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Excerpt

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BOOK V

DOUBLE-MARRIAGE PROJECT, AND WHAT
ELEMENT IT FELL INTO

1723-1726

CHAPTER I

DOUBLE-MARRIAGE IS DECIDED ON

WE saw George I. at Berlin in October 1723, looking out upon his little Grandson drilling the Cadets there; but we did not mention what important errand had brought his Majesty thither.

Visits between Hanover and Berlin had been frequent for a long time back; the young Queen of Prussia, sometimes with her husband, sometimes without, running often over to see her Father; who, even after his accession to the English crown, was generally for some months every year to be met with in those favourite regions of his. He himself did not much visit, being of taciturn splenetic nature: but this once he had agreed to return a visit they had lately made him,—where a certain weighty Business had been agreed upon, withal; which his Britannic Majesty was to consummate formally, by treaty, when the meeting in Berlin took effect. His Britannic Majesty, accordingly, is come; the business in hand is no other than that thrice-famous ‘Double-Marriage’ of Prussia with England; which once had such a sound in the ear of Rumour, and still bulks so big in the archives of the Eighteenth Century; which worked such woe to all

VOL. II.

A

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 MARRIAGE PROJECT STARTED [BOOK V.

[1723-1726

parties concerned in it; and is, in fact, a first-rate nuisance in the History of that poor Century, as written hitherto. Nuisance demanding urgently to be abated;—were that well possible at present. Which, alas, it is not, to any great degree; there being an important young Friedrich inextricably wrapt up in it, to whom it was of such vital or almost fatal importance! Without a Friedrich, the affair could be reduced to something like its real size, and recorded in a few pages; or might even, with advantage, be forgotten altogether, and become zero. More gigantic instance of much ado about nothing has seldom occurred in human annals;—had not there been a Friedrich in the heart of it.

Crown-Prince Friedrich is still very young for marriage-speculations on his score: but Mamma has thought good to take matters in time. And so we shall, in the next ensuing parts of this poor History, have to hear almost as much about Marriage as in the foolishlest Three-volume Novel, and almost to still less purpose. For indeed, in that particular, Friedrich's young Life may be called a *Romance flung heels-over-head*;—Marriage being the one event there, round which all events turn,—but turn in the inverse or reverse way (as if the Devil were in them); not only towards no happy goal for him or Mamma, or us, but at last towards hardly any goal at all for anybody! So mad did the affair grow;—and is so madly recorded in those inextricable, dateless, chaotic Books. We have now come to regions of Narrative, which seem to consist of murky Nothingness put on boil; not land, or water, or air, or fire, but a tumultuously whirling commixture of all the four;—of immense extent too. Which must be got crossed, in some human manner. Courage, patience, good reader!

Queen Sophie Dorothee has taken Time by the Forelock

Already, for a dozen years, this matter has been treated of. Queen Sophie Dorothee, ever since the birth of her Wilhel-

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Excerpt

[More information](#)CH. I.] DOUBLE-MARRIAGE IS DECIDED ON 3
1723-1726]

mina, has had the notion of it; and, on her first visit afterwards to Hanover, proposed it to 'Princess Caroline,'—Queen Caroline of England who was to be, and who in due course was;—an excellent accomplished Brandenburg-Anspach Lady, familiar from of old in the Prussian Court: 'You, Caroline, Cousin dear, have a little Prince, Fritz, or let us call him *Fred*, since he is to be English; little Fred, who will one day, if all go right, be King of England. He is two years older than my little Wilhelmina: why should not they wed, and the two chief Protestant Houses, and Nations, thereby be united?' Princess Caroline was very willing; so was Electress Sophie, the Great-Grandmother of both the parties; so were the Georges, Father and Grandfather of Fred: little Fred himself was highly charmed, when told of it; even little Wilhelmina, with her dolls, looked pleasantly demure on the occasion. So it remained settled in fact, though not in form; and little Fred (a florid milk-faced foolish kind of Boy, I guess) made presents to his little Prussian Cousin, wrote bits of love-letters to her; and all along afterwards fancied himself, and at length ardently enough became, her little lover and intended,—always rather a little fellow:—to which sentiments Wilhelmina signifies that she responded with the due maidenly indifference, but not in an offensive manner.

After our Prussian Fritz's birth, the matter took a still closer form: 'You dear Princess Caroline, you have now two little Princesses again, either of whom might suit my little Fritzchen; let us take Amelia, the second of them, who is nearest his age?' 'Agreed!' answered Princess Caroline again. 'Agreed!' answered all the parties interested: and so it was settled, that the Marriage of Prussia to England should be a Double one, Fred of Hanover and England to Wilhelmina, Fritz of Prussia to Amelia; and children and parents lived thenceforth in the constant understanding that such, in due course of years, was to be the case, though nothing yet was formally concluded by treaty upon it.¹

¹ Pöllnitz, *Memoiren*, ii. 193.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)4 MARRIAGE PROJECT STARTED [BOOK V.
(1723-1726)

Queen Sophie Dorothee of Prussia was always eager enough for treaty, and conclusion to her scheme. True to it, she, as needle to the pole in all weathers; sometimes in the wildest weather, poor lady. Nor did the Hanover Serene Highnesses, at any time, draw back or falter: but having very soon got wafted across to England, into new more complex conditions, and wider anxieties in that new country, they were not so impressively eager as Queen Sophie, on this interesting point. Electress Sophie, judicious Great-Grandmother, was not now there: Electress Sophie had died about a month before Queen Anne; and never saw the English Canaan, much as she had longed for it. George I., her son, a taciturn, rather splenetic elderly Gentleman, very foreign in England, and oftenest rather sulky there and elsewhere, was not in a humour to be forward in that particular business.

George I. had got into quarrel with his Prince of Wales, Fred's Father,—him who is one day to be George II., always a rather foolish little Prince, though his Wife Caroline was Wisdom's self in a manner:—George I. had other much more urgent cares than that of marrying his disobedient foolish little Prince of Wales's offspring; and he always pleaded difficulties, Acts of Parliament that would be needed, and the like, whenever Sophie Dorothee came to visit him at Hanover, and urge this matter. The taciturn, inarticulately thoughtful, rather sulky old Gentleman, he had weighty burdens lying on him; felt fretted and galled, in many ways; and had found life, Electoral and even Royal, a deceptive sumptuosity, little better than a more or less extensive 'feast of shells,' next to no real meat or drink left in it to the hungry heart of man. Wife sitting half-frantic in the Castle of Ahlden, waxing more and more into a gray-haired Megæra (with whom Sophie Dorothee under seven seals of secrecy corresponds a little, and even the Prince of Wales is suspected of wishing to correspond); a foolish disobedient Prince of Wales; Jacobite Pretender people with their Mar Rebellions, with

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

CH. I.] DOUBLE-MARRIAGE IS DECIDED ON 5

1723-1726]

their Alberoni combinations ; an English Parliament jangling and debating unmelodiously, whose very language is a mystery to us, nothing but Walpole in dog-latin to help us through it: truly it is not a Heaven-on-Earth altogether, much as Mother Sophie and her foolish favourite, our disobedient Prince of Wales, might long for it! And the Hanover Tail, the Robethons, Bernstorfs, Fabrices, even the Blackamoor Porters,—they are not beautiful either, to a taciturn Majesty of some sense, if he cared about their doings or them. Voracious, plunderous, all of them ; like hounds, long hungry, got into a rich house which has no master, or a mere imaginary one. ‘*Mentiris impudentissime,*’ said Walpole in his dog-latin once, in our Royal presence, to one of these official plunderous gentlemen, ‘You tell an impudent lie!’—at which we only laughed.¹

His Britannic Majesty by no means wanted sense, had not his situation been incurably absurd. In his young time he had served creditably enough against the Turks ; twice commanded the *Reichs*-Army in the Marlborough Wars, and did at least testify his indignation at the inefficient state of it. His Foreign Politics, so-called, were not madder than those of others. Bremen and Verden he had bought a bargain ; and it was natural to protect them by such resources as he had, English or other. Then there was the World-Spectre of the Pretender, stretching huge over Creation, like the Brocken-Spectre in hazy weather ;—against whom how protect yourself, except by cannonading for the Kaiser at Messina ; by rushing into every brabble that rose, and hiring the parties with money to fight it out well ? It was the established method in that matter ; method not of George’s inventing, nor did it cease with George. As to Domestic Politics, except it were to keep quiet, and eat what the gods had provided, one does not find that he had any.—The sage Leibnitz would very fain have followed him to England ; but, for reasons indifferently good, could never be allowed. If the truth must

¹ Horace Walpole, *Reminiscences of George I. and George II.* (London, 1788).

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Excerpt

[More information](#)6 MARRIAGE PROJECT STARTED [BOOK V.
[1723-1726]

be told, the sage Leibnitz had a wisdom which now looks dreadfully like that of a wiseacre! In Mathematics even,—he did invent the Differential Calculus, but it is certain also he never could believe in Newton's System of the Universe, nor would read the *Principia* at all. For the rest, he was in quarrel about Newton with the Royal Society here; ill seen, it is probable, by this sage and the other. To the Hanover Official Gentlemen devouring their English dead-horse, it did not appear that his presence could be useful in these parts.¹

Nor are the Hanover womankind his Majesty has about him, quasi-wives or not, of a soul-entrancing character; far indeed from that. Two in chief there are, a fat and a lean: the lean, called 'Maypole' by the English populace, is 'Duchess of Kendal,' with excellent pension, in the English Peerages; Schulenburg the former German name of her; decidedly a quasi-wife (influential, against her will, in that sad Königsmark Tragedy, at Hanover long since), who is fallen thin and old. 'Maypole,'—or bare Hop-pole, with the leaves all stript; lean, long, hard;—though she once had her summer verdures too; and still, as an old quasi-wife, or were it only as an old article of furniture, has her worth to the royal mind. Schulenburgs, kindred of hers, are high in the military line; some of whom we may meet.

Then, besides this lean one, there is a fat; of whom Walpole (Horace, who had seen her in boyhood) gives description. Big staring black eyes, with rim of circular eyebrow, like a coachwheel round its nave, very black the eyebrows also; vast red face; cheeks running into neck, neck blending indistinguishably with stomach,—a mere cataract of fluid tallow, skinned over and curiously dizened, according to Walpole's portraiture. This charming creature, Kielmannsegge by German name, was called 'Countess of Darlington' in this country,—with excellent pension, as was natural.

¹ Guhrauer, *Gottfried Freiherr von Leibnitz, eine Biographie* (Breslau, 1842); Ker of Kersland, *Memoirs of Secret Transactions* (London, 1727).

Cambridge University Press

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Excerpt

[More information](#)CH. I.] DOUBLE-MARRIAGE IS DECIDED ON 7
1723-1726]

They all had pensions : even Queen Sophie Dorothee, I have noticed in our State-Paper Office, has her small pension, ‘800*l.* a year on the Irish Establishment’ : Irish Establishment will never miss such a pittance for our poor Child, and it may be useful over yonder!—This Kielmannsegge Countess of Darlington was, and is, believed by the gossiping English to have been a second simultaneous Mistress of his Majesty’s ; but seems, after all, to have been his half-Sister and nothing more. Half-Sister (due to Gentleman Ernst and a Countess Platen of bad Hanover fame) ; grown dreadfully fat ; but not without shrewdness, perhaps affection ; and worth something in this dull foreign country, mere cataract of animal oils as she has become. These Two are the amount of his Britannic Majesty’s resources in that matter ; resources surely not extensive, after all !—

His Britannic Majesty’s day, in St. James’s, is not of an interesting sort to him ; and every evening he comes precisely at a certain hour to drink beer, seasoned with a little tobacco, and the company of these two women. Drinks diligently in a sipping way, says Horace ; and smokes, with such dull speech as there may be,—not till he is drunk, but only perceptibly drunkish ; raised into a kind of cloudy narcotic Olympus, and opaquely superior to the ills of life ; in which state he walks uncomplainingly to bed. Government, when it can by any art be avoided, he rarely meddles with ; shows a rugged sagacity, where he does and must meddle : consigns it to Walpole in dog-latin,—laughs at his ‘*mentiris.*’ This is the First George ; first triumph of the Constitutional Principle, which has since gone to such sublime heights among us,—heights which we at last begin to suspect might be depths, leading down, all men now ask : Whitherwards ? A much-admired invention in its time, that of letting-go the rudder, or setting a wooden figure expensively dressed to take charge of it, and discerning that the ship would sail of itself so much more easily ! Which it will, if a peculiarly good sea-boat, in certain kinds of sea,—for a time. Till the Sinbad ‘Magnetic

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Excerpt

[More information](#)8 MARRIAGE PROJECT STARTED [BOOK V. ^[1723]

Mountains ' begin to be felt pulling, or the circles of Charybdis get you in their sweep ; and then what an invention it was ! —This, we say, is the new Sovereign Man, whom the English People, being in some perplexity about the Pope and other points, have called-in from Hanover, to walk before them in the ways of heroism, and by command and by example guide Heavenwards their affairs and them. And they hope that he will do it? Or perhaps that their affairs will go thither of their own accord? Always a singular People!—

Poor George, careless of these ulterior issues, has always trouble enough with the mere daily details, Parliamentary insolences, Jacobite plottings, South-Sea Bubbles ; and wishes to hunt, when he gets over to Hanover, rather than to make Marriage-Treaties. Besides, as Wilhelmina tells us, they have filled him with lies, these Hanover Women and their emissaries : ' Your Princess Wilhelmina is a monster of ill-temper, crooked in the back and what-not,' say they. If there is to be a Marriage, double or single, these Improper Females must first be persuaded to consent.¹ Difficulties enough. And there is none to help ; Friedrich Wilhelm cares little about the matter, though he has given his Yes.—Yes, since you will.

But Sophie Dorothee is diligent and urgent, by all opportunities ;—and, at length, in 1723, the conjuncture is propitious. Domestic Jacobitism, in the shape of Bishop Atterbury, has got itself well banished ; Alberoni and his big schemes, years ago they are blown into outer darkness ; Charles XII. is well dead, and of our Bremen and Verden no question henceforth ; even the Kaiser's Spectre-Hunt, or Spanish Duel, is at rest for the present, and the Congress of Cambrai is sitting, or trying all it can to sit : at home or abroad there is nothing, not even Wood's Irish Halfpence, as yet making noise. And on the other hand, Czar Peter is rumoured (not without foundation) to be coming westward,

¹ *Mémoires de Bareith.*

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Edited by Henry Duff Traill

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CH. I.] DOUBLE-MARRIAGE IS DECIDED ON 9

8th Oct. 1723]

with some huge armament; which, whether 'intended for Sweden' or not, renders a Prussian alliance doubly valuable.

And so now at last, in this favourable aspect of the stars, King George, over at Herrenhausen, was by much management of his Daughter Sophie's, and after many hitches, brought to the mark. And Friedrich Wilhelm came over too; ostensibly to bring home his Queen, but in reality to hear his Father-in-law's compliance to the Double-Marriage, — for which his Prussian Majesty is willing enough, if others are willing. Praised be Heaven, King George has agreed to everything; consents, one propitious day (Autumn 1723, day not otherwise dated),—Czar Peter's Armament, and the questionable aspects in France, perhaps quickening his volitions a little. Upon which Friedrich Wilhelm and Queen Sophie have returned home, content in that matter; and expect shortly his Britannic Majesty's counter-visit, to perfect the details, and make a Treaty of it.

His Britannic Majesty, we say, has in substance agreed to everything. And now, in the silence of Nature, the brown leaves of October still hanging to the trees in a picturesque manner, and Wood's Halfpence not yet begun to jingle in the Drapier's Letters of Dean Swift,—his Britannic Majesty is expected at Berlin. At Berlin; properly at Charlottenburg, a pleasant rural or suburban Palace (built by his Britannic Majesty's late noble Sister, Sophie Charlotte, 'the Republican Queen,' and named after her, as was once mentioned), a mile or two South-west of that City. There they await King George's counter-visit.

Poor Wilhelmina is in much trepidation about it; and imparts her poor little feelings, her anticipations and experiences, in readable terms:

'There came, in those weeks, one of the Duke of Gloucester's gentlemen to Berlin,'—*Duke of Gloucester* is Fred our intended, not yet Prince of Wales, and if the reader should ever hear of a *Duke of Edinburgh*, that too is Fred,—'Duke of Gloucester's gentlemen to Berlin,' says Wilhel-

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

10 MARRIAGE PROJECT STARTED [BOOK V.

[8th Oct. 1723

mina: 'the Queen had Soirée (*Appartement*); he was Presented to her as well as to me. He made me a very obliging compliment on his Master's part; I blushed, and answered only by a curtsy. The Queen, who had her eye on me, was very angry I had answered the Duke's compliments in mere silence; and rated me sharply (*me lava la tête d'importance*) for it; and ordered me, under pain of her indignation, to repair that fault tomorrow. I retired, all in tears, to my room; exasperated against the Queen and against the Duke; I swore I would never marry him, would throw myself at the feet'—And so on, as young ladies of vivacious temper, in extreme circumstances, are wont:—did speak, however, next day, to my Hanover gentleman about his Duke, a little, though in an embarrassed manner. Alas, I am yet but fourteen, gone the 3d of July last: tremulous as aspen-leaves; or say, as sheet-lightning bottled in one of the thinnest human skins; and have no experience of foolish Dukes and affairs!—

'Meanwhile,' continues Wilhelmina, 'the King of England's time of arrival was drawing nigh. We repaired, on the 6th of October, to Charlottenburg to receive him. The heart of me kept beating, and I was in cruel agitations. King George' (my Grandfather and Grand Uncle) 'arrived on the 8th, about seven in the evening;—dusky shades already sinking over Nature everywhere, and all paths growing dim. Abundant flunkies, of course, rush out with torches or what is needful. 'The King of Prussia, the Queen and all their Suite received him in the Court of the Palace, the "Apartments" being on the ground-floor. So soon as he had saluted the King and Queen, I was presented to him. He embraced me; and turning to the Queen said to her, "Your daughter is very big of her age!" He gave the Queen his hand, and led her into her apartment, whither everybody followed them. As soon as I came in, he took a light from the table, and surveyed me from head to foot. I stood motionless as a statue, and was much put out of countenance. All this went on without his uttering the least word. Having thus passed me in review, he addressed himself to my Brother, whom he caressed much, and amused himself with, for a good while.' Pretty little Grandson this, your Majesty;—any future of history in this one, think you? 'I,' says Wilhelmina, 'took the opportunity of slipping out;—hopeful to get away; but could not, the Queen having noticed.

'The Queen made me a sign to follow her; and passed into a neighbouring apartment, where she had the English and Germans of King George's Suite successively presented to her. After some talk with these gentlemen, she withdrew; leaving me to entertain them, and saying: "Speak English to my Daughter; you will find she speaks it very well." I felt much less embarrassed, once the Queen was gone; and picking up a little courage, I entered into conversation with these English.