



## A ROYAL SURGICAL NURSE.

BY E. SELLERS.



OF all the noble women who, in this our day, are striving to introduce brightness and comfort into the lives of the poor and suffering, not one is doing better work, more arduous, more self-sacrificing, than Maria Josepha of Bavaria.

She was born March 19th, 1857, at Brombach in Baden, and is the daughter of that ne'er-do-well, Don Miguel, from whom certainly she did not inherit her love of her kind. With all his faults, however, the Portuguese pretender was a most devoted parent, and his children had a very happy time together in his picturesque old castle at Heubach. Realizing the disadvantage his own lack of education had been to him, he resolved that his children should start life under better auspices than he had done; and neither money nor trouble were ever considered when they and their welfare were in question. Skilful teachers were appointed for each one of them as soon as they left the nursery; and Don Miguel himself, that arch-plotter whom a quarter of a century before all Europe had regarded as the blackest of black sheep, would sit for the hour together listening to his daughters repeating their lessons.

As a girl, Maria Josepha was tall, slight, and graceful, with a singularly sweet expression, and large dark eyes, which, even in childhood, gave a pensive cast to her face. When only just seventeen she was married to Karl Theodor, Duke in Bavaria. It was not a brilliant marriage from a worldly point of view, for the Duke is a poor man; he is nineteen years his wife's senior too, a fact, however, that in no way detracts from the perfect sympathy between the two.

The Duke took his bride to his palace at Tegernsee, one of the oddest, quaintest, and yet most beautiful of homes. It was built by the Benedictine monks some thousand years ago, and remained a monastery until the beginning of this century when, the order being dissolved, it passed into the hands of the Bavarian royal family. The little chapel in the centre of the building is still just as it was in the days the old monks worshipped there; but the left wing of the monastery has, strange to say, been turned into a brewery, for the Duke holds truly democratic notions as to the dignity of trade. The right wing is now the palace. The cells have been thrown together and modern luxuries introduced; but there is still a somewhat monastic air about the place. It stands in the midst of the most perfect scenery in Europe, just on the borderland between Bavaria and Tyrol, by the side of the lake of Tegern, with the great Alps all around. Here the Duchess Maria Josepha has passed the greater part of her time since her marriage, as completely cut off from the world of pleasure and amusement as if she were in the Sahara. Probably she had been warned beforehand that, as the wife of Karl Theodor, her life would be very different from that of most princesses, and it certainly is. The isolation of Tegernsee was at first most trying to her, for she had always been accustomed to a large family party at Heubach; and, what made matters worse, she had not even the consolation of her husband's society. Although he is the grandson of a king, the Duke works as hard, from morning till night, as the veriest country practitioner. Very early in life he had developed a decided talent for surgery, and, having taken his degree as a surgeon-doctor, he had made a special study of blindness, with a view to seeing to what extent it might be

cured, or at least alleviated. He has such wonderful skill in operating upon the eye that people flock to him now from all parts of Germany; yet, in early days, it was with the greatest difficulty that he could prevail upon the peasants to allow him to attend them. There is something terribly pathetic in the patient fatalism with which the poor endure the ill's flesh is heir to: blindness, especially, they regard as a curse from which when it is once fallen, there is no escape. But the Duke was not to be baffled in his good work. He made his way up the valleys from hamlet to hamlet, from alm to alm, giving advice, distributing medicine, and, above all, with kindly, hopeful words inspiring the sufferers from cataract with the courage to submit to the necessary operation.

When the young Duchess arrived at Tegernsee she found that her husband had established there, at his own expense, a large hospital in which he was attending professionally some hundreds of sufferers. All the money he can raise—he has a thousand ingenious little devices for spinning out his income—goes to the support of this place. Most of his patients are drawn from around his own home, for cataract is unaccountably prevalent in the Alpine valleys. Every morning at six o'clock he is in the hospital, and it is often nearly twelve before he has gone his round. When luncheon is over he establishes himself in his consulting-room, where he receives, without distinction of rank, all who come to him for help. Nor is his day's work finished when these out-patients are gone; for all the latest scientific treatises have then to be studied, reports of discoveries examined, and instruments put to the test. It is a marvel that, in the midst of so much work, he had ever found time to marry a wife.

Industry is infectious, and before long the Duchess began to declare that she too must have work to do, real work, work for which others would be the better. Her husband is not the man to throw obstacles in her way; but, when she asked to be allowed to become his assistant in the hospital, he hesitated. As he told her, to give real help, she must know something of medicine and surgery. Nothing daunted, she at once threw herself into the study of these subjects with an ardour that carried everything before it, and, in the course of a year, knew more of the theory at least of medicine than many a doctor. It was not until it became necessary to combine practice with theory that she encountered any great difficulty. The Duchess is a refined, delicate woman, one who by nature shrinks instinctively from what is painful. Up to the time of her marriage she had been carefully guarded from all contact with the horrible or repulsive, and knew no more of the dark side of life than a child. In the hospital she was at once brought into close contact with rough peasants, to whom purity, moral or physical, was an unknown word, men who were ignorant of the most ordinary decencies of life, men, too, whom a terrible affliction rendered peculiarly loathsome. What the princess suffered when going through her first experience of hospital life will never be known, for she is not a woman to speak of her own feelings; but those who were with her at the time noticed that she grew strangely white and thin. When the Duke remonstrated, however, and begged her to relinquish her undertaking, she had always the same answer, "Surely what others can endure I can see." And she persisted in declaring that it was only a mere childish, cowardly feeling that made her shudder at the sight of wounds and sores, and the sound of rough, coarse words.

She must have a fund of courageous resolution in her character, for she was soon



JOS ALBERT, PHOTO.

MARIA JOSEPHA, DUCHESS IN BAVARIA.

able to stand by her husband's side whilst he performed his operations ; and to-day if any work of special difficulty has to be done, it is always she who holds his instruments. She can use them too, when the necessity for a second pair of hands arises, as deftly, as coolly, as any surgeon. Most days she is in the hospital by eight o'clock in the morning ; and before the operations begin, she goes round from bed to bed cheering the patients, each in turn, with bright, kindly words.

It is the intensity of the Duchess's sympathy with suffering that most touches those she is brought in contact with. She caresses the children as tenderly as if they were her own ; and you may see her, with her face bent down over some old workman, her delicate little white hand clasped in his rough grasp, as, in a low, eager whisper, he tells her he has seen—yes, he is sure of it—that first faint glimmer of light which speaks of hope. But not all those who come to the hospital are cured : some come too late, others are doomed from the first, and it is these cases that almost kill the Duchess. Upon her devolves the duty of breaking the sad news that hope must be renounced ; for no one can perform it so tenderly as she. Her disappointment is so keen, her sorrow so intense, that the sufferers often forget their own grief in trying to comfort her. Little wonder she is idolized in Bavaria. Peasants who have once been under her care will often make their way down the mountainside to tell "Die Frau Doctorin," as they call her, how the world is going with them. If any knotty question is to be decided in the hamlets around, some old woman is sure to come to ask the Duchess's advice ; and many an old patient has been kept from going to the bad by the fear lest the woman who had nursed him with such tender care should hear of his evil doings.

Maria Josepha is devoted to her own children, they are her delight, her relaxation, her rest ; but she never allows anxiety for them to interfere with her work. They are strong and healthy, with many to care for them and tend them ; it is the poor and afflicted who have most need of her, she feels, for they have no one else to look to.

Some few years ago Karl Theodor alarmed his friends by the delicacy of his health. He must have rest, the doctors declared, and go to a warmer climate. At his wife's entreaty, he consented, though most reluctantly, to accompany her to Meran for a real holiday. No sooner were they there, however, than, wandering in the old town, they came across men and women suffering from eye-disease. This was too much for the ducal pair. How could they enjoy a holiday when they knew that every day of rest for them might mean loss of eyesight to some poor creature ? Without a moment's hesitation they set to work, and invited the people to come in and try what surgical skill could do towards alleviating their sufferings. Patients came literally by the hundreds, and the Duke and Duchess were kept as hard at work at Meran as if they had been at Tegernsee. They soon found, however, that it was impossible to do the best for their patients there in the very limited space at their disposal ; they therefore set to work to build a hospital for the blind. This has not been accomplished without a considerable amount of self-sacrifice on their part ; for money is by no means too plentiful in the ducal palace, little as one would suspect the fact to note the lavish scale upon which help is distributed there amongst the needy. The new hospital—it was opened only the other day—is a perfect model of what a hospital should be ; it is bright and cheerful, and has a quaint beauty of its own from the very simplicity of its construction. All the latest scientific appliances for the relief of suffering have been introduced with the most complete disregard of cost, and every patient who enters there is as skilfully treated and carefully tended as if he were a millionaire.

In the midst of her hospital work the Duchess Maria Josepha has never lost her air of distinction ; although dressed with the greatest simplicity, she is still a graceful, elegant woman, with the sweetest and tenderest of faces. She is always bright and cheerful when talking to her patients ; at other times there is a look of sadness in her great dark eyes that is ineffably pathetic : it is as if she were haunted by the memory of the suffering she has witnessed.

She is verily a noble woman, doing a noble work in the world. Strange that she should be the daughter of Don Miguel !