



Frederick the Great and His Court - A Historical Romance

Louisa Muhlbach

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The palace glittered with light and splendor; the servants ran here and there, arranging the sofas and chairs; the court gardener cast a searching glance at the groups of flowers which he had placed in the saloons; and the major domo superintended the tables in the picture gallery. The guests of the queen will enjoy to-night a rich and costly feast. Every thing wore the gay and festive appearance which, in the good old times, the king's palace in Berlin had been wont to exhibit. Jesting and merrymaking were the order of the day, and even the busy servants were good-humored and smiling, knowing that this evening there was no danger of blows and kicks, of fierce threats and trembling terror. Happily the king could not appear at this ball, which he had commanded Sophia to give to the court and nobility of Berlin.

The king was ill, the gout chained him to his chamber, and during the last few sleepless nights a presentiment weighed upon the spirit of the ruler of Prussia. He felt that the reign of Frederick the First would soon be at an end; that the doors of his royal vault would soon open to receive a kingly corpse, and a new king would mount the throne of Prussia.

This last thought filled the heart of the king with rage and bitterness. Frederick William would not die! he would not that his son should reign in his stead; that this weak, riotous youth, this dreamer, surrounded in Rheinsberg with poets and musicians, sowing flowers and composing ballads, should take the place which Frederick the First had filled so many years with glory and great results.

Prussia had no need of this sentimental boy, this hero of fashion, who adorned himself like a French fop, and preferred the life of a sybarite, in his romantic castle, to the battle-field and the night-parade; who found the tones of his flute sweeter than the sounds of trumpets and drums; who declared that there were not only kings by "the grace of God, but kings by the power of genius and intellect, and that Voltaire was as great a king—yes, greater than all the kings anointed by the Pope!" What use has Prussia for such a sovereign? No, Frederick William would not, could not die! His son should not reign in Prussia, destroying what his father had built up! Never should Prussia fall into the hands of a dreaming poet! The king was resolved, therefore, that no one should know he was ill; no one should believe that he had any disease but gout; this was insignificant, never fatal. A man can live to be eighty years old with the gout; it is like a faithful wife, who lives with us even to old age, and with whom we can celebrate a golden wedding. The king confessed to himself that he was once more clasped in her tender embraces, but the people and the prince should not hope that his life was threatened.

For this reason should Sophia give a ball, and the world should see that the queen and her daughters were gay and happy...



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