ELIZABETH



EMPRESS OF AUSTRIA AND QUEEN OF HUNGÀRY

KŰCHLER

PRESENTED BY PDF AI



ELIZABETH as the young Empress

LIFE STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

ELIZABETH

EMPRESS OF AUSTRIA AND QUEEN OF HUNGARY

Translated from the German of Carl Küchler

BY

GEORGE P. UPTON

Translator of "Memories," "Immensee," etc.

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS



CHICAGO
A. C. McCLURG & CO.
1909

COPYRIGHT
A. C. MCCLURG & CO.
1909
Published August 21, 1909

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, U.S.A.

Translator's Preface

The story of the life of Elizabeth of Bavaria, Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary, is one of the saddest in the history of royalty, and in some respects recalls the story of the life of Marie Antoinette. Both their lives were sorrowful, both ended tragically, the one at the hands of an assassin, the other upon the guillotine. Elizabeth will not be remembered in history as a sovereign, for everything connected with the throne and with court life was distasteful to her, but rather as the beautiful, sorrowful daughter of the Wittelsbachs. She was not only one of the most beautiful women of her time, but an accomplished scholar and linguist, a good musician, and well versed in history, science, and art. She was a passionate lover of the woods and mountains, and was happiest when she was walking or riding among them, or associating with the Hungarian people. She was no more at home with the Viennese than was Marie Antoinette with the Parisians. Her domestic life was saddened by estrangement from her husband, by lack of sympathy among her relatives, by the terrible tragedy which ended the life of her son, Prince Rudolph, and by other tragedies which involved the happiness and sometimes the lives of those nearest to her. At last her sufferings were ended by the dagger of a cruel anarchist assassin. As the author of this volume says: "She died as she had often wished to die, swiftly and painlessly and under the open sky. Who can say that her last breath was not a sigh of thankfulness and peace?"

G. P. U.

CHICAGO, May 10, 1909.

Contents

Chapter		Page
I	The Diamond Wedding	11
II	Birth and Childhood of Elizabeth of Bavaria	19
III	Betrothal of Princess Elizabeth	25
IV	The Wedding Ceremonies	32
V	First Troubles	40
VI	Travels and Sorrows	46
VII	Birth of Crown Prince Rudolf	53
VIII	Elizabeth's Illness and Sojourn in Madeira	58
IX	The Express' Flight from Vienna	63
X	The Coronation in Hungary	67
XI	The Archduchess Marie Valerie	72
XII	The Castle of Gödöllö	77
XIII	The Empress in Vienna	83
XIV	Marriage of Crown Prince Rudolf	88
XV	King Ludwig Second of Bavaria	96
XVI	The Empress' Travels	101
XVII	The Empress' Literary Tastes	110
XVIII	Daily Life of the Empress	114
XIX	Death of Crown Prince Rudolf	119
XX	Death of the Empress	128
	Appendix	139

Illustrations

ELIZABETH AS THE YOUNG EMPRESS	*Frontispiece*
EMPEROR FRANZ JOSEPH IN HIS TWENTY-EIGHTH YEAR	34
CROWN PRINCE RUDOLF	90
EMPRESS ELIZABETH IN LATER YEARS	122

Elizabeth

Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary

Chapter I

The Diamond Wedding

On the ninth of September, 1888, an unusual event occurred in the princely house of Wittelsbach. Maximilian Joseph, the head of the ducal line of Vorpfalz-Zweibrücken-Birkenfeld, and his wife Ludovica (Louise), daughter of King Maximilian First of Bavaria and his second wife, Caroline of Baden, celebrated on that day their diamond wedding, both bride and groom having been barely twenty years old at the time of their marriage.

Few princely couples have been closely connected with so many of the reigning families of Europe. Their eldest son, Ludwig Wilhelm, renounced the succession to wed an actress, Henrietta Mendel, who had received the title of Countess Wallersee. Helene, the eldest daughter, married the Hereditary Prince of Thurn and Taxis, and their daughter Louise, by her alliance with Frederick of Hohenzollern, formed new ties between the Wittelsbachs and the royal house of Prussia. The next daughter was Elizabeth of Austria-Hungary, whose son in his turn took for his bride the King of Belgium's daughter, Stephanie. After Elizabeth, in the family, came Karl Theodore, well known as an oculist, and, on his father's death, the head of the ducal line of Wittelsbach. He first married his cousin Sophie, daughter of King John of Saxony; the second and present wife is Marie Josepha, Princess of Portugal. Two other daughters, Marie and Mathilde, allied themselves with the younger branch of the Bourbons. Marie became the wife of King Francis Second of Naples and Mathilde married his half-brother, Count Louis of Trani. The

youngest daughter, Sophie, was betrothed at one time to her cousin, King Ludwig Second of Bavaria, but afterwards married Duke Ferdinand d'Alençon, nephew of Louis Philippe of France, while the youngest son, Max Emanuel, married Amélie of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, thereby becoming connected by marriage with Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria.

The Wittelsbachs have always been eccentric. Mental disorders have been common with them, and during the last century between twenty and thirty members of the family have died insane. Yet in spite of their peculiarities and eccentricities they have always been exceedingly popular with their subjects, as much for their personal charm as for their devotion to the happiness and welfare of their people. The annals of Bavaria have little to record of treason or conspiracy against the princes of the land, but tell much of the loyalty and sacrifices of life and property on the part of the people. 13

Duke Maximilian Joseph was born at Bamberg, December 4, 1808. He was the son of the weak-minded Duke Pius Augustus of Bavaria and his wife, Amélie Louise, Princess of Arenberg. "The good Duke Max," as he was called by the people, was the only direct descendant of his grandfather, while his wife, on the other hand, was the youngest of a large family of sisters. Two had been princesses of Saxony and one a Queen of Prussia, while the fourth was the mother of the Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria-Hungary. King Ludwig First of Bavaria was a half-brother, and there were also two half-sisters. One was married first to the King of Würtemberg and afterwards to the Emperor Francis First of Austria-Hungary; the other became the wife of Napoleon's stepson, Eugene Beauharnais, and the grandmother of Kings Charles Fifteenth and Oscar Second of Norway and Sweden.

Thus most of the dynasties of Europe were interested in the festivities in honor of the aged pair, and sent congratulations to the secluded spot on Starnberg Lake, where the event was 14

celebrated, and where many touching proofs of the loyalty of the people of Bavaria were also received.

Maximilian Joseph belonged to the most eccentric and popular branch of the Bavarian royal family. Educated directly under the eye of his grandfather, his childhood had been spent partly in Bamberg, partly in Munich. At the age of eighteen he entered the University of Munich, where he applied himself assiduously to the study of history, natural science, and political economy, and on coming of age he was given, as provided by the Bavarian constitution, a seat in the Senate chamber. But he did not aspire to fame, either as orator or statesman; nor did he strive for military distinction, though at the age of thirty he was assigned to the command of a regiment of cavalry and in 1857 was invested with the rank of general. His natural love for science, literature, and art more often led him to exchange his uniform for the simple civilian dress.

During the youth of the Duke a musician, named Johann Petzmacher, created a great stir. He was born in 1803, the son of an innkeeper in Vienna, and in his eighteenth year accidentally learned to play the homely zither with which the mountaineers of the Austrian and Bavarian highlands accompany their folk songs. He soon became so absorbed in the possibilities of this instrument that he gave up everything else to devote himself to it. His fame as a performer soon spread far and wide. He played before the most select circles of Vienna and even at court, and made tours throughout Germany, being received everywhere with the greatest enthusiasm. Duke Max first heard him in 1837 at a concert in Bamberg, and determined to learn to play the zither under the master's direction. Petzmacher was introduced to the would-be virtuoso, and from that time until his death made his home with his art-loving patron. The Duke in 1838 undertook a long journey through Asia and Africa, and his musician friend accompanied him. Savages listened with delight to his

playing, and as the two friends sat on the top of the Egyptian pyramids or camped in the hot desert sands, the homely melodies carried their thoughts back to loved ones in Germany, and dangers and hardships were forgotten. While on this journey Duke Max wrote several musical compositions which were afterwards performed in public and received with great applause. Under the name of "Phantasus," he wrote a collection of dramatic poems and novels that showed no small literary talent. More noteworthy than these, however, is his "Travels in the Orient," a book of considerable merit. On his return to Bavaria he had a circus ring constructed in the rear of his palace in the Ludwigstrasse, at Munich, which aroused much curiosity, where he frequently made his appearance as ringmaster with members of the Bavarian nobility as circus riders and performers.

16

It was only during the winter months that he remained in Munich. All through the Summer and Autumn he lived with his family at his castle Possenhoffen, beautifully situated on Lake Starnberg. This picturesque region, shut in by a chain of lofty Alps, seems as if created to inspire poetical sentiment, and various members of the art-loving Bavarian royal family have built summer palaces there.

17

Max Joseph was an enthusiastic hunter and spent whole days roaming through the forests and mountains about Possenhoffen. Enjoyment of the beauties of nature was one of his passions, and he often came out in the Winter for a few days at a time. On these excursions he wore a simple hunting costume,—short gray jacket, open shirt with suspenders, feathered cap, knickerbockers with long stockings, and heavy-soled shoes. He generally went about on foot, but sometimes made use of the mail-coach, the usual mode of conveyance at that time. His fellow travellers seldom suspected that the good-natured huntsman who chatted so freely with them was a duke and the brother-in-law of their sovereign. He was continually besieged with petitions, and rarely did any one

appeal in vain to the comparatively poor but warm-hearted prince. His benevolence was one of the chief causes for his popularity in Munich, though he was most beloved by the people as the gay zither player who with his instrument under his arm would enter their cottages quite like one of themselves, and play for the young people who were never weary of dancing to his music.

His wife was very different. She had not his artistic, impulsive temperament, and the good-humored simplicity with which he mingled with the common people did not altogether meet with her approval. The proper maintenance of her position seemed no more than a duty due to her high birth and rank, and for this reason she was never as popular as her husband, though her many admirable qualities commanded the greatest respect and admiration during the sixty years that she remained mistress of Possenhoffen. She was naturally endowed with a good mind and had been carefully educated. Honesty and love of truth were among her most marked characteristics, and all her life she held firmly to what after mature reflection she believed to be right. Like the Duke, she preferred the seclusion of the country to city life, and all through their happy married life she acted as a balance to her loving but restless husband as well as friend and adviser of her children, who adored and looked up to her always. Her glance was keen but kindly. Smiles came easily to her lips, and there was an air of distinction about her that sprang from true nobility of heart. She was one of those strong souls born to help others, but in little need of support themselves. She was by no means unambitious for her children, though the trials suffered because of them taught her by degrees to place less value upon outward splendor. She disliked to excite personal attention and cared only to live as quietly and modestly as possible.

Chapter II

Birth and Childhood of Elizabeth of Bavaria

It was the Christmas Eve of 1837. The bells of Munich were proclaiming the festival when Max Joseph, wandering about in one of the poorer quarters of the city, met a woman dragging herself painfully toward him with a bundle of firewood on her back. She addressed him with the usual Bavarian greeting,

"Praised be Jesus Christ!"

"For ever and ever, Amen!" replied the Duke, adding kindly, "Why are you carrying such a load upon your back this holy Christmas Eve?"

"I will tell you why, gracious Duke," said the woman; "it is because my children have no Christmas gifts, and I have been in the forest gathering wood so that they may at least enjoy a warm room."

"You did right," returned the Duke. "As for me, I have already received my Christmas gift, for my wife presented me to-day with a charming little daughter who is to be called Liese, and I am so happy over it I wish you too to have a Merry Christmas."

He wrote her name and address in his notebook, and after the darkness had fallen two servants appeared at the poor woman's dwelling with two heavy baskets filled with food. At the bottom of each was a banknote for a considerable sum.

The child born on this day was Elizabeth, afterward Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary. In many countries it is regarded as a sign of misfortune to be born on Christmas Eve, but the happy childhood of the little princess had no foreshadowing of the experiences of her after life. Most of her early years were spent at Possenhoffen, which her father had bought some time before her birth. The great park and surrounding forests were the child's first playgrounds, and developed in her sensitive soul a deep love of nature and of freedom.

The Duchess's chief concern was the education of her eldest daughter, of whom she had great hopes. Helene was nearly four years older than her sister and was the favorite of the mother, whom she resembled both in character and appearance. Overshadowed by her seemingly superior talents, with no interest in books and ignorant of the requirements of court life, Elizabeth—or "Sissi," as she was called—grew up almost unnoticed. She loved her sister with the enthusiasm of youth and with the natural tendency of the ignorant to look up to those more clever than themselves, but her father and brothers were dearer to her than either sister or mother.

The little girl was the darling of the Duke. She had inherited his love of nature, roamed about constantly with him through the mountains, visiting the peasants' huts, and learned to look at life and people through his eyes. Her bringing up in no way fitted her for the high station she was afterward to occupy. At the end of her fifth year she was given a governess, but "Sissi," though an unusually gentle and lovable child, soon learned how to wind her teacher round her finger and concerned herself little about study, for which she had no love. The Empress used to declare that in her youth she was the most ignorant princess in Europe, and the little she did know had been learned as she sat on her father's knee. But if not over-taxed with lessons, her education in other branches was by no means neglected. The Duke was determined that

his children should be well developed physically, and one of the best dancing masters of the time was summoned to Possenhoffen to teach Elizabeth and her sisters to dance and carry themselves properly. Even in her later years the Empress was an excellent walker and famous for her easy, graceful carriage.

"Walking never tires me," she said once to one of her attendants, "and I have my father to thank for it. He was an indefatigable hunter and wanted my sisters and myself to be able to leap and spring like the chamois." She also learned to swim and ride and dearly loved to sit a horse and feel the wind blowing through her hair. She was never happier than when riding about Lake Starnberg on her little pony, and in the winter, when forced to stay in the capital, it was her greatest joy to escape to the stables, where she would mount the most unmanageable horses that could be found. One day while playing circus, as she often did, she was thrown by a wild, full-blooded animal. Her governess uttered a shriek of terror, but Elizabeth quickly rose to her feet, neither frightened nor hurt, and laughingly besought permission to mount the horse again, which the terrified governess refused to grant. The happiest time in the whole year to her was when the warm spring days made it possible for them to return to Possenhoffen and she could enjoy unlimited freedom once more. She was passionately fond of flowers, and it is still told among the Bavarian Alps how "Liese of Possenhoffen" used to scramble about the wild unbeaten mountain paths to return at last with her arms full of edelweiss.

Her father taught her to play the zither, and she often went with him on long tramps among the Alps, stopping now and then for rest and refreshment at some hut where they would play dance music on their own instruments or on some they found there. On one occasion they had done this in a remote region where the huntsman and his daughter were not known, and the people gave the pretty child a piece of money in

payment. Elizabeth always kept it. “It is the only money I ever earned,” she once said, when showing it to an acquaintance. There was never much pocket money for her to buy presents with, and she used often to spend the evenings knitting stockings for her mountain friends or sewing on some piece of needlework. The country folk about Possenhoffen idolized the little Liese, and when overtaken by one of the autumn storms she would often take refuge in their huts, quite alone, and sit down by the fire to chat and laugh with old or young. Her parents saw nothing amiss in this. Duke Max liked nothing better than to enter into the lives of his people, and when the mother was told how her daughter ran about with her brothers or played the zither in hovels while the peasants danced she but smiled indulgently, saying: “She is only a child. I will take her education in hand later on.”

This free life at Possenhoffen taught the little Elizabeth to regard the woods and mountains as her second home, and the most splendid halls of the palace seemed small and stifling to her in comparison. It no doubt exerted a marked influence on her later development, and possibly furnished a clue to her character as Empress of Austria. Had her childhood been different, she would unquestionably have been better fitted for the position she was soon to occupy.

Chapter III

Betrothal of Princess Elizabeth

One of the first journeys Elizabeth made with her parents and sisters was to Ischl. It was there that Franz Joseph's parents were in the habit of spending the summer months, and the two sisters, the Archduchess Sophie and the Duchess Ludovica, had agreed to meet here in the Summer of 1853. The five years that had passed since the Emperor's accession to the throne had been years of struggle and anxiety. Only a few months before, he had been wounded by the dagger of an assassin. The internal disorders of the Empire, however, had not prevented his name from being linked with that of various European princesses,—reports which were finally silenced by his clever and strong-willed mother, who swayed him completely and had determined that a princess of her own house should share her son's double throne. This was natural enough. Both the Wittelsbachs and Hapsburgs are among the oldest reigning families of Europe, both have remained loyal to the Roman Catholic Church, and for six hundred years alliances between them have been common.

The Archduchess had heard much of the talent and amiability of her sister's daughter Helene. She and the Duchess Ludovica were on the best of terms and had already secretly decided on the marriage. It only remained for the young people to meet and take a fancy to each other,—a matter of some concern to the Emperor, who, though an obedient son, was also a passionate admirer of the fair sex. It was certainly mutual attraction that drew Franz Joseph and Elizabeth together, though there are many tales told of how their

betrothal came about. The following account, however, is probably nearest the truth.

On the sixteenth of August, 1853, the Emperor went to visit his parents at Ischl and meet Max Joseph's family. As the travelling carriage rolled along the dusty highway, his adjutant suddenly uttered a cry of admiration:

"Look, your Majesty, look yonder!"

Franz Joseph drew out his field glass and caught a glimpse of a beautiful child playing with a flock of goats on a meadow near by. The next instant the road turned and the town appeared in sight.

An hour later he was sitting with his mother when a young girl burst into the room, unannounced, with a bunch of wild roses in her hand. She wore a short white frock, and a mass of silky chestnut hair fell in soft waves about her slender figure. It was the same youthful beauty he had seen from the carriage. It was the first time they had met, but she recognized him at once from the portraits she had seen, and without a trace of embarrassment approached and greeted him, saying heartily:

"How do you do, cousin?"

"Who are you?" inquired the Emperor, almost fearing lest the lovely apparition might vanish before his eyes.

"I am Elizabeth!"

The smile in the wonderful blue eyes won his heart upon the spot.

A few hours later he was presented to the Princess Helene, who, if not beautiful, was a bright, intelligent-looking girl with an air of great distinction. Had not Franz Joseph seen

Elizabeth first, Helene would undoubtedly have become his Empress. The same day he was to dine with his aunt and uncle. As he entered their hotel in Ischl, he heard two voices from behind a half-closed door.

"I beg of you not to go out, Princess!" said one; "you know it has been forbidden."

"That is the very reason why I want to," retorted the other in soft girlish tones which he recognized; and the next moment Elizabeth stood before him, all smiles and blushes.

"Why must you not go out?" he asked.

"Because I am only a child and am not expected to appear till my older sister is married. It is all your fault, and I shall have to eat by myself, too!"

"Princess, what are you thinking of?" cried the governess, who now made her appearance, crimson with anger. "Pardon, your Majesty!" she added, turning to the Emperor, "but I have had strict orders."

Without heeding her, he offered his arm to the young girl.

"Let us go out together, cousin," he said.

"No, no, I dare not!" she replied in alarm. "Papa would be furious."

"Come back!" cried the governess, and taking advantage of her pupil's momentary hesitation, she drew her into the room and closed the door with a low courtesy to the Emperor.

At the close of the meal Franz Joseph turned to the Duke. "I have a favor to ask of my kind host," he said. "Is it not the custom in Bavaria for the children to come in after dinner? I would like to become better acquainted with your second

daughter, whom I saw for a moment at my mother's this morning."

All exchanged glances, and there was a moment's silence, as Duchess Ludovica felt all her hopes for Helene slipping away. The Duke replied: 29

"It shall be as you wish, your Majesty," and in a few moments Elizabeth made her appearance, blushing and frightened.

Franz Joseph had not a high opinion of women as a rule. Young as he was, he had already had some experience of them, but this lovely, innocent child wrought a sudden change in him, and through the political clouds that darkened the first years of his reign love flashed like lightning into his heart. That evening the Archduchess Sophie gave a ball at which both nieces were present. The court, suspecting that fateful events were brewing, watched the Bavarian princesses curiously. The Archduchess showed marked favor to Helene; the son devoted himself to both. When during the cotillion he handed Elizabeth a magnificent bouquet of roses, the interest increased. Would the mother yield to the son, or the son give way to the mother?

Franz Joseph's choice was already made, however, and at the close of the ball he announced that he would have no one but Elizabeth for his wife. The Archduchess' surprise and chagrin at the failure of her cherished plan knew no bounds, but she determined not to oppose her son's choice. She had wanted him to marry her other niece, hoping to rule her as she did him; if the crown were to go to an immature child of sixteen instead of her clever sister of twenty, no doubt it would be so much the easier. 30

At nine o'clock the next morning the royal carriage stopped before Max Joseph's door. The Emperor hastened up the steps, asked for an interview with the Duke and the Duchess, and then and there made a formal request for the hand of

Princess Elizabeth. This was an affront to Helene that neither her father nor her mother found it easy to endure, but the suitor was persistent. If he could not have the one he loved, then he would not marry at all, and at length they were forced to yield. Franz Joseph wanted Elizabeth to be notified at once, but they would not consent to force her in any way. She was still as much a child in heart and feeling as in appearance, and when first told of the Emperor's wishes she clasped her hands in dismay, exclaiming:

"It is impossible! I am much too young!"

Love had entered her dreams, however, even if her heart was not yet awakened. Franz Joseph's impetuous wooing appealed to her impulsive nature. She was attracted by his person and his temperament, and without pausing to reflect, she joyfully promised to be his wife. The betrothal took place on the Emperor's twenty-third birthday, August 18, 1853.

Great were the public rejoicings when the news reached Vienna. The glamour of romance that enveloped the affair appealed to the popular fancy, and a thousand tales were woven about the lovely child who was to be the bride of their young sovereign. Her pictures were scattered broadcast throughout the Empire, and people were never weary of dwelling on her beauty and the simple home life of her early days. During the month that the betrothed pair remained at Ischl with their parents, crowds flocked thither daily to gaze upon their future Empress, and returned full of praises of her modesty and charm.

Chapter IV

The Wedding Ceremonies

On the twentieth of April, 1854, Elizabeth, accompanied by her parents and her two oldest sisters, started on her bridal journey to Vienna. Peasants from all the surrounding country thronged the streets of her native city through which she passed, and, overcome with the grief of parting, she stood up in her carriage and waved a tearful farewell to the cheering crowds.

The steamboat *Stadt Regensburg* conveyed the party from Straubing to Liutz. Work was everywhere suspended as on a holiday, and nothing was thought of but the coming of the long-awaited princess. At Liutz they had to go ashore to change boats, and there Franz Joseph met them, hurrying back to Vienna, however, so as to be there to welcome his bride. The town was buried in flowers. A magnificent arch had been erected. Bonfires burned on all the surrounding heights, while torchlight processions, theatrical performances, and serenades concluded the festivities of the day.

The next morning, April 22, the journey down the Danube was resumed. The *Franz Joseph*, which carried them from Liutz to Mussdorf, was covered with roses from stem to stern, the cabin hung with purple velvet, and the deck transformed into a flower garden. It was a beautiful spring morning. Banners waved from every roof and tower, and the river banks were lined on either side with cheering throngs, eager to catch a glimpse of their future Empress. What they saw was a slender, white-robed figure hastening from one side of the

vessel to the other and bowing continually in response to the storms of greeting of which she never seemed to tire.

Meanwhile, at Mussdorf, the landing place for Vienna, great preparations had been made to welcome her. Since early morning crowds had been flocking thither, waiting with imperturbable patience and struggling to keep the places so hardly won. Near the bridge a pavilion had been erected with a wide portico whose gilded turrets and cupolas gleamed afar, and by noon it was filled with nobles, prelates, high officials, and deputies from the middle classes. Stationed upon a terrace to the right were the foreign ambassadors with their ladies; on the left sat representatives from Vienna and other cities under the Hapsburg rule. The weather had been threatening in the early part of the day, but towards noon heavy gusts of wind scattered the clouds, leaving the bluest of skies to welcome the bridal party. At half-past six the boat touched the shore amid the booming of cannon, strains of music, and the solemn pealing of bells. Franz Joseph hastened forward to embrace his bride, closely followed by his parents, the Archduke Franz Karl and the Archduchess Sophie, who embraced Elizabeth and then led her back to the bridegroom.

At last came the long-awaited moment when Elizabeth, leaning on the Emperor's arm, entered the Austrian capital. From thousands of throats came the shout, "Long live the Emperor's bride!" The sound was so overwhelming that Elizabeth stood for some moments by her lover's side as if spellbound; then, as her glance swept slowly over the excited throng, she smiled charmingly and waved her handkerchief to the delighted spectators. Many years have passed since that day, many misfortunes have overtaken Austria and the house of Hapsburg, but eyewitnesses are still living who remember that moment and tell of the picture the fair young princess made as she then appeared in all her exquisite loveliness.



EMPEROR FRANZ JOSEPH in his twenty-eighth year

The progress from Mussdorf to Schönbrunn was a continuous ovation. At half-past seven they reached the gates of the old palace, where the Emperor once more bade his bride welcome before leading her up the great staircase, which was decorated from top to bottom with tropical plants and flowers. On the

following day the state entry into Vienna took place. Every house had been decorated by loving hands, and the streets through which the bride was to pass were perfect rivers of flowers. The Elizabeth Bridge, which connected Vienna with the suburb of Wieden or "An der Wien," was opened that day and given the name of the Empress.[1] Here the mayor and council of the city were stationed to welcome her. About the eight statues of famous men which adorned the bridge, thousands of rare shrubs and blossoms from the hothouses of Princes Lichtenstein and Schwarzenberg, the fragrance of which filled the whole town, had been effectively arranged. As far as the Corinthian gate stretched a triple wall of citizens, and at short intervals young girls stood strewing flowers.

The thunder of cannon and pealing of bells from every church tower in Vienna and its suburbs proclaimed the starting of the procession. The golden state coach was drawn by eight milk-white horses with tall white plumes on their heads; the harnesses were covered with gold, and the coachman, footmen, and postilions wore white wigs. On the back seat sat the bride with her mother. Her dress was of red satin, embroidered in silver, and over it she wore a white cloak trimmed with garlands of roses. About her neck was a lace handkerchief, and in her beautiful hair sparkled a circlet of diamonds, twined in which was a wreath of red roses. Never had Elizabeth more fitly deserved the name so often given her, never had she more perfectly looked "The Rose of Bavaria."

Early on the morning of April 24, 1854, Te Deums were celebrated in all the churches of Vienna and the august pair attended high mass in the court chapel. By three o'clock in the afternoon the crowds about the Hofburg and the Church of the Augustins, where the ceremony was performed, were so great that barriers had to be erected to keep a way clear for the coaches to pass. From all parts of the Empire and of Europe guests had been pouring into the capital. On the preceding day alone, seventy-five thousand strangers arrived, a most

extraordinary number for those days. Even the Orient—Alexandria, Smyrna, and Salonica—sent representatives to the wedding.

The famous old Church of the Augustins was gorgeously decorated for the occasion. Above the high altar rose a canopy of white velvet embroidered with gold, under which were placed two prie-dieux, also of white velvet. The walls and columns of the church were hung with damask and costly tapestry and the floor was carpeted. From a hundred candelabra countless tapers shed a soft but brilliant light. The Augustin Gallery, which led from the inner apartments of the Hofburg to the church, was similarly decorated and illuminated.

The marriage was to take place at seven o'clock in the evening. By six every available space in the church was filled with invited guests. The gay uniforms of the officers, the many-colored and picturesque court dresses of the Hungarian and Polish nobles, the sparkling jewels of the ladies, the gold-embroidered coats of the ministers and distinguished guests, the red robes of the cardinals, the fantastic costumes of many of the Oriental emissaries, all united to form a scene of incredible magnificence.

At the appointed time Prince Archbishop Rauscher, the Emperor's former tutor, with more than seventy bishops and archbishops in their gold-embroidered vestments, assembled in the sacristy. The master of ceremonies informed his Majesty that all was ready, and the procession entered the Augustin Gallery. First came the pages, stewards, and gentlemen-in-waiting; next the privy councillors and high court officials; then the Archdukes with their chamberlains; and, last of all, the Emperor himself, in the uniform of a field marshal and wearing all his orders. Directly behind the bridegroom came his mother, leading the bride on her left. On Elizabeth's left was her own mother, Duchess Ludovica, and

after them followed the ladies of the court led by the Lord Chamberlain.

38 The bride of sixteen was radiant with all the beauty and happiness of youth. Her wedding gown was of heavy white silk, richly embroidered with gold and silver, over which she wore a loose garment of the same material with long sleeves. A diamond clasp held the long veil of Brussels point lace, and the bridal wreath of fresh myrtle and orange blossoms was secured by a magnificent coronet of diamonds which her mother-in-law had worn at her own marriage and given to Elizabeth as a wedding gift. A diamond necklace encircled her throat, and upon her breast she wore the Bavarian order of Theresa and the Austrian order of the Starry Cross, together with a bunch of white roses.

39 The Emperor and his bride were met at the door of the church by the Prince Archbishop, who sprinkled them with holy water, after which they knelt on the prie-dieux while the other members of the two royal families took their places. After a short prayer Franz Joseph and Elizabeth advanced to the high altar, made their responses, exchanged rings, and clasped hands. As the Archbishop pronounced the Church's blessing at the close of the ritual, a salvo of musketry sounded from the regiment of infantry stationed on the Josephsplatz, and the next instant the thunder of cannon proclaimed that Austria had an Empress and Hungary a Queen.

40

Chapter V

First Troubles

At the time of her marriage Elizabeth was said to be not only the youngest but also the most beautiful Empress that had ever sat on the throne of the Hapsburgs. Her figure was tall and slender, her hands and feet small and well shaped, her features regular and delicate. She had a charming smile, wonderfully expressive dark blue eyes, a beautiful complexion, and a mass of waving chestnut hair that fell about her, when loosened, like a veil, and which she wore either hanging in eight heavy braids or wound like a coronet around her head. With no experience of the world and full of the confidence of youth, she looked forward to her married life as one long holiday. Crowned with love, all hearts should bow before her and she would be the good genius of her people.

But disappointment followed close upon the heels of the first intoxication. If the lower classes were charmed with their Empress, this was far from being the case with an aristocracy that claims to be the most exclusive in Europe, and there were many at court who felt that neither by age nor rank was this daughter of a non-royal Duke fitted to be their sovereign. Instead of being welcomed with open arms, therefore, she encountered only a wall of opposition and intrigue. Far from being the brilliant centre of homage and admiration, as she had dreamed, she was grieved and mortified to find those about her anxious only to deprive her of the honors and influence that were her due. It was most unfortunate that she should have been placed so early in a position requiring the

utmost tact and knowledge without having had any training to fit her for it,—a poor bird that had left the home nest before it had learned to fly! In Bavaria she had been a happy, care-free child, beloved by every one and so full of the joy of life that she seemed to carry with her wherever she went a breath of those woods and mountains she so dearly loved. A Wittelsbach by both lines of descent, she had inherited the characteristics of the race, their pride and independence, honesty and courage, to a striking degree. Even these virtues, however, were but so many dangers, since they made it difficult for her to adapt herself to the rules laid down by court life. Her very youth and freshness were out of place at Schönbrunn and the Hofburg. Her ignorance and inexperience, which were well known in Vienna, made it seem probable that she would prove an easy tool at court, provided she were only amused and flattered sufficiently. But this error was soon discovered. With the peculiarities of her race she had also inherited their marked mental gifts, and young as she was, her mind was quick to grasp whatever interested her and to choose or reject with certainty.

Such a nature could not but rebel against the restraint and monotony of court life. Its pomps and ceremonies wearied her from the first, and little as she resembled Marie Antoinette in other ways, she hated etiquette even more than did that unfortunate Queen. The court of Vienna, which had lived by its conventional usages from time immemorial, regarded as natural and necessary the forms that Elizabeth considered ridiculous and childish. She once aroused a storm of indignation by refusing to appear at the customary state breakfast, which consisted of various hot dishes, and ordering some bread and sausage and a glass of Munich beer to be brought to her in her own apartments. On another occasion, when presiding at one of her first court ceremonials, she took off her gloves, contrary to all custom and tradition. An elderly court dame hastened to remind her of her mistake.

“Why should I not?” inquired the Empress.

“Because it is against the rules of etiquette,” was the answer.

“Then in future let it be proper to break the rule!” she declared. 43

No young husband could have been more devoted than Franz Joseph was to the bride he had found for himself without the aid of ambassador or envoy. “I am beloved as if I were a lieutenant, and as happy as a god!” he wrote to a friend just after the wedding.

And Elizabeth did truly love him, but not as he did her. In spite of the intensity of feeling that showed itself in after life, there was a certain inborn coldness in her nature that made it impossible for her to share his ardor or to understand him always. But it often taxed his devotion and patience to reconcile this freedom-loving child of nature to the restraints and obligations of her new position, and he was many times called upon to make peace between the older court ladies and their young mistress. He would gladly have loosened her bonds somewhat, but dared not introduce new ways and customs.

The Archduchess Sophie had hitherto reigned supreme at court. She was a remarkably clever woman, and all through the first difficult years of her son’s reign had proved a valuable support to him, and acquired an influence which she had no intention of surrendering into the hands of her seventeen-year-old niece. Two women, though of the same blood, could scarcely have been more different. The Archduchess was ambitious and worldly; the Empress cared nothing for place or power. Sophie was completely under the influence of the priesthood; Elizabeth worshipped God in nature, but avoided all religious ceremonies and hated priests. The older woman expected to find it easy to govern this child who had so unexpectedly received the imperial crown, 44

through her vanity and inexperience, but finding herself mistaken, she resorted to other means. Elizabeth, as we have seen, had come to Vienna full of hopes and dreams, expecting naturally to occupy the first place in her husband's life and court; but every attempt to assert her right as Empress was deliberately set aside by the Archduchess, who crushed her hopes and dispelled her dreams with a cruel hand, regardless of her feelings.

As for the court, "Madame Mère," as she was called, was a power whose friendship it was prudent to possess. It was believed, moreover, that Franz Joseph, whose fickleness and susceptibility in matters of the heart were well known, would soon tire of his young wife. Elizabeth's inexperience made it impossible for her to battle successfully with court intrigues, and it was plain that the mother-in-law would be victorious in the struggle between them. The Emperor always treated his wife with the greatest care and consideration, but misunderstandings gradually arose between them, fostered by wounded pride on her side and on his by the Archduchess Sophie's constant efforts to lower her in the eyes of her son. Dearly as she loved Franz Joseph, Elizabeth held herself more and more aloof from him for fear of seeming the troublesome child her mother-in-law called her, and an expression of quiet sadness grew upon her. But there were moments, too, of hot revolt against the cold, selfish world in which she lived, and these did not mend matters for her. Rash and thoughtless, she struggled against this unceasing persecution. She treated the Archduchess' followers with marked disdain and gave her confidence to others who deceived and betrayed her.

Chapter VI

Travels and Sorrows

Nothing had been originally farther from the wishes of the young Empress than to fill her throne in solitary state, surrounded only by a few chosen families of noble birth. What she most wanted was to go about among the people and get acquainted with her new subjects, and during the early part of her married life she was often seen in the streets of Vienna. Wherever she went crowds gathered, struggling and pushing good-naturedly to get as near a view of her as possible. One day she went out to walk, accompanied only by one of her ladies-in-waiting and without informing any one of her intention. On one of the principal squares, seeing something in a window that attracted her, she entered the shop, but on turning to go out again was unpleasantly surprised to find hundreds of faces peering in at the door and windows, and it was only with the aid of the police that she was able to reach the street again. This incident excited the greatest disapproval at court.

"Her Majesty seems to imagine herself still in the mountains of Bavaria. She forgets that she is the Empress of Austria and what she owes to her husband's position," was whispered about her.

Discouraged at the result of her attempts to mingle with the people, she thenceforth avoided appearing in public as much as possible, confining her walks to the secluded portions of the palace gardens or the park about Schönbrunn. But even this did not satisfy the court, which now found fault with her

for neglecting to show herself before the people on every possible occasion. This hostility and opposition that met the young Empress at every turn only made her retire the more within herself, and really inflicted an irreparable wrong, for it developed in her an inherited love of solitude that, once acquired, soon became too fixed ever to be renounced.

Meanwhile the outlying portions of the Empire—Bohemia, Moravia, Galicia, and Hungary—were waiting anxiously to welcome the imperial pair, and soon after the wedding they began a series of short journeys.

In September, 1856, they made a visit to the Austrian Alps that is still remembered and talked of even in the remotest mountain valleys. From Heiligenblut, where they spent the night, the Emperor and Empress climbed the Grossglockner. About four o' clock in the morning, after hearing mass in the little parish church, they began the ascent, accompanied by two experienced guides, Elizabeth riding part of the way, while her husband walked. During the walk he gathered a bunch of edelweiss growing on a steep cliff and handed it to his wife, saying, "This is the first edelweiss I ever picked."

At the Wallner Hut, as it was then called, the Empress stopped to rest, while Franz Joseph climbed to the lofty Glockner-saddle, and it was in remembrance of this visit that the Wallner Hut received the name of Elisabeth-ruhe. From there they went to Steiermark and thence to Gratz, where they arrived on the eleventh of September, and where, as at all other places, they were received with the greatest enthusiasm. In November of the same year they visited the Italian provinces which at that time formed part of their dominions. Owing to the political disturbances of the period and the feeling of the Italians against Austria, it was feared the sovereigns would meet with a cold reception; but the "mistress of the Adriatic" had decked herself magnificently to greet the young Empress. The streets and market-places were

brilliantly illuminated and gorgeous masked balls were given in her honor. All hearts were won by Elizabeth's beauty and charm of manner, and the delighted Emperor said to her:

"Your smile has done more toward conquering the people than all my armies have been able to accomplish!" 49

Franz Joseph, as we have seen, was a mere youth when his uncle, the Emperor Ferdinand, abdicated in his favor and retired to Prague to end his days. The young sovereign had scarcely ascended the throne when rebellion broke out in Hungary, and unable to quell the disturbance alone he was forced to seek aid from Russia. Czar Nicholas placed one hundred thousand men at his disposal, and the revolt of 1848-1849 was crushed with a firm hand. Countless towns, villages, and estates were laid in ashes, and the country was left bleeding from almost incurable wounds. The people bore their hard fate in sullen defiance, and five years later, when the Emperor married, time had done little to soften their hatred of Austria.

The pardon that Franz Joseph had granted on his wedding day to all political offenders in his dominions formed one step toward reconciliation, but the first real signs of a more friendly feeling were due not to him but to the Queen. It was her smile that finally appeased the wrath of the Hungarians, her beauty and goodness that laid the foundation of more amicable relations between them and their sovereign. She devoted herself assiduously to the study of their language, one of the most difficult in Europe, interested herself in the art and customs of the country, and showed such deep concern for their welfare that she is said to have wept on occasions when her husband refused to grant their wishes. 50

The reason for Elizabeth's sudden and strong attachment to this hitherto unknown country could have been only a psychological one. When she first came to Vienna, she was impressed with the violent prejudice that existed at court

against the Hungarians. Each attempt of that liberty-loving people to throw off their chains was regarded as a fresh crime by the Archduchess Sophie and her adherents, and the Empress heard much harsh criticism of her subjects beyond the Leytha. Her natural perversity and independence, however, led her to investigate the matter for herself, and she soon gained a very different idea of the open-hearted, chivalrous Hungarians, whose natural character was so like her own. Hoping to learn more of the inner life of the people by means of the language, she began the study of it with a zeal and industry that shrank from no difficulties till in time she acquired perfect mastery of it even to speaking it like a native.

"Queen Elizabeth speaks our language without a trace of foreign accent," said the Hungarian poet, Maurus Jókai, "speaks it like a peasant woman and without any of the affectation common with most of our court ladies."

Her first teacher was an old professor named Homokh, with whom she learned the grammar and to read easily. But this did not satisfy her. She wanted a thorough knowledge of Hungarian literature and engaged as her instructor Dr. Max Falk, at that time a journalist in Vienna. His methods were far less tedious than those of Homokh, and she began to read the best passages of Scripture, together with a history of the people. He also gave her for translation into Hungarian the French correspondence between Joseph Second of Austria and Catherine Second of Russia, published by Arnath, a task she found most delightful. Her tutor was charmed with her enthusiasm and the accuracy with which she performed her duties as pupil. One morning as she handed him her written translation, she said:

"All day yesterday my time was taken up with audiences, and in the evening there was a court concert. After that I was so tired I went directly to bed, but no sooner had I lain down

than I remembered my Hungarian translation had not been written. So I tore a leaf from the almanac that lay on a table beside my bed and did it there. Excuse the pencil."

It was not until May, 1857, however, that she made her first visit to Hungary. Her arrival was hailed with enthusiasm, and the young Queen was everywhere greeted with shouts of joy. An extensive tour of the country had been planned by the sovereigns, but a sad event forced them to abandon it.

The Emperor and Empress had two children at this time, the little Archduchesses Sophie and Gisela. Scarcely had the court established itself in the royal palace at Ofen when word was received of the illness of the two-year-old Sophie. The physicians' first reports were reassuring, but on reaching Debreczin, May 28, the despatches announced a change for the worse. The anxious parents hastened back to Budapest, where on the next evening they heard that their oldest child was dead.

Elizabeth left Hungary with tears in her eyes. Her first great sorrow had befallen her on her first visit among the Magyars, and it may have been that grief attached her still more closely to this people whom in after years she loved so well and by whom she was adored as a sovereign and reverenced as a guardian angel.

Chapter VII

Birth of Crown Prince Rudolf

Not only the Emperor and his family but the whole nation were anxious for an heir to the throne, and the disappointment was great when on May 5, 1855, the Empress gave birth to a daughter, who was called Sophie Dorothea, after the Emperor's mother. Elizabeth was too young and inexperienced to understand this, though she could not fail to read the evidences of it in the faces of those about her. Still greater dissatisfaction greeted the birth of a second daughter, Gisela, in July, 1856. This daughter was married in 1873 to Prince Leopold of Bavaria, second son of the present Prince Regent.

The Empress looked forward to her maternal duties with the greatest happiness, and asked nothing more than to devote herself to her children. But even this was not to be allowed her. The Archduchess Sophie had the little girls removed almost immediately to a remote wing of the Hofburg, leaving the young mother alone in her splendid apartments, where she had always felt herself so much a stranger. Involuntarily she compared her lot with that of her mother, the mistress of Possenhoffen, whose busy life was filled with work and noble sacrifices for her flock of children, while the Empress of Austria had nothing left her but to preserve her beauty and exhibit her toilettes. The importance of providing the Empire with an heir was impressed upon her so constantly that she was puzzled and asked her own mother once in a moment of confidence:

"If I should have no son, do you suppose that Franz would follow Napoleon's example and cause our marriage to be annulled?"

"Do not think of such things, my child," replied the Duchess. "You know that Franz loves you devotedly." Then she continued: "There are two sorts of women in this world,—those who always get their own way and those who never get it. You seem to me to be one of the latter. You have great abilities and do not lack character. But you have not the faculty of stooping to the level of your associates, or adapting yourself to your environment. You belong to another period, that in which saints and martyrs existed. Do not attract notice by being too obviously the first or break your own heart by fancying yourself the latter."

At last, shortly before her twenty-first birthday, her dearest wishes were gratified, and on August 21, 1858, a son was born to the imperial pair, a beautiful child though somewhat delicate, in whose cradle the delighted father hastened to lay the Order of the Golden Fleece.

The next morning the good news was carried by telegraph to every corner of the world, a salute of a hundred and one guns was fired from all the fortresses in Austria and Hungary, and the signal was echoed from a million throats, while public enthusiasm was still further increased when the Crown Prince, at his christening, received the name of his great ancestor Rudolf of Hapsburg. The popularity of the Empress was at once restored. Her enemies were silenced, her mother-in-law contented, and she herself for a time was happy.

"No one has seemed to need me until now," she declared pathetically, "not even my little girl whom they keep from me as much as possible. But I will not permit my boy to be taken away and given to the care of strangers. He will need me and we will be happy in each other."

Again, however, she was mistaken. Rudolf was installed as soon as possible in a remote part of the palace, the Archduchess insisting that it was not suitable for the heir to a great empire to be brought up by a young mother who as yet did not even know how to conduct herself. When Elizabeth begged to be allowed the care of her own child and dwelt on the comfort it would be to her, her mother-in-law declared indignantly that it was absurd to talk of the need for comfort when she had everything in the world to make her happy. From Sophie's point of view indeed this was perhaps true, but Elizabeth was of a different stamp, and no outward luxury could make up to her for disappointed hopes or an empty heart. Matters grew still worse for her when in the Summer of 1857 the Emperor's second brother, Ferdinand Maximilian, married Charlotte, the daughter of King Leopold First of Belgium. This aspiring princess attached herself at once to the court party and became a great favorite with her mother-in-law.

Meanwhile heavy clouds were gathering on the political horizon. Among Franz Joseph's Italian subjects the ferment was strongest, but throughout the whole Empire there was great discontent. It was well known that the Archduchess Sophie held the reins of power, and that it was she who declared war or concluded peace,—a state of things that caused much opposition in diplomatic circles, while all classes united in condemning this so-called "petticoat government."

When the war with France and Sardinia broke out in 1859, it was less a question of the country's incontestable rights than of the maintenance of the power of the Jesuits. Elizabeth plainly saw the mistake her husband was making in allowing himself to be guided so much by his mother in political matters and longed to use her influence with him to prevent it, but she was powerless. No one asked her advice, no one cared for her opinion; so she held her peace. While Franz Joseph

was fighting at Solferino and his mother corresponded with foreign courts or held long conferences with statesmen and diplomats, the Empress had to content herself with visiting wounded soldiers and officers from the Italian battlefields. Like an angel of mercy she went about among the hospitals, tasting the food that had been prepared and distributing money and cigars. Her gentle words of pity and cheer carried the more weight since they had none of the sanctimonious tone so common at that time. The halo of piety with which the Archduchess Sophie enveloped all her actions was most distasteful to Elizabeth, who did not attempt to conceal her dislike of the clergy.

Once at a court ball, her train became entangled around the feet of the papal nuncio, who happened to be standing near. With an angry glance the Empress jerked it toward her with such force that the prelate barely escaped a fall,—a scene that was the cause of much suppressed merriment, for it was well known that Her Majesty would quite as gladly have deprived him of his influence at court as upset his person in the ball-room.

Chapter VIII

Elizabeth's Illness and Sojourn in Madeira

The estrangement between the Emperor and Empress gradually increased. Affairs of state, the distractions of court life, together with Franz Joseph's growing disposition to return to the habits and pleasures of his bachelor life, all tended to widen the breach between them. The Emperor was naturally kind and affectionate, but he also had weaknesses which on closer acquaintance proved him to be far from the ideal character his young wife had imagined. She was too proud to stoop to unworthy means to retain his attachment for her, and her increasing sadness and reserve as well as her disinclination to take part in the festivities of the court, only wearied and helped to estrange him the more, as he felt in it a silent reproach.

Elizabeth had expected to find complete happiness in his love, and her solitary position at court in an atmosphere so hostile had made her cling yet more closely to this hope. By this time, however, reality had dispelled this illusion. She did not feel that she had lost her power over him or even his love, but her faith in him was shaken and her confidence destroyed. To be pitied was unendurable to the proud daughter of the Wittelsbachs. She hid her disappointment from the world and retired more and more within herself. At length her health began to give way. She struggled bravely against her growing weakness, but was finally seized with an illness which her physicians could neither understand nor cure. After repeated consultations it was decided that her lungs were affected, and a journey to Madeira was advised, that place being at the time

regarded as the most favorable one for troubles of that kind. For a long time she refused to follow their advice, but finally early in the year 1861 she consented to go. Those who saw her start doubted whether she would ever return, and she herself had little hope of regaining her health.

She left Europe wrapped in mist and cold. When she landed in Madeira, a week later, she was greeted by blue skies, brilliant sunshine, and tropical vegetation. The villa she was to occupy was charmingly situated, with wide verandas, terraces overlooking the sea, and a chain of mountains stretching behind it. Under these new conditions the Empress began at once to improve and by the first of March was able to make daily excursions about the island, which was now ablaze with flowers. She even grew to look upon her illness as a deliverer. It had enabled her to escape from the oppression of court life, and the quiet solitude taught her patience and gave her strength to bear the trials still in store for her. She lived over the struggles of her life at Vienna, so different from the happy days of childhood in her peaceful Bavarian home, the memory of which, together with the tales and legends she had heard at her father's knee, returned so often and so vividly to her mind.

She rose early every morning, studied, and practised her music, wrote daily letters to her husband and her parents, and took long walks upon the shore. Once during her stay on the island she had a visit from her sister Helene, who had married the Prince of Thurn and Taxis. Vessels rarely stopped there, and her life was most uneventful; but nature, which she had always loved, now became doubly dear. It was there too that she discovered a new interest in the world of poetry, and books soon became like friends to her. In the long solitary evenings she would take refuge in them from the restless longings of her heart and forget for the time her cares and troubles. Meanwhile, in Vienna, news of the Empress' death was daily expected, but instead came word that her cough

grew better, and at last it was announced that the climate of Madeira had done its work and she would be allowed to come back after a stay of four months.

61 On the way home in the middle of May a frightful storm arose, and the yacht *Victoria and Albert* (which had been loaned her by Queen Victoria of England for the return voyage) was tossed about like a nutshell on the angry sea. The Empress, however, refused to leave the deck in spite of all entreaties and the mountainous waves that threatened to sweep her over the side of the vessel. She even had herself fastened to the mast that she might safely enjoy the wonderful spectacle. On the eighteenth of May she was met off Trieste by the Emperor, who had come out on a warship to welcome her with an escort of five steamboats carrying notables and citizens with bands of music. At ten o'clock a shot from the castle announced the approach of the flotilla, and amid thundering salutes from batteries and warships the Emperor and Empress entered the harbor and landed near Miramar, the pleasure palace built for Archduke Maximilian, afterward Emperor of Mexico. A celebrated painting depicts the meeting between the young Archduchess Charlotte and Elizabeth on the great marble terrace overlooking the sea.

62 At Baden Elizabeth saw her mother-in-law and children again, and five days later the imperial pair entered Vienna, the railway station of which was decorated with flowers in honor of the occasion. They drove to the palace in an open carriage amid the cheers of the populace, whose joy over the Empress' recovery found further expression the following day in praise services held in all the churches of the city.

63

Chapter IX

The Empress' Flight from Vienna

Elizabeth's sojourn in Madeira did not bring the permanent improvement that was hoped for. A few weeks after her return to Austria the cough returned, and fearing that the nature of her illness had been mistaken, her parents' physician who had had the care of her in her youth was sent for. He decided that she was suffering from acute indigestion and that a change was imperative. This time the place of resort chosen was the island of Corfu, where she arrived safely soon afterward, accompanied by her physician. The Empress was charmed with the villa that had been secured for her, about half an hour's drive from the capital. It was surrounded with gardens and large grounds, and in a shorter time even than at Madeira she began to show the beneficial effects of the climate.

Not far from the house was the mountain Aja Kyriahi, on the summit of which stood a small church surrounded with cypresses. Every morning before sunrise she climbed to this spot, and whenever in after years she came back to Corfu she always visited it.

At the end of two months her health was quite restored, and toward the close of October she left for Venice, where she held her court that Winter. Her return to Vienna the following August, after a sojourn in the Tyrol, was the occasion for almost as much enthusiasm as on her wedding day, the people everywhere showing the most touching proofs of their sympathy and devotion.

But again her stay in Vienna was destined to be of short duration, for after the lapse of a few weeks, unexpectedly and without confiding her intentions to any one, she left the capital, to seek refuge in travel from the troubles and complications of her position there. The Emperor followed to try and bring about a reconciliation, but she refused to meet him, and he returned at length to Vienna weary and disheartened. With her capacity for loving and her pride Elizabeth must have suffered intensely from the slights and disappointments of her married life, and fresh persecutions on the part of her mother-in-law, who had already succeeded in estranging her husband and children from her, no doubt led her to this step.

Months went by, and still the Empress continued her wanderings. There was a general feeling of sympathy for the Emperor, but in spite of this many began to take the part of his young wife, and when the Archduchess Sophie condemned her too harshly, believed that had it not been for "Madame Mère," her daughter-in-law would never have gone away. The estrangement lasted for several years, but Elizabeth, at the urgent entreaties not only of the court but of her own family, agreed to return to Vienna once or twice a year to fulfil the state duties required of her. She remained no longer than necessary, however. The joys of travel had become too dear to her, the constraints of court life too irksome. 65

Franz Joseph meanwhile was growing more and more unreconciled to this state of affairs. The health of the Crown Prince was causing some anxiety, and his Majesty was urged to make his peace with the Empress. Elizabeth accordingly was approached by her mother, the Duchess Ludovica, for whose opinion she had the greatest respect, and who finally convinced her that it was her duty to go back to her children. Time and loneliness too had softened the bitterness of her feelings and awakened a mutual desire for reconciliation. 66

Outside events also helped to bring about the reunion. Misfortune had overtaken Austria: the war of 1866 had driven the Hapsburgs from Italy and Germany, and Elizabeth, roused to sympathy, turned her face homeward, feeling that her place was with the Emperor and his people. Though still young in years her sorrows and trials had robbed her of her youth, and she came back a woman strong and self-reliant, caring little for court life, but devoting herself to hospital work among the wounded soldiers with an energy and self-sacrifice that earned her the reverence of all. Day after day she spent at the bedsides of the suffering, speaking to each in his own language and seeking to satisfy his wants. One man, named Joseph Feher, had refused to have his arm amputated, but the Empress begged him so earnestly to consent to the operation that he finally yielded, and she wrote to his mother that she would have her son taken to the palace of Laxenburg and provide for his future. Another day she came upon a soldier whose head had been so nearly severed that the physicians had no hope of saving him. Sitting down beside him, she asked if he had any last requests that she might fulfil for him. In a faltering voice he answered:

"Since I have had the happiness of seeing the Empress at my death-bed, there is nothing left to wish for in this world. I die happy!"

Wherever she appeared the weakest tried to lift themselves at her approach. Arms were outstretched to touch her as she passed, and when she left, there was a general murmur of—

"God bless our Elizabeth!"

Chapter X

The Coronation in Hungary

Again the Archduchess Sophie's schemes for the house of Hapsburg proved disastrous, and Franz Joseph's eyes were opened at last to the fact that her sway had been as unfortunate for the country as it was fatal to his domestic happiness. In these bitter days of defeat and humiliation he learned to value the Empress at her true worth. She now became his real companion. In the latter years of her life he often consulted her in regard to affairs of state, and she might have exercised a much greater power in politics had she so desired. But the only matter of government in which she ever cared to have a voice was in regard to Hungary, in whose welfare she always felt the deepest interest. After the Austrian losses in 1866 she once said to Count Julius Andrassy:

"It distresses me to have things go wrong in Italy, but if anything were to happen to Hungary it would kill me!"

One Summer while visiting some baths, she climbed a near-by mountain on the summit of which a small chalet had been built. As they entered, her companion, seeing a visitor's book on the table, wrote in it "Elizabeth, Empress of Austria." Thereupon her mistress drew off her gloves and, taking the pen, added in Hungarian, "Elizabeth, Queen of Hungary."

This mutual attachment proved a valuable safeguard during the war of 1866, when the Prussians threatened to advance on Vienna. It was thought safest for Elizabeth and the little Crown Prince to retire to Budapest, where she was received

with an enthusiasm little short of Maria Theresa's memorable reception. There is no doubt that the devotion of the people to the Queen was largely instrumental in bringing about a better feeling between Austria and Hungary, while still another proof of this devotion was their special request that she might be crowned together with the King, an event that had never before occurred in the history of the country.

It was not until the eighth of June, 1867, however, that the coronation took place. The ancient city of Pressburg had been the scene of all former coronations, but on this occasion the ceremonies were to be held for the first time in Ofen and Pesth, or Budapest, as it is now called, which had been made the capital in 1848. The city is one of the most beautifully situated in all Europe. On an almost perpendicular rock stands the royal castle, an imposing structure of great antiquity, and at its foot, surrounding it on three sides, lies Ofen. The flat and more modern town of Pesth is to the left, and beyond it extend boundless plains. 69

Both cities were in gala attire to welcome the sovereigns. In every direction as far as the eye could reach was a sea of waving flags and pennants, and on the spire of the Rathshaus gleamed a huge crown of St. Stephen. The evening before the ceremony was to take place Franz Joseph and his wife made a visit to the cathedral, which had been magnificently decorated for the occasion, and were greeted everywhere with the wildest enthusiasm. As they were about to leave the church an old man fell from a ladder on which he had perched himself in order to obtain a view of "the good Queen of Hungary." Elizabeth, who saw him fall, hastened at once to his assistance,—an act that called forth renewed cheers when it reached the ears of those outside.

The town was crowded with Magyars from all parts of the kingdom, and sixty thousand troops lined the streets from the railway station to the royal castle, a distance of six kilometres. 70

It was a most brilliant sight as the procession wound slowly down from the castle and crossed the bridge. Franz Joseph made a stately and imposing figure in his crown and coronation robes, but Elizabeth was the centre of all eyes. The sides of the coach were of glass so that she could be seen from all directions. It was surmounted by a large crown and drawn by six magnificent white horses, their long manes and tails interwoven with gold. Elizabeth at this time was in the prime of her majestic loveliness, having not yet reached her thirtieth year, and was considered the most beautiful princess in the whole civilized world. Deafening "Eljens" greeted her all the way to the cathedral, cannon thundered, and white-clad maidens showered roses in her path.

Immediately behind the Queen followed a mounted escort of two hundred young nobles in the gorgeous costume of the Hungarian magnate, covered with gold and precious stones. Their reins and stirrups were similarly adorned, and over the left shoulder they wore a leopard skin. The King and his suite had already taken their places in the cathedral when the Queen entered. She wore a dress of white brocaded satin and a black velvet bodice covered with diamonds. The coronation robe was also of black velvet, bordered with white satin. About her neck was a Hungarian necklace of diamonds, and on her head she wore the Hapsburg coronet that had been made originally for Maria Theresa. It is composed entirely of pearls and diamonds and is valued at three million gulden. While the King was being crowned, she remained seated with clasped hands absorbed in prayer, after which she in turn went through her part of the ceremony. As she resumed her place upon the throne beside the Emperor with orb and sceptre in hand, the whole assemblage joined in a mighty Te Deum which re-echoed from the vaulted roof of the old church.

The coronation ceremonies and the enthusiasm with which she was everywhere received made such an impression upon Elizabeth that she could never afterward speak of them

without emotion and always regarded the occasion as one of the happiest times of her life.

Chapter XI

The Archduchess Marie Valerie

The years following the coronation in Hungary were without doubt among the happiest of the Empress Elizabeth's life. She interested herself in the details of her children's education, shared her husband's occupations and anxieties, and resumed her place at court with a dignity and loftiness of purpose that completely silenced her enemies. Conditions too had changed. The Archduchess Sophie had not only ceased to be a ruling power, but was completely crushed by the death of her second son, Maximilian, in Mexico, where he had been condemned to death and shot in 1867, after he had reluctantly accepted the throne. His unhappy wife, whose ambition was partly responsible for these tragic events, became hopelessly insane and it fell to Elizabeth's lot to support and comfort the grief-stricken family.

The following year, April 22, 1868, another daughter was born to the imperial pair at the royal castle at Ofen. It was the first time for a century that a child of the royal house had been born in Hungary, and the enthusiasm of the Magyars knew no bounds. All night the streets were filled with excited throngs shouting "Eljens" for the King and Queen and the new-born Princess.

The Archduchess Marie Valerie, as she was christened, became the Empress' favorite child. The two older ones had been kept away from her so long that at first they were completely estranged and it required much patience and devotion on her part to gain their affection and confidence.

The Crown Prince, who was ten years old at that time, was a most interesting child and already a universal favorite, but under his grandmother's influence he had developed a mixture of wayward pride and vanity that troubled his mother greatly and which she strove hard to correct. Fortunately, however, Rudolf was tender-hearted and easily influenced, and she succeeded at last to a large extent in overcoming the evil effects of the adulation and flattery with which the little heir had been surrounded. With Valerie she determined it should be different, and from earliest babyhood her training and education became the Empress' chief care. She was a delicate child, and the mother watched over her with a devotion that seemed almost like a reparation for what she had failed to give her other children. She was present at the lessons of the two elder ones whenever possible and took the greatest interest in their education, repeatedly impressing on their teachers that she did not want them favored or spoiled. She taught the little girls to dance, and the first dance that Valerie learned was the Hungarian Czardas. She tried to implant in them her own love for Hungary and urged their tutors and governesses "to make them as little German as possible."

Christmas was the most joyful time in the year for the imperial family, and Christmas Eve, being also Elizabeth's birthday, was celebrated as a double feast. There were always two trees, the smaller of which the Empress decorated with her own hands for the children. She spent days looking for appropriate gifts for them and the Emperor, as well as the various members of the court, whose individual tastes she always tried to gratify. One day, shortly before Christmas, Marie Valerie came to her mother with a beseeching air and begged that the presents intended for her might be given to some poor children. Much touched by the idea, Elizabeth consented, and from that time there was always another tree laden with gifts for the unfortunates.

The Empress adored flowers. During her rambles she would gather whole armfuls, and even when riding would often spring from her horse to pick wild flowers and fasten them to the pommel of her saddle. Her rooms were always filled with them, and if any choice blossom chanced to please her especially she would carry it at night into her own bedroom. "Mutzerl," as Marie Valerie was called, inherited this passion of her mother's, and almost as soon as she could walk she started little gardens of her own at the different places where the court stayed in turn. She was her mother's constant companion and there was the most touching sympathy and devotion between them. "Valerie is not only a daughter to me," Elizabeth once said, "but my best friend and companion."

The Archduchess was remarkable for her simplicity and lack of self-consciousness, as well as for her dignity and kindness of heart. Elizabeth was a firm believer in the virtues of physical exercise and had her daughter taught to ride, fence, and shoot; but Valerie did not altogether share her love of long walks and rides. She had the Wittelsbach love of art and literature, was devoted to poetry and even as a child wrote verses of some merit. Remembering the mortifications her own lack of education had caused her in her early married life, the Empress took special interest in Valerie's education. She had her taught Latin and Greek, besides several modern languages, and shared her studies as much as possible, often poring over some difficult passage in Greek Scripture with her or learning by heart the most beautiful verses. The young poetess looked upon her mother as her most valuable critic and showed her all her poems which filled several volumes, deferring always to the Empress' judgment and finding in her praise her greatest reward. She was devoted to both her parents, but as time went on became almost a second self to her mother—the living token of the reconciliation between herself and the Emperor, and a consolation for all her loneliness and suffering.

Chapter XII

The Castle of Gödöllö

Not long after their wedding the Emperor and Empress visited an exhibition of paintings in Vienna. Franz Joseph was anxious to purchase some of them, but left the choice entirely to his wife, who went back accordingly a few days later with one of her ladies and selected twenty-four, every one of which when sent to the palace proved to be of horses. Both at the Hofburg and at Schönbrunn her chief interest was in the imperial stables, where she spent most of her mornings trying different mounts. She loved exercise of all kinds, but riding was her greatest delight and her skill and daring as a horsewoman were remarkable. Authorities in these matters have declared that she outshone any rider of her own sex, for she had a singular, almost hypnotic power over horses, and even the most vicious ones would allow her to approach and stroke them. Her slender wrists were like steel, and there was no horse she could not ride when once she had made up her mind to do so. Fear and fatigue were alike unknown to her, and she used often to terrify the director of the riding-school in Vienna by asking him to send her one or two of his wildest specimens to try. A cavalry officer once expressed his surprise to the Emperor at his allowing the Empress of Austria to spend so much time in the stables and make companions of jockeys and circus riders. "Ah, my young friend," replied the Emperor kindly, "it is evident you do not know women. They usually do as they please without waiting for our permission."

Elizabeth never appeared to better advantage than when on horseback. Her habit, which seemed as if moulded to her

figure, was usually dark blue, trimmed with fur. She also wore a low round hat and heavy riding-gloves, but never a flower or bow or anything superfluous except a black fan, which she carried in her hand or hung by a strap to her saddle. Strangers generally supposed this was to protect her complexion, but her friends were well aware that it was merely to guard herself from the inevitable photographers who pursued her everywhere. “I hate being photographed,” she once declared: “every time in my life that I have been, something dreadful has happened to me.” She liked to attend to her horses personally and visited them every morning, taking sugar and carrots in her pocket for them, sometimes even going into their stalls to pet or rub them down. At Schönbrunn she had a room the walls of which were completely covered with pictures of horses. “Look,” she once said to her Greek teacher when showing him this room, “all these are friends I have lost. Many of them have died for me, which is more than I can say of any human being. People would far rather have me killed.” She was never so happy as when in the saddle, dashing through the forests of Austria or the wide Hungarian plains. But these long rides also served another purpose. On both sides of the house she had relatives whose lives were darkened by the fatal inheritance of the Wittelsbachs; so it was not strange that as she grew older her sensitive nature should have brooded over the fear of developing the family disorder. To banish these terrible fits of depression she would gallop for hours, insensible to weather or physical exhaustion, sometimes drenched to the skin, and it was only when she felt her horse quiver under her with fatigue that she would slacken her pace.

Immediately after the coronation the Hungarians presented to their Queen the castle of Gödöllö, situated in the depths of the forest, not far from Budapest, and for many years it was her favorite residence. Here there was nothing to break the peaceful seclusion but the plaintive notes of the Zingaris’ violins. Here she was her own mistress, spending long, happy,

care-free days. She usually rose at four o'clock, and was in the saddle from five till eleven, when she breakfasted. It was an ideal country for riding, and she became familiar with every forest pathway for miles around, often stopping at some camp of the Czikos to chat with these half-savage Bedouins of the Hungarian Puszta, in whom she felt the greatest interest. She brought them gifts of tobacco, and was always welcomed with delight by these strange herdsmen.

But there were gay times also at Gödöllö in those days, when her husband and children were there and the castle was full of guests. Her stag hunts were famous, and the walls were covered with trophies of the chase. "There is a tree at Gödöllö," she once said to a companion, "who is one of my best friends. He knows all my inmost thoughts, and whenever I go back there I tell him all that has happened to me since we parted." 80

Wherever she might be her thoughts turned longingly toward her beloved Hungary, where she was happiest, and among whose romantic, impulsive people she always felt most at home. All classes in Budapest adored their beautiful Queen, who wore the national costume of the country and lost no opportunity of remaining among them. Her courage, gentleness, and open-hearted generosity made her universally beloved. She would go about among the poorest and vilest quarters of the city, helping the suffering and needy, quite unconscious of danger or fear. The wretched creatures often little suspected who she was, but she was welcomed everywhere as an angel of mercy, and could go unharmed where even the police would scarcely venture. 81

One evening she was riding with a companion through the outskirts of Budapest, and was just passing a hovel set back a little from the main road when they were startled by hearing piercing shrieks from within. The voice was that of a woman evidently in the greatest distress. On the impulse of the 82

moment they leaped from their horses, and rushing to the door and bursting it open, found themselves in a low, dirty room, where a huge ruffian of a man was dragging a woman about the floor by her long, unbound hair, kicking her vigorously as he did so. Without a moment's thought Elizabeth dealt him a blow in the face with her heavy hunting-crop, which so surprised the fellow that he dropped his victim and stared at her in blank amazement. Elizabeth's own astonishment was still greater, however, when the ill-used woman arose and sprang at her like a tiger, overwhelming her at the same time with the vilest abuse for presuming to attack her husband. The Empress burst into a peal of laughter, and taking a gold piece from her pocket she handed it to the man, exclaiming: "Beat her, my friend. Beat her all she wants; she deserves it for being so loyal to you."

Chapter XIII

The Empress in Vienna

The year 1873 was a memorable one to Franz Joseph and Elizabeth. Their eldest daughter, Gisela, was married, April 20, to Prince Leopold of Bavaria in the Church of the Augustins, where the imperial pair had celebrated their union nineteen years before. The bride was led to the altar by her mother and left that same afternoon with her husband for Munich. The Viennese overwhelmed the Archduchess with gifts and entertainments, and the streets were lined with crowds eager to witness the departure of the young couple.

A few days afterward, May 1, 1873, the Emperor and Empress opened the World's Exposition at Vienna, an event that was celebrated with all sorts of festivities and made the occasion of a perfect jubilee. The Exhibition was a great success as well as a source of pride to Austria, as it demonstrated what the country could accomplish in the way of arts and manufactures in a comparatively short space of time. Many of the crowned heads of Europe came as guests to the capital. The old Emperor William and his clever wife Augusta visited at the Hofburg and Schönbrunn; Czar Alexander Second of Russia and King Victor Emmanuel of Italy also came, as did the Shah of Persia and many others.

Elizabeth, however, cared little for people of her own rank. "Titles mean nothing," she declared; "they are only the trappings with which we try to hide our nakedness; they do not change our real selves." Little to her taste as court ceremonies were, she bore her part in them with ease and

dignity and was always the centre of interest and admiration wherever she went. Some years before the fall of the French Empire, the Austrian sovereigns met Napoleon and Eugénie at Salzburg. The French Empress was then at the zenith of her beauty, but Elizabeth with her glorious eyes and hair and the wonderful charm of her personality did not suffer by comparison with the Spaniard nor even with younger princesses.

In 1873 the twenty-fifth anniversary of Franz Joseph's accession to the throne was celebrated with great rejoicings, the festivities culminating in the evening by the triumphal progress of the imperial pair with the Crown Prince through the streets of Vienna, which were brilliantly illuminated and decorated and filled with cheering throngs. But even on this occasion it was evident Elizabeth found it an effort to appear in public, and she avoided the noise and confusion as much as possible. Her growing reserve and dislike of self-display were taken as a personal offence by the spectacle-loving Viennese and added to her unpopularity. She was considered cold and proud and was taxed with heartlessness and indifference, a fact of which she was well aware and which only added to her melancholy.

She adored children, rich and poor alike, and at the close of the Vienna Exposition took into her service a little Berber boy named Mahmoud, who had acted as page in the Cairene house erected in the Prater by the Khedive of Egypt and afterward presented to the Empress. Mahmoud adored his mistress and she was exceedingly kind to him. When the climate of Vienna affected his lungs and he fell ill with pneumonia, she nursed and tended him herself, and he became the favorite playmate of the Archduchess Valerie, greatly to the horror of the Austrian aristocracy. Patience was not one of the Wittelsbach virtues, and so many false and cruel reports were circulated about her in Vienna by careless tongues that when Elizabeth was informed of the indignation she had aroused by her

kindness to Mahmoud she responded by having the two children photographed together and the picture displayed in public. This act of defiance naturally added to the number of her detractors, and many even began to hint that the Empress' restlessness and eccentricities were certain signs of approaching insanity.

But there was still another reason for the Empress' unpopularity in the Austrian capital. Her husband's German subjects keenly felt her lack of sympathy with them and resented her unconcealed preference for Hungary. It was even rumored that she intended to bestow all her Austrian possessions upon the Magyars, but this was a rank injustice to Elizabeth, for throughout the Empire, Austria as well as Hungary, there was scarcely a charitable institution or cause that she did not aid or support, nor a case of suffering and need that she did not attempt to relieve. When Austria took possession of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878, the Empress found a fresh field for her energies in caring for the wounded soldiers and providing for the families of those who were killed; and when cholera and smallpox broke out in Budapest, she insisted upon accompanying the Emperor, who was obliged to go there for the opening of the National Assembly, declaring that in time of danger her place was at her husband's side. 86

In 1879 Franz Joseph and Elizabeth celebrated their silver wedding, an occasion not unmixed with sadness to them both, as they looked back on the trials and disappointments of their married life. They had requested that there should be no public observance of the day, and that the sums contributed for that purpose should be given to charity. An exception to this was made, however, in Vienna, where a great ovation had been prepared for the imperial pair. On the spot where the Emperor had been attacked by Libeny, the Hungarian, a church had been erected to commemorate his fortunate escape, and this was to be formally dedicated as part of the 87

ceremonies of the day. The city was *en fête*, and crowds had gathered to salute the Emperor and Empress as they drove to and from the church. There was little in their appearance to suggest the storms that had shaken their lives, for Franz Joseph was still in the prime of his manhood and Elizabeth the youngest and most beautiful of grandmothers (her eldest daughter Gisela had several children at that time). The festivities, which lasted several days, concluded on the twenty-seventh of April with an historical pageant, arranged by the celebrated painter Hans Makart and carried out on the most magnificent scale. Every class, institution, and province in the kingdom was represented, and the various groups costumed with historical accuracy, the whole procession making a most imposing spectacle as it moved slowly along the Ringstrasse amid the deafening cheers of the spectators.

Chapter XIV

Marriage of Crown Prince Rudolf

Both Franz Joseph and Elizabeth were very proud of their only son, whose winning ways and kindness of heart had made him wonderfully popular with all classes. He had inherited his mother's impatience of restraint as well as her literary and artistic tastes, and, like her, cared little for people of his own rank. His own intimate circle was composed of poets, artists, and journalists, and he had an enthusiastic friend and teacher in the celebrated naturalist, Brehm. According to the custom of Austrian princes, he had been required to learn some trade and chose that of printing, but he possessed a marked talent for writing and published several books of real merit. He adored his mother, and the relation between them was one of the closest confidence and intimacy, but Elizabeth's love for her son did not blind her to his faults, and she fully realized that he had all his father's youthful susceptibility and love of pleasure. Both she and the Emperor were agreed as to the necessity of his marrying early, not only to insure the succession, but also because they hoped it would steady the rather wild and headstrong young prince. Franz Joseph, however, had political advantages most in mind in the choice of a wife for his son, while Elizabeth was chiefly concerned as to his prospects of domestic happiness. She felt the importance of his marrying some one with sufficient beauty and intelligence to restrain his somewhat errant fancy and win his respect as well as affection.

There were but few marriageable princesses in Europe at that time (Rudolf was then in his twentieth year), and the

Emperor's choice was far from satisfactory to Elizabeth, for it fell on the Belgian princess Stephanie, a seventeen-year-old girl of very ordinary mind and not at all attractive in appearance. Elizabeth had no liking either for King Leopold Second of Belgium or his wife, an Austrian archduchess, who played rather an unenviable role at her husband's court, and bitterly opposed the match; but the Queen's sister, the Archduchess Elizabeth (mother of the Queen Regent of Spain and a favorite cousin of the Emperor's) brought all her influence to bear in her niece's favor, and the Empress' objections were overruled, Rudolf himself, meanwhile, seeming to regard the whole affair with perfect indifference.

The wedding took place May 10, 1881. All through the festivities that preceded the great event Elizabeth played her part perfectly as mother of the bridegroom, though her cold and distant manner toward her future daughter-in-law as well as the King and Queen of Belgium was only too evident. Part of the ceremonies consisted of a state procession through the streets of the capital, and during the whole progress she hardly spoke once to Queen Henriette, who rode beside her, but sat erect, bowing continuously in acknowledgment of the cheers of the populace, with a look almost of absentmindedness on her lovely face. In the middle of the marriage ceremony her self-control gave way completely, however, and she burst into a violent fit of weeping. This was her last public appearance in Vienna.

Gay, frivolous, and fond of admiration, Stephanie was a princess to please the taste of the Viennese. Her arrival at court was hailed with delight, and when on the third of September, 1883, a daughter was born to the young couple, the public enthusiasm was a proof of their popularity. A change in the relations of Rudolf and his mother after his marriage was inevitable. Though he continued to make her his confidante, she was not long in discovering that he was far from happy in his marriage. Wretched over this unfortunate

state of affairs and feeling less at home than ever in the Hofburg, she now rarely visited Vienna, sometimes spending only a few weeks there in the winter.



CROWN PRINCE RUDOLF

She had never liked the Hofburg nor Schönbrunn, where the Emperor always spent the spring months, and now determined to have a residence of her own somewhere in the neighborhood of the capital. The spot chosen was the beautiful park of Lainz, hidden from the public gaze by high stone walls and further protected by a thick, impenetrable hedge surrounding the gardens. During the two years that "Waldesruhe," as she called the Schloss, was being built it was rigidly guarded from intrusion of any kind, and even after it was finished no one but the servants and the family were allowed to enter the park or gardens. The building itself is in the style of the Renaissance, the *façade* adorned with balconies and terraces which in the Empress' time were always a mass of flowers. A wide marble staircase covered with red velvet carpet led to the first floor, which contained the apartments of the Emperor and Empress, connected by a great salon or reception hall. Elizabeth's spacious sleeping chamber was on the corner, with two windows to the east and two tall ones to the south, giving upon a balcony. The bed was placed in the centre of the room, protected at the head by a large screen, upon the reverse side of which was a painting of the Virgin Mary. A figure also representing the Blessed Virgin stood in one corner, holding in her hands a magnificent antique rosary. Opposite the bed was an exquisite statue of Niobe, the pedestal buried in growing plants and lighted with green incandescent lamps so arranged that as the Empress lay in bed she could see no light in the room but the green glimmer that fell on the Niobe. Breakfast was served on the balcony, which was like a flower garden. Here too in later years she placed a favorite work of art, a small reproduction of the marble statue of Heine made by the Danish sculptor Hasselriis for her villa Achilleon at Corfu. Adjoining her bedchamber and also giving upon the balcony was the Empress' study, filled with photographs of her family and friends, and a picturesque litter of casts, sketches, bronzes, souvenirs of travel, and porcelain vases filled with flowers. Over the great square writing-table hung a striking portrait of

her cousin King Ludwig Second of Bavaria. A fire was always burning on the wide hearth, and the Emperor and Empress used often to sit there together in the evenings watching the glowing logs and talking over the events of the day. The guest chambers and apartments of the Archduchess Marie Valerie were on the floor below, as was the Empress' gymnasium. Physical exercise was so necessary to her that she always had a room fitted up in this way wherever she happened to be staying.

Another favorite retreat of Elizabeth's was Miramar, the Emperor Maximilian's palace, where for several years after his death she used to make frequent visits. Built of the purest white marble, it stands on a rocky promontory overlooking the sea, and near by is the pavilion used as a residence by the Empress Charlotte when she returned from Mexico a widow and hopelessly insane.

At the time Elizabeth was first sent to Corfu to recuperate, the beauty of the country made a deep impression upon her, and her love for the shores of Greece after repeated visits in later years decided her to build a villa upon the island, the planning and furnishing of which should reflect her own individual taste. Near the idyllic village of Gasturi accordingly there rose the masterpiece of architecture which she called Achilleon. It stands on a hill facing the sea, the slopes of which are covered with olive and lemon trees and laid out as gardens on wide terraces. The house contains one hundred and twenty-eight rooms, filled with treasures of Greek and Pompeian art, and there are accommodations in the stables for fifty horses. All the rooms are filled with classic treasures. The Empress' own apartments were entirely apart from the rest of the building, with a private entrance so that she could come and go at will. She used to rise at five and after her bath would go for a walk, usually alone, with a book under her arm. The mornings were devoted to study, the afternoons to long rambles. She knew every road for miles about, but loved best to explore the

steepest and most dangerous mountain paths, the silent grandeur and beauty of the heights seeming to soothe for a time the restless cravings of her spirit. At nine she would retire after another bath in the marble basin which was brought from the Villa Borghese in Rome. Heine's Book of Songs was always under her pillow, and often she would rise in the middle of the night, unable to sleep, and wander about through the dark avenues. At Achilleon, as elsewhere, she was most anxious to escape observation, and a high wall of marble with a screen of olive trees hid the palace from the public gaze. It was not people, however, that she disliked so much as being the object of their curiosity.

"All I ask of people," she often said, "is that they will leave me in peace."

She was always kind and gracious to the poor, and the peasants used to kneel in the dust before her when she approached, calling aloud in their melodious language, "O Queen of Beauty, may God bless thine every step!" All heads were uncovered when she passed, and the children who watched for her coming would run to meet her with their hands full of blossoming orange and almond boughs. On the heights above Achilleon stood a monastery where she often used to go and talk with the monks. She asked one of them once if he ever went to the village.

"There is always the marketing to do," he answered. "Man is but human, and the body suffers from cold or hunger; but except for that, what should one do in the village? It is far better and more beautiful up here."

"That is true," said the Empress; "undoubtedly you have chosen the better part."

Chapter XV

King Ludwig Second of Bavaria

Through all her sorrows and troubles Elizabeth never lost her love for her Bavarian home or for her own family, with whom she corresponded regularly. For many years she was in the habit of spending part of every summer at Possenhoffen, revisiting the scenes of her childhood and going about among her peasant friends, who always spoke of her as "our Empress," forgetful of the fact that this title properly belonged to the Queen of Prussia.

The years had brought many sorrows and misfortunes to Duke Max Joseph and his wife. Their oldest son married an actress of doubtful reputation. The Princess of Thurn and Taxis early lost her husband and oldest child and was left with the burden of managing the vast family estates. The third daughter, Marie, like Elizabeth, was elevated to a throne at the age of seventeen, by becoming the wife of Francis Second, King of the Two Sicilies; but barely a year later Garibaldi's freelances robbed her unworthy husband of his crown and made her a queen without a country. A scarcely happier fate befell her sister Mathilde, who was married at eighteen to Count Louis of Trani, a broken-down *roué* who afterward died by his own hand. Neither of these Princesses had seen their husbands before their marriage.

Sophie, Duchess d'Alençon, the youngest of the five sisters, was very beautiful and resembled the Empress Elizabeth in appearance, though not at all in disposition, for those who knew her as a young girl describe her as being full of

animation and vivacity. She became engaged to her cousin Ludwig Second of Bavaria a year after his accession to the throne, and the betrothal met with general approval. He was a strikingly handsome young man of twenty at this time, and so desperately in love with his cousin that he had a bust made of her by a famous sculptor and placed in his winter garden where he could always look at it. Just before the wedding was to take place, however, he suddenly broke the engagement without a word of preparation or explanation, because he suspected that she was untrue to him. There is no doubt that the Princess was the victim of a deliberate plot to rob her of the King's affection, but Ludwig made no attempt at reparation of any kind and his behavior made a breach between him and Duke Max's family which was never healed.

Ludwig himself, fed by continual flattery and admiration and with a morbid idea of his own dignity, was deeply injured by the supposed faithlessness of his *fiancée*. In the first transports of his rage he seized the bust of the Princess and flung it out of the window, dashing it to pieces on the stones of the courtyard. Even at the beginning of his reign he had shown signs of mental unsoundness, but from this time he began to shun the society of his fellow creatures and lived a solitary life. He would have nothing more to do with women, and except for a few chosen companions would see no one. Even when obliged to receive his ministers, he would hide behind a screen. The only exception he made was in favor of his cousin Elizabeth, with whom he was a great favorite in spite of his erratic ways, and who also was devoted to him until his death. They were much alike in temperament as well as in appearance, and he always looked forward to her arrival each summer at Feldafing, near which was one of his favorite retreats, "Roseninsel," a small island shut in by dense shrubbery and lofty trees. In olden times it had been the site of a heathen temple which was replaced later by a Roman Catholic chapel. The gardens, which were laid out by King Maximilian Second, were greatly enlarged and beautified by

his son Ludwig and are said to contain sixteen thousand of the choicest varieties of roses, the perfume of which is wafted far out across the lake. The Hermitage, a small villa in the Italian style, and the gardener's cottage are now the only buildings left in this wilderness of flowers, so overgrown that it is almost impossible to approach the little wharf where King Ludwig used to land from his yacht *Tristan*. Here he collected all his favorite authors and spent long happy days dreaming over them or working in the garden, and here too he and Elizabeth would meet and pour out their hearts to each other, alone and undisturbed.

After all, who can say with certainty where human reason ends and insanity begins? "I am not sure," the Empress once said, in speaking of Shakespeare's Hamlet, "that those persons who are called mad are not the really wise ones." King Ludwig's eccentricities became so pronounced, however, that in 1886 he was forced to resign the government and was sent to Schloss Berg on Lake Starnberg under the care of a physician. One June evening they went out to walk together as usual, and when, after waiting in vain for their return, a search was made, the bodies of both were found at length at the bottom of the lake. Elizabeth happened to be staying at Feldafing when the catastrophe occurred and was deeply affected by the King's tragic death. She hastened at once to the castle, and entering the room where his lifeless body lay, requested to be left alone with it. For an hour her attendants waited, and at length, alarmed at the delay, ventured to enter the apartment, where they found their mistress stretched upon the floor, apparently lifeless. It was only with the greatest difficulty that she was restored to consciousness, and when at last she did open her eyes, she stared wildly about her for some moments, then cried in a shaking voice: "For God's sake, release the King from the mortuary chapel! He is not dead—he is only pretending to be so, that he may be left in peace and not tormented any longer."

Ludwig's body was carried back to Munich, where he lay in state, the bier heaped about with wreaths and floral offerings, but on the breast of the dead King lay a simple spray of jasmine, Elizabeth's last gift to her friend and kinsman.

100

101

Chapter XVI

The Empress' Travels

Urged by her love of nature and of new scenes as well as by her inborn restlessness, Elizabeth, as is well known, spent a great part of her time travelling about incognito from place to place like any ordinary tourist. She never tired of studying strange lands and peoples, and the constant change and communion with nature calmed her tortured spirit as nothing else could. "One should never stay indoors except when absolutely necessary," she declared, "and our homes should be so ordered as not to destroy the illusions we bring in with us." The sea had an irresistible attraction for her, and she would pace up and down the deck of her yacht for hours sometimes, ordering no one to speak to or approach her. "The sea is my father confessor," she used to say; "it removes all my cares and troubles and has taught me all I know." Her yacht *Miramar*, on which she spent so much of her time, was elegantly and conveniently fitted up with every comfort. On the deck was a large round pavilion of glass commanding a view of the sea in all directions, for her use in wet weather, but the Empress' favorite spot was the after deck, which was shut off from the rest of the yacht with sail cloth so that there should be nothing to interfere with her outlook over the sea.

She usually travelled under the name of Countess of Hohenembs, her Majesty's thirty-eighth title in the Court Calendar. She loved to explore strange, out-of-the-way places, and displayed wonderful enthusiasm and endurance as a traveller. Of all lands, however, she loved the East the best.

Her favorite cities were Tunis, Algiers, Cairo, and Alexandria, and she was the first European sovereign to visit Troy.

Her talent for languages was remarkable. Besides German and Hungarian, she had mastered French, English, and Greek, and had a fair knowledge of Latin. She never cared to learn Italian, indeed she had the greatest dislike to everything pertaining to Italy, having been subjected to several outrages at the hands of the people of that country. She had narrowly escaped death at Trieste in the early eighties, when a bomb was thrown into the citadel where she was staying.

Owing to the Empress' reluctance to appear in public, her features were not generally known in Austria, a fact which led to many absurd situations. One day when taking the train at Mödling she sent her servant to order the station-master to have the train stopped at a small station near her palace at Lainz. Seeing that the train was about to start, she called to the guard: "Tell that man in the black coat to make haste!" Whereupon the officer bawled out, "Here, hurry up, you! or else your good woman will go off and leave you!" evidently taking the Empress for the horrified servant's wife. It was not always easy to preserve her incognito on her travels, though she made every effort to do so because of her keen enjoyment of the adventures which it brought about.

In her younger days she used to spend much time in Scotland and Ireland, where she delighted in the hunting. During one of these visits in Ireland the fox she was pursuing sprang over the wall of Maynooth College, near which the chase had led her, and dashed across the exercise ground where the students were sauntering peacefully about. Great was their amazement the next moment when the wall was also cleared by several hounds and a horsewoman on a magnificent hunter, who had evidently followed the fox through a pond, for she was dripping wet. The fox was quickly captured, and the rider dismounted and asked to see the head of the college, to whom

she explained her identity, requesting to be shown to a room where she could change her clothes. No feminine garments were to be found, however, in a seminary for young priests and she was forced to borrow one of the doctors' cassocks. While her clothes were drying she invited the professors to have tea with her, charmed them all with her graciousness, and caused much merriment by her comical appearance and lively descriptions of her adventures.

Once while in Amsterdam, where she occasionally went to be treated by an eminent specialist in nervous disorders, she entered a toy shop to buy a doll, saying to her companion: 104

"I am sure my granddaughter will be delighted when she gets this."

The shop-keeper, thinking it impossible that this slender, youthful-looking person could be a grandmother, made some remark to that effect.

"Oh, yes, I have four grandchildren," said the Empress, "and to prove it I will come again soon and buy some toys for the other three. You may send them to my daughter, the Princess Gisela in Munich."

The poor shop-keeper was dumfounded and humbly apologized for his rudeness.

"You were not rude," said Elizabeth kindly; "on the contrary, you were very flattering."

She was usually regarded as somewhat eccentric in Amsterdam, from her habit of always holding a fan before her face in the street, and once a street urchin ran up to her and snatched it away, crying, "Let me see your face!" But in spite of the unpleasant experiences which her incognito occasionally created, she could never be induced to abandon it and was much displeased when people did not respect her 105

wishes in this matter. When one of the servants at a Spanish hotel, where she had registered as "Frau Folna of Corfu," addressed her as "Your Highness," she retorted sharply, "There are no Highnesses in my apartments."

She would often start off on the spur of the moment to see some work of art of which she had heard without telling any of her suite where they were going. Her Greek teacher, Professor Rhousso Rhoussopoulos, relates that on one occasion when the Empress was staying at Wiesbaden for the baths, he suddenly received orders to get ready to accompany herself and the Archduchess Marie Valerie on a journey, and not until they reached the railway station did he learn that their destination was Frankfort-on-the-Main, where Elizabeth wanted to see Thorwaldsen's reliefs and Danecker's "Ariadne," which were in the Rothschild collection there. Luncheon had been ordered for them at the station restaurant at Frankfort. The Empress was in high spirits, and taking her daughter's arm, walked up and down, watching the people and enjoying the bustle of the station. She was delighted that no one recognized her and ate the first part of her luncheon with great relish. But when the second course arrived it was specially served on gold plate with extra attendants; evidently her identity had been discovered. Instantly her cheerfulness vanished and she hastily finished the meal in order to escape as soon as possible. There was nothing she disliked so much as being stared at.

As Professor Rhoussopoulos was walking with her one day in a North German city, she suddenly exclaimed:

"Look how that woman across the street is staring at us! What do you suppose it means?"

"Probably it is only a bad habit she has, your Majesty," replied the professor; but before the words were out of his mouth the Empress had rushed across the street and the next moment the two women were in each other's arms. It was her

sister, the Countess of Trani, who was almost as fond of travelling as Elizabeth herself.

Wherever she went the Empress was perpetually at warfare with the police authorities whose duty it was to watch over her safety. She resorted to all sorts of devices to elude and mislead them, and their task was no easy one. Once when she and the Emperor were staying at Mentone, she sent for the chief of police there and told him that it annoyed her exceedingly to be continually followed about by detectives and she wished it stopped. The officer replied that he was compelled to perform his duties, and if it displeased Her Majesty there was nothing left for him but to resign his position.

"No, no!" said the Empress. "Remain in Mentone, by all means, and devote yourself to protecting my husband, for his life is most necessary to his subjects. As for me, what am I? A mere stranger and far too unimportant to attract any attention."

An English journalist was glancing over some books one day in front of a second-hand bookshop in Monza, when the dealer came out and asked him to go away, as the lady inside did not wish to be followed about, evidently supposing him to be a detective. Curious to know who the lady was, he cast a searching glance through the window and recognized the Empress. Taking out one of his cards, he handed it to the dealer with the request that he inform his illustrious customer of her mistake. An hour later, as he was strolling through the palace grounds, he saw Her Majesty a short distance in front of him. Not wishing to arouse her suspicions a second time, he was about to turn down a side path, when she beckoned him to approach and with much dignity and graciousness explained to him the annoyance she was subjected to by the officiousness of the police, and apologized for the scene at the bookshop. Late the next evening, as the journalist entered a

well-known restaurant in Milan, great was his amazement to find the Empress seated at one of the tables quite alone and unattended. As he took his seat near by, one of the waiters came to her and said:

"It is rather late, signora, to get anything good; almost everything is gone." 108

"But I am hungry," replied Elizabeth; "you will have to find me something."

The man disappeared and was back again in a moment. "There is just one course left, signora," he said, "but it is the best of all. I can recommend it, for I have just eaten some of it myself. But it is a trifle dear!"

"How much does this superior dish cost?" asked the Empress, smiling.

"Eighty centesimi," said the waiter doubtfully.

Elizabeth laughed aloud.

"The signora need not laugh," he went on in an offended tone; "most people find it so dear they order only a half portion!"

The journalist had sat all this time hidden behind his newspaper, but the Empress recognized him at once and addressing him pleasantly with "Good-evening, Herr Journalist," continued to converse with him during the meal.

She was extremely fond of Paris and rarely failed to go there when on her European tours, though always as Countess of Hohenembs and never as Empress of Austria. She would often meet her sisters, the Duchess d'Alençon and the Countess of Trani, and go about with them, as she could do so there without fear of annoyance. One day she took a fancy to ride on an omnibus, but when the driver came to collect her fare 109

she gave him two pieces of gold, an act of munificence that stunned the frugal Parisians and led to her being recognized. Annoyed at the curious interest of the other passengers, she hastily alighted and took refuge in the nearest house, where she waited till the crowd had dispersed and then drove back to her hotel in a closed carriage with the shades closely drawn, vowing it was the last time she would ever attempt to ride on an omnibus in a city like Paris.

Chapter XVII

The Empress' Literary Tastes

Elizabeth was passionately fond of both music and poetry. From her father she had acquired a perfect mastery of the zither, but she had also a beautiful voice and was a piano pupil of Liszt, and often sung and played at court charity concerts. Her favorite composers were Rubinstein, Chopin, and Wagner, to the latter of whom she proved a true friend by sending him a large sum of money at one of his times of greatest need, and after his death she made one of her incognito trips to Bayreuth to hear the Wagner productions there.

For art, too, she had the greatest enthusiasm. Both Makart and Munkacsy were warm personal friends of hers and she would often spend hours in their studios. She never went to the theatre in her later years, but always manifested great interest in the foremost actors and actresses in Austria and showed them many kindnesses on various occasions.

It was in literature, however, and poetry in particular, that she found her greatest inspiration and distraction. She was never without a book in her hand and would sit or wander about for hours so absorbed in her reading as to completely forget the passage of time, while as for her general knowledge competent judges have declared it to be amazing. "To converse intelligently with the Empress," said Hasenauer, "one should be well versed in history, science, and art."

She translated the whole of Schopenhauer into modern Greek and was an earnest student of Rousseau and Voltaire. But her prime favorite in the literary world was Heinrich Heine, for whom she had the greatest reverence and admiration; she possessed all his works, many of them in manuscript, and many touching instances are told of her kindness to the great poet's family. She had learned to love his poems soon after her marriage, in her first days of sorrow and disillusionment, and they always found a responsive echo in her heart. Anxious that his memory should be honored publicly, she interested herself in the erection of a monument to him in some German city, heading the subscription list herself with a large sum. The plan was in a fair way to succeed, when a letter arrived from Bismarck to the cabinet in Vienna, expressing his surprise that the ruler of a friendly neighboring country should wish to do public honor to a poet who had insulted the Hohenzollerns. As a rule, Franz Joseph and Elizabeth respected each other's peculiarities and differences of taste, but in this case, on account of the Triple Alliance, the Emperor was obliged to ask his wife to remove her name from the list, and, thanks to this episode, it remains for the future to erect a monument to Heine in Germany. But Elizabeth was determined not to be thwarted and had her revenge, for, learning that the Danish sculptor Hasselriis in Rome had already prepared designs for a statue of her favorite poet, she commissioned him to execute it in marble and had it placed in front of her palace at Corfu. Apparently the Hohenzollerns did not resent this, however, for the then Emperor of Germany was most attentive to her whenever she was travelling in that country. He always made a point of calling upon her with his wife and is said to have considered her one of the cleverest women he ever met.

There were not many books that she cared for, but she loved to read her favorites again and again. Heine was the only one of the German poets whose works she understood and treasured. Neither Goethe nor Schiller appealed to her, nor did

the modern French poets interest her, although she thought highly of Lamartine. In English she specially admired Shakespeare and Byron, Shakespeare indeed ranking only second to Heine in her affections. She made excellent translations of several of his plays and could repeat whole scenes from them by heart. “Hamlet” and “Midsummer Night’s Dream” were her favorites, and she had a painting of Titania and her lover with the ass’s head hanging in each of her palaces. “Our illusions are the asses’ heads that we all kiss,” she used to say.

She wrote charmingly herself, and while on the long journeys that consumed so much of her time she would send long letters every week to her husband and children, containing brilliant descriptions of her travels, bits of poetry or translations, often illustrated with exquisite pen-and-ink or water-color sketches. These valuable souvenirs are all preserved in the Hofburg, together with what she called her “day-book,” a sort of diary covering many years.

Chapter XVIII

Daily Life of the Empress

As time went on, the hereditary disease of the Wittelsbachs, now known as neurasthenia, which for generations had manifested itself in one form or another, became more and more pronounced in the Empress Elizabeth. Her passion for solitude, her aversion to mingling with people, and constant craving for change must certainly be regarded as inherited peculiarities, though she was more ill than was generally suspected. A complication of disorders together with neuritis made her later years a perpetual martyrdom, yet she bore her sufferings with a patience and fortitude that her physicians pronounced almost superhuman.

It was a bitter sacrifice for her to give up her riding, but fortunately she was still able to take the walks and climbs that meant so much to her. Often, indeed, it was not so much the love of exercise as the effort to find relief in physical exhaustion from the sleeplessness that tortured her and secure the rest so necessary to her overwrought nerves.

Always a remarkably small eater, her tastes were extremely simple. For weeks at a time she would live on nothing but milk, and even at state banquets often took nothing but a slice or two of wheat bread, a cup of bouillon, and some fruit. She detested liquor of any sort, and never tasted it except when the physicians insisted upon her drinking a little wine for her health. As a rule, she had little respect for medical knowledge and much preferred to treat herself with her own remedies. She had a morbid horror of getting stout. Every day she had

herself weighed, and if her usual weight increased at all she would live on oranges till it was reduced to the proper amount, in spite of her physicians' warnings of the danger of so slender a diet. But although Elizabeth cared so little for eating, when at home she gave much attention to the menus presented to her each morning by the chef, which she often altered to suit herself. No table could be served more daintily and artistically than that of the Austrian court when the Empress was present. She selected the costliest porcelain and glass and had gold and silver services for all her palaces, though they were rarely used owing to her long absences.

Maria Theresa had sixteen children, and her son the Emperor Leopold Second seventeen; so the Austrian imperial family is a large one, aside from the numbers of foreign princes in Vienna who are related to the house of Hapsburg-Lorraine. But except on one or two state occasions in the course of the winter these distant connections rarely saw either Franz Joseph or Elizabeth. Absorbed in cares of state and caring for little but his shooting trips in later years, the Emperor led almost as solitary a life as his wife. When they were together with their children, the Empress always strove to make these reunions as happy and cheerful as possible, as if to make up in some degree for the family life her long absences deprived him of. They would spend long cosey evenings on the terraces or by the fireside, and Rudolf would often join the party, or, if the Emperor were busy, Elizabeth would entertain herself with Marie Valerie and some of her ladies-in-waiting. The court in general, however, kept aloof from her. Her manner was cold and forbidding to those she did not like, though her intimate companions had the deepest love and admiration for her and she was worshipped by her servants, none of whom was too humble to share her sympathy and interest.

One morning in Vienna it was learned that one of Elizabeth's maids had died during the night, and very harsh comments were made on the fact of the Empress having been seen riding in the Prater on that very same afternoon. It was not told, however, that she had spent the whole of the previous night at the dying woman's bedside, and it was only when death had ended the maid's sufferings that the Empress had gone out into the fresh air.

Nature endowed Elizabeth with great beauty, a noble nature, and a good mind; fate gave her wealth and the most exalted position a woman can occupy, and she seemed to have been destined for a life of ease and happiness. Perfect as she seemed in outward appearance, however, her character was full of contradictions. She loved nothing so much as freedom and solitude, yet when forced to appear in public, no princess in Europe could equal her for grace and majesty. Simple and economical in her own tastes and habits, in many respects she had no idea of money, as, for instance, when she furnished her cousin Ludwig of Bavaria with enormous sums to gratify his passion for building palaces. Her generosity was boundless, and wherever she went she scattered gifts and money broadcast. She never followed the freaks of fashion, yet her slender figure was the delight and envy of modistes. She dressed as simply as any of her attendants, but whatever she wore it was impossible to conceal her inborn dignity and air of distinction. Her favorite costume for every-day wear was a short, close-fitting skirt with loose waist, and she never put on her elaborate court dresses except when absolutely necessary, though even these always bore the stamp of her individuality. In her later years she was rarely seen in anything but black or white; on a few special occasions she would wear light gray or lilac, but never bright colors. Her hair never lost its beauty, though before her death it began to show a trace of silver here and there,—much to her annoyance, for she had a horror of growing gray. When loosened, it fell far below her knees and

enveloped her like a mantle. She used to have it brushed for hours every day and often grew impatient of the trouble it caused her.

"My hair tires me," she said one day to her Greek teacher, running her hands through its waves as if to relieve herself of a burden, "it is such a weight upon my head."

"It is Your Majesty's crown!" was the courtly answer.

"But not so easy to remove as the other kind of a crown!" she retorted with a melancholy smile.

Another time she declared impatiently: "I am a perfect slave to my hair! I think I shall have it all cut off sometime."

But remarks such as these were made only in moments of annoyance and weariness. As a matter of fact, she was very proud of her magnificent tresses. It was almost the only sign of vanity she ever displayed.

Chapter XIX

Death of Crown Prince Rudolf

On the thirty-first of January, 1889, a terrible affliction befell the Emperor and Empress in the sudden and violent death of their only son. The tragedy of Mayerling is well known in its main points, and hundreds of different stories have been told concerning it, but the real circumstances of the affair are wrapped in impenetrable secrecy, and perhaps it is just as well if what the King of Belgium wrote to his brother, the Count of Flanders, is true.

"Any report," he said, "is better than that the real truth should be revealed."

All that is known with certainty is that the Crown Prince was found dead in his bed with a frightful wound in his head at his hunting lodge at Mayerling, near Vienna, where he had been spending a few days. In the same room lay the body of a young girl, the Baroness Vetsera, with whom he had been in love. It was difficult to believe that both had committed suicide, and there are facts which seem to indicate that Rudolf may have been murdered. The rest is all conjecture.

The unfortunate Prince was extremely popular with all classes and had many brilliant qualities, but after his marriage he developed habits which caused some anxiety as to his future. There was one person, however, who never lost faith in him, and that was his mother. She had wisely and carefully prepared him for the position he was to occupy in the world, and it was to her training and influence that he owed much of

his early popularity. All Vienna was paralyzed with horror on the cold gray morning when word was brought from Mayerling of the Crown Prince's death. No one knew just what had happened. No details of the affair were published and the confusion was indescribable. It was thought best to convey the news at once to the Empress, though many feared the shock might destroy her life or reason. As events proved, however, her mind and nerves were stronger than those of most people. She seemed stunned at first and turned away without speaking, her face drawn and colorless, but collecting herself she inquired in a dry, unnatural tone where her son was. Then her thoughts flew at once to her husband, who as yet knew nothing of what had happened. No one had the courage to tell him, but while the matter was being discussed Elizabeth stepped forward, pale but quite self-possessed, and declaring that it was her place to break it to the Emperor, left the room immediately. During the terrible days that followed the Empress gave ample proof, if it were needed, of her true nobility and strength of character. With heroic courage she stifled her own feelings to soothe and comfort her grief-stricken husband, and supported him bravely all through the endless ceremonies that accompanied the burial of their unfortunate child with whom so many hopes had perished. Well might Franz Joseph say, as he did when expressing his thanks to the people of Vienna for their sympathy: "What I owe to the courage and devotion of my beloved wife in this time of trouble, I can never adequately express, and I thank God with all my heart for bestowing on me so noble a consort." Ten days later, the imperial pair, accompanied by Marie Valerie, left Vienna for Hungary.

Rudolf had been the first prince of the reigning house to give promise of being a really constitutional monarch. He wrote and spoke the Hungarian language like a native, was thoroughly familiar with all parts of the country, and well liked by both the people and the aristocracy. In his death Hungary suffered an irreparable loss, and throughout the

kingdom there was genuine grief over his tragic fate, while the depth of public sympathy for the afflicted parents was shown in the warmth of the reception they received in Budapest. In a conversation with Dr. Christomanos some years before her death Elizabeth declared: “In every human life there is a moment when one dies inwardly and that need not necessarily be the time when death actually takes place.” This moment to her was when they brought her the news of her son’s death. She was never the same afterward. At the time of the catastrophe she had shown the courage of a heroine, but after her wonderful self-control had given way, the reaction was terrible and her despair heart-breaking. “I have no longer the strength to live nor the desire to die,” she said. It was reported in Berlin that her reason was destroyed, nor would it have been surprising if this had been the case after such a shock. Of course it was not true, but she did begin to develop symptoms of a serious heart trouble from which she suffered until her death. She never wished to see the Crown Princess Stephanie again, nor could she endure the presence of the little Archduchess Elizabeth, the grandchild who had inherited her father’s nature with the features of a mother to whose behavior the Empress attributed the changes in Rudolf’s way of life and his tragic fate. She shrank from contact with people more and more and often wounded her husband and children by her craving for solitude. Even her favorite palace of Lainz failed to attract her for more than a few weeks, while at Gödöllö the roses drooped and faded and the grass grew thick upon her once-loved bridle paths.



EMPRESS ELIZABETH in later years

On the Christmas Eve following the death of the Crown Prince, her mother's fifty-second birthday, the Archduchess Marie Valerie was betrothed to her cousin Franz Salvator, Duke of Tuscany, an event that was a cause of happiness and satisfaction to all concerned. Next to her parents' blessing she was anxious to have that of her grandmother, and the day after

Christmas accordingly she left for Munich, accompanied by her mother and her lover. Duke Max had died in 1888, shortly after the diamond wedding celebration at Possenhoffen, but the Duchess Ludovica, though bowed with age and many sorrows, had lost none of her mental acuteness and the meeting between the old lady and her daughter and granddaughter was most touching. From there they went to Wiesbaden and Heidelberg, where they spent the spring months. As they were returning to Vienna, they narrowly escaped death by the derailing of the train near Frankfort. Several of the coaches were overturned and crushed, but none of the imperial party, strange to say, was injured. Scarcely had the Empress reached home when she was called to Regensburg by the sudden death there of her eldest sister, Helene of Thurn and Taxis, and after the funeral she went again to Munich to comfort her grief-stricken mother.

The marriage of Marie Valerie and Franz Salvator that summer was one of the few happy events of Elizabeth's later life. On that occasion she laid aside her mourning for a pale gray silk gown, and for the first time since Rudolf's death made an effort to smile and appear cheerful. But the brief gleam soon vanished. The Archduchess had been the one bright spot in her life, and even though she was to remain in the country as the wife of an Austrian prince, Elizabeth realized that the relations between them could never be the same again. She had lost her dearest companion.

On the twenty-fifth of January, 1892, her burden of sorrow was increased by the death of her mother, and she retired to Achilleon, where she had had a monument erected to her unfortunate son that she might be alone with memories of her beloved dead. Even her attendants saw her for only a short time each day, and she lived mostly in a world of dreams. Her favorite poets still afforded her solace and diversion, but she grew to care less for books than for the solitude, which she peopled with creations of her own fancy. Her reader

sometimes tried to interest her in new authors, but her thoughts would soon wander and her absent expression prove the uselessness of such attempts. Only Shakespeare or Heine had power to fix her attention, and she would often interrupt her reading to recite favorite verses or passages to herself.

The only court ceremony at which the Empress appeared after the death of her son was on the occasion of the visit of the present Czar and Czarina of Russia to Vienna. Her presence at the state reception given in their honor excited even more interest and curiosity than did that of the young Czarina herself, and all eyes were fixed upon her as she entered on the arm of the Russian Emperor, smiling and bowing graciously to those about her. She was dressed in black, as usual, but looked twenty years younger than any of her contemporaries. In spite of all her sorrows and sufferings she could still be truthfully called the most beautiful woman at her court. But her thoughts were continually straying from her guests and from the brilliant scene about her.

125

"There often seems to be a thick veil between me and the world, as if I were masquerading in the costume of an Empress," she once remarked. "When I am with people I only show the part of me that we have in common, and they are surprised that I am so much like them when I talk about the weather and the price of candy. It is like taking a dress out of the wardrobe and putting it on for certain occasions."

In 1896 Hungary celebrated her thousandth anniversary. Elizabeth was even more miserable than usual at the time, and did not feel that she could be present, but it was urged that her absence would cast a shadow over the festivities, and, ill as she was both in body and mind, she finally was persuaded and appeared beside her husband on the throne. Dressed all in black, with a long veil worn Hungarian fashion over her hair, she sat pale and motionless as a statue, her long eyelashes drooping and an expression of unspeakable sadness on her

126

lovely face. Not a muscle moved as the speaker began his address of welcome. She seemed neither to see nor hear until he spoke the word “Elizabeth” and a mighty shout went up from the whole assembly that seemed to shake the marble walls of the throne room. Then the majestic head was lowered slightly, almost imperceptibly, but with wonderful grace and charm in acknowledgment of this tribute. Again the cheers rose louder than before and lasted several minutes, even the highest nobles of the kingdom waving their tufted kalpaks high in the air.

The Queen’s head sank, her deadly pallor giving place to a faint flush. Her eyes opened wide with a flash of their old brilliancy, and a tear rolled slowly down her cheek. It was plain that the affection between Elizabeth and her Hungarian subjects had undergone no change. The speaker went on with his address, the flush slowly faded from her cheeks, and soon she sat beside the Emperor, a Mater Dolorosa once more. It was her last visit to Hungary and her last appearance on the throne.

Chapter XX

Death of the Empress

The Empress Elizabeth had no fear of death, though the thought of it was often in her mind. “I am ready to die,” she used to say; “all I ask is that I may not live to suffer.” She had a presentiment that she was to die an unnatural death and believed it would be by drowning. Sometimes when walking along the shore or on the deck of her yacht she would say: “The sea will have me some day; I know I belong to it.” Her forebodings were destined to be fulfilled, though in a manner that neither she nor any one else could have foreseen, for the life that began so like a summer idyl ended in a tragedy.

In the Spring of 1897 a terrible fate befell her sister Sophie while assisting at a charity bazar held in Paris by the ladies of the French aristocracy. About four o’clock in the afternoon of the fourth of May the lamp of a cinematograph exploded, setting fire to some draperies. The hall was a flimsily built structure, and the flames spread with such rapidity that in a few moments the whole place was a sea of fire and the greater part of those present were unable to escape. One hundred and thirty people perished in this frightful disaster, among them the Duchess d’Alençon, Ludwig of Bavaria’s former *fiancée*. It was known that she must have perished, for her wedding ring was found among the ruins soon after the conflagration, though it was not till some days later that her body was found and identified.

The Queen of Naples and Mathilde of Trani were now Elizabeth’s only surviving sisters, and of these the latter was

her favorite. They had many traits in common, particularly their aversion to society and their love of travel. The Countess of Trani, who spent most of her time at hotels and watering-places, usually went by the modest title of "Fräulein Nelly Schmidt." The last Christmas of Elizabeth's life the two sisters spent together in Paris, but an acute attack of neuritis forced the Empress to hasten southward, and taking her yacht *Miramar* at Marseilles, they went to San Remo. Here they stayed for two months, leaving on the first of March for Territet in Switzerland, where they parted never to meet again.

Elizabeth was fond of returning to familiar places, and Lake Geneva was one of her favorite spots. From Territet she used to go every day by rail to Glion and from there on foot to Mont de Caux, accompanied only by one of her ladies or her reader, a young man named Frederick Barker.

After a six weeks' stay in Switzerland she returned to Vienna and went with the Emperor to Lainz. Never had her mind appeared so clouded as now. The veil of melancholia had settled over her thicker and heavier than ever. Her glance was restless, there was an unspeakable weariness in her expression, and hard and bitter lines had appeared about her mouth. Constant suffering made life a torment to her and she could find no rest day or night.

Early in August she went as usual with her husband and Valerie's family to Ischl to celebrate the Emperor's birthday. It was the only day in the year on which she laid aside her mourning, and the imperial pair usually went together to church. This time, however, she left earlier and went to Mannheim to take some special massage treatment recommended by her physicians. Her health improved so much that she was able to eat and sleep again and to resume her excursions about the neighborhood, though still too weak to take the long walks and climbs she was so fond of.

On the twenty-ninth of August she went back to Switzerland, this time by special train to Mont de Caux, where she could be more quiet than at Territet. She seemed unusually well, and those who met the slender black-robed foreign lady, chatting familiarly with her one companion, little surmised that she was the sovereign of one of the greatest powers of Europe and ruler over more than forty million people. In a letter to the Emperor written at this time she expressed regret that he was not sharing the peace and pleasure of her stay here and urged him to join her, declaring that she was feeling so much better she hoped to be present at his approaching jubilee, the fiftieth anniversary of his accession to the throne. 131

On the ninth of September she suddenly decided to make a visit to Pregny, a beautiful villa on the shores of Lake Geneva, that had once belonged to Joseph Bonaparte, but is now in the possession of the Rothschild family. The Baroness Adolph Rothschild had been very kind to the Queen of Naples in her days of misfortune, and Elizabeth was anxious to show her some attention.

She had gone for a stroll the preceding afternoon in the neighborhood of Territet with her reader, Mr. Barker, who had taken with him a basket of fruit for her refreshment. Seating herself on some moss-grown rocks, the Empress peeled a peach, half of which she offered to her companion. Just as she was in the act of handing it to him, a huge raven flew down from a tree near by, flapping its wings almost in her face and knocking the peach from her hand. Remembering the famous legend of the raven, which is always said to appear to the Hapsburgs as a forerunner of misfortune, the startled reader sprang to his feet in alarm and begged her to abandon the trip to Geneva. 132

“I am not afraid, my friend,” replied Elizabeth. “We must all meet our fate sooner or later, and whatever is destined to

happen will happen. Nothing we can do will alter it. You know I am a fatalist."

The next day she went to Pregny, as she had planned, accompanied only by her Hungarian lady-in-waiting, the Countess Sztaray. She was in a remarkably cheerful mood, most gracious and friendly with the Baroness and much pleased with her visit. Late in the afternoon she arrived at the Hôtel Beaurivage, where she was in the habit of staying. Every precaution had been taken as usual to preserve her incognito, though the servants, remembering her from former visits, were no doubt well aware of her identity. On her first arrival in Switzerland the police of the canton had been charged to watch over her safety, but she had wished as usual to be spared their espionage and left to go her own way.

At noon on the tenth of September, 1898, she left the hotel with her lady-in-waiting to take the steamer to Mont de Caux. They were a little late, and the Countess Sztaray hurried on in advance of her mistress to signal the captain to wait for them. Just at that moment a man arose from a bench on the quay where he had been sitting as they passed. It was the Italian Luigi Luccheni, a dangerous anarchist on whom the Swiss authorities had been warned to keep a watchful eye. With one bound he flung himself upon the Empress and plunged a dagger into her breast. The Countess was unaware that anything had happened, but turning just in time to see her mistress stagger, ran and caught her in her arms.

"Is Your Majesty ill?" she asked in alarm.

"I do not know," said Elizabeth.

"Will Your Majesty take my arm?"

"Thank you. I do not think I need it."

Though ghastly pale, she walked to the steamer without assistance, crossed the gang-plank, and then fell fainting to the deck. The steamer started, and the Countess Sztaray with some of the women on board endeavored to restore her to consciousness. No one suspected that she had been wounded until the Countess, loosening her dress to give her more air, discovered stains of blood on her clothing. Just then Elizabeth opened her eyes and in a clear, distinct voice asked, "What has happened?" then sank again into unconsciousness. Now thoroughly alarmed, the Countess informed the captain of her mistress' identity, and the boat was turned back at once to Geneva, where Elizabeth was carried on a stretcher to the hotel and laid upon her bed. Three physicians who happened to be staying there at the time were hastily summoned and did all in their power to revive her, but in vain: about three o'clock she gave one or two deep sighs and passed away quietly and painlessly, as she had so often expressed a wish to do.

So cold-blooded and unprovoked an assault in broad daylight and in the public street of a large city was one of the most shocking crimes of modern times and aroused the horror and indignation of the whole civilized world. Elizabeth of Austro-Hungary had no enemies. She had exerted no influence in politics, directly or indirectly, nor was she interested in state affairs. As her grief-stricken husband said of her, "she had done much good and never harmed a human being."

The Empress' salon in the hotel was quickly transformed into a mortuary chapel. The walls were hung with black, tall candles placed about the coffin, at the foot of which knelt monks reciting prayers for the dead, and over the bier fell a purple velvet pall, in the corner of which some young Swiss girls had embroidered the words "*Répose en paix*." Elizabeth was dressed as she had been in life, in black, her hands folded over a rosary and an ivory crucifix. The beautiful features

were not altered, but had changed their look of suffering to an expression of wonderful majesty and peace.

On the evening of the eleventh of September a special train bearing her remains left Geneva and passed slowly through Switzerland and Austria amid the tolling of bells, and was met at every stop by sorrowing throngs eager to pay a last tribute to the dead Empress. 135

The Emperor was overwhelmed with messages of sympathy from all parts of the globe. Flowers and funeral wreaths came from high and low alike in every land that she had visited. Even China and the Transvaal sent offerings to lay upon the Empress' coffin. From Cairo came a wreath made of desert blooms, hundreds of Jericho roses, the old Christian emblem of the resurrection, and lotus blossoms, symbolic of eternity.

Her death made almost as deep an impression in most of the foreign capitals as in Vienna, where for years she had been so little seen that her Austrian subjects had almost forgotten how she looked, and her assassination aroused less sorrow than rage against the wretch who could have slain a defenceless woman.

In Hungary, however, the public mourning was deep and profound. Every flag was at half-mast and the streets were full of sobbing men and women. The great autumn manœuvres were abandoned, and it was decreed that her biography should be recorded in the national archives, so that her memory might be forever preserved in the history of the country. 136

The Empress Elizabeth's personal fortune was a large one. Her jewels alone—presents from Franz Joseph and other royal personages—were valued at four million gulden. Her will was made at Budapest in 1896. It was very short and written in her own hand. Her palace at Lainz was bequeathed to her daughter Valerie; Achilleon, in Corfu, to the elder, Gisela. All her servants and ladies-in-waiting received legacies, and a

number of old friends were also remembered. To her old reader and companion, Ida von Ferenczy, who had been with her for thirty years, she left an annuity, besides a considerable sum of money and a life residence in the imperial palace.

In earlier days Elizabeth had expressed a wish to be buried at Gödöllö, then her favorite residence, but in her will she mentioned Achilleon as her chosen place of burial. Her desire was not fulfilled, however. Indulgent as Franz Joseph had been toward his wife's eccentricities during her lifetime, he was not willing that her hatred of conventionality should be exhibited in her death, and determined that her body should be laid to rest with those of former Empresses and members of his family.

In the heart of Vienna there stands an insignificant-looking chapel belonging to the Capuchins. Above a side door are the words "Imperial Vaults," and a flight of well-worn steps leads down into the dim burial-place of the royal race of Hapsburg. It was into this chamber that the great Maria Theresa used to force her gay young daughters to descend to meditate on the perishability of all earthly greatness, and here she herself would spend hours beside the tomb of her husband. At the end of a cross passage stands the tomb of the murdered Empress, between that of her brother-in-law, the murdered Emperor of Mexico, and her son Rudolf, who also met with a violent end.

In life she had shunned all religious observances; now masses are said day and night for the repose of her soul. Every morning the gates of the crypt are opened, and she who in life so loved solitude and seclusion is a mark for the gaze of hundreds of curious sightseers.

How much more fitting a place of rest for the nature-loving Empress the sunny shores of her Greek island would have been than the gloomy burial chamber of the Capuchins! How

much finer a requiem the sighing of winds and waters than the chantings of vestured priests!

To the world in general Elizabeth of Austria and Hungary will be little remembered as the queenly sovereign in all the insignia of her lofty rank, but rather as the beautiful and unfortunate daughter of the Wittelsbachs, following her solitary way through life, her lonely spirit ever seeking rest and peace in vain. Terrible as it seemed to die by the hand of an assassin in a foreign country, far from all she loved, the dagger of Luccheni was but the instrument of fate, and death came to her almost as a friend. She died, as she had often wished to die, swiftly and painlessly and under the open sky. Who shall say that her last earthly breath was not a sigh of thankfulness and peace?

Footnotes

[1] A few days before the death of the Empress Elizabeth, in 1898, this bridge was torn down.

Appendix

The following is a chronological statement of important events connected with the life of Elizabeth, Empress of Austria:

1837 Birth of Elizabeth.
1853 Betrothal to Franz Joseph.
1854 Marriage.
1856 Visit to Austrian Alps.
1855 Birth of Sophie Dorothea.
1856 Birth of second daughter, Gisela.
1858 Birth of Crown Prince Rudolf.
1859 Sardinian War.
1866 Estrangement of Emperor and Empress.
1866 War with Prussia.
1867 Elizabeth Crowned Queen of Hungary.
1868 Birth of Marie Valerie.
1878 War with Bosnia and Herzegovina.
1881 Marriage of Prince Rudolf.
1889 Death of Prince Rudolf.
1896 Hungary Celebrated Thousandth Anniversary.
1898 Elizabeth Killed by an Assassin.

Translated from the German by
GEORGE P. UPTON

24 VOLUMES NOW READY

Historical and Biographical

BARBAROSSA
WILLIAM OF ORANGE
MARIA THERESA
THE MAID OF ORLEANS
FREDERICK THE GREAT
THE LITTLE DAUPHIN
HERMAN AND THUSNELDA
THE SWISS HEROES
MARIE ANTOINETTE'S YOUTH
THE DUKE OF BRITTANY
LOUISE, QUEEN OF PRUSSIA
THE YOUTH OF THE GREAT ELECTOR
EMPEROR WILLIAM FIRST
ELIZABETH, EMPRESS OF AUSTRIA

Musical Biography

BEETHOVEN
MOZART
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
JOSEPH HAYDN

Legendary

FRITHJOF SAGA
GUDRUN
THE NIBELUNGS
WILLIAM TELL
ARNOLD OF WINKELRIED
UNDINE

Illustrated. Each 60 cents *net*
A. C. McCLURG & CO., CHICAGO

Transcriber's Notes

- Copyright notice provided as in the original—this e-text is public domain in the country of publication.
- In the text versions, delimited italics text in _underscores_ (the HTML version reproduces the font form of the printed book.)
- Silently corrected palpable typos; left non-standard spellings and dialect unchanged.