

Modern History Sourcebook:
Luise Gottsched:
Description of the Empress Maria Theresa, 1749

From: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1749gottschens-mariatheresa.html>

*Luise Gottsched was one of the brightest women of the 18th Century. She wrote exceedingly well. But after her husband began his **Dictionary of the German Language & Model Grammar** she dropped all her own literary work to assist him. As usual, fame has been unjust: the husband received all the credit, while the wife did all, or nearly all, of the work. Morning, noon, and night for thirty years she toiled at this verbal drudgery; and when she was sick, worn out at age forty-seven, her husband whined, publicly, because she did not always "answer pleasantly" when he called her from her invalid's couch to copy his interminable manuscripts. She died at the age of fifty-nine.*

To Fräulein Thomasius, of Troschenreuth and Widersberg, at Nürnberg.

Vienna, 28 September, 1749.

MY ANGEL: First, embrace me. I believe all good things should be shared with one's friends. Hence must I tell you that never, in all my life, have I had such cause to be joyfully proud as on this day. You will guess at once, I know, that I have seen the Empress. Yes, I have seen her, the greatest among women. She who, in herself, is higher than her throne. I have not only seen her, but I have spoken with her. Not merely seen her, but talked with her three-quarters of an hour in her family circle. Forgive me if this letter is chaotic and my handwriting uneven. Both faults spring from the overwhelming joy I feel in the two delights of this day---the privilege of meeting the Empress and the pleasure of telling your Highness of the honor.

This morning we went at ten to the palace. We took our places where Baron Esterhazy, who procured us admission, told us to stand. He supposed, as we did, that we, with the hundreds of others who were waiting, might be permitted to see her Majesty as she passed through the apartment on her way to the Royal Chapel. After half an hour we had the happiness of seeing the three Princesses go by. They asked the Court-mistress who we were. Then, on being told our names, they turned and extended their hands for us to kiss. The eldest Princess is about ten years old. As I kissed her hand, she paid me a compliment. She said she had often heard me highly spoken of. I was pleased, of course, and very grateful for her remarkable condescension. Forgive me if this sounds proud. Worse is to follow. I cannot tell of the incredible favor of these exalted personages without seeming to be vain. But you well know that I am not vain.

About eleven o'clock, a man-servant, dressed in gorgeous livery, came and told us to follow him. He led us through a great many frescoed corridors and splendid rooms into a small apartment which was made even smaller by a Spanish screen placed across it. We were told to wait there. In a few moments, the Mistress of Ceremonies came. She was very gracious to us. In a little while, her Majesty entered followed by the three princesses. My husband and myself each sank upon the left knee and kissed the noblest, the most beautiful hand that has ever wielded a scepter. The Empress gently bade us rise. Her face and her gracious manner banished all the timidity and embarrassment we naturally felt in the presence of so exalted and beautiful a figure as hers. Our fear was changed to love and confidence. Her Majesty told my husband that she was afraid to

speak German before the Master of that language. "Our Austrian dialect is very bad, they say," she added. To which my man answered that, fourteen years before, when he listened to her address at the opening of the Landtag, he had been struck by the beauty and purity of her German. She spoke, on that occasion, he said, like a goddess. Then the Empress laughed merrily, saying "Tis lucky I was not aware of your presence or I should have been so frightened that I should have stopped short in my speech."

She asked me how it happened that became so learned a woman. I replied, "I wished to become worthy of the honor that has this day befallen me in meeting your Majesty. This will forever be a red-letter day in my life." Her Majesty said, "You are too modest. I well know that the most learned woman in Germany stands before me." My answer to that was "According to my opinion, the most learned woman, not of Germany only, but of all Europe, stands before me as Empress." Her Majesty shook her head. "Ah, no," she said, "my familiar acquaintance with that woman forces me to say you are mistaken."

Her husband, the Emperor Franz I, joined our group and chatted with us most affably. Some of the younger children were called in and properly reverenced. Then the Empress asked if we would like to see her remaining babies, upstairs. Of course, we were enchanted at the thought. Following the Mistress of Ceremonies, we went upstairs to the three little angels there, whom we found eating their breakfast under the care of the Countess Sarrau. After kissing the little, highborn hands, we were conducted through the private rooms of the palace, an honor not vouchsafed to one stranger out of a thousand. Finally we returned to the waiting room, where all congratulated us upon the unusual honor shown.

Source:

From: Hermann Schoenfeld, *Women of the Teutonic Nations* (Philadelphia: Rittenhouse Press, 1908), pp. 278-282.

Scanned by Jerome S. Arkenberg, Cal. State Fullerton. The text has been modernized by Prof. Arkenberg.

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