

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ASSASSINATION.

EARLY on the next day a strange and exciting report pervaded the city of Rastadt. Austrian regiments were encamped all round the city, and Sczekler hussars held all the gates. This was the report which filled with astonishment and terror all those who were not initiated into the secrets of the political situation, and who were not familiar with the condition of the negotiations between France and Germany. For, by surrounding the city with troops, in spite of the presence of the French ambassadors, Austria openly violated the treaty stipulating that, until the congress had adjourned *sine die*, neither German nor French troops should approach the city within a circuit of three German miles.

It was reported, too—what the ambassadors as yet remaining in Rastadt had carefully concealed up to this time—that the imperial ambassador, Count Metternich, had quietly left the city several days before, and that the peace commissioners of the empire had the day previous suspended their official functions.

Congress had then dissolved; the peace commissioners of France and Germany had been in session for two years without accomplishing their task, and the situation looked as ominous and warlike as ever.

Every one resolved to depart; every trunk was being packed, every carriage drawn forth from its shed. The French actors and ballet-dancers had fled from Rastadt several weeks before at the first rude blast of the approaching storm, like rats leaving a sinking ship. The sounds of joy and mirth had died away, and everywhere only grave and gloomy words were heard, only sorrowful and down-cast faces met.

Every one, as we stated above, was preparing to set out, and the French ambassadors, too, were going to leave Rastadt to-day, the twenty-eighth of April. Their carriages were ready for them early in the morning in the courtyard of the castle, when, all at once, some footmen of the embassy, with pale, frightened faces, rushed into the castle and reported that Austrian hussars were posted at the gates and refused to allow any one to leave or enter the city. Even the commander of Rastadt, an officer of the Duke of Baden, had not been permitted by the hussars to ride out of the gate. He had been compelled to return to his headquarters.*

* Historical.—Vide "Geheim: Geschichte der Rastatter Friedensverhandlungen in Verbindung mit den Staatsbündeln dieser Zeit." Von einem Schweizer, part vi.

"But we will not allow them to prevent us from leaving Rastadt," said Roberjot, resolutely. "They will not dare to interfere with the departure of the representatives of the French Republic!"

"The republic would take bloody revenge for such an outrage, and these Germans are afraid of the anger of the republic!" exclaimed Jean Debry, haughtily.

Bonnier violently shook his black mane, and a gloomy cloud settled on his brow.

"Barbaczy's hussars are encamped in front of the gates, and Victoria de Poutet last night had another interview with Lehrbach and Barbaczy," he said. "If, like both of you, I had a wife and children with me, I should not dare to depart without further guaranties."

At this moment the door opened, and a footman handed Roberjot a letter that had just arrived from the Prussian ambassador, Count Goertz.

Roberjot opened the letter and glanced over it. "The guaranties you referred to, Bonnier, will soon be here," he said, smiling. "It seems the German ambassadors are sharing your apprehensions. They have drawn up a joint letter to Colonel Barbaczy, requiring him to give them a written pledge that there would be no interference with the free departure of the French ambassadors, and that the safety of the latter would not be endangered. Count Goertz, therefore, requests us not to set out until a written reply has been made to the letter of the ambassadors. Shall we delay our departure until then?"

"We will," said Bonnier; "you will not derogate from your republican dignity by consulting the safety of your wives and children. I may say that, inasmuch as I have to take care of no one but myself, and as I know that no care would be of any avail in my case."

"What do you mean, my friend?" asked Jean Debry.

"I mean that I shall die to-day," said Bonnier, solemnly.

Roberjot turned pale. "Hush," he whispered; "let us say nothing about this matter to the women. My wife had a bad dream last night; she saw me weltering in my gore and covered with wounds, and she asserts that her dreams are always fulfilled."

"Roberjot, Bonnier, and Debry, may God have mercy on your poor souls!" muttered Bonnier, in a low voice.

"I do not believe in dreams!" said Jean Debry, with a loud, forced laugh, "and besides, my wife has had no bad dream whatever, and not been warned by fate. Come, let us go to our ladies who are already clad in their travelling-dresses. Let us tell them that we shall, perhaps, be compelled to wait a few hours."

But several hours elapsed, and the messenger the German ambassadors had sent to Colonel Barbaczy's headquarters did not return. Nearly all of the German ambassadors made their appearance at the castle in order to express to the representatives of the French republic their astonishment and profound indignation at this disrespectful delay, and to implore them not to set out until the message had arrived.

The French ambassadors themselves were undecided and gloomy; their ladies were pacing the rooms with sad faces and tearful eyes. Every one was in the most painful and anxious state of mind.

The whole day passed in this manner, and night set in when finally the messenger whom the ambassadors had sent to Colonel Barbaczy, returned to Rastadt. But he did not bring the expected written reply of the colonel. In its place, an Austrian officer of hussars made his appearance; he repaired to the Prussian Count Goertz, at whose house the other ambassadors were assembled, and brought him a verbal reply from Count Barbaczy. The colonel excused himself for not sending a written answer, stating that a pressure of business prevented him from so doing. He at the same time assured the count and the ambassadors that the French ministers could safely depart, and that he would give them twenty-four hours for this purpose.*

The officer brought, however, an autograph letter from Barbaczy to the French ministers, and he repaired to the castle in order to deliver it to them.

This letter from Barbaczy contained the following lines:

"MINISTERS: You will understand that no French citizens can be tolerated within the positions occupied by the Austrian forces. You will not be surprised, therefore, that I am obliged to request you, ministers, to leave Rastadt within twenty-four hours.

"BARBACZY, Colonel."

"Gernsbach, April 28, 1799."†

"Well, what are we to do?" asked Roberjot, when the officer had left them.

"We will set out," said Jean Debry, impetuously.

"Yes, we will set out," exclaimed his beautiful young wife, encircling him with her arms. "The air here, it seems to me, smells of blood and murder; and every minute's delay redoubles our danger."

"Poor wife, did they infect you, too, already with their evil forebodings and dreams?" said Jean Debry, tenderly pressing his

* Vide Dohm, nach seinem Wollen und Handeln, von Gronau, p. 600.

† Dohm preserved a copy of this letter.—Ibid.

wife to his heart. "God forbid that they should endanger a single hair of your dear, beautiful head! I am not afraid for myself, but for the sake of my wife and of my two little daughters. For you and for our friends here I would like to choose the best and most prudent course."

"Let us set out," said Madame Roberjot; "the terrible dream last night was intended to give us warning. Death threatens us if we remain here any longer. Oh, my husband, I love nothing on earth but you alone; you are my love and my happiness! I would die of a broken heart if I should lose you! But no, no, not lose! We live and die together. He who kills you must also take my life!"

"They shall not kill us, my beloved," said Roberjot, feelingly; "life, I trust, has many joys yet in store for us, and we will return to our country in order to seek them there. Bonnier, you alone are silent. Do not you believe also that we ought to set out to-night?"

Bonnier started up from his gloomy reverie. "Let us set out," he said, "we must boldly confront the terrors from which we cannot escape. Let us set out."

"Be it so!" shouted Roberjot and Jean Debry. "The republic will protect her faithful sons!"

"And may God protect us in His infinite mercy," exclaimed Madame Roberjot, falling on her knees.

And Jean Debry's wife knelt down by her side, drawing her little girls down with her.

"Let us pray, my children, for your father, for ourselves, and for our friends," she said, folding the children's hands.

While the women were praying, the men issued their last orders to the servants and to the postilions.

At length every thing was in readiness, and if they really wished to set out, it had to be done at once.

Roberjot and Jean Debry approached softly and with deep emotion their wives, who were kneeling and praying still, and raised them tenderly.

"Now be strong and courageous—be wives worthy of your husbands," they whispered. "Dry your tears and come! The carriages are waiting for us. Come, come, France is waiting for us!"

"Or the grave!" muttered Bonnier, who accompanied the others to the court-yard where the carriages were standing.

The ambassadors with their wives and attendants had finally taken seats in the carriages. Roberjot and his wife occupied the first carriage; Bonnier, the second; Jean Debry with his wife and daughters, the third; in the fourth, fifth, and sixth were the secretaries of legation, the clerks and servants of the ambassadors.

The last coach-door was closed; a profound momentary silence succeeded the noise and turmoil that had prevailed up to this time. Then the loud, ringing voice of Roberjot asked from the first carriage, "All ready?"

"All ready!" was the reply from the other carriages.

"Then let us start," shouted Roberjot, and his carriage immediately commenced moving. The other five carriages followed slowly and heavily.

The night was chilly and dark. The sky was covered with heavy clouds. Not the faintest trace of the moon, not a star was visible. In order that they might not lose their way, and see the bridge across the Rhine, a man, bearing a torch, had to precede the carriages. But the gale moved the flame so violently that it now seemed near going out, and then again flared up and cast a glare over the long procession of the carriages. Then every thing once more became dark and gloomy and ominously still.

The torch-bearer, preceding the foremost carriage, vigorously marched ahead on the road. All at once it seemed to him as though black figures were emerging from both sides of the highway and softly flitting past him. But assuredly he must have been mistaken; it could not have been any thing but the shadows of the trees standing on both sides of the road.

No, now he saw it again, quite plainly. The shadows were horsemen, softly riding along on both sides of the highway.

He raised his torch and looked at the horsemen. There was quite a cavalcade of them. Now they crossed the ditch and took position across the road, thus preventing the carriages from passing on.

The torch-bearer stood still and turned around in order to shout to the postilions to halt. But only an inarticulated, shrill cry escaped from his throat, for at the same moment two of the horsemen galloped up and struck at him with their flashing swords. He parried the strokes with his torch, his only weapon, so that one of the swords did not hit him at all, while the other only slightly touched his shoulder.

"What is the matter?" shouted Roberjot, in an angry voice, from the first carriage.

The horsemen seized the arms of the torch-bearer and dragged him toward the carriage. "Light!" they shouted to him, and quite a squad of merry horsemen was now coming up behind them. When they dashed past the torch, the frightened torch-bearer was able to see their wild, bearded faces, their flashing eyes, and the silver lace on their uniforms.

The torch betrayed the secret of the night, and caused the Sczekler hussars of Barbaczy's regiment to be recognized.

They now surrounded the first carriage, shouting furiously, and shattering the windows with their sabres.

"Minister Roberjot! Are you Minister Roberjot?" asked a dozen wild, howling voices.

Roberjot's grave and threatening face, illuminated by the glare of the torch, appeared immediately in the aperture of the window. "Yes, I am Roberjot," he said, loudly; "I am the ambassador of France, and here is the passport furnished me by the ambassador of the Elector of Mentz."

He exhibited the paper, but the hussars took no notice of it; four vigorous arms dragged Roberjot from the carriage, and before he had time to stretch out his hand toward his pistols, the sabres of the hussars fell down upon his head and shoulders.

A terrible yell was heard, but it was not Roberjot who had uttered it; it was his wife, who appeared with pale and distorted features in the coach door, hastening to her beloved husband, to save him or to die with him.

But two stout arms kept her back—the arms of the *valet de chambre* who, perceiving that his master was hopelessly lost, wanted to protect at least his mistress from the murderous sabres of the hussars.

"Let me go, let me go; I will die with him!" she cried; but the faithful servant would not loosen his hold, and, unable to reach her husband, she had to witness his assassination by the hussars, who cut him with their sabres until he lay weltering in his gore.

"He is dead!" shrieked his wife, and her wail aroused Roberjot once more from his stupor. He opened his eyes and looked once more at his wife.

"*Sauvez! sauvez!*" he shouted, in a voice full of anguish. "Oh!—"

"What! not dead yet?" roared the hussars, and they struck him again.

Now he was dying. That loud, awful death-rattle was his last life-struggle. The *valet de chambre* in order to prevent her from hearing that awful sound, with his hands closed the ears of his mistress, who, petrified with horror, was looking at her dying husband.

But she did not hear it; she had fainted in the servant's arms. At this moment a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and the wild, bearded face of a hussar stared at him.

"Footman?" asked the hussar, in his broken Hungarian dialect.

"Yes, footman!" said the *valet de chambre*, in broken German. The hussar smilingly patted his shoulder, and, with his other hand, pulled the watch from his vest-pocket, kindly saying to him, "Footman, stay here. No harm will befall him!" He then bent forward,

and with a quick grasp, tore the watch and chain from the neck of Roberjot's fainting wife.

His task was now accomplished, and he galloped to the second carriage, to which the other hussars had just dragged the torch-bearer, and which they had completely surrounded.

"Bonnier, alight!" howled the hussars, furiously—"Bonnier, alight!"

"Here I am!" said Bonnier, opening the coach door; "here—"

They did not give him time to finish the sentence. They dragged him from the carriage, and struck him numerous blows amidst loud laughter and yells. Bonnier did not defend himself; he did not parry a single one of their strokes; without uttering a cry or a groan, he sank to the ground. His dying lips only whispered a single word. That word was, "Victoria!"

The six hussars who crowded around him now stopped in their murderous work. They saw that Bonnier was dead—really dead—and that their task was accomplished. Now commenced the appropriation of the spoils, the reward that had been promised to them. Four of them rushed toward the carriage in order to search it and to take out all papers, valuables, and trunks; the two others searched and undressed the warm corpse of Bonnier with practised hands.

Then the six hussars rushed after their comrades toward the third carriage—toward Jean Debry. But the others had already outstripped them. They had dragged Debry, his wife, and his daughters from the carriage; they were robbing and searching the lady and the children, and cutting Jean Debry with their sabres.

He dropped to the ground; his respiration ceased, and a convulsive shudder passed through the bloody figure, and then it lay cold and motionless in the road.

"Dead! dead!" shouted the hussars, triumphantly. "The three men are killed; now for the spoils! The carriages are ours, with every thing in them! Come, let us search the fourth carriage. We will kill no more; we will only seize the spoils!"

And all were shouting and exulting, "Ho for the spoils! for the spoils! Every thing is ours!" And the wild crowd rushed forward, and Jean Debry lay motionless, a bleeding corpse by the side of the carriage.

Profound darkness enveloped the scene of horror and carnage. The torch had gone out; no human eye beheld the corpses with their gaping wounds. The ladies had been taken into the carriages by their servants; the hussars were engaged in plundering the three remaining carriages, the inmates of which, however, forewarned in time by the shrieks and groans that had reached them from the

scene of Roberjot's assassination, had left and fled across the marshy meadows to the wall of the castle garden. Climbing over it and hastening through the garden, they reached the city and spread everywhere the terrible tidings of the assassination of the ambassadors.

CHAPTER XXX.

JEAN DEBRY.

As soon as the report of the dreadful occurrence had been circulated, a dense crowd gathered in the streets of Rastadt, and for the first time for two years the ambassadors of all the German powers were animated by one and the same idea, and acting in concord and harmony. They repaired in a solemn procession to the Ettlinger gate, headed by Count Goertz and Baron Dohm; the others followed in pairs, Count Lehrbach, the Austrian ambassador, being the only one who had not joined the procession. But the guard at the gate refused to let them pass, and when they had finally succeeded, after long and tedious negotiations, in being permitted to leave the city, they were met outside of the gate by the Austrian Captain Burkhard and his hussars.

Count Goertz went to meet him with intrepid courage. "Did you hear that an infamous murder has been perpetrated on the French ambassadors not far from the city?"

"I have heard of it," said the captain, shrugging his shoulders.

"And what steps have you taken in order to save the unfortunate victims, if possible?"

"I have sent an officer and two hussars for the purpose of ascertaining the particulars."

"That is not sufficient, sir!" exclaimed Count Goertz. "You must do more than that; you must strain every nerve on this occasion, for this is not an ordinary murder, but your honor, sir, is at stake, as well as the honor of your monarch and the honor of the German nation!"

"The honor of the German nation is at stake," shouted the ambassadors, unanimously. "Our honor has been sullied by the assassination!"

But the captain remained cold and indifferent. "It is a deplorable misunderstanding," he said. "It is true, the patrols were going the rounds at night, and such things may occur at this time. The French ministers should not have set out by night. The crime has

been committed, and who is to blame for it? It was not done by anybody's order." *

"Who would deem it possible that such an outrage should have been committed by order of any commanding officer?" exclaimed Count Goertz, indignantly.

"Ah, yes, an outrage indeed!" said Burkhard, shrugging his shoulders. "A few ambassadors have been killed. A few of our generals, too, were killed during the last few years." †

Count Goertz turned to the other ambassadors with an air of profound indignation. "You see," he said, "we need not hope for much assistance here; let us seek it elsewhere. Let some of us repair in person to Colonel Barbaczy's headquarters at Gernsbach, while the rest of us will go to the spot where the murders were committed. If the captain here declines giving us an escort for that purpose, we shall repair thither without one; and if we should lose our lives by so doing, Germany will know how to avenge us!"

"I will give you an escort," said Burkhard, somewhat abashed by the energetic bearing of the count.

While the ambassadors were negotiating with the captain at the Ettlinger gate, the hussars were incessantly engaged in plundering the six carriages. After finishing the first three carriages, they ordered the ladies and servants to reënter them and to await quietly and silently what further would be done in relation to them. No one dared to offer any resistance—no one was strong enough to oppose them. Dismay had perfectly paralyzed and stupefied all of them. Madame Debry lay in her carriage with open, tearless eyes, and neither the lamentations nor the kisses of her daughters were able to arouse her from her stupor. Madame Roberjot was wringing her hands, and amidst heart-rending sobs she was wailing all the time, "They have hacked him to pieces before my eyes!" ‡

No one paid any attention to the corpses lying with their gaping wounds in the adjoining ditch. Night alone covered them with its black pall; night alone saw that Jean Debry all at once commenced stirring slightly, that he opened his eyes and raised his head in order to find out what was going on around him. With the courage of despair he had been playing the rôle of a motionless corpse as long as the hussars were in his neighborhood; and now that he no longer heard any noise in his vicinity, it was time for him to think of saving himself.

He remained in a sitting position in the ditch and listened.

* The literal reply of Captain Burkhard.—*Vide* "Report of the German Ambassadors concerning the Assassination of the French Ministers near Rastadt."

† *Ibid.*

‡ "*Ils l'ont haché devant mes yeux!*"—Lodius, vol. iii., p. 195.

His head was so heavy that he had not sufficient strength to hold it erect, it dropped again upon his breast; from a burning, painful wound the blood was running over his face into his mouth, and it was the only cooling draught for his parched lips. He wanted to raise his arm in order to close this wound and to stanch the blood, but the arm fell down by his side, heavy and lame, and he then felt that it was likewise severely injured.

And yet, bleeding and hacked as he was, he was alive, and it was time for him to think of preserving his life. For over yonder, in the carriage, there resounded the wail of his children, and the lamentations of his servants. His wife's voice, however, he did not hear. Was she not there? Had she also been assassinated?

He dared not inquire for her at this moment. He had to save himself, and he was determined to do it.

He arose slowly, and heedless of the pain it caused him. Every thing around him remained silent. No one had seen him rise; night with its black pall protected him. It protected him now as he walked a few steps toward the forest, closely adjoining the highway. At length he reached the forest, and the shades of darkness and of the woods covered the tall, black form that now disappeared in the thicket.

But his enemies might be lurking for him in this thicket. Every step forward might involve him in fresh dangers. Exhausted and in despair, Jean Debry supported his tottering body against a tree, the sturdy trunk of which he encircled with his arms. This tree was now his only protector, the only friend on whom he could rely. To this tree alone he determined to intrust his life.

Heedless of his wounded arm and the racking pains of his other injuries, Jean Debry climbed the knotty trunk; seizing a large branch, he raised himself from bough to bough. A few birds, aroused from their slumbers, arose from the foliage and flitted away. Jean Debry followed them with his eyes, and whispered, "You will not betray me!"

On the highest bough, in the densest foliage, he sat down, gasping with exhaustion, and groaning with pain. In his utter prostration after the extraordinary effort he had just made, he leaned his head against the trunk of the tree, the dense branches of which closely enveloped him, and gave a roof to his head and a resting-place to his feet.

"Here I am safe—here no one will look for me!" he muttered, and he fell asleep, prostrated by his sufferings and loss of blood.

Night with its dark mantle covered him up and fanned his feverish brow with its cooling air: the foliage of the tree laid itself soft and fresh around his burning cheeks, and delightful

dreams descended from heaven to comfort this poor, tormented human soul.

After several hours of invigorating sleep, Jean Debry was awakened, not, however, by the rude hands of men, but heaven itself aroused him by the torrents of a heavy shower.

Oh, how refreshing were these cold drops for his parched lips! How gently did this soft and tepid water wash the blood and dust from his wounds! How delightfully did it bathe his poor benumbed limbs!

He felt greatly invigorated, and courageously determined to make further efforts for the preservation of his life. He slowly glided down from the tree and stood once more on the ground.

The shower was constantly on the increase, and the rain became now, at daybreak, Jean Debry's protector. When men forsake their poor, tormented fellow-beings, Nature takes pity on them and encircles them with her saving and protecting maternal arms.

The rain protected Jean Debry; it washed the dust and blood from his garments, and made him resemble the other men who had gathered in a large crowd on the road, not far from where he emerged from the forest. All of them were looking with pale faces and expressions of unbounded horror at some objects lying in their midst. What was it that rendered this crowd, generally so noisy and turbulent, to-day so silent and grave?

Jean Debry penetrated further into their midst, and he discovered now with a shudder what riveted the attention of the vast gathering on the road.

He beheld the bloody and mutilated corpses of his two friends—the dead bodies of Roberjot and Bonnier.

Jean Debry closely compressed his lips in order to keep back the cry that forced itself from his breast; with the whole energy of his will he suppressed the tears that started from his eyes, and he turned away in order to return to Rastadt.

The rain protected Jean Debry. The rain had driven the soldiers at the gate into the guard-room, and the sentinel into the sentry-box. No one took any notice of this wet and dripping man when he entered the gate.

He quietly walked up the street, directly toward the house inhabited by Count Goertz, the Prussian ambassador. He entered the house with firm steps, and hastened into the anteroom which, as he formerly used to do, he wanted to cross in order to walk to the count's room without sending in his name.

But the footmen kept him back; they refused to admit this pale man with the lacerated face and tattered clothes to their master's private room.

"Don't you know me any longer, my friends?" he asked, sadly. "Am I so disfigured that no one of you is able to recognize Jean Debry?"

The footmen now recognized his voice, and the *valet de chambre* hastened to open the door of the count's study, and to shout, in a loud voice, "His excellency, the French ambassador Debry!"

Count Goertz uttered a joyful cry, and hastily rose from the sofa on which, exhausted by the efforts of the terrible night, he had sought a little rest.

Jean Debry entered the room. He made a truly lamentable appearance as he approached the count, and fixed his dimmed, blood-shot eyes upon him with an expression of unutterable anguish.

"Are my wife and children safe?" he asked, breathlessly.

"Yes, they are safe!" exclaimed the count.

And Jean Debry, the austere republican, the scoffing infidel, Jean Debry fell upon his knees! Lifting up his arms toward heaven, his eyes filled with tears, he exclaimed: "Divine Providence, if I have hitherto refused to acknowledge thy benefits, oh, forgive me!"*

"And punish those who have perpetrated this horrible crime!" added Count Goertz, folding his hands, and uttering a fervent prayer. "O God, reveal the authors of this misdeed; let us find those who have committed this outrage, lest it may remain a bloody stigma on the fame of our country! Have mercy on poor Germany, on whose brow this mark of infamy is now burning, and who will be obliged to pour out rivers of her best blood in order to atone for this crime, and to clear her sullied honor! Have mercy on all of us, and give us courage to brave the storms which this horrible event will assuredly call down! Have mercy, O God; punish only the assassins, but not our native land!"

This prayer of Count Goertz was not fulfilled. The real instigators of the murder were never detected and punished, although the Austrian court, in a public manifesto to the German nation, promised a searching investigation of the whole affair, and a rigorous chastisement of the assassins. But the investigation was but a very superficial proceeding, and its results were never published. The Sczekler hussars publicly sold, on the following day, the watches, snuff-boxes, and valuables they had stolen from the French ambassadors. Some of them even acknowledged openly that they had perpetrated the murder, at the instigation of their officers. But nobody thought of arresting them, or calling them to account for their crime. It is true, after a while some of them were imprisoned and tried. But the proceedings instituted against them were never

*He exclaimed: "*Divine Providence, si j'ai méconnu tes bienfaits jusqu'ici, pardonne!*"—Lodius, iii., p. 195.

published, although the Austrian court had expressly promised to lay the minutes of the commission trying the prisoners, and the results of the whole investigation, before the public. In reality, however, the Austrian authorities tried to hush up the whole affair, so that the world might forget it. And it was forgotten, and remained unpunished. In diplomatic circles, however, the real instigators of the outrage were well known. "It was," says the author of the "Memoirs of a German Statesman" (Count Schlitz), "it was a man who, owing to his exalted position, played a very prominent part at Rastadt; not a very noble one, however. He was actuated by vindictiveness, and he was determined to seize the most secret papers of the ambassadors at any price. The general archives, however, had been forwarded to Strasburg several days before. He had found willing tools in the brutal hussars. These wretches believed that what a man of high standing asked them to do was agreeable to the will of their imperial master. Baseness is easily able to mislead stupidity, and soldiers thus became the assassins of unarmed men, who stood under the sacred protection of international law."

The excitement and indignation produced by this horrible crime were general throughout Europe, and every one recognized in it the bloody seeds of a time of horrors and untold evils; every one was satisfied that France would take bloody revenge for the assassination of her ambassadors. In fact, as soon as the tidings from Rastadt penetrated beyond the Rhine, there arose throughout the whole of France a terrible cry of rage and revenge. The intelligence reached Mentz in the evening, when the theatre was densely crowded. The commander ordered the news to be read from the stage, and the furious public shouted, "*Vengeance! vengeance! et la mort aux Allemands!*"*

In Paris, solemn obsequies were performed for the murdered ambassadors. The seats which Bonnier and Roberjot had formerly occupied in the hall of the *Corps Legislatif* were covered with their bloody garments. When the roll was called and their names were read, the president rose and replied solemnly: "Assassinated at Rastadt!" The clerks then exclaimed: "May their blood be brought home to the authors of their murder!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE COALITION.

COUNT HAUGWITZ, the Prussian minister of foreign affairs, had just returned from a journey he had made with the young king to Westphalia. In his dusty travelling-costume, and notwithstanding

* "*Vengeance! vengeance! and death to the Germans!*"

his exhaustion after the fatigues of the trip, as soon as he had entered his study, he had hastily written two letters, and then handed them to his footman, ordering him to forward them at once to their address, to the ambassadors of Prussia and England. Only then he had thrown himself on his bed, but issued strict orders to awaken him as soon as the two ambassadors had entered the house.

Scarcely an hour had elapsed when the footman awakened the count, informing him that the two ambassadors had just arrived at the same time, and were waiting for him in the small reception-room.

The minister hastily rose from his couch, and without devoting a single glance to his toilet and to his somewhat dishevelled wig, he crossed his study and entered the reception-room, where Lord Grenville and Count Panin were waiting for him.

"Gentlemen," said the count after a hurried bow, "be kind enough to look at my toilet, and then I hope you will excuse me for daring to request you to call upon me, instead of coming to you as I ought to have done. But you see I have not even doffed my travelling habit, and it would not have behooved me to call on you in such a costume; but the intelligence I desire to communicate is of such importance that I wished to lose no time in order to lay it before you, and hence I took the liberty of inviting you to see me."

"As far as I am concerned, I willingly accepted your invitation," said Lord Grenville, deliberately, "for in times like these we can well afford to disregard the requirements of etiquette."

"That I was no less eager to follow your call," said Count Panin, with a courteous smile, "you have seen from the fact that I arrived at the same time with the distinguished ambassador of Great Britain. But now, gentlemen, à truce to compliments; let us come to the point directly, and without any further circumlocution. For the six months that I have been here at Berlin, in order to negotiate with Prussia about the coalition question, I have been so incessantly put off with empty phrases, that I am heartily tired of that diet and long for more substantial food."

"Your longing will be gratified to-day, Count Panin," said Count Haugwitz, with a proud smile, inviting the gentlemen, by a polite gesture, to take seats on the sofa, while he sat down in an arm-chair opposite them. "Yes, you will find to-day a good and nourishing diet, and I hope you will be content with the cook who has prepared it for you. I may say that I am that cook, and believe me, gentlemen, the task of preparing that food for you has not been a very easy one."

"You have induced the King of Prussia at length to join the coalition, and to enter into an alliance with Russia, England, and

Austria against the French Republic?" asked Count Panin, joyfully.

"You have told his majesty that England is ready to pay large subsidies as soon as Prussia leads her army into the field against France?" asked Lord Grenville.

"Gentlemen," said Count Haugwitz, in a slightly sarcastic tone, "I feel greatly flattered by your impetuous inquiries, for they prove to me how highly you value an alliance with Prussia. Permit me, however, to communicate to you quietly and composedly the whole course of negotiations. You know that I had the honor of accompanying my royal master on his trip to our Westphalian possessions, where his majesty was going to review an army of sixty thousand men."

"It would have been better to send these sixty thousand men directly into the field, instead of losing time by useless parades," muttered Count Panin.

The minister seemed not to have heard the words, and continued:

"His majesty established his headquarters at Peterhagen, and there we were informed that Archduke Charles of Austria was holding the Rhine against Bernadotte and Jourdan, and that the imperial army, under the command of Kray, in Italy, had been victorious, too; it is true, however, the Russian auxiliary army, under Field-Marshal Suwarrow, had greatly facilitated Kray's successful operations. This intelligence did not fail to make a powerful impression upon my young king, and I confess upon myself too. Hitherto, you know, I had always opposed to a war against France, and I had deemed it most expedient for Prussia to avoid hostilities against the republic. But the brilliant achievements of Russia and Austria in Italy, and the victories of Archduke Charles on the Rhine, seem to prove at length that the lucky star of France is paling, and that it would be advantageous for Prussia openly to join the adversaries of the republic in their attack."

"A very bold and magnanimous resolution," said Count Panin, with a sarcastic smile.

"A resolution influenced somewhat by the British subsidies I have promised to Prussia, I suppose?" asked Lord Grenville.

"Let me finish my statement, gentlemen," said Count Haugwitz, courteously. "The king, undecided as to the course he ought to pursue, assembled at Peterhagen a council of war, our great commander, Ferdinand, duke of Brunswick, of course, having been invited to be present. His majesty requested us to state honestly and sincerely whether we were in favor of war or peace with France. The duke of Brunswick was, of course, the first speaker who replied to the king; he voted for war. He gave his reasons in a fiery and

energetic speech, and demonstrated to the king that at a time when England was about to send an army to Holland, an advance into Holland by our own army would be highly successful. For my part, I unconditionally assented to the duke's opinion, and Baron Köckeritz declaring for it likewise, the king did not hesitate any longer, but took a great and bold resolution. He ordered the Duke of Brunswick to draw up a memorial, stating *in extenso* why Prussia ought to participate in the war against France, and to send in at the same time a detailed plan of the campaign. He instructed me to return forthwith to Berlin, and while he would continue his journey to Wesel, to hasten to the capital for the purpose of informing you, gentlemen, that the king will join the coalition, and of settling with you the particulars—"

At this moment the door of the reception-room was hastily opened, and the first secretary of the minister made his appearance.

"Pardon me, your excellency, for disturbing you," he said, handing a sealed letter to the count, "but a courier has just arrived from the king's headquarters with an autograph letter from his majesty. He had orders to deliver this letter immediately to your excellency, because it contained intelligence of the highest importance."

"Tell the courier that the orders of his majesty have been carried out," said Count Haugwitz; "and you, gentlemen, I am sure you will permit me to open this letter from my king in your presence. It may contain some important particulars in relation to our new alliance."

The two gentlemen assured him of their consent, and Count Haugwitz opened the letter. When he commenced reading it, his face was as unruffled as ever, but his features gradually assumed a graver expression, and the smile disappeared from his lips.

The two ambassadors, who were closely watching the count's countenance, could not fail to notice this rapid change in his features, and their faces now assumed likewise a gloomier air.

Count Haugwitz, however, seemed unable to master the contents of the royal letter; he constantly read it anew, as though he were seeking in its words for a hidden and mysterious meaning. He was so absorbed in the perusal of the letter that he had apparently become entirely oblivious of the presence of the two gentlemen, until a slight coughing of the English ambassador aroused him from his musing.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he said, hastily, and in evident embarrassment; "this letter contains some intelligence which greatly astonishes me."

"I hope it will not interfere with the accession of Prussia to the

coalition?" said Panin, fixing his eyes upon the countenance of the minister.

"Not at all," said Count Haugwitz, quickly and smilingly. "The extraordinary news is this: his majesty the king will reach Berlin within this hour, and orders me to repair to him at once."

"The king returns to Berlin!" exclaimed Count Panin.

"And did not your excellency tell us just now that the king had set out for Wesel?" asked Lord Grenville, with his usual stoical equanimity.

"I informed you, gentlemen, of what occurred two weeks ago," said Count Haugwitz, shrugging his shoulders.

"What! Two weeks ago? Nevertheless, your excellency has just arrived at Berlin, and are wearing yet your travelling-habit?"

"That is very true. I left Minden two weeks ago, but the impassable condition of the roads compelled me to travel with snail-like slowness. My carriage every day stuck in an ocean of mire, so that I had to send for men from the adjoining villages in order to set it going again. The axle-tree broke twice, and I was obliged to remain several days in the most forsaken little country towns until I succeeded in getting my carriage repaired."

"The king seems to have found better roads," said Count Panin, with a lurking glance. "The journey to Wesel has been a very rapid one, at all events."

"The king, it seems, has given up that journey and concluded on the road to return to the capital," said Count Haugwitz, in an embarrassed manner.

"It would be very deplorable if the king should as rapidly change his mind in relation to his other resolutions!" exclaimed Lord Grenville.

"Your excellency does not fear, then, lest this sudden return of the king should have any connection with our plans?" asked Panin.

"The king has authorized you to negotiate with the English ambassador, Sir Thomas Grenville, and with myself, the representative of the Emperor Paul, of Russia, about forming an alliance for the purpose of driving the rapacious, revolutionary, and bloodthirsty French Republic beyond the Rhine, and restoring tranquillity to menaced Europe?"

"It is true the king gave me such authority two weeks ago," said Count Haugwitz, uneasily, "and I doubt not for a single moment that his majesty is now adhering to this opinion. But you comprehend, gentlemen, that I must now hasten to wait on the returning king, in order to receive further instructions from him."

"That means, Count Haugwitz, that you have invited us to call

on you in order to tell us that we may go again?" asked Panin, frowning.

"I am in despair, gentlemen, at this unfortunate coincidence," said Count Haugwitz, anxiously. "It is, however, impossible for me now to enter into further explanations. I must repair immediately to the palace, and I humbly beg your pardon for this unexpected interruption of our conference."

"I accept your apology as sincerely as it was offered, and have the honor to bid you farewell," said Panin, bowing and turning toward the door.

Count Haugwitz hastened to accompany him. When he arrived at the door, and was about to leave the room, Count Panin turned around once more.

"Count Haugwitz," he said, in a blunt voice, "be kind enough to call the attention of the king to the fact that my imperial master, who is very fond of resolute men and measures, prefers an open and resolute enemy to a neutral and irresolute friend. He who wants to be no one's enemy and everybody's friend, will soon find out that he has no friends whatever, and that no one thanks him for not committing himself in any direction. It is better after all to have a neighbor with whom we are living in open enmity, than one on whose assistance we are never able to depend, and who, whenever we are at war with a third power, contents himself with doing nothing at all and assisting no one. Be kind enough to say that to his majesty."

He bowed haughtily, and entered the anteroom with a sullen face.

Count Haugwitz turned around and met the stern, cold glance of the English ambassador, who was also approaching the door with slow and measured steps.

"Count Haugwitz," said Lord Grenville, quietly, "I have the honor to tell you that, in case the King of Prussia will not now, distinctly and unmistakably, declare his intention of joining the coalition between Russia, Austria, and England, we shall use the subsidies we had promised to pay to Prussia for an army of twenty-five thousand men, in some other way. Besides, I beg you to remind his majesty of the words of his great ancestor, the Elector Frederick William. That brave and great sovereign said: 'I have learned already what it means to be neutral. One may have obtained the best terms, and, in spite of them, will be badly treated. Hence I have sworn never to be neutral again, and it would hurt my conscience to act in a different manner.'* I have the honor, count, to bid you farewell."

* Häusser's "History of Germany," vol. ii., p. 281.

And Lord Grenville passed the count with a stiff bow, and disappeared in the door of the anteroom.

Count Haugwitz heaved a profound sigh, and wiped off the perspiration pearly in large drops on his brow. He then took the king's letter from his side-pocket and perused it once more.

"It is the king's handwriting," he said, shaking his head, "and it is also his peculiar laconic style." And, as if to satisfy himself by hearing the contents of the letter, he read aloud:

"Do not enter into any negotiations with the ambassadors of Russia and Great Britain. We will hold another council of war. I am on my way to Berlin. Within an hour after receipt of these lines, I shall expect to see you in my cabinet. Yours, affectionately,

"FREDERICK WILLIAM."

"Yes, yes, the king has written that," said Haugwitz, folding the letter; "I must hastily dress, therefore, and repair to the palace. I am anxious to know whence this new wind is blowing, and who has succeeded in persuading the king to change his mind. Should my old friend, Köckeritz, after all, be favorable to France? It would have been better for him to inform me confidentially, and we might have easily agreed; for I am by no means hostile to France, and I am quite ready to vote for peace, if there be a chance to maintain it. Or should the young king really have come to this conclusion without being influenced by anybody? Why, that would be a dangerous innovation! We should take quick and decisive steps against it. Well, we will see! I will go and dress."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FRIEND OF PEACE.

THE king, with his wonted punctuality, had reached Berlin precisely at the specified time, and when Count Haugwitz arrived at the palace he was immediately conducted to the king, who was waiting for him in his cabinet.

Count Haugwitz exchanged a rapid glance with Baron Köckeritz, who was standing in a bay window, and then approached the king, who was pacing the room with slow steps and a gloomy air.

He nodded to the minister, and silently continued his promenade across the room for some time after his arrival. He then stepped to his desk, which was covered with papers and documents, and sitting down on a plain cane chair in front of it, he invited the gentlemen to take seats by his side.

"The courier reached you in time, I suppose?" he said, turning to Count Haugwitz.

"Your majesty, your royal letter reached me while holding a conference with the ambassadors of Russia and Great Britain, and just when I was about to inform them of your majesty's resolution to join the coalition."

"You had not done so, then?" asked the king, hastily. "It was your first conference, then?"

"Yes, your majesty, it was our first conference. I invited the ambassadors immediately after my return to call on me."

"It took you, then, two weeks to travel from Minden to Berlin!"

"Yes, your majesty, two weeks."

"And yet these gentlemen are in favor of an advance of the army!" exclaimed the king, vehemently. "Yes, if all of my soldiers were encamped directly on the frontier of Holland and had their base of supplies there! But in order to send a sufficient army to Holland, I should have to withdraw a portion of my soldiers from the provinces of Silesia and Prussia. They would have to march across Westphalia, across the same Westphalia where it took you with your carriage two weeks to travel from Minden to Berlin. And my soldiers have no other carriages but their feet. They would stick in that dreadful mire by hundreds and thousands; they would perish there of hunger, and that march would cost me more men than a great, decisive battle. I had given you my word that I would join the coalition, Count Haugwitz; I had even authorized you to negotiate with the ambassadors of Russia and Great Britain, but on the road to Wesel I was obliged to change my mind. Ask Baron Köckeritz what we had to suffer on the first day of our journey, and how far we had got after twelve hours' travelling."

"Yes, indeed, it was a terrible trip," said General von Köckeritz, heaving a sigh. "In spite of the precautions of the coachman, his majesty's carriage was upset five times in a single day, and finally it stuck so firmly in the mud that we had to send for assistance to the neighboring villages in order to set it going once more. We were twelve hours on the road, and made only three German miles during that time."

"And we had to stop over night in a miserable village, where we scarcely found a bed to rest our bruised and worn-out limbs," said the king, indignantly. "And I should expose my army to such fatigues and sufferings! I should, heedless of all consideration of humanity, and solely in obedience to political expediency, suffer them to perish in those endless marshes, that would destroy the artillery and the horses of the cavalry. And all that for what purpose? In order to drag Prussia violently into a war which might