

"As for that," said the Duke, with a chuckle, "I am not afraid. I defy him to do his worst; and I am willing to wager that I shall be a match for him. However," he added, "you're an entertaining fellow; so come and see me again whenever you please."

And thus, by the wish of the Duchess's husband himself, the ducal "hawker" became a daily visitor at the palace, entertaining His Highness with his chatter, and, when his back was turned, making love to his wife, and joining her in shrieks of laughter at his easy gullibility.

Thus many happy weeks passed, Gasparini, the pedlar, selling few volumes, but reaping a rich harvest of stolen pleasure, and revelling in an adventure which added such a new zest to a life sated with more humdrum love-making. But even the Duchess's charms began to pall; the ladies he had left so disconsolate in Paris were inundating him with letters, begging him to return to them--letters, all forwarded to him from his chateau at Richelieu, where he was supposed to be in retreat. The lure was too strong for him; and, taking leave of the Duchess in floods of tears, he returned to his beloved Paris to fresh conquests.

And thus it was with the gay Duc until the century that followed that of his birth was drawing to its close; until its sun was beginning to set in the blood of that Revolution, which, if he had lived but one year longer, would surely have claimed him as one of its first victims. Three wives he led to the altar--the last when he had passed into the eighties--but no marital duty was allowed to interfere with the amours which filled his life; and to the last no pity ever gave a pang to the "conscience" which allowed him to pick and fling away his flowers at will, and to trample, one after another, on the hearts that yielded to his love and trusted to his honour.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE INDISCRETIONS OF A PRINCESS

It was an ill fate that brought Caroline, Princess of Brunswick-Wolfenbuettel to England to be the bride of George, Prince of Wales, one April day in the year 1795; although probably no woman has ever set forth on her bridal journey with a lighter or prouder heart, for, as she said, "Am I not going to be the wife of the handsomest Prince in the world?" If she had any momentary doubt of this, a glance at the miniature she carried in her bosom reassured her; for the pictured face that smiled at her was handsome as that of an Apollo.

No wonder the Princess's heart beat high with pride and pleasure during that last triumphal stage of her journey to her husband's arms; for he was not only the handsomest man, with "the best shaped leg in Europe," he was by common consent the "greatest gentleman" any Court could show. Picture him as he made his first appearance at a Court ball. "His coat," we are told, "was of pink silk, with white cuffs; his waistcoat of white

silk, embroidered with various-coloured foil and adorned with a profusion of French paste. And his hat was ornamented with two rows of steel beads, five thousand in number, with a button and a loop of the same metal, and cocked in a new military style." See young "Florizel" as he makes his smiling and gracious progress through the avenues of courtiers; note the winsomeness of his smiles, the inimitable grace of his bows, his pleasant, courtly words of recognition, and say if ever Royalty assumed a form more agreeable to the eye and captivating to the senses.

"Florizel" was indeed the most splendid Prince in the world, and the most "perfect gentleman." He was also, though his bride-to-be little knew it, the most dissolute man in Europe, the greatest gambler and voluptuary--a man who was as false to his friends as he was traitor to every woman who crossed his path, a man whom no appeal of honour or mercy could check in his selfish pursuit of pleasure.

"I look through all his life," Thackeray says, "and recognise but a bow and a grin. I try and take him to pieces, and find silk stockings, padding, stays, a coat with frogs and a fur collar, a star and blue ribbon, a pocket handkerchief prodigiously scented, one of Truefitt's best nutty brown wigs reeking with oil, a set of teeth and a huge black stock, under-waistcoats, more under-waistcoats, and then--nothing. French ballet-dancers, French cooks, horse-jockeys, buffoons, procuresses, tailors, boxers, fencing-masters, china, jewel and gimcrack-merchants--these were his real companions."

Such was the husband Princess Caroline came so light-heartedly, with laughter on her lips, from Brunswick to wed, little dreaming of the disillusion and tears that were to await her on the very threshold of the life to which she had looked forward with such high hopes.

We get the first glimpse of Caroline some twelve years earlier, when Sir John Stanley, who was making the grand tour, spent a few weeks at her father's Court. He speaks of her as a "beautiful girl of fourteen," and adds, "I did think and dream of her day and night at Brunswick, and for a year afterwards I saw her for hours three or fours times a week, but as a star out of my reach." Years later he met her again under sadly changed conditions. "One day only," he writes, "when dining with her and her mother at Blackheath, she smiled at something which had pleased her, and for an instant only I could have fancied she had been the Caroline of fourteen years old--the lovely, pretty Caroline, the girl my eyes had so often rested on, with light and powdered hair hanging in curls on her neck, the lips from which only sweet words seemed as if they would flow, with looks animated, and always simply and modestly dressed."

Lady Charlotte Campbell, too, gives us a glimpse of her in these early and happier years, before sorrow had laid its defacing hand on her. "The Princess was in her early youth a pretty girl," Lady Charlotte says, "with fine light hair--very delicately formed features, and a fine complexion--quick, glancing, penetrating eyes, long cut and rather small in the head, which gave them much expression; and a remarkably delicately formed mouth."

It was in no happy home that the Princess had been cradled one May day in 1768. Her father, Charles William, Duke of Brunswick, was an austere soldier, too much absorbed in his military life and his mistress, to give much thought to his daughters. Her mother, the Duchess Augusta, sister of our own George III., was weak and small-minded, too much occupied in self-indulgence and scandal-talking to trouble about the training of her children.

Princess Caroline herself draws an unattractive picture of her home-life, in answer to Lady Charlotte Campbell's question, "Were you sorry to leave Brunswick?" "Not at all," was the answer; "I was sick tired of it, though I was sorry to leave my fader. I loved my fader dearly, better than any oder person. But dere were some unlucky tings in our Court which made my position difficult. My fader was most entirely attached to a lady for thirty years, who was in fact his mistress. She was the beautifullest creature and the cleverest, but, though my fader continued to pay my moder all possible respect, my poor moder could not suffer this attachment. And de consequence was, I did not know what to do between them; when I was civil to one, I was scolded by the other, and was very tired of being shuttlecock between them."

But in spite of these unfortunate home conditions Caroline appears to have spent a fairly happy girlhood, thanks to her exuberant spirits; and such faults as she developed were largely due to the lack of parental care, which left her training to servants. Thus she grew up with quite a shocking disregard of conventions, running wild like a young filly, and finding her pleasure and her companions in undesirable directions. Strange stories are told of her girlish love affairs, which seem to have been indiscreet if nothing worse, while her beauty drew to her many a high-placed wooer, including the Prince of Orange and Prince George of Darmstadt, to all of whom she seems to have turned a cold shoulder.

But the wilful Princess was not to be left mistress of her own destiny. One November day, in 1794, Lord Malmesbury arrived at the Brunswick Court to demand her hand for the Prince of Wales, whom his burden of debts and the necessity of providing an heir to the throne of England were at last driving reluctantly to the altar. And thus a new and dazzling future opened for her. To her parents nothing could have been more welcome than this prospect of a crown for their daughter; while to her it offered a release from a life that had become odious.

"The Princess Caroline much embarrassed on my first being presented to her," Malmesbury enters in his diary--"pretty face, not expressive of softness--her figure not graceful, fine eyes, good hands, tolerable teeth, fair hair and light eyebrows, good bust, short, with what the French call 'des epaules impertinentes,' vastly happy with her future expectations."

Such were Malmesbury's first impressions of the future Queen of England, whom it was his duty to prepare for her exalted station--a duty which he seems to have taken very seriously, even to the regulating of her toilette and her manners. Thus, a few days after setting eyes on her, his diary records: "She will call ladies whom she meets for the first time 'Mon coeur, ma chère, ma petite,' and I am obliged to rebuke and

correct her." He lectures her on her undignified habit of whispering and giggling, and impresses on her the necessity of greater care in her attire, on more constant and thorough ablution, more frequent changes of linen, the care of her teeth, and so on--all of which admonitions she seems to have taken in excellent part, with demure promises of amendment, until he is impelled to write, "Princess Caroline improves very much on a closer acquaintance--cheerful and loves laughing. If she can get rid of her gossiping habit she will do very well."

Thus a few months passed at the Brunswick Court. The ceremonial of betrothal took place in December--"Princess Caroline much affected, but replies distinctly and well"; the marriage-contract was signed, and finally on 28th March the Princess embarked for England on her journey to the unseen husband whose good-looks and splendour have filled her with such high expectations. That she had not yet learnt discretion, in spite of all Malmesbury's homilies, is proved by the fact that she spent the night on board in walking up and down the deck in the company of a handsome young naval officer, conduct which naturally gave cause for observation and suspicion in the affianced bride of the future King of England.

It was well, perhaps, that she had snatched these few hours of innocent pleasure: for her first meeting with her future husband was well calculated to scatter all her rosy dreams. Arrived at last at St James's Palace, "I immediately notified the arrival to the King and Prince of Wales," says Malmesbury; "the last came immediately. I accordingly introduced the Princess Caroline to him. She very properly attempted to kneel to him. He raised her gracefully enough, and embraced her, said barely one word, turned round and retired to a distant part of the apartment, and calling to me said: 'Harris, I am not well; pray get me a glass of brandy.' I said, 'Sir, had you not better have a glass of water?' Upon which he, much out of humour, said with an oath: 'No; I will go directly to the Queen,' and away he went. The Princess, left during this short moment alone, was in a state of astonishment; and, on my joining her, said, '\_Mon Dieu\_, is the Prince always like that? I find him very fat, and not at all as handsome as his portrait.'"

Such was the Princess's welcome to the arms of her handsome husband and to the Court over which she hoped to reign as Queen; nor did she receive much warmer hospitality from the Prince's family. The Queen, who had designed a very different bride for her eldest son, received her with scarcely disguised enmity, while the King, although, as he afterwards proved, kindly disposed towards her, treated her at first with an amiable indifference. And certainly her attitude seems to have been calculated to create an unfavourable impression on her new relatives and on the Court generally.

At the banquet which followed her reception, Malmesbury says, "I was far from satisfied with the Princess's behaviour. It was flippant, rattling, affecting raillery and wit, and throwing out coarse, vulgar hints about Lady----, who was present. The Prince was evidently disgusted, and this unfortunate dinner fixed his dislike, which, when left to herself, the Princess had not the talent to remove; but by still observing the same giddy manners and attempts at cleverness and coarse sarcasm, increased

it till it became positive hatred."

"What," as Thackeray asks, "could be expected from a wedding which had such a beginning--from such a bridegroom and such a bride? Malmesbury tells us how the Prince reeled into the Chapel Royal to be married on the evening of Wednesday, the 8th of April; and how he hiccuped out his vows of fidelity." "My brother," John, Duke of Bedford, records, "was one of the two unmarried dukes who supported the Prince at the ceremony, and he had need of his support; for my brother told me the Prince was so drunk that he could scarcely support himself from falling. He told my brother that he had drunk several glasses of brandy to enable him to go through the ceremony. There is no doubt that it was a \_compulsory\_ marriage."

With such an overture, we are not surprised to learn that the Royal bridegroom spent his wedding-night in a state of stupor on the floor of his bedroom; or that at dawn, when he had slept off the effects of his debauch, "pages heard cries proceeding from the nuptial chamber, and shortly afterwards saw the bridegroom rush out violently."

Nor, we may be sure, was the Prince's undisguised hatred of his bride in any way mitigated by the stories which Lady Jersey and others of her rivals poured into his willing ears--stories of her attachment to a young German Prince whom she was not allowed to marry; of a mysterious illness, followed by a few weeks' retreat; of that midnight promenade with the young naval officer; of assignations with Major Toebingen, the handsomest soldier in Europe, who so proudly wore the amethyst tie-pin she had presented to him--these and many another story which reflected none too well on her reputation before he had set eyes on her. But it needed no such whispered scandal to strengthen his hatred of a bride who personally repelled him, and who had been forced on him at a time when his heart was fully engaged with his lawful wedded wife, Mrs Fitzherbert, when it was not straying to Lady Jersey, to "Perdita" or others of his legion of lights-o'-love.

From the first day the ill-fated union was doomed. One violent scene succeeded another, until, before she had been two months a wife, the Prince declared that he would no longer live with her. He would only wait until her child was born; then he would formally and finally leave her. Thus, three months after the birth of the Princess Charlotte, the deed of separation was signed, and Caroline was at last free to escape from a Court which she had grown to detest, with good reason, and from a husband whose brutalities and infidelities filled her with loathing.

*April 1796.*

She carried with her, however, this consolation, that the "great, hearty people of England loved and pitied her." "God bless you! we will bring your husband back to you," was among the many cries that greeted her as she left the palace on her way to exile. But, to quote Thackeray again, "they could not bring that husband back; they could not cleanse that selfish heart. Was hers the only one he had wounded? Steeped in selfishness, impotent for faithful attachment and manly enduring love--had it not survived remorse, was it not accustomed to desertion?"

For a time the outcast Princess, with her infant daughter, led a retired

life amid the peace and beauty of Blackheath, where she lived as simply as any bourgeoisie, playing the "lady bountiful" to the poor among her neighbours. Her chief pleasure seems to have been to surround herself with cottage babies, converting Montague House into a "positive nursery, littered up with cradles, swaddling-bands, feeding bottles, and other things of the kind."

But even to this rustic retirement watchful eyes and slanderous tongues followed her; and it was not long before stories were passing from mouth to mouth in the Court of strange doings at Blackheath. The Princess, it was said, had become very intimate with Sir John Douglas and his lady, her near neighbours, and more especially with Sydney Smith, a good-looking naval captain, who shared the Douglas home, a man, moreover, with whom she had had suspicious relations at her father's Court many years earlier. It was rumoured that Captain Smith was a frequent and too welcome guest at Montague House, at hours when discreet ladies are not in the habit of receiving their male friends. Nor was the handsome captain the only friend thus unconventionally entertained. There was another good-looking naval officer, a Captain Manby, and also Sir Thomas Lawrence, the famous painter, both of whom were admitted to a suspicious intimacy with the Princess of Wales.

These rumours, sufficiently disquieting in themselves, were followed by stories of the concealed birth of a child, who had come mysteriously to swell the numbers of the Princess's proteges of the creche. Even King George, whose sympathy with his heir's ill-used wife was a matter of common knowledge, could not overlook a charge so grave as this. It must be investigated in the interests of the State, as well as of his family's honour; and, by his orders, a Commission of Peers was appointed to examine into the matter and ascertain the truth.

The inquiry--the "Delicate Investigation" as it was appropriately called--opened in June, 1806, and witness after witness, from the Douglasses to Robert Bidgood, a groom, gave evidence which more or less supported the charges of infidelity and concealment. The result of the investigation, however, was a verdict of acquittal, the Commissioners reporting that the Princess, although innocent, had been guilty of very indiscreet conduct--and this verdict the Privy Council confirmed.

For the Princess it was a triumphant vindication, which was hailed with acclamation throughout the country. Even the Royal family showed their satisfaction by formal visits of congratulation to the Princess, from the King himself to the Duke of Cumberland who conducted his sister-in-law on a visit to the Court.

But the days of Blackheath and the amateur nursery were at an end. The Princess returned to London, and found a more suitable home in Kensington Palace for some years, where she held her Court in rivalry of that of her husband at Carlton House. Here she was subjected to every affront and slight by the Prince and his set that the ingenuity of hatred could devise, and to crown her humiliation and isolation, her daughter Charlotte was taken from her and forbidden even to recognise her when their carriages passed in the street or park.

Can we wonder that, under such remorseless persecutions, the Princess became more and more defiant; that she gave herself up to a life of recklessness and extravagance; that, more and more isolated from her own world, she sought her pleasure and her companions in undesirable quarters, finding her chief intimates in a family of Italian musicians; or that finally, heart-broken and despairing, she determined once for all to shake off the dust of a land that had treated her so cruelly?

In August, 1814, with the approval of King and Parliament, the Princess left England to begin a career of amazing adventures and indiscretions, the story of which is one of the most remarkable in history.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE INDISCRETIONS OF A PRINCESS--\_continued\_

When Caroline, Princess of Wales, shook the dust of England off her feet one August day in the year 1814, it was only natural that her steps should first turn towards the Brunswick home which held for her at least a few happy memories, and where she hoped to find in sympathy and old associations some salve for her wounded heart.

But the fever of restlessness was in her blood--the restlessness which was to make her a wanderer over the face of the earth for half a dozen years. The peace and solace she had looked for in Brunswick eluded her; and before many days had passed she was on her way through Switzerland to the sunny skies of Italy, where she could perhaps find in distraction and pleasure the anodyne which a life of retirement denied her. She was full of rebellion against fate, of hatred against her husband and his country which had treated her with such unmerited cruelty. She would defy fate; she would put a whole continent between herself and the nightmare life she had left behind, she hoped for ever. She would pursue and find pleasure at whatever cost.

In September, within five weeks of leaving England, we find her at Geneva, installed in a suite of rooms next to those occupied by Marie Louise, late Empress of France, a fugitive and exile like herself, and animated by the same spirit of reckless revolt against destiny--Marie Louise, we read, "making excursions like a lunatic on foot and on horseback, never even seeming to dream of making people remember that, before she became mixed up with a Corsican adventurer, she was an Archduchess"; the Princess of Wales, equally careless of her dignity and position, finding her pleasure in questionable company.

"From the inn where she was stopping she heard music, and, quite unaccompanied, immediately entered a neighbouring house and disappeared in the medley of dancers." A few days later, at Lausanne, "she learned that a little ball was in progress at a house opposite the 'Golden Lion,' and she asked for an invitation. After dancing with everybody and anybody, she finished up by dancing a Savoyard dance, called a

fricassee, with a nobody. Madame de Corsal, who blushed and wept for the rest of the company, declares that it has made her ill, and that she feels that the honour of England has been compromised." Thus early did Caroline begin that career of indiscretion, to call it by no worse name, which made of her six years' exile "a long suicide of her reputation."

In October we find the Princess entering Milan, with her retinue of ladies-in-waiting, chamberlains, equerry, page, courier, and coachman, and with William Austin for companion--a boy, now about thirteen, whom she treated as her son, and who was believed by many to be the child of her imprudence at Blackheath, although the Commission of the "Delicate Investigation" had pronounced that he was son of a poor woman at Deptford. At Milan, as indeed wherever she wandered in Italy, the "vagabond Princess" was received as a Queen. Count di Bellegarde, the Austrian Governor, was the first to pay homage to her; at the Scala Theatre, the same evening, her entry was greeted with thunders of applause, and whenever she appeared in the Milan streets it was to an accompaniment of doffed hats and cheers.

One of her first visits was to the studio of Giuseppe Bossi, the famous and handsome artist, whom she requested to paint her portrait. "On Thursday," Bossi records, "I sketched her successfully in the character of a Muse; then on Friday she came to show me her arms, of which she was, not without reason, decidedly vain--she is a gay and whimsical woman, she seems to have a good heart; at times she is ennuyee through lack of occupation." On one occasion when she met in the studio some French ladies, two of whom had been mistresses of the King of Westphalia, the poor artist was driven to distraction by the chatter, the singing, and dancing, in which the Princess especially displayed her agility, until, as he pathetically says, "the house seemed possessed of the devil, and you can imagine with what kind of ease it was possible for me to work."

Before leaving Milan the Princess gave a grand banquet to Bellegarde and a number of the principal men of the city--a feast which was to have very important and serious consequences, for it was at this banquet that General Pino, one of her guests, introduced to Caroline a new courier, a man who, though she little dreamt it at the time, was destined to play a very baleful part in her life.

This new courier was a tall and strikingly handsome man, who had seen service in the Italian army, until a duel, in which he killed a superior officer, compelled him to leave it in disgrace. At the time he entered the Princess's service he was a needy adventurer, whose scheming brain and utter lack of principle were in the market for the highest bidder. "He is," said Baron Ompteda, "a sort of Apollo, of a superb and commanding appearance, more than six feet high; his physical beauty attracts all eyes. This man is called Pergami; he belongs to Milan, and has entered the Princess's service. The Princess," he significantly adds, "is shunned by all the English people of rank; her behaviour has created the most marked scandal."

Such was the man with whose life that of the Princess of Wales was to be so intimately and disastrously linked, and whose relations with her were



to be displayed to a shocked world but a few years later. It was indeed an evil fate that brought this "superb Apollo" of the crafty brain and conscienceless ambition into the life of the Princess at the high tide of her revolt against the world and its conventions.

When Caroline and her retinue set out from Milan for Tuscany it was in the wake of Pergami, who had ridden ahead to discharge his duties as avant courier; but before Rome was reached his intimacy and familiarity with his mistress were already the subject of whispered comments and shrugged shoulders. At a ball given in her honour at Rome by the banker Tortonina, the Princess shocked even the least prudish by the abandon of her dancing and the tenuity of her costume, which, we are told, consisted of "a single embroidered garment, fastened beneath the bosom, without the shadow of a corset and without sleeves." And at Naples, where King Joachim Murat gave her a regal reception, with a sequel of fetes and gala-performances in honour of the wife of the Regent of England, she attended a rout, at the Teatro San Carlo, so lightly attired "that many who saw her at her first entrance looked her up and down, and, not recognising her, or pretending not to recognise her, began to mutter disapprobation to such an extent that she was compelled to withdraw.... The English residents soon let her understand, by ceasing to frequent her palace, that even at Naples there were certain laws of dress which could not be trampled underfoot in this hoydenish manner."

While Caroline was thus defying convention and even decency, watchful eyes were following her everywhere. A body of secret police, whose headquarters were at Milan, was noting every indiscretion; and every week brought fresh and damaging reports to England, where they were eagerly welcomed by the Regent and his satellites. And while the Princess was thus playing unconsciously, or recklessly, into the hands of the enemy, Pergami was daily making his footing in her favour more secure. Before Caroline left Naples he had been promoted from courier to equerry, and in this more exalted and privileged role was always at her side. So marked, in fact, was the intimacy even at this early stage, that the Princess's retinue, one after another, and on one flimsy pretext or another, deserted her in disgust, each vacancy, as it occurred, being filled by one of Pergami's relatives--his brother, his daughter, his sister-in-law (the Countess Oidi), and others, until Caroline was soon surrounded by members of the ex-courier's family.

From Naples she wandered to Genoa, and from Genoa to Milan and Venice, received regally everywhere by the Italians and shunned by the English residents. From Venice she drifted to Lake Como, with whose beauties she was so charmed that she decided to make her home there, purchasing the Villa del Garrovo for one hundred and fifty thousand francs, and setting the builders to work to make it a still more splendid home for a future Queen of England. But even to the lonely isolation of the Italian lakes the eyes of her husband's secret agents pursued her, spying on her every movement--"uncertain shadows gliding in the twilight along the paths and between the hedges, and even in the cellars and attics of the villa"--until the shadowy presences filled her with such terror and unrest that she sought to escape them by a long tour in the East.

Thus it was that in November, 1815, the Princess and her Pergami household set forth on their journey to Sicily, Tunis, Athens, the cities of the East and Jerusalem, the strange story of which was to be unfolded to the world five years later. How intimate the Princess and her handsome, stalwart courier had by this time become was illustrated by the Attorney-General in his opening speech at her memorable trial. "One day, after dinner, when the Princess's servants had withdrawn, a waiter at the hotel, Gran Bretagna, saw the Princess put a golden necklace round Pergami's neck. Pergami took it off again and put it jestingly on the neck of the Princess, who in her turn once more removed it and put it again round Pergami's neck."

As early as August in this year Pergami had his appointed place at the Princess's table, and his room communicating with hers, and on the various voyages of the Eastern tour there was abundant evidence to prove "the habit which the Princess had of sleeping under one and the same awning with Pergami."

But it is as impossible in the limits of space to follow Caroline and her handsome cavalier through every stage of these Eastern wanderings, as it is unnecessary to describe in detail the evidence of intimacy so lavishly provided by the witnesses for the prosecution at the trial--evidence much of which was doubtless as false as it was venal. That the Princess, however, was infatuated by her cavalier, and that she was in the highest degree indiscreet in her relations with him, seems abundantly clear, whatever the precise degree of actual guilt may have been.

Pergami had now been promoted from equerry to Grand Chamberlain to Her Royal Highness, and as further evidence of her favour, she bought for him in Sicily an estate which conferred on its owner the title of Baron della Francina. At Malta she procured for him a knighthood of that island's famous order; at Jerusalem she secured his nomination as Knight of the Holy Sepulchre; and, to crown her favours, she herself instituted the Order of St Caroline, with Pergami for Grand Master. Behold now our ex-courier and adventurer in all his new glory as Grand Chamberlain and lover of a future Queen of England, as Baron della Francina, Knight of two Orders and Grand Master of a third, while every post of profit in that vagrant Court was held by some member of his family!

The Eastern tour ended, which had ranged from Algiers and Egypt to Constantinople and Jerusalem, and throughout which she had progressed and been received as a Queen, Caroline settled down for a time in her now restored villa on Lake Como, celebrating her return by lavish charities to her poor neighbours, and by popular fetes and balls, in one of which "she danced as Columbine, wearing her lover's ear-rings, whilst Pergami, dressed as harlequin and wearing her ear-rings, supported her."

But even here she was to find no peace from her husband's spies, whose evidence, confirmed on oath by a score of witnesses, was being accumulated in London against the longed-for day of reckoning. And it was not long before Caroline and her Grand Chamberlain were on their wanderings again--this time to the Tyrol, to Austria, and through Northern Italy, always inseparable and everywhere setting the tongue of

scandal wagging by their indiscreet intimacy. Even the tragic death in childbirth of her only daughter, the Princess Charlotte, which put all England in mourning, seemed powerless to check her career of folly. It is true that, on hearing of it, she fell into a faint and afterwards into a kind of protracted lethargy, but within a few weeks she had flung herself again into her life of pleasure-chasing and reckless disregard of convention.

But matters were now hurrying fast to their tragic climax. For some time the life of George III. had been flickering to its close. Any day might bring news that the end had come, and that the Princess was a Queen. And for some time Caroline had been bracing herself to face this crisis in her life and to pit herself against her enemies in a grim struggle for a crown, the title to which her years of folly (for such at the best they had been) had so gravely endangered. Over the remainder of her vagrant life, with its restless flittings, and its indiscretions, marked by spying eyes, we must pass to that February morning in 1820 when, to quote a historian, "the Princess had scarcely reached her hotel (at Florence) when her faithful major-domo, John Jacob Sicard, appeared before her, accompanied by two noblemen, and in a voice full of emotion announced, 'You are Queen.'"

The fateful hour had at last arrived when Caroline must either renounce her new Queendom or present a bold front to her enemies and claim the crown that was hers. After a few indecisive days, spent in Rome, where news reached her that the King had given orders that her name should be excluded from the Prayer Book, her wavering resolution took a definite and determined shape. She would go to London and face the storm which she knew her coming would bring on her head.

At Paris she was met by Lord Hutchinson with a promise of an increase of her yearly allowance to fifty thousand pounds, on condition that she renounced her claim to the title of Queen, and consented never to put foot again in England--an offer to which she gave a prompt and scornful refusal; and on the afternoon of 5th June she reached Dover, greeted by enthusiastic cheers and shouts of "God save Queen Caroline!" by the fluttering of flags, and the jubilant clanging of church-bells. The wanderer had come back to the land of her sorrow, to find herself welcomed with open arms by the subjects of the King whose brutality had driven her to exile and to shame.

The story of the trial which so soon followed her arrival has too enduring a place in our history to call for a detailed description--the trial in which all the weight of the Crown and the testimony of a small army of suborned witnesses--"a troupe of comedians in the pay of malevolence," to quote Brougham--were arrayed against her; and in which she had so doughty a champion in Brougham, and such solace and support in the sympathy of all England. We know the fate of that Bill of Pains and Penalties, which charged her with having permitted a shameful intimacy with one Bartolomeo Pergami, and provided as penalty that she should be deprived of the title and privilege of Queen, and that her marriage to King George IV. should be for ever dissolved and annulled--how it was forced through the House of Lords with a diminishing majority, and finally withdrawn. And we know, too, the

outburst of almost delirious delight that swept from end to end of England at the virtual acquittal of the persecuted Caroline. "The generous exultation of the people was," to quote a contemporary, "beyond all description. It was a conflagration of hearts."

We also recall that pathetic scene when Caroline presented herself at the door of Westminster Abbey to demand admission, on the day of her husband's coronation, to be received by the frigid words, "We have no instructions to allow you to pass"; and we can see her as, "humiliated, confounded, and with tears in her eyes," she returned sadly to her carriage, the heart crushed within her. Less than three weeks later, seized by a grave and mysterious illness, she laid down for ever the burden of her sorrows, leaving instructions that her tomb should bear the words:

CAROLINE  
THE INJURED QUEEN OF ENGLAND.

As for Pergami, the idol with the feet of clay, who had clouded her last years in tragedy, he survived for twenty years more to enjoy his honours and his ill-gotten gold; while William Austin, who had masqueraded as a Prince and called Caroline "mother," ended his days, while still a young man, in a madhouse.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE LOVE-AFFAIRS OF A REGENT

When Louis XIV. laid down, one September day in the year 1715, the crown which he had worn with such splendour for more than seventy years, his sceptre fell into the hands of his nephew Philippe, Duc d'Orleans, who for eight years ruled France as Regent, and as guardian of the child-King, the fifteenth Louis.

Seldom in the world's history has a reign, so splendid as that of the Sun-King, closed in such darkness and tragedy. The disastrous war of the Spanish Succession had drained France of her strength and her gold. She lay crushed under a mountain of debt--ten thousand million francs; she was reduced to the lowest depths of wretchedness, ruin, and disorder, and it was at this crisis in her life as a nation that fate placed a child of four on her throne, and gave the reins of power into the hands of the most dissolute man in Europe.

Not that Philippe of Orleans lacked many of the qualities that go to the making of a ruler and a man. He had proved himself, in Italy and in Spain, one of the bravest of his country's soldiers, and an able, far-seeing leader of armies; and he had, as his Regency proved, no mean gifts of statesmanship. But his kingly qualities were marred by the taint of birth and early environment.