

with this determination," said the chancellor; "will you suffer a boyish caprice to mar the glory of your reign, and let the crown which encircled the brow of Gustavus Vasa, be worn by a stranger?"

The king resumed his seat and sunk into a deep reverie. The respect he felt for the chancellor made him diffident of avowing his romantic determination of wooing one of the fair originals of the portraits before him, in his own person. Yet his resolution was taken, and, after a few minutes of intense deliberation, he determined to abide by it.

"Oxenstiern!" he cried; "I have ever considered you more in the light of a father and friend than as a subject whose services I could claim as a right. Listen to me—the land is at peace, the sound of joy is in every dwelling, and, for some months to come, our enemies are not in a condition to make head against us. My presence at Stockholm is only required to see justice properly administered, and to form plans of future conquest, to add to the glory of my country; but these affairs are of little importance at the present moment, and can be regulated as well at a distance, through the medium of a faithful friend like you, as if Gustavus were himself on the spot."

"What are your majesty's intentions?" exclaimed the chancellor, in a tone of considerable alarm, and very unceremoniously breaking in upon the long speech, with which the young monarch prefaced the disclosure he was about to make.

"I do not wonder at your want of courtesy," said the king, bursting into a hearty laugh; "by St. Herbertus! I should be tired of the prologue to such a farce myself. In matters of love, as well as of war, it is the best plan to come to the point at once,—as we did with the Poles at the storming of Raunsburg, but as I had to lay siege to the wisdom and experience of forty years, for once in my life I thought it best to be wary, lest the enemy should force me to abandon the trenches. Nay, do not look so provokingly grave, my dear Oxenstiern, I have a mind to act the part of a lover as well as that of a soldier, and woo a bride for myself, without the interposition of a third person, who in nine cases out of ten, wins the heart he is sent to secure for his master. It is my royal intention to leave Stockholm incognito tomorrow evening, and commence my travels in search of a wife."

"Sire, you will never gain my consent to take so rash and ill advised a step," returned the chancellor; "you are still a minor, and must forgive the boldness of a friend, who dares warn you against the danger of such a hazardous enterprise."

"It is useless to oppose my wishes," replied the impatient prince; "if the journey be fraught with danger, the satisfaction of overcoming it will enhance the pleasures of success. I feel confident that heaven will prosper my undertaking, and that I

shall return to Stockholm, the happy husband of a lovely bride."

It was in vain that the chancellor used all the arts of persuasion of which he was master, to dissuade the king from following the bent of his own wishes; he found him inexorable; and at length, not only yielded to his importunities, but entered into his plans, and finally suffered the enterprising prince to leave Stockholm, with no other attendant than a favourite page, the heir of a noble and distinguished family, on whom the king had conferred many marks of his esteem and friendship.

Gustavus found the state of affairs in Germany much as he had predicted. The poorer class of people were writhing under the tyranny of their petty princes, without the power of bettering their condition, or any hope of emancipation from a state of slavery. On the other hand, these oppressive lords of the soil were equally discontented with the emperor, and ready to shake off their allegiance the first opportunity that offered.

While slowly urging his steed through gloomy forests, and over long tracts of uncultivated ground, the mind of the Swedish monarch was entirely employed in arranging those mighty plans of conquest which in after years he carried effectually into execution.

Under the title of Count Dahl, he visited every court in the empire, boldly plunging into scenes of dissipation and pleasure, to gain a greater insight into the morals and manners of the princes and nobles of the land.

His elegant manners and perfect knowledge of polite literature, and the grace and fluency with which he spoke the French and German languages, made his company eagerly sought after by men of taste and learning, and rendered him an object of envy to the gay and thoughtless votaries of pleasure.

The haughty and apathetic indifference the ladies of rank evinced for worth and genius, when unconnected with immense wealth and very exalted station, so completely disgusted our royal adventurer, that he was on the point of giving up his romantic enterprize, and had come to the notable conclusion that love in Germany was still confined to their amatory songs and fables, when he caught the rosy god in the very act of directing his keenest arrows from the dark eyes of the sprightly and beautiful Sophia of Mecklenburg.

Diminutive in stature, but exquisitely formed, Sophia possessed every requisite charm to make a finished beauty, and her personal advantages were aided by a quick wit and lively engaging manner. When she sang, the most apathetic bent forward to listen—when she danced, a graceful carriage only acquired greater ease by increased rapidity of motion. Her laugh was irresistible, and the opening of her lips displayed a double row of pearls set in a casket of rubies. Gustavus was dazzled with her