

THE MAD KING DIES

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*The Story of the Mad King, Ludwig II
of Bavaria: of his association with
and friendship for Richard Wagner:
and of some of the women
on the footsteps of
the Throne.*

BY

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FOREWORD

IT is many years ago since some rumours of the story of Ludwig of Bavaria, and his friend Richard Wagner, first made an enduring appeal to a boyish imagination. I was still at school when I read of the mad King's adventures upon the lake of Starnberg and upon its shore; of the swans which drew his boat upon those beautiful waters; of the fairy-like sleighs, gaudily illumined with flaming lamps, which terrified the peasants of the neighbouring mountains in the winter time; of his extravagances in the theatre; of the vast orchestra and the splendid company engaged to divert one man who sat alone in his box in the auditorium of a vast and otherwise deserted theatre. But this talk was merely rumour at the time. The Victorian press naturally hushed up many of the eccentricities attributed to the gentle monarch. We heard of them, but in odd ways from Continental sources, and more fully when the supreme tragedy came. Few people knew much about the King or his sanity until that moment.

The death of so remarkable a man naturally produced many biographies. There were the works of Doctor Franz Karl, of Louise von Kobell, of Professor Beyer, and of Friedrich Lampart, but there was also a most interesting story from a Norwegian source, "Ludwig the II., King of

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Bavaria," by Clara Tschudi, ably translated by E. H. Hearn, and to this particular book I am sure most romancers are indebted. I would hereby acknowledge the very great help in detail which I have derived from the perusal of this fascinating biography, and my obligations to its author.

Ludwig's story will for ever present an enigma. Was he mad or sane? If mad, undoubtedly there was method apparent. When he sent for Richard Wagner, then working in comparative obscurity in Switzerland, he saved for Europe the greatest musical genius of that or perhaps of any age. When he planned a great temple of music wherein the *Nibelungen* should be played, he had in mind the fame which such a musical endeavour would win for his country, and the glory it would reflect upon him and his successors. But his projects needed money and the Bavarian citizen was not more patient than the citizens of other states when demands were made upon his purse. I have shown at the end of this book, in a story otherwise largely romance, that Luitpold was not made Regent of Bavaria until Ludwig II. was actually negotiating a loan with France, and that because of that loan the Council discovered finally that he was mad. It was a madness, nevertheless, which had already given "The Ring" to the world, and helped to

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crown the Master in the Temple at Bayreuth.

There is another fact. This king unquestionably was beloved by his people. When physicians went to Neu-Schwanstein to arrest him as a madman, the very peasants came down from the hills with ploughshares in their hands. His charities were wide and indiscriminating. He retained his faith to the end, and his last present to one of his valets was a prayer book. "Pray for me," he said—and when he said it, he had already determined upon his own death.

That he was ever in love with a woman is doubtful. His friendships were many and often unwise. That he loved Richard Wagner and was by him beloved there is no possibility of doubt. He was a mere boy when he had heard the music of *Rienzi* and *Tannhäuser* and he had sworn that, if he ever came to the throne, such a musician should be honoured above all others. And honoured he was, as we know, until the greed of the citizens of Munich drove Richard Wagner out and first gave tongue to those accusations which were to bring their King to the grave.

I say that he was never known really to have loved a woman, but that women figured largely in his life this romance will show. I have taken some of the more memorable figures associated with his name, and have built about them those happenings

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which history has in part recorded. For the rest, a romancer's liberty must be claimed. The women of these pages all lived and were beloved by Ludwig II. ; but that Fricka was not the wife of von Rucker some historians will be bold enough to affirm, though the mere storyteller may well accept the fact and rely upon the common report.

Apart from the story of Ludwig, I have endeavoured to present some phases of the life of Richard Wagner, which may be of interest to those who are the disciples of that great master. When I first heard of Ludwig of Bavaria, I heard also of his friend. but too often in terms of contempt. Those were the days when the comic papers still derided the divine music of *Tannhäuser* and made merry when *Lohengrin* was discussed. Even some of the greatest critics on some of the greatest papers were unconverted to the end, and proclaimed Wagner a charlatan. We have travelled far since those days, but, in travelling, we have remembered much of the master's early struggles, of his often sordid love affairs, of his pride, his difficulties, and his faith. Above all, we have remembered what a great friend he found in Ludwig of Bavaria, and how wonderful was that hour of his destiny which transported him from poverty to the splendours of a palace and there established him in the luxuries he had so justly earned.