of Bavaria used to decorate his actors with: a watch-chain thick and strong enough to hold a two-year bull, a timepiece bulging like an alarum clock, and a profusion – or confusion – of gold-mounted seals and medals. But the finishing touch: sky-blue garters, set with rosettes of diamonds and pearls alternating.

We know his public face – stern, haughty, cast-iron, forbidding – and his official demeanour has been brought home

to us a thousand times and more in statue and photograph, in colour and black and white, throned, on horseback, or standing alone in Imperial self-glory under a purple canopy – he knows how to stage-manage himself in uniform.

The London tailor who skimped his coat in front, he hates with a deadly hatred, for padding, plenty of it, is essential to his *mise en scène*. See him on his well-trained, high-stepping horse, and you have the ideal camera subject: broad shoulders, prominent chest (laden with seventy-odd medals), strong limbs, jingling spurs, bronzed face, skyscraping moustachios and all.

But in the drawing-room, and in mufti – what a difference! Heavy set, somewhat short-limbed, and the face that looks strong when framed in military cap or helmet now seems to possess only brute force.

At this moment his left hand sought the seclusion of a trouser-pocket, while his right, studded with gems like a chorus-girl's, sawed the air with coarse assertiveness.

"My dear Frederick," he addressed his host, balancing himself on his right foot, "while you are here to execute my orders, all's well. But suppose something happened to you. You are not in the best of health and" – lowering his voice – "a careless boy. Don't deny," he added quickly when Frederick Krupp ventured to protest. "Both my Roman ambassador and our envoy at the Holy See heard about your peccadilloes in the island." The speech, begun in a bantering tone, terminated shrilly.

The Ironmaster alternately blushed and blanched. "I hope you

do not believe all you hear," he faltered.

"Never more than a third of what I'm told," replied the War Lord, softening his voice; "but, even so, things must not be left too entirely to chance."

Frederick Krupp went to the window, marking each step for the benefit of possible listeners, then tiptoed to the great folding doors. He opened the off wing suddenly and looked out. "All's safe," he said, returning; "and what fine brutes those outside."

"Fancy them?" laughed the War Lord jovially, for he knows how to unbend when he wants to carry a point. "Now to business. We are all liable to die almost any moment, and you, dear Frederick, are no more an exception to the rule than I am – or those brutes."

Frederick Krupp looked uncomfortable, and to hide his embarrassment or gain time dropped into courtly jargon. "And what may be your Majesty's pleasure?"

"Make a satisfactory last will, sir – a last will guaranteeing the Krupps' goodwill for ever and a day – likewise satisfactory dividends – for the chief stockholder, if you please."

Frederick Krupp bowed low. "Please?" he repeated. "Why, I lie awake nights planning wars for your benefit. If there were not a Persian Gulf, I would have invented one to pave the way for the little scrap with England you are aching for."

"Hold your horses!" cried the War Lord. "That Bagdad railway must be finished first. What I want is a guarantee, and a most binding guarantee, that the Krupp works be conducted in all

future as now, according to my Imperial will and pleasure, in the interest of the Fatherland and – our pocket," he added flippantly.

Frederick Krupp surveyed himself in the glass. "You talk as if I had one foot in the grave," he said in the careless manner of addressing a boon companion, or like one intimate putting things pleasant, or the reverse, to another. Frederick Krupp died in the odour of eccentricity. There was certainly something eccentric in his relations with the War Lord. But the latter tolerates familiarity only so long as it suits him; and, presently observing the clouds gather on his guest's brow, Frederick Krupp changed his tone.

"At your Majesty's commands, I am all ears," he murmured, as, obedient to a sign from the Emperor, he drew up an arm-chair for him.

"Sit down yourself," the Emperor ordered curtly, pointing to a tabouret. Then, sneeringly: "Your idea was – "

"To leave everything to my wife."

The War Lord slapped his knees hard, as he always does when excited.

"So would Herr Müller and Herr Schulze," he cried, without attempting to conceal the insult. "Her Ladyship – chief of the Krupp works – of what use would the Baroness Marguerite be to *my* interests?"

Mrs. Frederick Krupp was *née* von Ende, and the War Lord, always eager to use titles of nobility, chose to call her by her maiden name and style.

Frederick Krupp, who, despite his irregularities, was genuinely fond of his wife, moved uneasily on his low chair. "Your Majesty is pleased – "

"To have his head screwed on tightly and in the right place," declared the War Lord, bringing his fist down on a table at his elbow and making the Chinese ivories jump. "Now then, without further palaver, I don't choose to see the Baroness heiress of the Krupp works. She shall not control my interests, do you hear? nor those of the Fatherland."

The War Lord talked as if addressing a parcel of raw recruits. His withered left hand had pulled from the trouser-pocket, and was making spasmodic attempts to clutch the lapel of his coat. He has the curious taste to give this poor hand a liberal coating of rings, and his enormous emeralds seemed to gleam more poisonously than usual upon the cringing form of poor Frederick.

"Willy," gasped the Ironmaster pleadingly.

The War Lord was not to be cajoled.

"As I said, her Ladyship gets a pension. Leave her as big a share of your fortune as you please," he added on second thought. "Yes, the larger the better; it will avert suspicion – I mean forestall criticism, of course."

"But," remonstrated Frederick, in a weak way, "Marguerite and I have an understanding."

"Understanding," scowled the War Lord, brutality written all over him as if he were rehearsing his pretty phrase: "Those opposing me I smash."

He contemplated Frederick for a while as a big mastiff might a King Charles before mangling and killing it. At last he remembered there are two ways in most things. "Of course," he began rather soothingly, "understandings among subjects are null and void when opposed to the Imperial will. Explain to Lady Marguerite with my compliments, if you please," the last phrase emphasised three times by hand cutting the air vertically.

Frederick Krupp, thoroughly cowed by this time, nodded assent. This man, used to bull-dozing Governments the world over, a terror before his board of directors, and a demigod to his workmen, felt a mere atom with the eyes of the War Lord flashing wrath and contempt upon his yielding self.

"I will; but what may be your Majesty's precise commands?" he stammered meekly.

The War Lord perceived that his victim had become like wax under the lash of his tongue. He could afford, then, to be magnanimous. "You forget etiquette," he replied, with a half-smile; "since when is it customary to question a majesty? Still, I am no Eulenburg" (referring to the Grand Marshal of the palace), "and will overlook your *faux-pas* this time. Listen, Frederick." He softened his speech with a "dear Frederick," and then issued his mandate: "The Baroness eliminated – "

Herr Krupp raised his eyes supplicatingly, but the War Lord paid no attention. "Eliminated," he repeated, accentuating each syllable. Then, in pitying style: "Too bad you haven't got a son. However, the Salic Law does not apply to commoners."

The Ironmaster made bold to show annoyance at the word. "Commoner by my own free will," he protested. "Haven't I declined Earldoms and Dukedoms even?"

"More's the pity that you remain plain Krupp, like a grocer or the ashman, when you might be Prince of Essen," cried the War Lord, jumping up. The Ironmaster rose as well.

Courtly usage, of course, but also a measure of precaution. He meant to be on hand in case his august guest suffered a fall, and there is always a possibility of that when the War Lord labours under excitement, for his whole left side, from ear to toe, is weak and liable to collapse if the full weight of the body is thrust suddenly upon it. As a rule, the War Lord remembers, but when carried away by passion, or for other reasons loses control of himself, he is prone to forget or even fall in a heap with no warning. Such a *contretemps* happened once at Count Dohna's, when Frederick was one of the house party, and long remained in his memory.

Visiting at Proeckelwitz in the summer of 1891, the War Lord had deigned to be pleased with a pair of blacks. "Buy two more of them for a four-in-hand, as befits the Sovereign," he said to his host.

The hint, dropped with charming German delicacy, was a command, of course, and a year later, in June, the War Lord started for the castle in right royal style; but he did not get far that way, since the four-in-hand shied and bolted when the villagers burst into patriotic song, to the waving of a thousand and one

flags. As an eye-witness put it: The leaders rose on their hind legs, the cross pieces came loose and began knocking against their pasterns, and off they were at a furious rate. Count Dohna let the reins of the runaways slip, and hung the more heavily on to those of the shaft horses, who were trying to follow the others. He let the blacks run for a while but without losing control, and as they were about to plunge into a bed of harrows he succeeded in checking them.

Then, for a mile or so, he gave them a run on freshly ploughed ground. After that they went steadily.

The War Lord had put his arm around his host's shoulders when the horses started off, and, the danger past, pressed the Count's hand, but did not say a word. Then came the collapse. He had to be helped down from his seat, and took no notice of the greetings of the ladies awaiting him. Leaning upon his chasseur and Adjutant Von Moltke (now Field Marshal), he crept to his room, his face pale as death and lips compressed.

Dinner was set back an hour, but the War Lord had not recovered his speech when, with difficulties, he put his feet under the mahogany. His body physician, Doctor Leuthold, was sitting opposite the august person, and upon a sign from the medical man the War Lord rose from table after vainly trying to swallow a spoonful of soup. Nor did he come down to breakfast, but attended luncheon, still looking pale and haggard. Then, for the first time, he greeted the ladies of the house, and spoke a few words to his host; but when a forward young miss referred to the

accident he bade her keep silent by an imperious gesture, while a tremor seemed to run through his body. He would not hear of hunting, and left next day without having fired a shot.

Frederick Krupp, remembering Proeckelwitz, moved as near to his Imperial guest as politeness permitted, ready to catch him in his arms if need be, but the War Lord no sooner perceived his intention than he became more infuriated than ever. "For Heaven's sake no heroics, Frederick!" he roared, sitting down again. "Draw up a stool and listen."

"One second," pleaded the Ironmaster, "I will set the miniature orchestrella going." He pressed a button, and almost simultaneously a music-box near the door, sheathed in tortoise-shell and gold bronze, began trilling out melodies, so as to confuse, if not obscure, conversation to possible listeners if it waxed overloud again.

The War Lord nodded. "Not half bad. You may send me one of those things to put in Bülow's office. There are always some Italians lurking about – to report to Madame la Princesse, I fancy – and put the W.I.R. on the box.

"Well, let's get back to things," he added, quickly changing his tone to drill-ground clangour. "Madame eliminated and there being no son – "

"Your Majesty desires me to leave the business jointly to Bertha and Barbara?" asked Krupp.

"Are there six crown princes or one?" inquired the War Lord in his turn, with affected calmness.

"I don't follow," said Herr Krupp.

The War Lord could hardly master his impatience. Still more raising his voice, he demanded abruptly: "Is Prussia to be divided into six petty Kingdoms when I die because I happen to have six sons, and a small principality besides for my daughter?"

Herr Krupp opened his eyes wide: "Your Majesty wants me to disinherit one of my children?"

"I want you to proclaim my godchild Bertha Crown Princess of the Kingdom of Cannon."

"But my other daughter – "

"Bertha is *my* goddaughter!" (with the emphasis on the "my").

"Can I ever forget the honour conferred upon my humble house?"

"I trust not," said the War Lord, who is careful not to let people forget any small favours he may bestow.

His brain works in fits and starts, in bounds and leaps, and when he wants a thing it jumps at once to the conclusion that his fancy is a *fait accompli*. Persuading Frederick had been easy with its bits of browbeating and flashes of cajolery. Now, flushed with the triumph gained, he launched forth the details. "Bertha, Crown Princess, trust me to find the right consort for her."

"She is only a child."

"The very age when she ought to be taken in hand and moulded." The War Lord illustrated the intended process by kneading the air with grasping fingers, his "terrible right" alternately pushing and squeezing, attacking, relaxing and

coaxing, with the father looking on, terror-stricken.

Such, then, was to be the fate of his little girl: a vice round her white neck, spurs to her sides. The man before him came into the world accoutred to ride, and seventy millions of people his cattle!

The jewels on the War Lord's ring-laden hand flashed and threatened. That twenty-carat ruby on his little finger meant blood, and the emerald, linked to it, might denote the poison-tongue eager to corrupt the childish mind into an instrument of high politics. Diamonds stand for innocence. There were diamonds galore. Oh, the farce of it! Opals, too, a rare collection, but the stone sacred to October tells at least an honest tale – tears.

The War Lord stripped off a gold hoop with a large turquoise. "Wear it in remembrance of this hour, dear Frederick," he said. "The turquoise signifies prosperity, you know."

He walked towards one of the windows and, standing within its deep embrasure, pointed to the towering chimneys. "*My* brave guardsmen," he exulted, half to himself, "outposts of my Imperial will, avant-guard of my seven millions of warriors; it will be great fun, old fellows, to make you dance as I whistle!"

Then, with a broad smile to Frederick: "That being settled, the Minister of Justice shall draw up your testament at once. I brought him to Essen for that. Now, don't look frightened, boy. 'Last will' does not mean 'last legs.' You will outlive us all, I bet. Let's think of a Prince Consort now."

"But, as said, Bertha is much too young," faltered Frederick.

"Herr," staccatoed the War Lord, "I already had the honour to

inform you that Bertha is my godchild – m-y g-o-d-c-h-i-l-d. Do you hear?" he yelled, while startled Frederick looked anxiously towards the door.

The War Lord took the hint and resumed conversational tone. "Come now," he ordered, "roll call. Some of our dear friends are still in the marriage mart." (Reflectively): "Too bad; Fritzie got married." Bertha's father shuddered at the mentioning of a certain Count, who, though brother-in-law of a reigning Grand Duke, was prisoner Number 5429 at Siegen jail, in Rhineland, a few years later for crimes unspeakable. In 1902, however, the dashing Colonel of Horse had not yet been publicly disgraced, and the War Lord launched into a panegyric of his friend. "Yes, indeed, Fritz would have made a first-class master here. Not overburdened with brains, but knows enough to obey orders. No humming and hawing for him when the War Lord has spoken. But the Suien girl caught him. The kind of son-in-law you want, Frederick."

Krupp shook his head.

"I respectfully beg to differ; none of these for my little girl."

"*These?*" The War Lord again raised his voice, but dropped into a hoarse whisper when he heard the officer *de jour* address the sentinels in the corridor. "One can't say a word without being overheard," he grumbled; "nearer, Frederick, still closer." As he continued speaking he laid his massive right hand on Frederick's knee and hissed between his teeth: "These? You forgot that you were referring to *my* friends."

"I did not, most assuredly I did not," returned the Ironmaster, disengaging himself by a swift movement and jumping up.

"You dare!" hissed the War Lord, again losing control of himself.

"I dare anything for my child!" cried Krupp, his face livid with rage; "and I tell you to your face none of your free-living friends for my Bertha!"

"Insolence!" roared the War Lord. "Take a care that I don't send you to Spandau."

"I would endure Schlüsselburg rather than suffer my child to marry one of *these*," insisted the Ironmaster doggedly.

The War Lord gazed at the speaker for twenty or more seconds, then said in a tone of command: "You can go. Send in Moltke" (referring to his adjutant, later chief of the general staff).

With the latter he remained closeted a quarter of an hour – quite a long space of time for a person of the War Lord's character – and it is said that he tried to persuade the blond giant (Moltke was blond and blooming then) that Krupp was a madman, as crazy as the Mad Hatter. Otherwise he would never have dared oppose his plebeian will against that of the supreme master. Of course not!

Of Moltke's counter-arguments we know naught, but the War Lord's visit to Essen wound up with a grand banquet of sixty covers, and in the course of it host and Imperial guest toasted each other in honeyed words.

* * * * *

Less than two months later Frederick Krupp died by his own hand, and Bertha Krupp – sixteen, homely and already prone to embonpoint – mounted the throne of the Cannon Kings, as the War Lord had willed.

And, as he had insisted, she became automatically a pawn in his hand, his *alter ego* for destruction and misery.

Ever since his intimacy with Frederick, the War Lord had looked upon the Krupp plant as the power house for the realisation of his ambition – the conquest of the world; and to a very considerable extent Frederick had aided and abetted his plans by employing his genius for invention and business to commercialise war, and making it fit in with the general scheme of high finance.

"Want a loan?" the Cannon King used to ask governments. "May we fix it for you? But first contract for so many quick-firing guns."

The loan being amply secured, and the quick-firers paid for, then the suggestion would come along: "Have some more Bleichroder or Meyer funds on top of our latest devices in man-killers." And so on, and so on; an endless chain.

Yet, while so eager to provide death with new-fangled tools wholesale, Frederick could not, or would not, divest himself from the shackles of business honesty – and his inheritance.

He wouldn't play tricks on customers. The steel and work he put into guns for, say, Russia or Chili were as flawless and expert as in the guns bought by his Prussian Majesty. And that was the "besetting sin of Frederick," the damning spot on the escutcheon of their friendship, as the War Lord viewed it. It followed, of course, that when one hundred of the Tsar's Krupp guns faced one hundred Krupp guns of the Government of Berlin, they would be an even match so far as material went – a thing and condition in strict contradiction to the Potsdam maxim: "Always attack with superior force."

How often the War Lord had argued with Frederick: Soft lining for enemy howitzers; a well-concealed, patched-up flaw in the barrel of quick-firers.

"I know no enemy, only customers," was Frederick's invariable rejoinder, garbed in politest language.

Customers! Decidedly the War Lord wanted customers – plenty of them, since, as we know, he had invested largely in Krupp stock; but to take customers' money was one thing, and to provide them with means for spoiling the War Lord's game was another.

When that pistol-shot startled Villa Huegel on November 22nd did it portend the death-knell of what the War Lord called "Krupp molly-coddledom"?

Even during Frederick Krupp's lifetime – just as if his early demise had been a foregone conclusion – technical experts of the Berlin War Office had been instructed to make extensive

experiments with steel on the lines ordered by Wilhelm the War Lord.

The test would be the Day!

CHAPTER II

WEAVING THE TOILS

ROUND BERTHA KRUPP

"Your Play Days are Over" – The Baroness Speaks Out – In the Grip of the Kaiser – A Room Apart

"The makings of the true German heifer," that astute Frenchman, Hippolyte Taine, would have said of the young girl who was busy in her garden behind Villa Huegel on the 24th of November, 1902. For her blooming youth was full of the promise of maternity – broad shoulders, budding figure, generous hands and feet, plenty of room for brains in a good-sized head. Pretty? An Englishman or American would hardly have accorded her that pleasing descriptive title, but comely and wholesome she was, with her air of intelligence and kindly eyes.

An abominable German custom makes scarecrows out of children at a parent's death. So Bertha Krupp was garbed in severest black, awkwardly put together. Her very petticoats, visible when she bent over her flowers, were of sable crepe; not a bit of white or lace, though it would have been a relief, seeing that the young woman's complexion was not of the best.

"Bertha – Uncle Majesty – " cried a child's voice from outside the house, "wants you," it added, coming nearer.

"To say good-bye?" called Bertha in return. One might have

discerned an accent of relief in the tone of her voice.

"Not yet," replied her sister, running up, as she tugged at Bertha's watering-can. "Adjutant von Moltke said something about a con-con – "

"Conference, I suppose," completed the older girl. "Will you never learn to speak, child?"

"Uncle Majesty uses such big words," pleaded little Barbara. "Hurry, sister, he is waiting, and you know how crazy he gets – "

"But what have *I* got to do with him? Let him speak to Mamma. Tell them I am busy with my flowers."

"Bertha!" cried a high-pitched voice from the direction of the villa.

"Mamma," whispered the younger girl; "hurry up, now, or you will catch it." At the same moment one of the library windows in Villa Huegel opened, disclosing the figure of the War Lord, accoutred as for battle – gold lace, silver scarf, many-coloured ribbons, metal buttons and numerals. His well padded chest heaved under dozens of medals and decorations, his moustachios vied with sky-scrapers. With his bejewelled right hand he beckoned imperiously.

"My child, my goddaughter," he said with terrible emphasis when Bertha entered the room, breathing hard, "once and for all you must understand that your play-days are over; at this moment you enter upon the service of the State." He turned abruptly to Bertha's mother, adding in tones of command: "You will put her into long dresses at once, Baroness. It isn't fitting that the heiress

of the Krupp works shows her legs like a peasant girl."

"But I don't want to wear long dresses, Uncle Majesty," pouted Bertha.

The War Lord took no notice of the childish protest, but looked inquiringly at Bertha's mother.

"Surely in matters of dress, at least, the child's wishes should be consulted," said the Baroness half defiantly.

"But I insist," fumed the War Lord.

"And I respectfully submit that your Majesty must not meddle with matters of toilette in my house."

The War Lord pulled a high-backed, eagle-crowned chair of silver-gilt up to the late Cannon King's desk and pushed Bertha into it. It was the fauteuil he had once designated as "sacred to the All Highest person" – meaning himself, of course. As a rule its gold and purple upholstery had a white silk cover, which was removed only when the War Lord visited the great house.

"Cardinal fashion," he said to the astonished child, without taking notice of his hostess's remark. "Cardinals, Bertha, are princes of the Roman Church, and each has a throne in his house. While the See of St. Peter is occupied, the emblem of power is turned to the wall. So, heretofore, this throne of mine was obsolete while I was away from Essen, but since your father, as his testament shows, appointed you his successor under my guardianship, you shall have the right and privilege to sit in my place. A throne for the War Lady while the War Lord is away!"

The bewildered child was slow to avail herself of the grand

privilege. Shoulders bent forward, she wriggled to the edge, hardly touching the seat, while her eyes sought her mother's with mute appeal.

However, the War Lord was determined to do all the talking himself. "As I pointed out, under Papa's will, you are sole owner of the Krupp business and mistress here," he declaimed, with a disdainful glance at the child's mother. The Purple-born did not scruple to exult over his victim before her daughter.

Happily, the young girl did not observe his ruthlessness, nor would she have understood her godfather's motive.

"Mistress here," repeated the War Lord; "responsible to no one but God's Anointed."

Bertha, now thoroughly frightened, burst into tears. "Don't cry," ordered the War Lord brusquely. But Frau Krupp jumped to her feet, and, placing herself in front of the child, exclaimed with flaming eyes: "Such language to a little girl and on the day of her father's burial!"

The War Lord saw that he had gone too far. "Come, now," he said soothingly, "I meant your Uncle Majesty, of course. Uncle has always been kind and considerate to his little Bertha, hasn't he?"

He asked the Baroness to be seated, while he patted Bertha's shoulder and hair. "God-daughter," he said softly, "be a brave girl and listen." And, with the child's eyes showing increasing bewilderment every moment, he burst into a panegyric of himself and his sublime mission on earth, such as even his

dramatic collaborators, von Wildenbruch and Captain Lauff, had never conceived in their most toadying moments.

He was on the most elaborately intimate terms with God, and every act of his was approved by "his" God beforehand. "His" God had appointed him vicar on earth, instrument of His benevolence and of His wrath.

"My child," he sermonised in accents of fanaticism, "think of the honour, the unheard-of honour in store for you; you, the offspring of humble parents, shall do my bidding as my God directs."

Bertha was stiff with astonishment, but the Baroness moved uneasily in her chair and was about to speak, when the War Lord, who had paused to observe the effect of his words, resumed:

"The Krupp business, *your* business, my dear Bertha, is unlike any other in the world. All other manufacturers and merchants cater to the material welfare of man, more or less; the Krupp works alone are destined to traffic in human life for God's greater glory and at His behest.

"For fourteen years God has listened to my prayers for peace; for fourteen long years I have beseeched Him, morning, noon and night, in every crisis that arose throughout the world to permit me to keep my sword sheathed – God's sword. But all these years myself and your father, Bertha, have kept our powder dry, never relaxing armed preparedness, doubling it rather, to be ready for God's first bugle-call."

And so the blasphemous vaingloriousings went on.

The War Lord strode over to the long wall of the room, dragging his sword over the marble floor and giving his spurs and medals an extra shake. He pushed a button, whereupon an illuminated map of Europe shot into a frame where, a second before, a Watteau shepherdess had impersonated *les fêtes galantes du Roi*. Drawing the sword, he delineated with its point the Central Empires, the Italian boot-leg, and Turkey's European possessions. Then he double-crossed France, Russia and Great Britain. "The enemy!" he cried. "Enemies of German greatness, of German expansion, of German *kultur*— therefore, enemies of the God of the Germans and of mine.

"But with your help I will smash them, pound them into a jelly, Bertha."

As if overcome by horror, the child glided from the impromptu throne of the self-appointed *Godgeissel* (the Lord's scourge) to the rug, and buried her face in her mother's lap.

"Uncle Majesty," she sobbed, "you mean to say that I must help you make war? The Commandment says, 'Thou shalt not kill.'"

"But the Lord also said, 'Vengeance is mine,'" quoted her Uncle Majesty; "and God wreaks His vengeance through me, His elect, His chosen instrument.

"Still, these matters you will understand better as you grow older," he continued. "For the present remember this: under your father's will, I am your chief guardian, and you must obey me in everything. While nominally, even legally, you

are sole proprietress of the Krupp works and their numerous dependencies, you hold these properties, as a matter of fact, in trust for me. It follows, my child, that you must leave the direction of the works to your Uncle Majesty and his subordinates, the directors and business managers. Do you agree to that?"

There was something hypnotic in the War Lord's delivery. As the Baroness explained afterwards, he talked like one possessed. Add to this his necromantic manoeuvring, his Machiavellian gestures, his grandly weird eloquence – inherited from an uncle who died in a strait-jacket – small wonder he prevailed upon the grief-stricken child, when, alternately, he threatened, cajoled and flattered.

As a matter of fact, the War Lord's words seemed to have a peculiar appeal to the richest girl in the world, who neither divined nor imagined their sinister purpose. What pierced her comprehension appealed to a youngster's love of independence, of shaking off mother's leading-strings. In the avalanche of phrases that assailed Bertha's ears this stood out: "Your mother doesn't count; you are mistress in your own right." Very well, she would put the promise to the test. "I don't quite understand," said the Cannon King's heiress; rising from her knees, and without looking at her parent, added, "but I leave it all to you, Uncle Majesty – everything."

"Do you hear?" cried the War Lord, addressing Frau Krupp.

"I have heard, and Bertha will go to her room now," replied the Baroness firmly; and though the War Lord made an impatient

gesture indicating that he meant the child to remain, she conducted her daughter to the door, kissed her on the forehead, and let her slip out.

When she turned round she saw the War Lord in the *Godgeissel* chair before the desk, resting his right arm on the blotter, his left hand on the hilt of his sword.

"Any further commands for the mistress of the house?" she queried in no humble tones.

The War Lord, seemingly absorbed in a document he had taken up, replied without looking at his hostess: "Send in Moltke," whereupon the Baroness retreated backward towards the door. She was about to drop a curtsy to signify her leave-taking, when the War Lord cried out: "One thing more, Madame la Baronne. From now on this room is *my* room, and none but myself or the Krupp heiress has the *entrée*. My goddaughter may see my representatives here, but no one else – no one."

CHAPTER III

A MOTHER'S REFLECTIONS

The Baroness and Franz – The Power-Drunk War Lord – A Pawn in the Game – The Sweets of Power – Germany Above All – The War Lord's Murder Lust – Fighting the Frankenstein – At the War Lord's Mercy

The Baroness's boudoir in Villa Huegel is a spacious apartment, hung in blue and silver, the colours of her noble house. Everything that riches, mellowed by refinement, could command enhanced its luxurious comfort. In the home of Baroness Krupp are trophies of her visits to foreign shores: cut glass, coins, bronzes and curios of all kinds. Silver-gilt caskets hold royal presents, precious stuffs and monstrous ornaments from German kings and kinglets – articles of jewellery for the most part, too big for a woman of taste. All are crowned and initialled, but few hall-marked. Since a prince is supposed to give away the real thing, why bother about carats? Numerous paintings, English landscapes, French and Italian decorative art and figures. An English grand piano in one corner. Britishers prefer German makes, but the much-travelled Baroness wouldn't tolerate the home product.

She is seated before a spindle-legged table with a crystal top over a velvet-lined drawer, where Madame's royal orders and

decorations repose – crosses and stars, quadrupeds and birds of various *outré* forms and degrees. Pointing to one of them bearing the name of a queen famous for her beauty and misfortunes, she murmured: "How proud I was when he gave it to me! At that time I thought him chivalrous and believed him sincere in his religious professions. Since he intrigues to make my little girl the accomplice of his murderous desires, never more will I wear it."

"Master Franz desires to speak to your ladyship," said a manservant from behind the portières covering the doorway.

"Show him up."

Franz was a distant relative who had lived much in the Krupp household after he finished his studies at the late Frederick Krupp's expense. At this time he was chief electrical engineer of the establishment, destined for still higher honours, for experts held that the mantle of the great Edison had descended upon Franz's broad shoulders. He was like a big brother to the Krupp girls, and looked upon the Baroness as a mother, having never known his own.

Tall and good-looking, Franz, as a rule, dressed like an Englishman of distinction, but to-day he had chafed under the obligation of wearing evening dress for breakfast, lunch and tea, because of the War Lord's presence. Even now his nether garments belonged to the ceremonial variety, but he wore a jacket tightly buttoned over the wide expanse of his shirt-front.

"So it is proposed to make two kinds of steel in future," he whispered, after closing the door and drawing the curtains. "Has

that your approval, Frau Krupp?"

The Ironmaster's widow heard only the first part of the sentence; she was too amazed to listen further.

"What is that you say, Franz?"

The young man kissed the Baroness's hand.

"Acting without your leave or consent – I thought so," he said. "I would have staked my life on it that you would permit no such infamy." Seeing the Baroness's questioning eyes focused on his, he explained:

An hour before the War Lord left the Director-General had sent for him – "to explain certain technical details," ran the message. He had to wait a considerable time in the ante-room of the conference chamber before being admitted, and while there could not help overhearing what was going on inside, as the War Lord was arguing in drill-ground accents.

This was the gist of his peroration, defended with consummate sophistry: It was a crime against the Fatherland to supply possible enemies with arms that at one time or another might be used against the War Lord's Majesty. That sort of thing – treason, to call it by its proper name – had been permitted long enough, too long, in fact; and now that the life-long defender of misguided business honesty had been removed by God's Hand – G-o-d's H-a-n-d – there must be an end of it. He (the War Lord), ever on guard against the Fatherland's enemies, had instructed his scientists to discover a substitute for hard steel with which to line enemy guns and armour. These substitutes were forthwith to be

experimented with, and, if the results were satisfactory, must be employed, instead of the real steel, whenever the War Lord so directs.

"And Frederick hardly cold in his shroud!" gasped the Baroness.

"But you," cried Franz, "you can prevent this fraud, this disgrace! You must, you will, I am sure of it!"

The Baroness had risen and stared vacantly into the fire.

"God punish me if I would hesitate a moment to do as honour dictates, Franz, but Frederick Krupp left his widow bound hand and foot," she replied bitterly.

"You mean to say that you submit to the power-drunk War Lord? Abdicate your sacred trust? Make your children and your workpeople accomplices of fraudulent practices?"

"Haven't you heard about the stipulations which were made in your Uncle Frederick's last will and testament?"

"Not a word," replied Franz.

"I thought Bertha would tell you."

"I was busy all the afternoon, and then came the Director-General's order, which prevented me from saying good night to the children."

"Sit down then and listen," said the Baroness. "As Uncle Frederick often told you, the War Lord has tried for years to obtain control of the Krupp works. In particular he was for ever preaching against the policy of business integrity, the proudest of the Krupp inheritances; but though my husband allowed himself

to be dominated by him in many respects, in this, the Krupp honesty, he remained adamant, partly thanks to my advice and strenuous opposition, I dare say. Up to now the Krupps have never played any government false, as you know."

"But, Uncle Frederick dead, the War Lord is moving heaven and earth to flog the firm into submission." There was suppressed rage in the tone of the young man's voice.

"Let me finish," demanded the Baroness. "Convinced that I would refuse to be the tool of his ambition, the War Lord persuaded your Uncle to ignore me as his legitimate successor, and the testament appoints Bertha sole heir and, again ignoring me, the War Lord her guardian and executor."

"*Gott!*" cried Franz.

The Baroness went on: "His position as supreme overlord of the Krupp business he made perfectly clear to us."

"Us? You mean the heads of the business?"

"I referred to the child and myself. He talked to the directors afterwards." The discrowned Cannon Queen told Franz the story of the Imperial interview. "He is the master," she said in conclusion, "Bertha his pawn, myself nobody."

"And we, the heads of the business, and our workmen, his slaves," added the chief electrician gloomily.

These two people, suddenly confronted by the unexpected – a wife shorn of her rights and wounded in her holiest maternal sentiments; an honest man commandeered to debase his genius and become an accessory to murder most foul – sat for a while

in silence, brooding over their misfortune and the disasters threatening mankind as a consequence.

At last the Baroness roused herself. "And what did they want with you at the conference, Franz?"

"I was admitted after the War Lord had left to be closeted with the Director-General," replied the engineer, "and the directors seemed to me extraordinarily perturbed – far more than the master's death warrants among equals. Herr Braun acted as spokesman. He said the War Lord wanted the firm to experiment with a new steel lining for guns intended for foreign countries.

"Foreign countries! What does that mean?" I asked, as if I had not been an involuntary listener to the War Lord's speech.

"Majesty's orders – it behoves subjects to obey, not to ask questions," said Herr Braun, with unusual severity. "To the point, sir, acting upon the War Lord's orders to entrust the business to expert hands, we have decided to turn over the job to you."

Franz stopped short, then burst out: "What am I doing, Frau Krupp? You just told me that you are not the head of the firm, and I am about to reveal matters of the gravest importance confided to my keeping. I made a mistake – I was led away by filial reverence for my benefactor's widow. Pray forget what I have said."

Franz was about to withdraw, when a voice outside called: "Mamma, can I come in?"

"You said good night once. I thought you were in bed and asleep, Bertha."

The door opened, and a hand rustled the portières.

"Are you alone?"

"Only Franz."

"Oh!"

Bertha's blonde head thrust itself through the centre of the curtains, while she paused on the threshold. Then a naked foot in a blue velvet slipper with a golden heel: a vision in floating white rushed in and nestled childishly at the Baroness's feet.

"Howdy, Franz?" said Bertha, drawing her kimono tighter over her bosom. And to her mother: "I couldn't sleep after what Uncle Majesty told us to-night. So I came down. You are not angry, Mamma? Don't scold, Mamma," she added, observing her mother's stern face.

Frau Krupp patted the child's head. "Fate!" she said to Franz. "*Voilà*, the head of the Krupp firm. Continue."

The engineer bowed. "With your permission, my chief," he said, addressing Bertha.

"Anything you please, you big booby," laughed the child. Then, seriously: "I am your chief, indeed I am. Think of bossing a big chap like you and that arrogant Herr Braun, too!" She motioned Franz to bend down, and whispered in his ear, "Wouldn't it be fun to sack him?"

"No nonsense, child, if you want to stay up," Frau Krupp was very much in earnest, and to Franz she said: "Go on; I am impatient to hear the rest."

"I was telling your mother about some business Herr Braun

wants to entrust me with," explained Franz, looking at the child.

"How very interesting," yawned Bertha; "but you can't get me to listen. Ah, there, I see one of Barbara's dolls. I will play with it till you get through; then supper. I didn't eat dinner with Fraulein," she added, looking at her mother, "and there's such a goneness here," touching her abdomen. The greatest force for destruction in the world, yet a child to all intents and purposes!

"Proceed," said the Baroness to Franz.

"With the chief's permission," began Franz formally; then, as if trying to make his disclosure as indefinite as possible: "You heard about the order from King Leopold, secured by the War-Lord's Brussels ambassador?"

The Baroness nodded, and Bertha took her eyes momentarily from her plaything. "Big, big guns," she said, describing a circle in the air by turning the doll's arm and hand round and round; "my apanage, poor Papa said. Glad you reminded me. I must tell Herr Braun about it. All the profits are to go to my children's hospital." She sat the doll astride her knee, bobbing her up and down, then burst out laughing. "See that head-dress, Franz, and her gown and apron – the Belgian colours. Looks like a coincidence, doesn't it?"

Bertha embraced the doll tenderly. "Thank your King for me, Dolly. The more guns he orders, the better for our little children here. German interests first," laughed Bertha, looking up. "Uncle Majesty told me so ever so often."

The "Germany-above-all" spirit, spelling moral and physical

ruthlessness, spoke out of the child. The Fatherland first, second and third; perdition for the rest of the world, if Germany's interests be served thereby!

Whether the heiress had an inkling of what the War Lord really intended, it is impossible to decide; neither can there be any positive knowledge as to the attitude she might have assumed if, perchance, she did understand Franz's pregnant words.

Pupil of the War Lord, firmly believing in his preachings, saturated with his theories, and over-awed by his claims of Divine mission, his vapourings were gospel to her, and "Germany-above-all" was one of the commandments, even though it conflicted with all the others.

A monstrous case of *folie à deux*, "deux" standing for the German nation. Here we have a man decked out in ornate regimentals travelling about his country telling four millions of men: "You must die for Me," and immediately each man says to his wife: "I wonder if there is a special heaven for patriots like your husband?"

And to a certain class of persons he points out that science is but the handmaiden of wholesale murder, and that they must employ their God-given inventive genius, all their brains, all their time, to devise new ways and means for killing as many men, women and children as there are in the world outside of the German Empire. And they do.

And to a woman he says: "You were born to suffer. Give me your husband; I want him for the fighting." And she forthwith

tells her man to make one more for the shambles.

And to the golden-haired girl he says: "A truce to your vanity, off with your locks, that I may buy more rifles; and your lover I want, too. His manly breast will make an excellent scabbard for a French or Russian lance."

And the golden-haired one raves that she is thrice happy to be allowed to sacrifice her beauty and the idol of her dreams for the War Lord.

"I want your fathers," he says to a playground full of children, "and your uncles and big brothers and cousins." And the little ones cry: "Hurrah! Long live the Emperor!"

"Would ye live for ever?" he queries of men between fifty and sixty-five. "To the barracks with you, even if you are but good for cannon fodder."

Someone tells him of a bunch of boys playing marbles in an alley; not one of them has finished his education. The War Lord examines them critically and sniffs. "You are big enough to stop a bullet somehow," he allows, and they are led to slaughter.

The All Highest looks upon the earth and boasts of his winged legions of man-killers. He declaims that Englishmen and Frenchmen and Italians and Belgians have turned out to fight God's Anointed; but adds with a sly smile they left their women at home and their brood, that he may out-Herod Herod. In his mind he feels the earth trembling under the heavy tread of his armed millions and the weight of his artillery.

This Dancing Dervish of universal slaughter, this man given

over to murder-lust is the object of veneration not only of those whom he addresses in person, because of their mistaken sense of duty and patriotism; a whole nation, seventy millions strong, acclaim him Saviour – Messiah of the Fatherland's destinies.

One can understand individual sacrifice, but seventy millions of people, every mother's son and daughter, turning beasts of prey! It baffles psychological speculation. Everywhere the "Evangelium of German superdom," as the War Lord sees it, is loud.

Small wonder Bertha, born of man-killer stock and suckled on the breasts of militarism, which nourished her kith and kin and their hundreds of thousands of dependents, believes unconditionally in the doctrines pronounced by her godfather, to her the God-head of power infinite, omniscience incarnate!

Hence the implied rebuke to Franz: "German interests first." After that she returned to the nursery – her Belgian doll.

Frau Krupp looked significantly at Franz. "You were going to say —

"My orders are to experiment with the War Lord's new formula for steel on those guns for Liége."

Franz buried his head in his hands, elbows planted on knees, leaning forward heavily, while the Baroness sat looking at him, her nimble mind weighing the pros and cons. At last she reached out a hand and touched the young man's shoulder.

"Franz," she said solemnly.

The young man's head shot up and he stared at Frau Krupp as

if she was a ghost. Answering the question in her eyes, he almost shouted, "Never!" holding up his right hand as if under oath.

The Baroness placed his hand on Bertha's head. "Swear that you will stand by this child."

"I swear, with all my heart, so help me, God," pronounced Franz, with severe emphasis.

A peculiar look came into the Baroness's eyes, half satisfied, half cunning, as with a sort of imperious finality she said: "It is well." Then, turning to the child: "Bertha, run along now and tell them to serve in the small dining-room in five minutes."

"Make it ten, Mamma, so I can put on my new *negligée*."

"All right, ten; but hurry," agreed Frau Krupp, looking at the pendule.

When the curtain had fallen behind Bertha the Baroness turned a white, severe face upon Franz. Then, abandoning all pretence of loyalty to the Grand War Lord, she told the terrible secrets long locked in her bosom, secrets imparted by her late husband or gathered from his lips during long, sleepless nights while he tossed on his pillow.

"It's the Frankenstein we have to fight," she said, "the pitiless, heartless, soul-less Evil One, intent upon setting the world afire through my child's inheritance. The plotting has been going on ever since the crowned monster was enthroned. Almost the first communication he made to Frederick, as head of the Empire, was: 'Now we must bend all energies to get ready. And when we are, I will set my foot upon the neck of the universe,

Charlemagne redivivus!"

"Previous to that, Frederick and myself had agreed gradually to drop cannon- and ammunition-making. The Krupps were to create, instead of facilitating destruction. No longer was Essen to be a place upon which a merciful God looked with abhorrence. Engines of death had made us rich and powerful; henceforth the coined results of war were to be employed to make waste land arable, to drain morasses, to dig canals, to prosecute every peaceful endeavour promising to enhance the German people's chances of happiness and prosperity. The old saw of turning swords into ploughshares was to be enacted by the firm that had made war thrice deadly. Then the tempter came. 'I rely upon you, Frederick! You are the Fatherland's only hope, for Germany can achieve its destinies only through blood and iron.'

"One more supreme effort, Frederick, then the War Lord will turn husbandman, making you manager-general of his great farm stretching from the Arctic Circle to the Mediterranean, from the Atlantic to Siberia.'

"As you know, the War Lord is an insinuating talker," continued Frau Krupp, "and his autocratic manner, enhanced by occasional flurries of condescension and persuading Frederick to join in his social relaxations. Ah!" she cried, striking the table with her hand, "it was these that forged the bullet which killed my husband!"

There was a shrill tone of rage and defiance in the last words. Then emotion mastered Frau Krupp's strength. She tottered,

swayed, and would have fallen had not Franz caught her. He knew what she had suffered through her husband's intimacy with the War Lord and his cronies, and shuddered.

"Mother," he said unconsciously, as her head touched his breast. The Baroness let it rest there a moment; here was a tower of strength, of reserve force.

"Alas!" she continued, after a tense silence, "in the long run they ensnared Frederick. He succumbed to their ensnaring wiles as a foolish man might to the flatteries of a flirt. My counsel was no longer sought; the promises he had made – which I had exacted in happier days – were forgotten or denied. The very ploughs and ploughshares we were manufacturing then were thrown into the melting-pot for guns."

She picked up a book lying on the mantel. "'Vital Statistics of the German Empire,'" she read aloud; "'Steady Increase of Population.'" She flung the volume on the hearth. "Multiply like the Biblical sands; it only means that Essen works the harder to put you under the sod."

Frau Krupp dropped her voice and went on in a whisper: "Do you understand now what your threatened retirement would mean? It would mean that, excepting France and Great Britain, the whole of the world, all the smaller nations, would be practically at the War Lord's mercy, because their guns wouldn't shoot, their swords and lances wouldn't pierce.

"Such is the goal he has been striving for, the goal he wants to attain through my little girl. 'Have them all inadequately armed,

and it will be a walk-over for German arms,' he calculates."

"And how can I prevent the world's debacle?"

"By fighting fire with fire. You cannot fight the War Lord openly – pretend obedience, fall in with his plans apparently, be an enthusiastic faker, as far as he can see; but don't smirch my little girl's business honour and submerge the world under a tidal wave of blood by making other nations defenceless. I have your promise, Franz?"

"It's a vast prospect," answered the young engineer, "but I have sworn to stand by Bertha – "

"I thank you," said the Baroness, as the portières were noisily pushed aside and a child's voice cried: "Supper's ready."

CHAPTER IV

BERTHA KRUPP, WAR LADY, ASSERTS HERSELF

Science Steps In – Franz Incurs the Kaiser's Wrath

Six months of feverish activity in the Essen works, of tests and measuring velocities, of experimenting with ingots, hardening processes, chilled iron castings and compound steel – who knows or cares for the technique of murder machinery save generals of the staff? As Mark Twain at one time labelled a book, "There is no weather in this," so the present author will not burden his pages with figures and statistics of any sort. It would be a tantalising undertaking at best, for the War Lord himself was directing, and insisted that his every misunderstood, mis-stated and often wholly untenable whim be immediately gratified by the ready servility of Krupp employés – "his people."

Up to the time under discussion the Emperor Wilhelm had devoted nearly all his energies to drill, political intrigue and uttering platitudes. To dabble in formulary details, with nobody to dispute his opinion or correct his errors, flattered him in the proportion as his judgment about ordnance construction became more and more fantastic.

He was always going about with a half-dozen professors at his heels, losing no opportunity of propounding nebulous and

remarkable theories to their startled but complaisant ears.

At the beginning of the present century the German professor was a hundred years behind the times in his dress, manners and social habits. The German Punch had rudely caricatured him into a new habitat, where soap and water, clean collars, unfrayed trousers and non-Cromwellian headgear held sway. Up to that period, he had bathed occasionally, had curled his hair now and then, and thereafter relapsed into that state of slovenliness which is labelled scientific preoccupation by the German mob, and stands in awe of learning, be it ever so badly digested and wrongfully applied.

The War Lord had an English mother; he is a Barbarian fond of the tub. He perceived that professors might be made useful to him. But how make them presentable?

A visit to England gave him the clue.

And forthwith the new order of Court dress was launched: short clothes and pumps, silk stockings and jabot-shirts; and the official Press rudely informed those "entitled to the uniform" that bathing was imperative before getting into it.

The brotherhood of science furthermore received hints to patronise the War Lord's own barber in regard to their flowing beards. "But Admiral von Tirpitz wears a forked beard too," pleaded some. "No precedent, Herr Professor, his Excellency has Majesty's special permit!"

With the superfluous hair, the professors likewise had to shed their accustomed hyperbole.

"Don't speak until spoken to." "Answer in as few inforamatory words as can be managed." "Invariably make your answer meet the Imperial wishes." "Never contradict," were the Grand Master's instructions, and the scientific men abiding by them soon found themselves in clover, because they were "useful," while the rest were discarded.

In particular, experts in chemistry were exploited by the War Lord. "They must help to feed my army and people" – in case war lasts longer than expected. "They must invent new weapons of destruction" – for while powder and lead are well enough in their way, they do not spell the end of things.

German scientific men are very fond of power and have an enormous idea of their own importance, but their notions are subject to fits of extravagant humility if policy, or personal advantage, can be served by Uriah Heepisms. The keener ones in the Imperial entourage found that it would pay to cater to the mobility in the War Lord's ideas while there was a certain degree of logic. And if, perchance, he happened to drop into incoherency or extravagance, was it the professor's business to set him right? Court usage registered an emphatic negative.

Such were the beginnings of the partnership between War Lordism and the perversion of German science into an instrument of destruction. "Science to the rescue of the lame and halt" – an out-of-date notion. Science makes them by the hundreds of thousands.

The professors were powerful assistants to the War Lord in

maintaining his grip on the Krupp throat and acquiring further business concessions from the firm; but, of course, as to realising the technical chimeras of the War Lord's mind with respect to new-fangled war machinery, there was more pretence than activity, for dividends had to be considered, and the War Lord would have been the first to make an outcry if his earnings were reduced by the fraction of a per cent.

Franz maintained his position as chief experimenter, and, his expert judgment in gunmaking as well as in electricity being unquestioned, he was able openly to frustrate some of the War Lord's most bloodthirsty plans by proving them impracticable to the satisfaction of the board of directors, which put a stop to their execution for the time at least.

"Uncle Majesty is very wroth with you," said Bertha to her relative one evening, when the War Lord had returned to Berlin after one of his unofficial visits to the Ruhr metropolis. He was in the habit of coming to Essen every little while now, unheralded and incog. Likewise in mufti; and what discarding of regimentals and associated fripperies meant to him few people can imagine.

His uniforms are built to make him appear taller and more imposing, while affording a ready background for all sorts of decorative material – ribbons, scarfs, stars, crosses and medals galore.

"Wroth with me?" queried Franz.

"Yes, with you," replied the child; "and I heard him dictate a long letter, giving you a terrible talking to. I just signed it," added

Bertha with a satisfied grin.

"And why am I hauled over the coals?" asked Franz.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied the child. "'One of the things little girls cannot understand,' said Uncle Majesty. But I do know that you must – I said *must*– not do it again. I won't let you, do you hear? I mean Uncle Majesty won't."

Franz raised his hat and knocked his heels together, military fashion. He was about to withdraw when Bertha caught him by the arm. "You are not angry with me, Franz?" she pleaded.

"No, my chief."

"Say 'no, *liebe* Bertha.'"

"No, *liebe* Bertha."

At this moment a messenger caught up with the two young people on the road to Villa Huegel and handed Franz an official-looking envelope. The engineer looked inquiringly at Bertha. "May I?"

Instead of answer the Krupp heiress picked up her skirts with both hands and ran towards the house.

Her letter informed Franz that the task of completing the Belgian guns had been entrusted to other hands. Secondly, that, in future, communications about experiments ordered by the War Lord must be addressed to the heiress direct, not to the board of directors.

CHAPTER V

HOW THE WAR LADY WAS CAJOLED

An Intoxication of Vanity – Barbara's Plain Words – A Shameful Memory

The Imperial Chief-Court-and-House Marshal, Count Eulenburg, has the honour to command Fraulein Bertha Krupp to attend upon their Imperial and Royal Majesties, His Majesty the Emperor and King, and Her Majesty the Empress and Queen, during the Christmas and New Year's festivities at the Schloss, Berlin.

A royal equipage will await Fraulein Krupp's pleasure at the station, meeting the early morning train of December 22nd.

Dress: Silks, Velvets and Laces.

Attendance: Wardrobe mistress and maid; A footman.

The invitation, copperplated on an immense sheet of rather cheap paper and sent through the mail free, created much excitement in Villa Huegel, the more so as it was wholly unexpected, the War Lord never having intimated that an honour of that kind was in store for his godchild.

In the meantime Bertha had risen to the dignity of opening her own letters and using her discretion as to divulging their contents,

or not, as she saw fit, or rather as the War Lord saw fit. This was strictly opposed to native custom; but isn't the King above the law? And certain reports, such as those ordered to be addressed to Bertha direct – Franz's for instance – All-Highest wouldn't have communicated to any save himself, not even to Frau Krupp. Hence his command that the Krupp heiress keep her own counsel in regard to her correspondence.

Bertha broke the great seal of the Court Marshal's office and her eyes became luminous as she read the printed words and angular script. She sat staring at the latter for a minute or two, while the Baroness, chafing under her impotency, pretended to be busy with an orange. Finally Barbara tiptoed behind her sister's chair and looked over her shoulder. The fourteen-year-old girl being well up in Court lore – having seen dozens of such letters addressed to her late father – applied herself to the essentials, skipping the merely decorative lines.

"Christmas and New Year's festivities at the *Schloss*, Berlin," she read aloud. Then higher up: "Fraulein Bertha Krupp."

"Oh, Mamma!" she cried, "we are not invited, you and I. Isn't that mean of Uncle Majesty?" She stamped her foot. "But he shan't kiss me when he comes again – see if I let him kiss me."

"Hold your tongue, naughty child."

Bertha spoke with an air of unwonted authority. She folded up her letter.

"Just see how high and mighty we are!" mimicked Barbara. "'Naughty child,' and what are you? I shouldn't wonder if Uncle

Majesty spanked you sometimes, when you are alone with him; you always come away full of humility to him and of arro – arro – " (she couldn't find the word) "the other thing to us – to Mamma and me, I mean."

The Baroness put out her arm as if she expected the children to resort to fisticuffs. "Barbara," she called half pleadingly.

"She will go to her room," insisted Bertha, ringing. The butler responded so promptly that there was no doubt he had been listening behind the portières.

"Fraulein Barbara's governess," Bertha ordered. And as the man was going out: "My secretary shall report at once in my council room."

"Are you mad?" cried Frau Krupp, when the curtains had dropped behind the servant. Bertha seemed so unlike herself – unlike what her child ought to be.

The Krupp heiress disdained to answer.

"Since I am to be their Imperial and Royal Majesties' guest, I must prepare for the honour," she deigned after a little while; "in half an hour I'll leave for Cologne. You may accompany me, if you like, Mother."

The Baroness grew white under the lash of Bertha's patronising tone. "You shall not go," she said hotly.

"If you will come to the council room you can see in black and white my authority to go where and when I please," replied Bertha, going out.

Barbara and her mother looked at each other in

blank amazement, the child not understanding, the mother understanding but too well. Bertha was lost to her; the supreme egotist had gained a strangle-hold on her flesh and blood.

With the strange intuition that often moves children to do the right thing at the right time when grown-ups are at their wits' end, Barbara seemed to divine what passed in her mother's mind and, burying her face in the Baroness's lap, she sobbed out convulsively words of consolation, of endearment and unbounded affection. Frau Krupp bent over the child's head and kissed her again and again. "My little girl, my Barbara, won't discard Mother, will she?" she said in broken tones.

"Not for ten thousand Uncle Majesties," cried Barbara fiercely; and, as if the words had freed her from a spell, she rose of a sudden and planted herself in front of Frau Krupp.

" – Uncle Majesty," she said, clenching her little fists.

Then, overcome by her breach of the conventions, she ran out of the room and into the arms of her governess.

Frau Krupp would not have had the heart to scold Barbara even if she had not run away. " – him!" – her own sentiments. With such reflections she leaned back in her great arm-chair, undecided whether she should follow Bertha to the council room or not. Her motherly dignity said "No," while anxiety for her child urged her to go to her.

"To think of him playing the bully in my own house," she deliberated; "the coward, setting a child against her mother! But I know what it's done for. He wants her like wax in his hand –

the hand getting ready to choke the world into submission."

The butler entered with soft step.

"Fraulein begs to say that she will leave for Cologne at 10.30 sharp, and she desires your ladyship to get ready."

"Thank you, my maid shall lay out the new black silk costume. Did you order the horses?"

"Fraulein's secretary is attending to everything," said the butler in a hurt voice. "I don't know by what authority he assumes my duties," he added.

"He shall not do so again, Christian," promised the Baroness.

Three hours later Frau Krupp and Bertha were going the rounds of Cologne's most exclusive shops. The Hochstrasse is too narrow to permit the use of a carriage; the ladies were followed, then, by a train of commissionaires laden with boxes, for Bertha was buying everything in the line of frocks, costumes and millinery that was pretty and expensive. Consult her mother? Not a bit of it. The Court Marshal's instructions were silk, velvet, laces; nothing else mattered.

The shopkeepers, of course, knew Frau Krupp; they had known Bertha familiarly ever since she was in short frocks. The girl of seventeen had blossomed into the richest heiress of the world, yet it would have been almost indecent not to consider the elder woman first.

So the best chair was pushed forward for the Baroness, and man-milliners and *mannequins* fell over each other trying to win her applause for the goods offered. The widow of the Ironmaster

smiled and talked vaguely about their merits, but announced that Bertha was to do her own choosing.

Bertha went about her task like an inexperienced country lass suddenly fallen into a pot of money. The girl seemed to be working under a sense of assertiveness, tempered by responsibility to a higher power. That higher power regarded her mother of no consequence. Though of a naturally dutiful and kindly nature, Bertha assumed an air of independence unbecoming to so young a woman.

Indeed her want of respect was of a piece with her "Uncle Majesty's" behaviour in a little Italian town, when his father lay dying there. The War Lord, then a junior Prince, had crossed the Alps as the representative of his grandsire, head of the State, and instantly presumed to lord over his mother, who was the Princess Royal of an Empire, compared with which his own patrimony is a petty *Seigneurie*.

He arrived on a Saturday night, and at once ordered divine service for seven o'clock next morning, an hour suiting his restlessness and most unsuited to his parent, worn out with night vigils and anxieties.

However, to humour him, and also to gain more time to spend with her ailing husband, the Imperial Mother acquiesced in the arrangement; but imagine her surprise when in the morning she learned at the last moment that, at her son's behest, the House Marshal had not provided carriages as usual, and that she was expected to walk three-quarters of a mile to the chapel.

Meanwhile the official procession of church-goers had started. At the head a platoon of cuirassiers, followed by the Prince's Marshal and staff. Next, his adjutants and a deputation of officers from his regiment; his personal servants in gala livery; finally, himself, walking alone, the observed of all observers.

The father's own household was commanded to fall behind. So were his mother and sisters; the Prince was not at all interested in them. His Royal Mother might lean on the arm of a footman for all he cared.

Here we have an exaggeration of the most repulsive traits of egotism, self-indulgence, callousness, coarseness, cruelty and deceitfulness, for, as intimated, Wilhelm had been careful to keep his parent in ignorance of the affront to be put upon her.

Small wonder that a person so constituted, having vested himself with full charge of a girl's soul and mind as she approached mental and physical puberty, upset her filial equilibrium, while her actions reflected the impress of his own arrogance.

CHAPTER VI

FRAULEIN KRUPP

INVITED TO COURT

The Virtue of a Defect – Bertha's Reception – A Disappointment

There is a streak of malignity in the best of women. Maybe the younger girl has nothing but praise for another a few years her senior, but she will add that naturally "age" inspires respect. Helen has the most beautiful eyes, the daintiest figure, the most transparent complexion, the softest colour, the most exquisite feet, the sweetest smile and the most delightful air of superiority, and when her friend tenders her a box at the Play she will invite some girl conspicuously deficient in most of these excellences – human nature, or just plain, ordinary devilry. So Bertha's mother took a sort of grim satisfaction in the poor taste Bertha displayed in selecting her Court gowns.

"He taught her to ignore her mother even in matters of dress; serves him right if her appearance jars on his sense of beauty," she said to herself more than once when superintending the packing of Bertha's many trunks.

The Baroness had never visited the Berlin Court, and her conception of its splendours resided in her own imagination.

As a matter of fact, the Berlin Court is the home of bad taste;

plenty of fine shoulders, but draped with ugly and inappropriate material. Some few *petite* feet against an overwhelming majority too large and clumsily shod. Some fine arms and hands, since such are subjects of the War-Lord's appreciation, but faces broad, plain and uninteresting.

The taste of a man who allows his wife to keep a bow-legged attendant is necessarily deplorable; a king permitting that sort of thing, despite prevailing fashions, is inexcusable.

An anecdote in point.

When, in the 'nineties, the Medical Congress sat in Berlin, the learned gentlemen were commanded to a reception at the Palace, and in their honour the whole contingent of Court beauties was put on exhibition.

"Did you ever see an uglier lot of women?" asked a Russian professor afterwards, addressing a table full of colleagues. All shook their heads sadly, depressed by the remembrance of what they had witnessed.

Into this *milieu* of hallowed ugliness and organised *ennui* dropped the Krupp heiress like a pink-cheeked apple among a lot of windfalls.

As we know, she was not pretty from the stand-point of the English-speaking races. Her complexion was good, but it lacked the Scottish maid's transparency; her hair was fair to look upon, but there are a thousand English girls travelling on the Underground daily whose glossy tresses are to be preferred; her figure was a little too full, like that of Jerome

Napoleon's Queen, Catherine of Würtemberg, whose finely chiselled bosoms scandalised the Tuileries when she was scarcely sixteen. She had the heavy gait of the German woman, and the vocabulary of them all: "*Oh Himmel,*" "*Ach Gott,*" "*Verdammt,*" and so forth, a dreadful inheritance, which even the "Semiramis of the North" could not shake off after fifty and more years' residence in Imperial Russia.

Her Majesty's maid of honour, Countess von Bassewitz, went to the station with Count Keller, a minor gold stick, to receive and welcome Bertha. Bassewitz was young and pretty – "the only happy isle in an ocean of inelegancy," as Duke Gonthier of Schleswig used to say. Her sole perceptible defect was indifferent hands, but, strange to say, this very blemish got her the position at Court.

The War Lord had declared that he wouldn't have more of the "hideous baggage" (meaning Her Majesty's ladies) that "made his house a nightmare," and that the next Dame du Palais to be appointed was to be good-looking, or must wear a bell, so that he could keep out of her way. His Queen, who regards all women through the jaundiced lorgnette of jealousy, was in despair. In her mind's eye she saw the Schloss peopled with Pompadours, Du Barrys and Dianes de Poitiers.

The War Lord had instructed the Court Marshal to demand photographs of applicants for the vacant post, and Countess von Bassewitz's he considered the most promising. "Wire her to report to-morrow morning at eight," he ordered. She arrived

while the War Lord was busy lecturing his Council of Ministers on international law, and Her Majesty saw the candidate first. She couldn't help admitting to herself that Ina was comely in the extreme, and that it would require a vast deal of intrigue to induce her husband not to appoint the young girl forthwith. Then a happy thought struck her. "You may remove your gloves," she said condescendingly.

Countess Ina blushed and grew pale in turn; conscious of her weak point, she was afraid it would work her undoing.

But, instead, Her Majesty smiled benignly upon those unlovely hands.

"His Majesty!" announced the valet de chambre.

"Be gloved, my child; hurry."

The War Lord didn't know what to make of it when "Dona" approved of his selection.

"She is mysteriously confiding," he said to his crony, Maxchen (the Prince of Fürstenberg). But he changed his mind when, a week or two later, he had induced Ina to take off her gloves in his presence.

The War Lord had instructed Bassewitz and Keller to treat Bertha "like a raw egg," saying: "Her income is bigger per minute than that of all you Prussian Junkers per annum" – a gratuitous slap, the more ungenerous since the old Kings of Prussia gobbled up a goodly part of their landed possessions, as Bismarck once pointed out to Frederick William IV.

Berlin pomp and circumstance! Three flags, paper flowers on

lanterns, a much-worn red carpet leading from the spot where Bertha's saloon carriage was to draw up to the royal reception room in the station.

As Bertha, though Grand-Lady-Armouress-of-the-World, has no place in the Army List, she must be content with walking through lines of royal footmen in black and silver, on which account the War Lord sincerely pitied the girl. "Twenty marks for a precedent to endow her with a uniform," but even the obsequious Eulenburg failed to discover an excuse.

Inside the Royal waiting-room: red-plush furniture, with covers removed, in garish glory; a bouquet of flowers from the Potsdam hothouses; a silver teapot steaming; on a silver platter four bits of pastry, one for each person and one over to show that we are not at all niggardly – oh, dear, no!

The stationmaster enters in some kind of uniform, a cocked and plumed hat above a red face, toy sword on thigh. "The train is about to draw into the station, Herr Graf, and may it please Her Ladyship."

Countess von Bassewitz starts for the door. "One moment, pray," admonishes gold stick, "the noblesse doesn't run its feet off to greet a commoner even if she is laden with money."

Courtiers suit their vocabulary to their lord and master. Countess Bassewitz is young and hearty. Never before had she reflected on the sad fact that Bertha lacked birth, but now that a gold stick had mentioned it, a mere maid of honour must needs bow to superior judgment.

So the richest girl in the world was left standing in the doorway of her saloon carriage for a good half-minute before their Majesties' titled servants deigned to approach. "Will take some of the purse-pride out of her," observed Count Keller.

Then, hat in hand and held aloft, three bows, well measured, not too low, for high-born personages' privileges must not be encroached upon.

"Aham, Aham" (several courtly grunts, supposed to be exquisitely *recherché*), "Fraulein Krupp, I have the honour – Count Keller – Countess von Bassewitz, dame to Her Majesty. Had a pleasant journey I hope," delivered in nasal accents. In Germany, you must know, it is considered most aristocratic to trumpet one's speech through the nose after the fashion of bad French tenors chanting arias.

Countess von Bassewitz, amiable and enthusiastic, spouted genuine civilities. "Fraulein looks charming!" "What a pretty frock!" "I will show you all around the shops," and more compliments and promises of that kind.

Childlike, Bertha had expected a coach-and-four. Another disappointment! The carriage at the royal entrance was of the most ordinary kind – a landau and pair of blacks, such as are driven about Berlin by the dozen.

"If you please," said Count Keller, bowing her into the coach. She planted herself boldly in the right-hand corner, facing the horses. Bassewitz looked horror-stricken at the heiress's cool assumption of the gold stick's place, and to smooth him over

attempted to take the rear seat; but Bertha pulled her to her side. "Don't leave me," she whispered, with a look upon the ruffled face of the Count, who marvelled that there was no earthquake or rain of meteors because he was obliged to ride backwards, with a "mechanic's daughter" in the seat of honour.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE CROWN PRINCE'S PRIVATE ROOM

A Talk with the Crown Prince – Matrimonial Affairs – Bertha Discussed – The Empress and Her Sons

The War Lord had not taken any notice of Frederick the Great's injunction against "useless beggar princes." At the time of Bertha's visit six of them, ranging from twenty-one to thirteen years of age, were roaming the palace, and there was a little girl of eleven besides. Only the eldest boy was provided for, by the Crown Prince's Endowment Fund; the rest were booked to live by the grace of their father's munificence and such moneys as could be squeezed out of the public in the shape of military and administrative perquisites, unless they contracted advantageous marriages; for while the Prussian allows himself to be heavily taxed for the Civil List, that jolly institution, grants for His Majesty's sisters, cousins and aunts has no place in his catalogue of loyalty.

Talking one day to his heir, the War Lord broached the subject of a money-marriage.

"But mother didn't have any money," the *bête noire*, Crown Prince William, had the temerity to interpose.

"No cash, it's true; but our marriage quasi-legitimatised our

acquisition of Schleswig-Holstein, and those provinces are worth something."

"Perhaps I had better marry Alexandra or Olga Cumberland," suggested young William, "so that the possession of Hanover can no longer be disputed. These girls have coin besides."

"Don't speak of them – there are reasons."

"Or a Hesse girl of the Electoral Branch."

"And turn Catholic like Princess Anna," cried the War Lord furiously. "Shut up about that Danish baggage. I myself will get you a wife. Trust father to find you the *comme il faut* wife — *comme il faut* in every respect: politics, family, religion and personal attractiveness, for we want no ugly women in our family."

The Crown Prince opened his mouth for a pert reply, but William forestalled him by an imperious gesture.

"I am preparing a message for the Ministerial Council."

In the evening William invited his younger brothers – Eitel, Albert, Augustus and Oscar – to his rooms, providing a bottle of beer and two cigarettes per head. Having attained his majority and consequently succeeded to the Dukedom of Oels, the Brunswick inheritance, he might have offered the boys a real treat, champagne and tobacco *ad lib.*, but such would have been against Prussian tradition, which stands for parsimony at home and display where it spells cheap glory.

"Joachim wanted to be of the party," said Augustus.

"And tell Mamma all – not if I know myself. It's time the kid

was in bed anyhow," said the Crown Prince with fine scorn, for Joachim was only thirteen years old at the time.

"He will tell all the same," suggested Albert.

"And will get a thrashing for his pains. Besides, I shall withdraw my allowance of three marks per week. Tell him so, that will settle the mamma-child."

"He shall have it straight from the shoulder; you can rely on that, Duke of Oels," said Eitel.

"Oels," repeated Eitel, "why didn't you inherit Sibyllenort too? The idea, giving Sibyllenort to those sanctimonious Saxons."

"Rotten, to be sure. But old William was eccentric, you know, like his brother, the Diamond Duke," said the Crown Prince.

"The Diamond Duke; wasn't he the chap who made some Swiss town erect him a monument, omitting the proviso that it must not tumble down?" asked Albert, who sets up as a scholar.

"Precisely so, and the monument is dust."

Prince William shook with laughter. "But that's not the question before the house." Willy assumed the oratorical pose favoured by Herr Liebnecht, the Socialist. "Boys," he continued, actually using the German equivalent for the familiar term, "what do you think? Father presumed to find me a wife – me!"

He repeated the personal pronoun three or four times with increasing emphasis, while beating the board with his clenched fist – a very good imitation of the War Lord himself.

"I am not beholden to him financially like you, not at all,"

cried the Crown Prince. "He can keep his miserable fifteen thousand thalers per annum.

"No," he added quickly, after reflection; "it will be the greater punishment to take his money."

The Crown Prince continued: "And if father dares propose wife-finding for *me*, what will he do to you, boys? If he has his way, you won't marry the girl of your choice, but some political or military possibility. There is only one way to prevent it," insisted the Crown Prince. "We must all stand together, declaring our firm determination to do our own wooing without interference from father. He will plead politics, interests of the Fatherland. But for my part, I won't have father impose a wife on me, even if the alliance gained us half of Africa or Persia."

"And I won't marry a Schleswig," said Eitel.

"Nor I a Lippe, no matter how much Aunt Vicky cracks up Adolph's family."

"Now then, all together," declaimed the Crown Prince. "We, Princes Wilhelm, Eitel, Albert, Augustus and Oscar of Prussia, solemnly swear not to have wives imposed upon us for reasons of State or politics, father's threats, entreaties and personal interests notwithstanding."

The boys repeated the impromptu troth word for word. "Shake on that," said Wilhelm, holding out his hand. And the agreement was so ratified. Then another round of beer on the Duke of Oels.

As the Princes were draining their *Seidels*— conspicuous for the emblem of the Borussia Students' Club of Bonn University

on the cover – a low whistle was heard outside.

"The mater," whispered Oscar.

"Push the *Seidels* into the centre," commanded the Crown Prince, helping vigorously. He pushed a concealed button and the centre of the table with its contents disappeared through an opening in the floor, while another set with glasses of lemonade and cakes shot into its place, the floor likewise filling up again.

The Princes were petrified with amazement. "Duplicate of the Barbarina *table de confiance*," explained the big brother; "had it secretly copied and installed without my Grand Master being the wiser."

This sort of table was invented by Frederick the Great for *tête-à-tête* confidences with Barbarina, the famous Italian beauty.

The sight of the lemonade made the Empress radiant. "And I had been told that you were up to all sorts of tricks," she said apologetically. And to the Crown Prince: "I am so glad you are setting your younger brothers a good example."

"Always, mother, always," vowed Wilhelm. "Believe me, if these boys were as abstemious as I, they would save fortunes out of their lieutenant's allowance."

"I came to prepare you for our visitor, Fraulein Bertha Krupp," began the Empress.

"A mere kid, isn't she?" cried Eitel in his most blasé air.

"Don't let your father hear that," said the Empress severely; and again addressing the Crown Prince, she continued: "She is quite a young lady, well educated and excellently well brought

up. Father wants us all to be particularly nice to his ward – treat her as one of the family."

"I say, mother," interrupted Eitel, "is there to be anything in the way of a matrimonial alliance between a Hohenzollern and the granddaughter of the Essen blacksmith? If so, mark me for the sacrifice. Judged by her photos, Bertha is a bonnie girl, with plenty of life; wouldn't I have a thousand and one uses for her money. To begin with, I would buy myself a hundred saddle horses and a gold wrist-watch, such as English officers wear, also a yacht."

"Not a word about *mésalliance!*" The Empress had grown red in the face, and Eitel made haste to apologise. Putting his arm around his mother's shoulders, he kissed her on the cheek and pleaded: "Mother, fancy his Royal Highness, Prince Eitel Frederick of Prussia, marrying anyone not of the blood royal! Of course I was joking. Just tell us, Willy and me, what ought to be done about that little commoner due to-morrow, and big brother and I will see to it that your commands are obeyed to the letter." This with a threatening look upon the younger boys.

"I thought father's injunction to treat her like one of the family would suffice. It means that you must not let her see the gulf between such as she is and Royalty. Show her the sights, but don't boast of anything we've got. Father says she can duplicate the Schloss and Neues Palais, all our palaces with all they contain, without considerable damage to her purse."

"But if none of us is going to marry the little-big gold mine,

and as papa is her guardian and can do as he likes with Bertha, what's the use of truckling to her?" asked Augustus, who has a logical mind.

The Empress who, as a rule, is not good at repartee, immediately replied as if she had foreseen the question. As a matter of fact, the War Lord had thoroughly coached her in what to say.

"Augustus," she replied, "of course your father's will is law with Bertha as with everybody else; but in this case he would rather coax than otherwise, for in a few years, you see, she will attain her majority, and might insist upon taking the bit between her teeth, if in the interval she had been driven too hard."

"Eminently correct," said the Crown Prince. "I endorse every word you say, Mother, and if these youngsters don't want to understand they needn't. They will be made to do as you suggest."

CHAPTER VIII

STORIES OF COURT LIFE

Musical Honours for Bertha – Bertha in a Temper – Luncheon at Court – A Tantalizing Procedure – A British Experience

"Call out the guards when Fraulein Krupp drives up," 'phoned the War Lord to the officer *du jour* from the Council Room between writing a treatise on a scrap-of-paper policy and making an outline of his speech, "An Appeal to Royalism," later delivered at Königsberg.

To have fifty men under a lieutenant exercise their feet on a given spot to the tune of fife and drum for the benefit of a person not born to the purple seems to William the highest honour conferable, a delusion bred by militarism. In the same spirit, the War Lord of Bismarck's time sent his Chancellor the patent of lieutenant-general. "That won't buy me a postage stamp," remarked Bismarck.

The Iron One would have preferred a pipe of tobacco, while his War Lord went about for three days patting himself on the back for his act of generosity and telling everybody within reach of the good fortune which, thanks to his grace, had befallen Bismarck, "really a mere civilian."

Bertha was too young to see the absurdity of the gratuitous manoeuvre, "the sausage intended to knock the side of bacon off

the hook," as they say in Hamburg. It cost the War Lord nothing, made healthy exercise for the soldiers, and Bertha, still a child in experience and mode of thought, was impressed when Count Keller, pricking up his ears at the sound of the drum like an old army horse in a tinker's cart, shot out of his seat, raised his hat and bowed low.

"Signal honour, upon word, Fraulein; unprecedented – almost," he added in an undertone.

And Countess von Bassewitz, rolling her eyes in loyal ecstasy, squeezed Bertha's arm. "Majesty must be exceeding fond of his godchild to treat you like an equal – almost," she too added.

Drum and fife still made for ear-splitting discord when Count Keller handed Bertha out of the carriage. His lordship, by the way, was now congratulating himself on having been deprived of the seat of honour. Small doubt, if he had taken it, it would have been reported to the War Lord, and Majesty, bent on showering Royal honours on the commoner, would have been furious.

Two lackeys at the door, more at the bottom of the stairs, still more on the first landing – men-servants seem to be the only commodity lavishly provided at the Berlin Court.

"*Kammerherr*, the Noble Lord von – " (mentioning some Masurian village) "commanded to the sublime honour – Fraulein Krupp's service" (long intervals between half-sentences to show that the speaker was really a Simon-pure Prussian aristocrat) "beg to submit – with Fraulein's permission – I will conduct Fraulein to her apartments."

Bertha did not understand half the titled personage trumpeted in nasal cacophony, but a word or two from little Bassewitz explained. Then ceremonious leave-taking, as if it was for years; assurances of "unexampled pleasure experienced," of "more in store," and "Majesty is so graciously fond of Fraulein – she ought to be so happy"; in fact, there wasn't a girl "in the wide, wide world so favoured," and more polite fiction of the sort.

Up two flights of stairs; corridor thinly and shingly carpeted; electric bulbs few and far between. Ante-room, saloon and bedchamber. In the first threadbare, red plush furniture. The bedchamber was hung in cretonne of doubtful freshness.

"I trust Fraulein's slightest wishes are anticipated. Princess von Itzenplitz last had these apartments, and was graciously pleased to express her highest satisfaction," boasted the *kammerherr*.

Her Grace of Itzenplitz may have done so, but the richest girl in the world was not inclined to put up with such third-class hotel accommodation!

When the *kammerherr* had bowed himself out Bertha sat down on the edge of the bed and had a good cry. Received like a princess, and housed like a charwoman! But she wasn't going to stand it, not she, Bertha Krupp.

Her assertiveness, newly acquired, but all the stronger for that, made her give a vicious pull to the bell-rope. She hardly noticed that it came off in her hand when a lackey, scenting baksheesh, responded.

"My servants, quick!" she ordered.

"Beg Fraulein's pardon, they haven't yet arrived from the station."

"Didn't Count Keller provide a conveyance for them?" she demanded peremptorily, hoping that her words would reach that worthy. "They must be sent for instantly."

There were sounds of carriage wheels in the courtyard below.

"Wait," cried Bertha; "there they are at last!" She handed the servant a small gold coin. "For the driver; let him keep the change."

The footman withdrew with a broad smile. No doubt he robbed the cabman of half the generous tip.

Torrents of "Ohs!" and "*Ach Gotts!*" when the Essen contingent came in. They had waited more than half an hour for the expected royal carriage, and then in despair took the only public vehicle available.

Bertha's tirewoman inspected the apartment while giving vent to her outraged feelings. "Darling Fraulein can never sleep in that bed. It's as hard as rocks."

"I know," said Bertha. "But what is to be done?"

"I will send Fritz to fetch in the car your own bed, all except the frame," decided the tirewoman after reflection.

"But wouldn't that be an insult to my hosts?" Bertha asked.

"Rubbish! The late Queen Victoria always carried her bed along, even when she came to visit her own daughter in Berlin. Besides, we can plead doctor's orders," said Frau Martha; and when the heiress still seemed doubtful she added: "On my own

responsibility, of course; you don't know anything about it. The Baroness will back me up, I'm sure."

The Krupp footman was accordingly dispatched, and returned two hours later with the bed-furnishings.

Meanwhile Bertha, all in white silk – according to the Court Marshal's command – was waiting upon Her Majesty, who fondly kissed her and inquired most affably after her mother – a regular set of questions afterwards repeated by the War Lord, all his sons, and daughter. They are not very original, these Hohenzollerns.

The Krupp heiress, who, as intimated, was first inclined to be rather proud that the guards were called out in her honour, loathed herself for that weakness ten minutes after penetrating the Imperial circle, for the incessant reference about that piece of pomp made by the royal family and their titled attendants was simply maddening. "Unheard-of honour"; "Must remember it to the end of your days"; "Most unique spectacle in Europe"; "How thoughtful of Majesty"; "Too bad madame, your mother, didn't witness it," were among the least stupid comments assailing Bertha's ears on all sides. The War Lord himself went into raptures of delight, being as pleased with his surprise, as he called it, as a schoolboy with a new top, and then forestalled possible further speculations on the matter of his dispensations of honour by announcing that, in honour of Bertha, he would partake of the family luncheon.

More effusions of delight, more congratulations showered on Bertha: "He must love his godchild very dearly"; "He wouldn't

have done that for the Emperor of China." ...

Luncheon at Court! Bertha had pictured to herself a grand function: courtiers in gold lace, swords at their side; ladies in grand toilettes; swarms of servants in showy liveries; a dozen or more courses, under the direction of the Lord Steward of the Household; golden dinner service à la American multi-millionaire; "heavenly music," and so forth.

Alas! And Bertha had brought her appetite along, the appetite of a growing, young, country lass from a food-worshipping household!

The ladies were dowdy, the gentlemen in ordinary uniform or dressed in abominable Berlin taste; over-loud music, with which the War Lord persistently found fault with both time and execution. The average *Kapellmeister* "had not the shadow of a perception" of the composer's artistic intentions. His views were "plebeian, necessarily – maybe his mother was a washerwoman, poor wench"; and, after all, the War Lord himself must conduct to "get proper results." Of course, everybody was "convinced" of that.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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