

EMPEROR WILLIAM'S STUD-FARM AND HUNTING FOREST

BY POULTNEY BIGELOW

When Remington and I crossed into Germany we determined to make an excursion into the very easternmost corner of the Prussian monarchy, where the father of Frederick the Great established a great horse-breeding establishment near a little village called Trakehnen. This famous stud-farm is still carried on with characteristic energy, and not only provides the German Army with the hundred thousand horses which it requires in time of peace, but does an enormous amount towards keeping up in the country a high standard of horse for general purposes. Trakehnen is only about ten miles from the Russian frontier, and has three times been exposed to capture by invasion from over the border: but each time the authorities have been able to escape with all the animals there, a feat which appears almost miraculous considering the flat and open character of the country. I had with me a letter of introduction to the commandant or governor of this estate, Major von Frankenberg-Prosclitz. We alighted one beautiful day in July at the little station of Trakehnen. It was the only house in sight, the village was four miles away, but the Major had kindly sent an open carriage to meet us. The drive to the Major's house was along beautiful avenues shaded by oak-trees almost the whole way. When we halted at the front door, our host received us with every manifestation of good-will in spite of the fact that on the morrow he was anticipating an official inspection at the hands of no less impressive dignitaries than the Minister of War and his colleague of the Agricultural Department. A Prussian inspection is a matter of tremendous importance, and that Major von Frankenberg under such circumstances should appear comfortable, even genial, speaks volumes for the self-reliance and sweetness of that gentleman's nature.

Nothing more pretty can be conceived than the appearance of the Major's quarters as we drove up through the vista of trees. It was large, commodious, covered with vines, fragrant with the odor of flowers that grew about and before the door. A shady lawn stretched in the rear with flower beds on its edges, and close by was a delightful arbor where coffee was served in the afternoon during the warm season. Within a few minutes the family of this Prussian officer made us feel that we had once more fallen amongst good friends. The kind Major quickly divined the interest which we felt in the great horse-breeding establishment which he controlled, and as soon as luncheon was disposed of lost no time in driving us about from point to point, chatting with us in regard to what we saw, and answering our questions with frankness.

To begin with, Trakehnen is situated in the most favored province of Germany for horse-breeding purposes, although, geographically considered, it appears to be the most unpropitious. Nearly every farm in East Prussia is devoted to this one occupation, and the German army gets many more horses from this little corner than from any other province or kingdom of the empire. The war authorities are, in respect to this branch of the government, very liberal, for it affects the army directly as well as it does the country indirectly. The very best thoroughbreds that can be bought for money are brought here, and from them are bred a secondary class of horses which the Germans call "halbblut", a word which cannot be safely translated as half-breed, but is more nearly rendered by the French "*près du sang*." Every year some of the best names on the English turf disappear in favor of the breeding-farms for the German cavalry. The stallions chosen are such as have good records on the race-track, and, in addition, the peculiar qualities of form and structure which the German officer considers essential to the ideal cavalry horse — that is to say, one in whom speed and weight-carrying capacity unite to the highest possible degree. All told, Trakehnen has about a thousand head of every age, but of only one general class. It has been by strict adherence to the principle of selection above mentioned that the *Trakehner* or *Prussian* horse has reached its present definite position and high level of power. Remington's drawings will give a better notion of the ideal which the Prussian military authorities entertain on the subject of this horse than any lengthy

description which I might attempt. Suffice it to say that Germans at least consider themselves amply compensated for the cost of this institution during the two centuries of its existence.

The Major does not breed for the racetrack nor for the plough; he has in view the heavy cavalry cuirassier horse, or the requirements of the lighter hussar, and Trakehnen may be considered a national stud-farm, in so far as the horse required for the cavalry is one that is useful for other purposes as well.

We pulled up in a field in which were a hundred three-year-old stallions running free and watched by two herders, each bearing a long whip, which they cracked now and then as a warning that some one of the herd was straying. The herders had no saddles or stirrups, sat simply upon a blanket strapped to the horse's back, and were dressed in the livery of the estate, which is not dissimilar to the grooms' livery of the royal family. Anyone familiar with three-year-old stallions in English or American stables might easily expect that a herd of one hundred would be disposed to resent the intrusion of a couple of strangers in their midst, especially remembering that these colts were of thoroughbred parents at least on one side and of fair blood on the other. We naturally remarked that the herd appeared very quiet, and paid little attention to our carriage as it drove up close to them on the grass. The Major wished us, however, to understand that they were as gentle as sheep and not half as shy, and in order to make a practical test of this, I jumped from my seat and walked up to the herd, into the very midst of them, strolling in and out amongst them, patting them on the nose or on the flank, wherever I happened to be nearest them. . Amongst German cavalry horses I had often experienced an extraordinary docility, which comes naturally as the result of intelligent handling on the part of the grooms, and was therefore more or less prepared to risk the heels and the teeth of those into whose midst Major von Frankenberg requested me to wander.

If this docility sprang from sleepiness or coarseness of blood, there would be little worth noting, but in the case of animals of most unquestioned pluck and power the experience is certainly unique.

"How do you accomplish this result?" we asked.

"We offer a prize," answered the Major, "to those whose horses show the most confiding disposition at the approach of man. Whenever I enter the large spaces under roof where they are gathered for the night, if I discover the least shyness or unfriendliness on the part of the colts, it is a sign that the herdsman have acted contrary to their duty."

Every spring, usually about May, the four-year-olds are distributed amongst the auxiliary or secondary stud-farms of Prussia, likewise for breeding purposes, so that with the exception of the stallions and brood-mares all the good blood here is disposed of when it is four years old. There is a very formidable committee that determines what horses are to be reserved for military breeding purposes at the other stations and what shall be sold at auction, an event which draws to Trakehnen buyers from every country of the globe, anxious to secure specimens of this excellent breed of horse. It is from this estate that the Emperor draws the horses which he uses for private purposes in his carriages and for the saddle.

By a special arrangement, made in 1848, the Prussian crown made these estates a present to the government, on condition that each year the King should be allowed to select thirty horses for private use, and naturally those selected are apt to be the best. A beautiful little saddle-horse was being trained for the Emperor's eldest son during our visit, as well built an animal as one could wish, and as gentle as a baby. The royal stables of Prussia are filled almost exclusively with black horses for driving purposes, although for riding the Emperor does not confine himself to any particular color. In addition to the breeding animals which are sent from here to the various stud-farms of the government in other parts of Prussia, the government is very wise and generous in encouraging horse-breeding in the neighborhood by every possible means. The farmers are permitted the use of government stallions of excellent pedigree at a remarkably low figure—\$5 was, I believe, the current price last year.

The secret of Trakehnen's fame as a horse-breeding place, according to our host, is the fact that it is irrigated in every direction in such a manner that the grass is rich and sweet to an extraordinary extent. The soil, too, is most favorable—deep and spongy. When it was originally selected for this purpose it was nothing better than a vast swamp over which the moose roamed wild, as he still roams in a circumscribed section of the Baltic shores near the mouth of the Memel River. The father of Frederick the Great was a capital farmer, and had a good eye for horses as well. He converted this swamp into the richest pasture-land of Germany, where even to-day one cannot dig two feet without striking water. In winter the meadows are flooded, and only the most careful irrigation preserves them in good condition for the balance of the year. There are no fences anywhere upon the estate, which stretches about nine miles in one direction and three or four in the other, and were the horses less docile than they are, it would seem an easy thing- for them to get lost many times in the year.

Major von Frankenberg has an enormous admiration for this particular horse, and as he goes to England every year for the purpose of selecting thoroughbreds, and has visited the stud-farms of nearly every country in the world, it is fair to conclude that his feelings are not the result of bias.

"But," said he, "I insist on one indispensable condition—our horse must not be used until he is six years old. He must be allowed to get his growth and seasoning before using. We made a great mistake in 1870 in permitting many young horses, as young as four years of age, to come into the army. They nearly all broke down, and in the long-run were a source of great loss to us — far beyond their cost. With proper food and treatment, however, I will back him against any horse I know."

The Major gave us many illustrations of what the *Trakehner* has done in his experience; not such rides as Austrian and German officer performed in October of 1892, but work of practical value. For instance, in the campaign against France of 1870 and 1871, he led his regiment of hussars throughout the months of January, February, and March, over a country covered with ice and snow, at the rate of thirty-five English miles a day.

At the same time the Major was careful to point out what United States cavalry officers can appreciate more than those of any other army, that these are not horses that can be turned out to take care of themselves, like the Indian's mustang or the rough Cossack pony of the steppes.

All the young horses are carefully rubbed clean and inspected every day, the brush and curry-comb being used, in cleaning. During this process the young colts are tied, but when three or four years old they stand quietly enough and enjoy it. In order to insure docility on the part of these animals it is made a rule that each day the colts are to be stroked with the hand, their feet raised — in other words, treated in such a way as to make them familiar with their future masters.

It would seem as though the rich succulent grass produced by the pastures would be enough food for these young animals, but the Major said that they did better when they received two portions of oats a day, once in the morning and again at noon, but never at night.

One evening the Major took us to see the horses called home from the pasture. They came in troops of hundreds, and gathered in large enclosures facing the stables, or rather the large spaces in which they all spent the night in common, in groups of one hundred or less. These paddock were formed by planting railway sleepers on end at short intervals, connected by gas-pipes — a very simple and economical arrangement. Here the young horses are exercised in the winter when it would be unsuitable to let them out in the snow. They go round and round in a ring under the eye of the groom.

On the occasion of our visit I noticed that the main body divided itself according to color — the blacks going to one corner, the browns to another, the bays to a third; of whites or grays I saw no specimens. Here and there would be one who had mistaken his corner, or was seeking forbidden company out of deviltry. The keeper had no difficulty in bringing

him to his right senses, however, by simply calling his name and waving his hand in the direction of the corner to which he belonged. The colt thus addressed invariably leaped out from the corner in which he was an intruder, and galloped straight to the corner whose color matched his. This we saw done many times over, and it never failed....

Neither Remington nor I had intended to tax the hospitality of our kindly host more than a day, but we were gladly persuaded to prolong our stay, which gave us an opportunity to visit the vast and almost primeval forests to which the Emperor of Germany retires in order to hunt the wild deer and boar. A victoria was placed at our disposal by the Major, and in this luxurious vehicle we sat while a pair of black Trakehner mares carried us swiftly, and without interruption, over the twenty miles of country road that separated us from the hunting-lodge of Rominten. It was a rolling open country across which we drove, until we came upon the edges of somber woods. The cultivation was on all sides of a high grade, and in striking contrast to what prevails across the border, only about five or ten miles distant. There were few villages, but their inhabitants were clean and tidily dressed. Had it not been a day of sunshine, made more beautiful by the effect of fleecy clouds studding here and there the blue heavens, in an atmosphere freshened by the breeze following a day of rain, with a road under us neither dusty nor muddy, although towards the latter part of it it was a mere cart-track through a somewhat sandy soil, I fear that we might have termed our twenty miles rather desolate travelling. We saw some fine specimens of the Emperor's wild-boar and big red deer, that bounded into the thicket as we approached, for these animals are not as tame as those in English parks, being rarely disturbed. At one point our driver stopped to let us get out and see how near we could come to a herd that appeared to be about a thousand yards off. We stalked so close that Remington decided emphatically that he would have bagged half a dozen had he been allowed to try his hand at it. As it was, however, he did something better by making some sketches from behind a fallen tree. We drove a long distance, after this, amidst magnificent trees, mostly evergreens, although oak and poplar appeared here and there. The forest, which includes about fifty square miles, is watered by some excellent streams, stocked with a variety of fish, chief of all the trout, although pike, perch, carp, *Scardinius erythrophthalmus*, *Carassius vulgaris*, and many others of excellent quality are also abundant. Half a dozen houses compose all there is of the village here, whose inhabitants are principally occupied in work about the forest. We passed through the village, over a bridge, and up a hill, on the top of which stood the house which the Emperor is building as his hunting-lodge. The dark evergreen forest closes it in at the rear, and in many respects it suggests a summer residence in the Adirondack Mountains. There were several officials in the house at the time, on various errands, the most important to us being the forester. We asked permission to enter and take a look at the rooms, but were politely informed, with apparent regret, that this was contrary to their orders. The German court was, however, at Potsdam, and as there was a telegraph office near by, we wired to the capital asking permission of the Emperor to visit his place here. The postmaster and chief of the telegraph department we found perched on the ridge-pole of his thatched roof making some repairs.

He came down cheerfully from the roof, sent off our message for us, and acceded to our desire that he should harness up his ponies to a farm wagon and point out to us some interesting features of the wilderness. We had a rather bumpy ride of it, for our way led over rocks and stumps, zigzagging in and out among the biff trees without reference to any road or path. He was a pretty old man, this forester, bent by rheumatism as well as years, but withal of a communicative and kindly disposition. As the Emperor's house here is so near the Russian frontier, it naturally occurred to Remington that a party of enterprising Muscovite cowboys could, without difficulty, on some moonlight night, jump this ranch, so to speak, and carry off the Emperor a hostage to St. Petersburg, without any more difficulty than cutting the telegraph wires leading from Rominten to the main line, some twenty or thirty miles away.

The old forester took us to points where we had glimpses of little lakes and streams and patches of meadow, surrounded by wilderness as perfect as anything in Colorado, and amused us until it was time to think of our noonday dinner, with a running commentary upon his life at Rominten.

His greatest hardship used to be protecting the forest from poachers. He told us that the last head game-keeper here had been shot by a poacher, but remarked, by way of a consoling foot-note, that his successor managed to kill two poachers at one shot. It would seem as though next to impossible to prevent poaching in such a vast forest as this, yet he assured me that with proper organization they had succeeded in almost suppressing this nuisance. The staff of foresters numbers from forty to fifty men, whose principal occupation is the patrolling of the woods, according to preconcerted arrangement, studying trees and plants, and noting everything that affects the welfare of the beasts who provide sport for the Emperor and his guests.

It is only since 1890 that the Emperor has taken a fancy to this hunting-ground, and until he built the hunting-lodge for whose inspection we had sought permission, he lived at the little inn where we had ordered dinner, and slept in the very room from the window of which Remington made a sketch of the building. The place appeals strongly to the Emperor, because it is so thoroughly natural and wild, in refreshing contrast to many royal parks, where the grass appears to be trimmed by a lawn-mower, and every tree has, so to speak, its hair brushed every morning. William II., too, is the first monarch of Europe who has appreciated the value of American methods of travel, and has so organized his train of cars that he can move from one end of his empire to another not only without personal fatigue, but under conditions that enable him to transact state business as satisfactorily as if he were in his working-room at Potsdam or Berlin. The Chicago Vestibule Limited finds its counterpart in the German imperial train, which may be said to have doubled the capacity for work of a monarch mainly criticised because of his superabundant energy. People, who find fault with the Emperor because, as they say, he is perpetually rushing from one corner of Europe to the other, forget that it is not he who does the rushing, but the train of cars under him. His life, meanwhile, is as placid and methodical as one could wish, but where his grandfather was satisfied to know a man through a written report, William II. prefers to see that man face to face.

But this is digression. The old forester illustrated the formerly neglected condition of this forest by telling us that thirty years ago there were not more than fifteen head of deer in the whole chase, thanks to neglect and poaching; to-day it is estimated that there are at least one thousand, thanks for which are mainly due to the excellent administration of the late forester who was shot by the poacher. Two months before we visited the place wild-boar had been introduced, and already four young ones had been born on the estate. This will prove an additional attraction for the future, as the wild-boar is notoriously one of the gamiest of animals. There are some moose here as well, differing scarcely at all from those of New Brunswick and Maine, but it is doubtful whether this animal will survive. The sport most, relished here is the chase after the big- red deer, of which about one hundred and fifty head are shot annually. At different points in the forest we came upon racks at which the deer fed during severe winters when food had to be provided for them, but they offered nothing in their structure to call for particular comment. Here, as in our first approach to the house, we were struck by the diversity and fine growth of the oak, beech, ash, elm, chestnut, linden, and evergreen trees about us. Also by the great diversity in the surface of the ground, in marked contrast to the rest of the great Prussian plain. There were steep little hills, beautiful gorges, and travelling as we did, it appeared as though we were in a hilly country, with streams in every valley, the slopes of which had been laid out with consummate art to simulate the Adirondacks.

Wolves, according to our worthy forester, are a great nuisance, and do a vast amount of mischief. Last year the keepers shot a most savage beast, who did an extraordinary amount of injury to the other animals. It seemed impossible to find him until the following plan was adopted: A wide circle was made about the spot in which they knew he must have

his hiding-place; this line was marked off by twigs planted in the ground at short intervals. Packthread was then drawn from twig to twig, connecting the whole circle excepting at one point, where an opening was left, near which the hunters stationed themselves. At intervals of ten feet red and yellow bits of rag were hung upon this line, for it was discovered that a wolf will not cross an impediment of this nature, which reminds one of the superstitious feeling the chicken is said to have in regard to crossing a chalk line. The wolf made his appearance in due course of time, and went from rag to rag in the hope of finding a way out. When he did so, however, it was to fall into the hands of his avengers, who shot him on the 15th day of November, 1891. He was stuffed, and is now scowling, through glass eyes only, in one of the corners of the hunting-lodge — a fine-looking beast, whose acquaintance, however, I should not like to have made under any other circumstances.

Our dinner was quite a festive affair, for in the midst of this wilderness had congregated at one and the same time not only the forester and the major-domo of the palace, but a high economic functionary from Berlin, who was here to make an inspection of the Emperor's property. All three received us in the spirit of fellowship, caused perhaps by the fact that on returning to the inn we found a dispatch from the Lord Chamberlain at Potsdam, informing us that the Emperor had given us the permission we desired. It was a permission which we had had little reason to anticipate, because an inventory of the place was being made, the furniture was in a somewhat confused state, and clerks were at work on the premises.

This hunting-lodge of the Emperor's is a cross between the typical Swiss chalet and an American log house: there is a striking amount of quaint Norwegian carving about it, and the rafters of the roof come to a point in the shape of grinning dragons heads — a feature of Scandinavian architecture I had noticed at many points in Norway. The Emperor took a great fancy to the simplicity and strength characterizing Norwegian buildings on his , many journeys along that coast, and had a dozen Norwegian builders come down on purpose from Christiania in order to erect this house for him. It is, of course, unpainted, and finished in the most severe style, as befits the purpose for which it was originally designed. Inside, the Avails and ceilings are all of the natural logs, finished off roughly and stained. The ceilings are low, the rooms small, but every corner is pervaded with coziness. The large assembly or living room looks down a series of rustic terraces to the little valley, where the trout stream runs from the Russian frontier to the Baltic. At one end of this large room is a great double fireplace, about which a large family can gather in the evening for the purpose of spinning hunting-yarns or telling ghost-stories. It is an exact counterpart of the fireplace in many a Norwegian house I have seen, reproduced here with minute fidelity. From the ceiling hangs an elaborate chandelier consisting entirely of antlers, so arranged as to form innumerable holders for candles.

The Emperor strongly dislikes anything in the nature of guards when he is on his hunting expeditions, although half a dozen country policemen do duty here when the Emperor is present. On his first arrival they were drawn up in line to salute him, but he ordered that it should not happen again, and now they are carefully kept out of sight. He is a man so indifferent to danger or personal safety that the mere idea of having officials watching on his account is in the highest degree distasteful. The furniture of the rooms at Rominten was in harmony with the simplicity of the walls— hard-wood, strongly made, and merely stained, so as to disclose the natural grain, which is, after all, the greatest charm about any furniture. On the walls hung many pictures of hunting scenes, notably the magnificent studies of Landseer. Amongst the pictures our guides pointed out two which they said had been done by the Emperor himself. I suspected the authorship at the time, because they were colored copies of notable paintings, and I knew that the Emperor preferred to do something more original than merely copy the work of another. Of course I did not mention my doubts to these officials, but on complimenting the Emperor in regard

to them shortly afterwards, he emphatically disclaimed their authorship, and gave me the name of the friend who had copied them.

However, it is now a tradition in the palace of Rominten that these two pictures were done by the Emperor, and there is little doubt that successive generations of care-takers will receive this tradition, and spread the error amongst all those who visit that interesting house. We may expect before long to see these works reproduced in some magazine as evidence of the Emperor's taste as an artist. He is, it is true, clever with his pencil, but in a different and more important way than is suggested by his alleged works at his hunting-box.

His study is a room of equal simplicity with the others, so arranged that should he arrive at an hour's notice he would find it ready for work. On the table in front of him stands a little framed photograph of his wife. There is scarcely more than room enough in the apartment for the large table which he always requires for the purpose of spreading out maps and plans. The room is a literary workshop, and no more. Amongst the ornaments, however, I noticed an excellent photograph of the Prince of Wales, his uncle, looking very slim and graceful in the uniform of a Prussian hussar.

Naturally, the most interesting points about the place were the many antlers fastened to the wall as trophies of the chase. The forester told us that hunting here was not such an easy matter as one might suppose; that they often went six days without finding any game, although on the very next day they might kill two. He thought a fair average would be to bag one deer in every four days. The antlers which appeared to be the most numerous belonged to the Dambirsch or Damwildpret; they resemble the big red deer of Europe, but have at the same time a suggestion of the moose in the shovel character of part of their horns. We were shown the hoof of one of these animals, which I measured and found to be thirteen centimeters in breadth, or about four and a half inches. As I said before, the moose is dying out, but an effort is being made to cross it with Norwegian in the hope of reviving the breed.

The Emperor, as is well known, is a capital shot in spite of the fact that he has little more than one arm to do his work with. His rifle is notable in an exceeding length of stock, by which he is able to shoot with his right hand alone. By long practice and natural aptitude he has succeeded in making - one almost forget that his left arm is very weak. As a matter of detail, the sportsman may care to know that the favorite rifle for deer in this place is thirteen millimeters caliber, with which eight grammes of powder are used. The trophies that here adorn the walls have a value far above those which decorate the hunting lodges of most princes, who, when they go out shooting, stand in a favored spot and allow the game to be driven by them, much as one would a drove of sheep or cows. The game here has to be legitimately hunted, and it is this very difficulty in securing a shot that makes Rominten, in the eyes of the Emperor, a favorite shooting-ground.

The characteristic Norwegian decoration of the hunting lodge is carried out at other points of the forest, notably a bridge which we crossed on our forenoon's journey with the venerable postmaster-forester and his two shaggy Polish ponies. The bridge was of roughhewn logs resting upon two series of piles, protected upstream against descending masses of ice, exactly as in the rapid torrents of Norway. Over the bridge is an arch, made by two beams crossing, at each end of which is carved the same draconical design characterizing the gables of the hunting-lodge. This bridge is interesting from the fact that it was built in four days by eighty-five men of the pioneer corps, who marched to this point for this purpose, did their work, and returned.

We parted from Rominten with many regrets, particularly from the rheumatic old forester who had done so much to make our day brimful of pleasant memories of a glorious forest and a unique race of woodcraftsmen.