

DORAN JOHN

MEMOIR OF QUEEN
ADELAIDE, CONSORT OF
KING WILLIAM IV.

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ADELAIDE OF SAXE-MEINENGEN

Und ich an meinem Abend, wollte,
Ich hätte, diesem Weibe gleich,
Erfüllt was ich erfüllen sollte
In meinen Gränzen und Bereich.

A. VON CHAMISSO.

THE little Duchy of Saxe-Meiningen was once a portion of the inheritance of the princely Franconian house of Henneberg. The failure of the male line transferred it, in 1583, to the family of reigning Saxon princes. In 1680, it fell to the third son of the Saxon Duke, Ernest the Pious. The name of this son was Bernard. This Duke is looked upon as the founder of the House of Meinengen. He was much devoted to the study of Alchemy, and was of a pious turn, like his father, as far, as may be judged by the volumes of manuscript notes he left behind him – which he had made on the sermons of his various court-preachers.

The law of primogeniture was not yet in force when Duke Bernard died, in 1706. One consequence was, that Bernard's three sons, with Bernard's brother, ruled the little domain in common. In 1746, the sole surviving brother, Antony Ulrich, the luckiest of this ducal Tontine, was monarch of all he surveyed, within a limited space. The conglomerate ducal sovereigns were plain men, formal, much given to ceremony, and not much embarrassed by intellect. There was one man, however, who had enough for them all: namely, George Spanginburg, brother of the Moravian bishop of the latter name, and who was, for some time, the Secretary of State at the court of Saxe-Meiningen.

Antony Ulrich reigned alone from 1746 to 1763. He was of a more enlightened character than any of the preceding princes, had a taste for the arts, when he could procure pictures cheaply, and strong inclination towards pretty living pictures, which led to lively rather than pleasant controversies at court. His own marriage with Madame Scharmann disgusted the young ladies of princely houses in Germany, and especially exasperated the aristocracy of Meinengen. They were scarcely pacified by the fact, that the issue of the marriage was declared incapable of succeeding to the inheritance.

The latter fell in 1763 to two young brothers, kinsfolk of Antony, and sons of the late Duke of Gotha, who reigned for some years together. The elder, Charles, died in 1782. From that period till 1803, the other brother, George, reigned alone. He had no sooner become sole sovereign, than he married the Princess Louisa of Hohenlohe Langenburg. At the end of ten years, the first child of this marriage was born, namely Adelaide, the future Queen of England.

Eight years later, in the last year of the last century A.D. 1800, a male heir to the pocket-duchy was born, and then was introduced into Meinengen the law which fixed the succession in the eldest male heir only. Saxe-Meiningen was the last country in Europe in which this law was established.

The father of the Princess Adelaide, like his brother Charles, was a man of no mean powers. Both were condescending enough to visit even the burgher families of Saxe-Meiningen; and Charles had so little respect for vice in high places, that when a German prince acted contrary to the rights of his people, the offender found himself soundly lashed in paper and pamphlet, the pseudonymous signature to which could not conceal the person of the writer – the hasty Duke Charles. If this

sometimes made him unpopular over the frontier, he was beloved within it. How could the people but love a sovereign Duke who, when a child was born to him, asked citizens of good repute rather than of high rank to come and be gossips?

In the revolutionary war, Duke George fought like a hero. At home, he afforded refuge to bold but honest writers, driven from more mighty states. He beautified his city, improved the country; and, without being of great mental cultivation himself, he loved to collect around him, scholars, philosophers, artists, authors, gentlemen. With these he lived on the most familiar terms, and when I say that Schiller and John Paul Richter were of the number, I afford some idea of the society which Duke George cared chiefly to cultivate. He buried his own mother in the common churchyard, because she was worthy, he said, of lying among her own subjects. The majority of these were country folk, but George esteemed the country folk, and at rustic festivals he was not unwilling to share a jug of beer with any of them. Perhaps the rustics loved him more truly than the sages, to whom he proved, occasionally, something wearisome. But these were often hard to please. All, however, felt an honest grief, when, on the Christmas night, of 1803, Duke George died, after a brief illness, caused, it is said, by a neglected cold, and the rage at an urgent demand from the Kaiser, of 60,000 florins, fine-money for knightly orders, ducally declined.

The Duke left a young family, Adelaide, Ida, and his son and successor, Bernard, then only three years of age. The mother of these fatherless children took upon herself the office of guardian, with that of Regent of the duchy. The duties of both were performed with rare judgment and firmness, during a time of much trouble and peril, especially when the French armies were overrunning and devastating Germany.

On the young ladies, gently and wisely reared in this little court, Queen Charlotte had begun to look with the foresight of a mother who had elderly and wayward sons to marry. When the death of the Princess Charlotte of Wales threatened to interrupt the direct succession of the crown, the unmatched brothers of the Regent thought of taking unto themselves wives. Cumberland had married according to his, but to no other person's, liking, hardly even that of his wife. The Dukes of Kent and Cambridge made better choice; and there then remained but the sailor-prince to be converted into a Benedict. The Queen selected his bride for him, and he approved, or acquiesced in the selection. He might, as far as age goes, have been her father, but that was of small account; and when Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen was spoken of, men conversant with contemporary history, knew her to be the good daughter of an accomplished and an exemplary mother.

The preliminaries of the marriage were carried out amid so much opposition, that at one moment the accomplishment of the marriage itself wore a very doubtful aspect. The difficulty was of a pecuniary nature. The Dukes of Kent and Cambridge were content, on the occasion of their respective marriages, to accept an addition to their income of £6,000. The Duke of Cumberland was compelled to rest content, or otherwise, without any addition at all, – save the expenses of a wife. With the Duke of Clarence it was different. He already possessed £18,000 per annum, and ministers resolved, after a private meeting with their supporters, to request the Parliament to allow him an increase of £10,000. On the 13th of April, 1818, a message from the Prince Regent to that effect, was submitted to either House, by Lord Castlereagh and the Earl of Liverpool. In the Commons, the first-named Lord hinted at the dependence of our Princes on the liberality of Parliament, since the time when the crown had surrendered its long uncontrolled disposal of revenues. But the House was not to be "suggested" into a generosity which might be beyond justice. Tierney, the gad-fly of his period, complained of the previous meeting of the friends of ministers, and the communication to them, before it was made to the House, of the amount to be applied for. Methuen insisted, that before the Commons would grant a farthing, they must be made acquainted with all the sources from which the King's sons derived their present revenue, as well as the amount of the revenue itself. Finally, Holme Sumner met the proposal of an additional £10,000, by a counter-proposal of £6,000. This

was carried by a narrow majority of one hundred and ninety-three to one hundred and eighty-four; and when this sum was offered to the Duke, he peremptorily declined to accept it.

Things did not progress more in tune with marriage-bells in the House of Lords. There, when Lord Liverpool stated what his royal client would be contented to receive, Lord King started to his legs and exclaimed, "That the question was not what it might please the Duke of Clarence to take, but what it might please the people to give him!" They were not willing to give what he expected, and for a time it seemed as if there would consequently be no marriage with the Princess of Saxe-Meinengen. But only for a time.

"The Duke of Clarence is going to be married, after all," was a common phrase launched by the newspapers, and taken up by the people, in 1818. If the phrase had but one meaning, it had a double application. In the former sense, it had reference to the disinclination of Parliament to increase his income, without which he had expressed his determination not to marry. It was further applied, however, to the old course of his old loves. There were the years spent with Dora Bland, then "Mrs. Jordan," the actress, – years of an intercourse which had much of the quiet, happy character of a modest English home, – the breaking-up of which brought such great grief to the mother in that home, that even every service subsequently rendered to her, seemed to partake of the quality of offence. It has been registered as such, by those who heard more of the wailing of the Ariadne, than they knew of the groundlessness of it, when vented in reproaches for leaving her unprovided for as well as deserted.

Then the public remembered how this light-of-heart Duke had been a suitor to other ladies. He was the rival of Wellesley Pole, for the favour and the fortune of the great heiress, Miss Tilney Long. That ill-fated lady conferred on this wooer of humbler degree, the office of slaying her happiness, sapping her life, and mining her estate. The other lady, who declined the Duke's offer of his hand, or petition for her own, was Miss Sophia Wykeham, of Thame Park, daughter and sole heiress of an Oxfordshire 'squire. Each lady had merits of her own, and other attractions besides those which lay in the *beaux yeux de sa cassette*; but, perhaps, each remembered the clauses of the royal marriage act; however this may have been, Miss Tilney chose between her suitors, while Miss Wykeham, after turning from the prayer of the Duke, never stooped to listen to a lowlier wooer.

These were the "antecedents" of the lover who, in maturer age, took, rather than asked for, the hand of Adelaide of Saxe-Meinengen. Of all the actions of his life, it was the one which brought him the most happiness; and with that true woman he had better fortune than is altogether merited by a man, who, after a long bachelorship of no great repute, settles down in middle-life to respectability and content, under the influences of a virtuous woman, gifted with an excellent degree of common-sense.

In the dusk of a July evening, in the year 1818, this unwooed bride quietly arrived, with her mother, at Grillon's Hotel, Albemarle Street. She had but cool reception for a lady on such mission as her own. There was no one to bid her welcome; the Regent was at Carlton House at dinner, and the Duke of Clarence was out of town on a visit. Except the worthy Mr. Grillon himself, no person seemed the gladder for her coming. In the course of the evening, however, the Regent drove down to Albemarle Street; and, at a later hour, the more tardy future-husband was carried up to the door in a carriage drawn by four horses, with as much rapidity as became a presumed lover of his age, in whom a certain show of zeal was becoming.

The strangers became at once acquainted; and acquaintance is said to have developed itself speedily into friendship. The family-party remained together till near upon the "wee sma" hours; there was much indulgence there, we are told, of good, honest, informal hilarity; and when the illustrious and joyous circle broke up, the easy grace, frankness, and courtesy of the Regent, and the freedom and light-heartedness of the Duke, are said to have left favourable impressions on both the mother and the daughter.

Quaintest of royal weddings was that which now took place in old Kew Palace. Indeed, there were two, for the Duke of Kent who had gallantly fetched his wife from abroad, and had married her

there, according to Lutheran rites, was now re-married to his bride, according to the forms of the Church of England. Early in the day, there was a dinner, at which the most important personages in that day's proceedings were present. The old house at Kew seemed blushing in its reddest of bricks, out of pure enjoyment. The Regent gave the bride away; and, the ceremony concluded, the wedded couples paid a visit to the old Queen in her private apartment. She was too ill, then, to do more than congratulate her sons, and wish happiness to the married. The Duke and Duchess of Kent thereupon departed, but the Duke and Duchess of Clarence remained, – guests at a joyous tea party, at which the Regent presided, and which was prepared *alfresco*, in the vicinity of the Pagoda. It must have been a thousand times a merrier matter than wedding state-dinners of the olden times, at which brides were wearied into suffering and sulkiness. If the figure about "cups which cheer but not inebriate" had not been worn to the finest tenuity, I might at once give it, here, application and illustration. Suffice it to say, that a more joyous party of noble men and women never met in mirthful greenwood; and when the princely pair took their leave, for St. James's, the Regent led the hilarious cheer, and sped them on their way, with a "hurrah!" worthy of his bright and younger days.

The Regent, undoubtedly, manifested a clearer sense of the fitness of things, on this occasion, than either of the managers of the theatres, honoured by the presence of the newly-married couple soon after the union.

At Drury Lane, was given the "Marriage of Figaro," and Covent Garden complimented the Duke and Duchess with the "Provoked Husband."

It cannot be said that the public looked with much enthusiasm on any of the royal marriages. Such unions with rare exceptions, are unpleasantly free from sentiment or romance; and, in the present instances, there was such a matter-of-fact air of mere "business" about these contracts and ceremonies, such an absence of youth, and the impulses and the dignity of youth, that the indifferent public, even remembering the importance of securing a lineal succession to the throne, was slow to offer either congratulation or sympathy. The caricaturists, on the other hand, were busy with a heavy and not very delicate wit; and fashionable papers, uniting implied censure with faint praise, observed that "the Duchesses of Kent, Clarence, and Cambridge are very deficient in the English language. They can scarcely speak a sentence. They possess most amiable dispositions." It may be added, that they also possessed true womanly qualities which won for them the esteem of husbands, of whom two of the three, at least, had never been remarkable for a chivalrous, a gentlemanlike, a manly respect for women. That was a sort of homage rarely paid by most of the sons of George III., and I am afraid, that our fathers generally are obnoxious to the same remark.

After a brief residence at St. James's, and as brief a sojourn at the Duke's residence in Bushey Park, the Duke and Duchess of Clarence repaired to Hanover, and remained there about a year, – no incident marking the time that is worthy of observation. The issue of this marriage scarcely survived the birth. In March 1819, a daughter was born, but to survive only a few hours. In December 1820, another princess gladdened the hearts of her parents, only to quench the newly-raised joy by her death in March of the following year. The loss was the keener felt because of the hopes that had been raised; and the grief experienced by the Duke and Duchess was tenderly nourished, rather than relieved, by the exquisite art of Chantrey, which, at the command of the parents, reproduced the lost child, in marble, – sleeping for ever where it lay.

The household at Bushey was admirably regulated by the Duchess, who had been taught the duties as well as the privileges of greatness. The fixed rule was, never to allow expenditure to exceed income. It is a golden rule which, when observed, renders men, in good truth, as rich as Croesus. It is a rule which, if universally observed, would render the world prosperous, and pauperism a legend. It was a rule the more required to be honoured in this case, as the Duke had large calls upon his income. When those were provided for, old liabilities effaced, and current expenses defrayed, the surplus was surrendered to charity. There was no saving for the sake of increase of income, – economy was practised for justice-sake, and the Duke and Duchess were so just, that they found themselves able

to be largely generous. With the increased means placed at their disposal by the death of the Duke of York, there was but trifling increase of expenditure. If something was added to their comforts, they benefitted who were employed to procure them; and, if there was some little additional luxury in the rural palace of Bushey, the neighbouring poor were never forgotten in the selfish enjoyment of it.

In 1824, the Duke and Duchess of Clarence had apartments in St. James's Palace, where, however, they seem to have been as roughly accommodated, considering their condition, as any mediaeval prince and princess in the days of stone walls thinly tapestried and stone floors scantily strewn with rushes. The Duke cared little about the matter himself, but he gallantly supported the claims of his wife. In a letter addressed to Sir William Knighton, the King's privy purse, in 1824, he thus expresses himself – from St. James's Palace: —

"His Majesty having so graciously pleased to listen to my suggestion respecting the alteration for the Hanoverian office, at the palace, I venture once more to trouble you on the point of the building intended for that purpose. To the accommodation of the Duchess, this additional slip at the back of the present apartments, would be most to be wished and desired, and never can make a complete Hanoverian office without our kitchen, which the King has so kindly allowed us to keep. Under this perfect conviction, I venture to apply for this slip of building which was intended for the Hanoverian office. I am confident His Majesty is fully aware of the inconvenience and unfitness of our present apartments here. They were arranged for me in 1809, when I was a bachelor, and without an idea at that time of my ever being married, since which, now fifteen years, nothing has been done to them, and you well know the dirt and unfitness for the Duchess of our present abode. Under these circumstances, I earnestly request, for the sake of the amiable and excellent Duchess, you will, when the King is quite recovered, represent the wretched state and dirt of our apartments, and the infinite advantage this slip would produce to the convenience and comfort of the Duchess ... God bless the King and yourself, and ever believe me, &c. – WILLIAM."

Though often as ungrammatical and inelegant, it was seldom the Duke was so explicit in his correspondence as he is in the above letter. Generally, he wrote in ambiguous phrases, very puzzling to the uninitiated; but when his Duchess Adelaide was in question, and her comfort was concerned, he became quite graphic on the "state and dirt" in which they passed their London days, in the old, dingy, leper-house palace of St. James's.

With the exception of the period during which the Duke held the office of Lord High Admiral, 1827-28, – an office which may be said to have been conferred on him by Canning, and of which he was deprived by the Duke of Wellington, – with the exception above noted, this royal couple lived in comparative retirement till the 26th of June, 1830, on which day, the demise of George IV. summoned them to ascend the throne.

It is said that when the news of the death of George IV. was announced to the Duchess of Clarence, the new Queen burst into tears. The prayer-book she held in her hand, at the moment, she conferred on the noble messenger, as a memorial of the incident, and of her regret. The messenger looked, perhaps, for a more costly guerdon; but she was thinking only of her higher and stranger duties. If Queen Adelaide really regretted that these now had claims upon her, not less was their advent regretted by certain of the labouring poor of Bushey, whose harvest-homes had never been so joyous as since the Duke and Duchess of Clarence had been living among them.

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