

THE KAISER AT EIGHTY

JOACHIM VON KURENBERG

TWENTY years have passed since the Kaiser flew to Holland, on the eve of the Armistice which ended the World War. They were the most exciting years in the world's history. But the man who, defeated and weary, came to Holland never to leave it again has lived there quietly through them all. He is eighty this January; and whatever may have been his shortcomings when he was a ruler, he has lived an exile of quiet dignity, which must have won him back many sympathies.

No one who unaware visits Doorn, a secluded village of some seven thousand inhabitants in the very centre of the Netherlands, would suspect it to be the residence of so exalted an exile. Every child knows "The House", which is too small, even in Dutch dimensions, to be called a Castle. From the road one sees only the gate-house, built in a semi-circle. A solitary plain-clothes detective scrutinises the callers; a gendarme negligently hovers nearby.

Visitors and Relics.

The casual visitor is shown into a room with two albums bound in red leather on a table, one bearing a crowned "W", the other a crowned "H". Those who desire to pay homage to the ex-monarch can enter their names in these books. Among the verbose entries are many loyal greetings, comforting maxims, and apt quotations from the Scriptures. The vast majority of the callers are Germans, but many foreign visitors to the district also sign a respectful remembrance. The visitors' book is put before the Kaiser every evening, and he never fails to read it most carefully.

As the House itself has not sufficient room, the Kaiser's pocket-suite, his faithful A.D.C. General von Dommès, Count Schwerin and a Secretary live in the lodge. The staff is of the smallest:—Princess Hermine has only one lady-in-waiting-cum-secretary.

A broad road leads through the Park to the Imperial Residence, along smooth lawns like green velvet carpets, bordered by clusters of age-old trees. The House, in its dignified Dutch patrician style, is only two storeys high, its red brick pleasantly

overgrown with green, gaily broken by the spotlessly white wide window sills. A bridge leads over the moat, and the moment one passes it, the broad glass front doors of the house slide open, and two servants in black clothes bow the visitor in.

The first things to catch the eye in the intimate hall are the pictures of a Dutch Stadholder and his wife. They are the outward sign of Wilhelm II's deep respect for the dynasty of Orange-Nassau, to which he is distantly related. He had always been keen to emphasize this, even long before he came to live under them, as testifies his gift, the statue of King-Stadholder William III, which stands in front of Kensington Palace in London.

On the hall table a staff map is spread out. China has now succeeded Abyssinia and Spain as war front which the Kaiser closely studies. Small flags indicate the respective positions, which are carefully kept to date. It is the only remaining note of the former War Lord, for what strikes the visitor more to-day is the abundance of flowers, everywhere throughout the house.

On the ground floor are the reception rooms. In the grand *salon* guests are entertained at evening. On the wall hangs a portrait of Queen Luise, his great grandmother, who withstood Napoleon. The chandelier is of Berlin porcelain, a veritable masterpiece. Gobelins cover the walls, and in a glass cabinet I noticed the snuff box of Frederick the Great. On the grand piano is a bust of the Kaiser in Cadiener majolica, in his uniform of Garde de Corps, but with the pointed beard which he wears now. On a desk in the corner stand a silver framed portrait of the late Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria, and of only one German brother monarch of his time: that of the late King August of Saxonia. Among flowers in the corner is a marble bust of his first wife.

The dining room has a lovely view over the park behind the house. In the evening the laid table looks gay and grand with the wonderful porcelain table service of the Neues Palast of Potsdam. But it would be a mistake to think that the Kaiser parades about here; on the contrary, everything is essentially simple. The Kaiser and his suite wear uniform only on special occasions, such as the recent wedding of his favourite grandson, Prince Louis Ferdinand, to the Grandduchess Kyria of Russia. The servants look like butlers in an English home, but the daily menu is probably more simple than in lordly mansions. For, owing to German currency restriction, house

management at Doorn is very careful. One evening the Kaiser took a young guest on his knee and said to him "Now you had better read out to me what we are going to have to-night". "Duck", the youngster spelled out. "What, again", remarked the Kaiser, "for the second time this week"... But the kitchen instructions insist that estate supplies are to be exhausted first.

The Empress and the Princess.

An extraordinarily small staircase leads to the first floor. The guest is handed some flowers, and ushered into the semi-darkness of the late Empress Augusta Victoria's deathroom. He lays his tribute on the white cover of the simple wooden bed. Over it hangs a picture of Castello near Rapallo, memory of sunny times. On her writing desk near his window stand, in over fifty separate frames, the pictures of her children and grandchildren. Here she used to sit, in the unaccustomed loneliness of exile, to feel herself back among her dear ones left behind. For family life, with her numerous and affectionate offspring, had always been of the happiest and simplest nature, even in days of might and splendour.

In the cosy boudoir nearby, the Kaiser's second wife, Princess Hermine, presides over afternoon tea, an English custom which is religiously observed at Doorn. She is the last descendant of one of the oldest princely families of Germany, the elder line of Reuss. Her first husband, the late Prince Schonauich-Carolath, was a gifted author and an enlightened man with liberal leanings. Hence Princess Hermine is interested in everything and widely read. She discusses books with wit and insight.

She thinks and acts in quite modern style. Only last year she allowed the marriage of her eldest daughter with a commoner. There is much in the new Germany which she frankly likes, and she knows the Fuehrer personally. She looks every inch the Grande Dame, but one with *esprit*, who holds and leads a *salon*. Her greying hair is done in modern fashion, only a strong mouth gives will power to a friendly face.

Officially her style is that of "Royal Prussian Highness", an old Hohenzollern title which was once bestowed upon the second wife of Friedrich Wilhelm III. The Kaiser, however, has a neat mannerism of showing his guests how, in his presence, he wishes her to be addressed. Quite casually he will soon remark: "Her Majesty shares my opinion."

Kaiser at Tea.

The Kaiser has come to tea, as is his wont. He walks into his wife's boudoir with an alert step, which one would not expect of a man of almost eighty. With his dark, immaculately cut lounge suit, he favours a white waistcoat and white spats. He wears only few rings nowadays, but still the large pin in his tie, and in his buttonhole the miniature Grand Cross of the *Pour Le Mérite* Order. With his full crop of white hair and his carefully trimmed beard, he is a Grand Seigneur. His movements are easy and gracious, not hampered by any clumsiness of old age. His keen eyes have kept their old charm and liveliness. He looks to-day, paradoxical though it may seem, like an elder edition of his son, the ex-Crown Prince.

What fascinates the visitor most is the Kaiser's complete alertness and freshness. One is fascinated by his face. A mocking smile plays over it, announcing an ironic intonation of his voice when, for instance, he speaks of the too many books written about his reign, but in which few authors attempted to get some orientation of him, their subject.

He talks vigorously and incessantly; it is well nigh impossible to interrupt him. I tried once to lead the conversation on to another subject—my only chance came when the Kaiser had just helped himself to bread and jam—but he shot me a gay wink, and talked on! Hardly a date or a name ever fails him.

His outspokenness is the same as of old, and he still likes to pepper his brisk table-talk with slang, which gives his conversation a youthful vigour. But he speaks only of his own times: he never comments on what happened after November 1918. That was the close of his *rôle* in life, and he rigorously accepts it as such, not giving the slightest chance to speculation or intrigues. A great mildness, the mellowness of old age, now emanates from him. One can almost watch how, when he gets crossed and that old hard light comes back into his eyes, he checks himself instantly, keeping his temper. Among the many international newspapers which litter his study I had espied the *Daily Telegraph*. Thinking of the historic Interview, I mentioned my relative, Prince von Bülow, his Chancellor at one time, who has attacked him so strongly in his *Memoirs* after his death. The Kaiser makes a movement with his hand. . . . "Let him sleep". And with warm affection he speaks instead of those whose loyalty sustained his exile, and of friends like the painter Adolf von Menzel. To talk about England, however, remains a delicate subject. The Kaiser feels himself, through

his mother, half an Englishman. He likes the life of an English country squire, on which he has modelled his own retreat. But he feels, somehow, rebuffed in his affection.

Busy at Eighty.

He rises between 8 and 9 a.m., and after breakfast he goes for a brisk walk in his park. When he walks in the village, it is understood that he notifies the local police, who follow him discretely. There is, however, really no need for special protection, as he is popular with the villagers.

Woodcutting is a thing of the past. He likes to do a little gardening, tending his roses. Often he goes for long drives through the country, or even to the North Sea coast, visiting friends, dropping in for tea. A son or a grandchild comes for a visit, the supervision of family affairs and of the family fortune takes its daily toll—and he still has an enormous mail.

Hence after supper he retires early to his study, to finish the day's work. Often, however, he entertains the so-called Doorn "Work Community": his friends, the archaeologists. From the time that he bought Corfu, in 1903, archaeology has been his pet hobby. Now that in the retirement of his twenty years exile he has completed his *Memoirs*, archaeology has become his great passion. Almost every other year he publishes a scientific work, *Studies on Gorgo*, *Kingship in Ancient Mesopotamia*, and the like. The strategists and statesmen have departed, politics no longer dominate his life. Of course, he cannot escape them altogether, after having held the centre of the world stage for so long, but they had to make way for his studies. Scientists are to-day the company he feels happiest in, and invites the most often. One realises the outlet for his virility and energy when one is privileged to watch their animated discussions.

Such is the impression which one carries away from this Monarch in Exile: the mellow distinction of his old age, the liveliness of excited debates on ancient cultures, and everywhere in his modest Doorn retreat a gay abundance of flowers.