

THE
COUNT PALATINE

AND

the Emperor's daughter.

At the time when Otto the Third, a descendant of the Imperial House of Saxony, mounted the throne of his ancestors as Emperor of Germania, the government of the State was in the hands of Theofania, a Grecian princess, widow of the late and mother to the reigning Emperor, a woman of great talent and superior endowment. It was only through her prudence that Otto maintained himself on his throne, for he had dangerous rivals in Crescentius Nomentanus, the Roman Consul, and Henry, Duke of Bavaria, descendant of Henry the Second, the last of whom once seized Otto and threw him into prison, from whence he was

liberated, only through the repeated remonstrances and threats of the assembled States of the Empire. The learned Gerber, who afterwards ascended the Pontifical chair as Sylvester the Second, was appointed tutor to the young Prince, by the Empress. This great man fashioned the heart of his pupil and instilled into his mind such virtues and noble sentiments as adorned the Empress Regent and, through his sage advice and example, excited him to those acts of kindness and generosity, which shed a lustre over his short life and made his death generally lamented.

Among the advisers of the widowed Empress was Ezo, Count Palatine of Aix-la-Chapelle, a man, who, although in the bloom of life, was so superior in science and martial prowess that not one of the oldest counsellors could compete with him. A short time before the commencement of this history, he had caused Lothario, King of Franconia, who had invaded Lorraine and laid siege to the city of Verdun, to leave that place and return to Allemannia without drawing his sword. During Otto's imprisonment and after his release, he was one of the most daring speakers against Henry of Bavaria and attended with unremitting ardour, to the affairs of the Empire. Through this, Theofania became much attached to the Count, gave him her confidence and intrusted him with the management of all matters of importance relating to the Empire. Ezo justified the confidence of the Empress, for no one among the Lords at Court was more zealous and attentive than he. By his affable disposition he gained many friends

and was esteemed by all. The young Emperor also became fond of Lord Ezo, not only because he instructed him in those manly exercises which are suitable to a noble Prince, but because his mother had informed him of his true and loyal services. Thus the Count Palatine not only became one of the first Counsellors to the Empress, who followed his advice in all undertakings where prudence, foresight and secrecy were required, but he was also the favorite of Otto and the esteemed companion of all Courtiers.

In the Convent of noble ladies at Essen, on the further side of the Rhine, in a small vaulted chamber, furnished with great elegance, sat Adelaide sister of Otto the Second the deceased Emperor of Germany and abbess of the convent. At her side, near a gothic beautifully arched window, was a young girl of rosy complexion, whose light tresses fell gracefully upon her alabaster neck and whose blue eyes full of gentleness and modesty were fixed on the work held by her delicate fingers. The rays of the rising sun, darting through the painted windows, threw the splendour of their colours over the apartment. An image of the Virgin Mary, sculptured with great skill, stood upon a small altar surrounded by figures of Saints suspended in gilt frames of curious workmanship. The vases of odoriferous flowers, placed before the image of the Madonna, seemed to vie, in the richness of their colours, with the ardent fires streaming through the glass windows. This young beauty was Matilda sister of the young Emperor Otto. Her education had

been entrusted to her aunt the Abbess, who intended her for a conventual life. She was a woman of rigid piety, whose great desire was, that her cherished pupil should quit the tumults of the world and retire to the protecting care of a convent. The timid young girl, who sincerely loved her aunt, dared not resist her wishes, although she had no inclination for a religious life. A single instant had decided her fate. She loved, but without hope. During her last sojourn at Aix-la-Chapelle, she had seen Ezo! His beautiful figure, the charms of his conversation, his bravery and the nobleness of his sentiments, had entirely captivated the heart of the tender maid. Finding that every one, even her mother, spoke in praise of Ezo and that he was the object of universal respect and distinction, she said to herself:— “This man or none!” The Count Palatine was in the same condition with regard to Matilda. He was often visibly affected, when she looked at or spoke to him, an ardent flush would instantly overspread his cheeks, and he would lower his eyes in silence. Although of an ancient and highly noble family, he dared not raise his eyes and wishes to a princess — the daughter of an Emperor! Neither did the history of Eginhard and Emma, which often occurred to his thought, give him any hope of success. With difficulty he quelled the violent throbbing of his breast whenever the princess, full of timidity and grace, approached him. Although not a word passed between the lovers, yet their eyes said enough. Ezo always kept at a measured distance

from Matilda, for he trembled and feared lest any discovery should lead to an unfortunate issue between them, and latterly he retired entirely from Court, only appearing at those times when affairs of duty or ceremony demanded his presence. At last the time of Matilda's departure arrived and she returned to her aunt, who was not long in observing that her manner was changed and that she had become absent and pensive.

Thus it was with Matilda on this particular morning. Her eyes had for a long time been vacantly fixed on the superb garden of the convent, where millions of flowers shed their lustre around and where the warbling birds revelled in the rays of the vernal sun. The maiden's delicate fingers reposed with her unfinished work, upon her lap. The wondering Abbess watched her for some time; at length breaking silence she said.

"What ails you Matilda, that you thus gaze at the sky and do not attend to your work, which has fallen from your hands?"

"I was thinking" . . . quickly began Matilda, but looking at the Abbess, she stopped suddenly, and fixed her eyes on the ground.

The Abbess arose, shook her head and approaching the altar, prostrated herself, saying: "She will never become a good nun now—notwithstanding all that I have done to dispose her mind to that state. The will of God be done!"

One afternoon about this time the young Emperor Otto was seated in the Imperial Palace at Aix-la-

Chapelle, in company with his two eldest sisters and many nobles of the court, amongst whom was Ezo the Count Palatine. As the king was extremely fond of chess and esteemed himself capable of playing against the whole world, he invited the Count to play with him. Ezo readily obeyed his Sovereigns commands, having devoted much time to the acquirement of a pastime at which he had attained a great degree of skill. When the servants had placed the board and the combatants were seated, it was agreed that whoever should be the victor, in three following games, might ask any thing he pleased of the other, that it was in his power to accord.

Now Ezo immediately resolved within himself, what prize he would ask, in the event of his vanquishing the Emperor. He looked on this chance as a favour offered by fortune, for he determined to demand the hand of Matilda as the prize of victory! But he visibly trembled, when the Emperor commenced the game and it was his turn to move; for, how easily he could lose and then all his hopes would fade in a moment. However his presence of mind did not desert him. The God of Love seemed to hover around him: he played with surprising success; each piece, that he brought forward against his adversary recalled Matilda to his mind and rendered him doubly cautious; so that Otto, who tried every means that his great science suggested, to put him off his guard, was entirely baffled.

The first game ended by the Emperor being checkmated. Ezo, hovering between hope and fear, thanked

heaven, but by far the greater danger was yet to overcome, for the Emperor would undoubtedly redouble his efforts to prevent being again beaten. The second game began, Otto annoyed at his loss, exposed his men, and the Count quickly took advantage of it. Thus the play continued until at the end of the third game, Ezo was the conqueror.

Who can describe what passed in the bosom of Ezo? He had to demand the prize! The name of Matilda was on his tongue, but he hesitated to pronounce it. "How easily," said he to himself, "may the Emperor refuse thee his sister, notwithstanding his given word, and state as an excuse that he did not intend the wager to be thus interpreted? What a humiliation to thee, when all hope is lost, to be obliged to retire from the presence of the whole Court!"

The nobles during this, looked with amazement on the Count Palatine, expecting he would ask for a large sum in gold or silver, or for a City or even a Duchy. At last confidence gained the ascendancy in the Count's bosom. Advancing boldly to the Emperor, he threw himself on one knee before him: but it was only with a faltering voice that he could pronounce these words: "Great Prince, give me Matilda your sister. I have long loved her, and you will make two hearts happy."

The courtiers were stupified with astonishment at this demand and looked at the Count Palatine who continued kneeling, awaiting his fate. Just then Theofania entered the saloon, she no sooner heard the

meaning of this singular scene, than she determined to support the Count's pretention. Advancing to the Emperor who was hesitating what to do, she said: "My son, keep your promise, give him Matilda, he has deserved her from us both, my maternal blessing shall crown their union."

Otto, who respected and loved his mother above all as his protectress and adviser, did not hesitate a moment to accede to her desire, so that it seemed he only waited her approbation, to crown the happiness of the Count Palatine, whom he had long known as the most faithful of his officers. "Take her then!" said he graciously raising Ezo, "take her and be happy: rest faithful to your Sovereign — your brother and be assured of my continual love."

Ezo could no longer contain his joy. He hardly dared trust his ears when he received this affectionate reply of the Monarch, whom he thanked most fervently a thousand times. His friends, who highly respected and loved him, flocked around to congratulate him on this happy attainment of his desires.

Provided with a letter from the Emperor, the Count set off immediately for Essen to conduct his lovely bride to Aix-la-Chapelle.

The early matins were over, the nuns had re-entered their cells, when two knights, mounted on faeming steeds, arrived at the convent and asked permission to enter. The gate was opened. The foremost rider sprung from his horse, threw the reins to a

domestic and having entered the convent, desired to speak with the Princess Matilda. He was ushered into the parlour, and the Princess almost immediately entered. A slight tinge of red mantled her cheeks as she recognized the Count Palatine. He approached and respectfully saluted her, then drawing a letter from his leathern pouch he placed it in her hands. The contents of the paper, thus presented to her were as follows:

“ Beloved sister, Salute, in the bearer of this letter, our dear and faithful Count Palatine, Lord Ezo, your intended husband, and return in his company, as quikly as possible, to Us and your mother at Aix-la-Chapelle. The Count will relate how this came to pass, and will assure you of the affection, with which I am, Your Brother Otto.

“ From our Palace at Aix-la-Chapelle the 22nd of May.”

With a bewildered look Matilda raised her eyes. Was it a dream or reality? She again examined the letter to ascertain that it was no illusion. For who could immediately believe in the existence of such unforeseen happiness? At last her glance, full of love fell upon the Count.

“ My Matilda ! ” cried he, with an accent of deep tenderness and with joy sparkling eyes; at the same moment he flew towards her and in the transport of his ecstasy pressed her to his palpitating heart and sealed their union with a first embrace.

The lovers now repaired to the Abbess. When the Princess declared her intention of returning to Aix-la-

Chapelle to marry the Count Palatine, the pious lady could not restrain her indignation and Ezo was obliged to listen to much harsh language for she would not consent to the removal of the Princess, and still hoped to persuade her to take the veil. Matilda was standing with down-cast eyes by the side of her lover, who listened tranquilly until the Abbess had made an end of her remarks : he then took the letter from the hands of his beloved and gave it to her. It may be easily conceived that, after perusing Otto's epistle, the Abbess had no longer any impediment to throw in the way of the marriage. She therefore subscribed to it without delay, consoling herself with the prospect that one or the other of the Imperial Princesses would embrace that happiness, which Matilda thus discarded. And so it really happened, even beyond the hopes of the worthy Abbess, for Adelaide became Abbess of Quedlinburg and Sophia Abbess of Gandersheim. Ezo and Matilda departed after receiving their benediction. The journey to Aix-la-Chapelle was quickly over and the assembled court received the lovers, who were shortly after eternally united by the hand of the priest and received the blessing of Theofania at Brauweiler.

This is the wonderful but true history of the Count Palatine and the Imperial Princess, as it is related in the chronicles and histories of the olden time. Ezo and Matilda lived long and happily together in holy matrimony and devoutly served the Lord, who had vouchsafed to them so great a portion of felicity.