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LUDWIG OF BAVARIA:

A PERSONAL REMINISCENCE.

THE adjustment of the estates of three of my French ancestors, who died in Rouen about eight years ago, necessitated my going to Bavaria. As the three deaths, being almost simultaneous, resulted in unprecedented complications, it was manifest, from the very first, that audience must be had with the Bavarian king. So, in leaving France, I bore with me, to Ludwig, a letter of introduction from M. Gambetta, which fully explained my mission and requested the king to facilitate my endeavors as far as possible. Arriving in Munich, I sent my letter to his royal highness, expecting, of course, to be turned over to the tender mercies of some deputy, after his usual custom. To my surprise, Gambetta's letter resulted in my being requested to wait upon the king at the royal palace the next morning at ten o'clock. Punctual to the second, I was shown into a beautifully-decorated sitting-room, where the monarch joined me after a brief delay.

To others he may have always been brusque, morose, and taciturn, but no one could have been more affable and gracious than he was that morning. He examined my papers with the most courteous interest, and weighed the whole matter with as much thoughtful consideration as if it had been something of vital concern to him. Waiving several Bavarian customs, for my convenience, and setting me straight in every possible direction, he was about ending the interview, when he suddenly caught sight of something which prolonged my audience with him for two of the most delightful hours which were ever owed to royal clemency. Leaving France, as I did, a day earlier than I had intended, in my haste I accidentally packed with my legal documents the proof-sheets of a paper which I had been writing for *Figaro* on Edgar Allan Poe. The proofs were left unnoticed with the other papers until the whole package was opened and spread out on the king's table. Until then his manner had been quiet and gentle, almost to effeminacy; but the moment he saw Poe's name he became all eagerness and animation. His magnificent eyes lit up, his lips quivered, his cheeks glowed, and his whole face was beaming and radiant.

"Is it a personal account of him?" he asked. "Did you know Poe? Of course you did not, though: you are too young. I cannot tell you how disappointed I am. Just for a moment I thought I was in the presence of some one who had actually known that most won-

derful of all writers, and who could, accordingly, tell me something definite and authentic about his inner life. To me he was the greatest man ever born,—greatest in every particular. But, like many rare gems, he was fated to have his brilliancy tarnished and marred by constant clashings and chafings against common stone. How he must have suffered under the coarse, mean indignities which the world heaped on him! And what harsh, heartless things were said of him when death had dulled the sharpness of his trenchant pen! You will better understand my enthusiasm when I tell you that I would sacrifice my right to my royal crown to have him on earth for a single hour, if in that hour he would unbosom to me those rare and exquisite thoughts and feelings which so manifestly were the major part of his life.”

His voice softened into a low monotone—almost a wail—as he approached the end of his sentence, and his head kept settling forward until his chin rested upon his breast. He kept this attitude, in dead silence, for several minutes, his face wearing an expression of the most intense sorrow. Suddenly arousing himself, he glanced at me in startled surprise, as if he had for the moment forgotten my presence. Then his eyes beamed pleasantly, and he laughed—a clear, merry, ringing laugh—at being caught in a day-dream.

“Will you be good enough to let me read what you have written?” he asked. “I see that it is in French,—the only language I know except my own.”

I handed him the proofs, and watched him as he read them. As the paper was chatty and gossipy, rather than critical, he seemed to enjoy it.

“I see by this that you, also, are fond of Poe,” he said, handing the proofs back to me; “and so I will tell you of a little fancy which I have cherished ever since I first began reading the works of your great fellow-American. At first, because of my respect for his genius and greatness, the lightest thought of what I am going to tell you would make my cheeks burn with shame at my presumption. After a time, I would occasionally write out my fancy, only to burn it, always, as soon as finished. Eventually I confided it to two trusted and valued friends; and now, in some unaccountably strange way, moved, perhaps, by the sympathy born of our common interest in Poe, I am going to take you into my confidence in this particular, stranger though you are. What I have to say is this: I believe, for reasons which I will give you, that there is a distinct parallel between Poe’s nature and mine. Do not be misled by assuming that I mean more than I have said. I but compared our *natures*: beyond that the parallel does not

hold. Poe had both genius and greatness. —I have neither. He had, also, force and strength, so much of both that he could defy the world, sensitive and shrinking as he was. That I never can do. Not that I am a coward, as the word is generally understood, because pain and death can neither shake nor terrify me. Yet any contact with the world hurts me. The same as Poe's, my nature is abnormally sensitive. Injuries wound me so deeply that I cannot resent them: they crush me, and I have no doubt that in time they will destroy me. Even the laceration my heart received from indignities which I suffered as a child are still uneffaceable. A sharp or prying glance from the eyes of a stranger, even though he be only some coarse peasant, will annoy me for hours; and a newspaper criticism occasions me endless torture and misery. The impressionable part of me seems to be as sensitive as a photographer's plate: everything with which I come in contact stamps me indelibly with its proportions. My impulses, it can be no egotism to say, are generous and kindly; yet I never, in my whole life, have done an act of charity that the recipient did not in some way make me regret it. People disappoint me; life disappoints me. I meet some man with a fine face and fine manner, and believe in the sincerity of his smile. Just as I begin to feel certain of his lasting love and fidelity, I detect him in some act of treachery, or overhear him calling me a fool, or worse."

Arising, he began to walk slowly up and down the room.

"Apparently," he continued, after a brief silence, "there is no place in the economy of life except for one kind of man. If one would be respected, he must be coarse, harsh, and phlegmatic. Let him be anything else, and friends and foes alike unite in declaring him eccentric. Much as I despise the gross, sensual creatures who wear the form and receive the appellation of man, I sometimes regret that I am not more like them, and, so, more at ease. They plunge into excesses with no more concern than a duck feels in plunging into a lake. With me the thought, or rather the dread, that I may some day so far forget myself as to debase and degrade myself, according to the common custom of man, is in itself sufficient cause for the most excruciating torture. When I look upon men as they average, and see the perfect nonchalance with which they commit this, that, or the other abuse from which I would recoil with utter repugnance, I wonder if, after all, they are not really to be envied. My condition is as much of a puzzle to me as it possibly can be to you. Logically, there is no reason for it. My father and mother were neither abnormally sensitive nor excessively moral. So far as I am able to ascertain, they regarded things in life very much as every one else does. It was

the same, I believe, with the parents of Poe. Things he has written prove to me that he felt the same disgust for whatever demoralizes that I have always felt, only he saw how the world would behave towards him if he did not seem to sanction and approve of its rottenness. I do not blame him. His way was wisest. Deceit is best in such a case, if it can only be assumed. With his sensitiveness were associated force and defiance,—two traits which I seriously lack. Perhaps, though, he could endure the world more easily than I can, because his childhood was less dreadful than mine. All through my infancy things were done which stung and wounded me. Not that I was treated more harshly than children commonly are, but because my nature was so unlike that of children in general that the things which never disturbed them were offensive to me. I soon learned that companionship meant pain, and that I could never know or feel anything like content unless I held myself aloof from every one. This, for a man, is hard enough to do; for a child it is next to impossible. I was forced to subject myself to the will of harsh, unfeeling teachers, and to the society of those who, scarcely more than animals themselves, accredited me with no instincts finer than their own. Most of the studies thrust upon me seemed dull, stupid, and worthless: because they so jarred upon me that my understanding faculties were dulled and blunted with pain, I was declared half-witted. For hours I would sit and dream beautiful day-dreams; and that won for me similar epithets. It is a misfortune to be organized as I am; yet I am what I am because a stronger will and power than mine made me so. In that lie my sole solace and comfort for having lived at all. If my reading and observation have not been in the wrong direction, much of the phenomenon which is called insanity is really over-sensitiveness. It is often hinted, and sometimes openly declared, that I am a madman. Perhaps I am; but I doubt it. Insanity may be self-hiding. An insane man may be the only person on earth who is not aware of his insanity. Of course I, for such reasons, may not be able to comprehend my own mental condition, except in an exaggerated and unnatural way. But I believe myself a rational being. That, though, may be proof of my insanity. Yet I doubt if any insane person could study and analyze himself as I have done and still do. I am simply out of tune with the majority of my race. I do not enter into man's common pleasures, because they disgust me and would destroy me. Society hurts me, and I keep out of it. Women court me, and for my safety I avoid them. Were I a poet, I should be praised for saying these things in verse; but the gift of utterance is not mine, and so I am sneered at, scorned, and called a madman. Will God, when he summons me, adjudge me the same?"

With tearful eyes, he pressed my hand, smiled, and left the room. The learned doctors have already declared Ludwig of Bavaria insane, and kindlier judgment from those who loved him would very likely be counted wasted sympathy by the world.

Lew Vanderpoole.

OUR EARTHQUAKE.

IT has been remarked as a curious chain of coincidences that within the last nine months the United States has been visited by a phenomenal winter, an unusual number of storms, an unprecedented drought, a sirocco, and an earthquake. The January frosts reached farther south—at least farther southeast—than ever before in the course of this century. Cyclone-pits were needed all the way from Oregon to Ohio. In fourteen counties of Western Texas the drought has thus far lasted eighteen months, and is so far from showing signs of subsidence that hundreds of families are moving East in the hope of “regaining a country where it rains, anyhow, once a year.” Two months ago Dakota was visited by a hot-air blast which raised the mercury from eighty-five to one hundred and twenty-two degrees Fahrenheit, at the very time of the morning when the rage of the dog-star is wont to relent. Now comes the Charleston earthquake. And yet there is no doubt that, in proportion to its extent, our national territory enjoys an incomparable immunity from all the visitations named. From all but the first, we might say. It is true that in winter our storms have an unconscionable way of disregarding degrees of latitude and sweeping their snow-whirls to the parallel of Timbuctoo, without the least deference to Old-World precedents; but in the form of equinoctial gales they rarely exceed the privileges of a vast lowland area, and have now for the first time indulged in the thermal tricks that worry the coast-lands of the Mediterranean ten times a year.

And as for earthquakes, we cannot begin to complain. The Charleston effort was by no means a first-class affair, and, considering the three million square miles and the geological diversity of our area, we must acknowledge that the Titan Seismos has thus far treated us with remarkable partiality. No other country of half that size has enjoyed an equal exemption from volcanic disturbances. The east end of the Czar's domain is a very hot-bed of plutonic fires, Kamtschatka and the Aleutian Islands being studded with active volcanoes. The real estate of Great Britain is liable to frequent fluctuations at not less than eight