

NAPOLEON AND QUEEN LOUISA.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

FERDINAND VON SCHILL.

PROFOUND silence reigned in the valleys and gorges of Jena and Auerstadt. The battles were over. The victorious French had marched to Jena to repose for a few days, while the defeated Prussians had fled to Weimar, or were wandering across the fields and in the mountains, anxiously seeking for inaccessible places where they might conceal their presence from the pursuing enemy.

A panic had seized the whole army. All presence of mind and sense of honor seemed to be lost. Every one thought only of saving his life, and of escaping from the conquering arms of the invincible French. Here and there, it is true, officers succeeded by supplications and remonstrances in stopping the fugitives, and in forming them into small detachments, with which the commanders attempted to join the defeated and retreating main force.

But where was this main army? Whither had the Prince of Hohenlohe directed his vanquished troops? Neither the officers nor the soldiers knew. They marched along the highroads, not knowing whither to direct their steps. But as soon as their restless eyes seemed to discern French soldiers at a distance, the Prussians took to their heels, throwing their muskets away to relieve their flight, and surrendering at discretion when there was no prospect of escape. In one instance a troop of one hundred Prussians surrendered to four French dragoons, who conducted their prisoners to headquarters; and once a large detachment hailed in a loud voice a few mounted grenadiers, who intended perhaps to escape

from their superior force, and gave the latter to understand, by signals and laying down their arms, that they only wished to surrender and deliver themselves to the French.

The Prussians had reached Jena and Auerstadt confident of victory, and now had left the battle-field to carry the terrible tidings of their defeat, like a host of ominously croaking ravens, throughout Germany.

The battle-field, on which a few hours previously Death had walked in a triumphant procession, and felled thousands and thousands of bleeding victims to the ground, was now entirely deserted. Night had thrown its pall over the horrors of this Calvary of Prussian glory: the howling storm alone sang a requiem to the unfortunate soldiers, who, with open wounds and features distorted with pain, lay in endless rows on the blood-stained ground.

At length the night of horror is over—the storm dies away—the thick veil of darkness is rent asunder, and the sun of a new day arises pale and sad; pale and sad he illuminates the battle-field, reeking with the blood of so many thousands.

What a spectacle! How many mutilated corpses lie prostrate on the ground with their dilated eyes staring at the sky—and among them, the happy, the enviable! how many living, groaning, bleeding men, writhing with pain, unable to raise their mutilated bodies from the gory bed of torture and death!

The sun discloses the terrible picture hidden by the pall of night; it illuminates the faces of the stark dead, but awakens the living and suffering, the wounded and bleeding, from their benumbed slumber, and recalls them to consciousness and the dreadful knowledge of their wretched existence.

With consciousness return groans and wails; and the dreadful conviction of their wretched existence opens their lips, and wrings from them shrieks of pain and despair.

How enviable and blissful sleep the dead whose wounds bleed and ache no longer! How wretched and pitiable are the living as they lie on the ground, tortured by the wounds which the howling night wind has dried so that they bleed no more! Those poor deserted ones in the valley and on the hills the sun has awakened, and the air resounds with their moans and cries and despairing groans, and heart-rending entreaties for relief. But no relief comes to them; no cheerful voice replies to their wails. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, had been placed in the ambulances, and, during the sudden panic, the surgeons had left the battle-field with them.

But hundreds, nay thousands, remained behind, and with no one to succor them!

From among the crowds of wounded and dead lying on the battle-field of Auerstadt, rose up now an officer, severely injured in the head and arm. The sun, which had aroused him from the apathetic exhaustion into which he had sunk from loss of blood and hunger, now warmed his stiffened limbs, and allayed somewhat the racking pain in his wounded right arm, and the bleeding gash in his forehead. He tried to extricate himself from under the carcass of his horse, that pressed heavily on him, and felt delighted as he succeeded in loosing his foot from the stirrup, and drawing it from under the steed. Holding with his uninjured left arm to the saddle, he raised himself slowly. The effort caused the blood to trickle in large drops from the wound in his forehead, which he disregarded under the joyful feeling that he had risen again from his death-bed, and that he was still living and breathing. For a moment he leaned faint and exhausted against the horse as a couch; and feeling a burning thirst, a devouring hunger, his dark, flaming eyes wandered around as if seeking for a refreshing drink for his parched palate, or a piece of bread to appease his hunger.

But his eye everywhere met only stiffened corpses, and the misery and horror of a deserted battle-field. He knew that no food could be found, as the soldiers had not, for two days, either bread or liquor in their knapsacks. Hunger had been the ally that had paved the way for the French emperor—it had debilitated the Prussians and broken their courage.

“I must leave the battle-field,” murmured the wounded soldier; “I must save myself while I have sufficient strength; otherwise I shall die of hunger. Oh, my God, give me strength to escape from so horrible a death! Strengthen my feet for this terrible walk!”

He cast a single fiery glance toward heaven, one in which his whole soul was expressed, and then set out on his walk. He moved along slowly and with tottering steps amid the rows of corpses, some of which were still quivering and moaning, as death drew near, while others writhed and wailed with their wounds. Unable to relieve their racking pains, and to assist them in their boundless misery, it only remained for him to sink down among them, or to avert his eyes, to close his ears to their supplications, and escape with hurried steps from this atmosphere of blood and putrefaction, in order to rescue his own life from the clutches of death.

He hastened, therefore, but his tearful eyes greeted the poor sufferers whom he passed on his way, and his quivering lips muttered a prayer for them.

At length the first and most horrible part of this dreadful field was passed, and he escaped from the chaos of the dead and wounded. That part, across which he was walking now, was less saturated with gore, and the number of corpses scattered over it was much smaller. Here and there was the wreck of a cannon besmeared with blood and mire, and empty knapsacks, fragments of broken wagons and muskets, in the utmost disorder and confusion.

"Spoils for the marauders," whispered the wounded officer, pressing on. "It seems they have not been here yet. God have mercy on me, if they should come now and look on me, too, as their spoil!"

He glanced around anxiously, and in doing so his eye beheld an unsheathed, blood-stained sabre lying near his feet. He made an effort to take it up regardless of the blood which, in consequence of the effort, trickled again in larger drops from his wounds.

"Well," he said, in a loud and menacing voice, "I shall defend my life at least to the best of my ability; the hateful enemies shall not capture me as long as I am alive. Forward, then; forward with God! He will not desert a faithful soldier!"

And supporting himself on his sabre, as if it were a staff, the officer walked on. Everywhere he met with the same signs of war and destruction; everywhere he beheld corpses, blood-stained cannon-balls, or muskets, which the fugitives had thrown away.

"Oh, for a drop of water!" groaned the officer, while slowly crossing the field; "my lips are parched!"

Tottering and reeling, with the aid of his sabre, and by his firm, energetic will, and the resolution of his spirit, he succeeded once more in overcoming the weakness of his body.

He hastened on with quicker steps, and hope now lent wings to his feet, for yonder, in the rear of the shrubbery, he beheld a house; men were there, assistance also.

At length, after untold efforts, and a terrible struggle with his pain and exhaustion, he reached the peasant's house. Looking up with longing eyes to the windows, he shouted: "Oh, give me a drink of water! Have mercy on a wounded soldier!"

But no voice responded; no human face appeared behind

the small green windows. Every thing remained silent and deserted.

With a deep sigh, and an air of bitter disappointment depicted on his features, he murmured:

"My feet cannot carry me any farther. Perhaps my voice was too weak, and they did not hear me. I will advance closer to the house."

Gathering his strength, with staggering steps he approached and found the door only ajar; whereupon he opened it and entered.

Within the house every thing was as silent as without; not a human being was to be seen; not a voice replied to his shouts. The inside of the dwelling presented a sorry spectacle. All the doors were open; the clay floor was saturated here and there with blood; the small, low rooms were almost empty; only some half-destroyed furniture, a few broken jars and other utensils, were lying about. The inmates either had fled from the enemy, or he had expelled them from their house.

"There is no help for me," sighed the officer, casting a despairing glance on this scene of desolation. "Oh, why was it not vouchsafed to me to die on the battle-field? Why did not a compassionate cannon-ball have mercy on me, and give me death on the field of honor? Then, at least, I should have died as a brave soldier, and my name would have been honorably mentioned; now I am doomed to be named only among the missing! Oh, it is sad and bitter to die alone, unlamented by my friends, and with no tear of compassion from the eyes of my queen! Oh, Louisa, Louisa, you will weep much for your crown, for your country, and for your people, but you will not have a tear for the poor lieutenant of your dragoons who is dying here alone uttering a prayer for a blessing on you! Farewell queen, may God grant you strength, and——"

His words died away; a deadly pallor overspread his features, his head turned dizzy, and a ringing noise filled his ears.

"Death! death!" he murmured faintly, and, with a sigh, he fell senseless to the ground.

Every thing had become silent again in the humble house; not a human sound interrupted the stillness reigning in the desolate room. Only the hum of a few flies, rushing with their heads against the window-panes, was heard. Once a rustling noise was heard in a corner, and a mouse glided across the floor, its piercing, glittering eyes looked searchingly around, and the sight of the bloody, motionless form, lying

prostrate on the floor, seemed to affright it, for it turned and slipped away even faster than it had approached, and disappeared in the corner.

The sun rose higher, and shone down on the dimmed windows of the house, reflecting their yellow outlines on the floor, and illuminated the gold lace adorning the uniform of the prostrate and motionless officer.

All at once the silence was broken by the approach of hurried steps, and a loud voice was heard near at hand, shouting:

"Is there anybody in the house?"

Then every thing was still again. The new-comer was evidently waiting for a reply. After a pause, the steps drew nearer—now they were already in the hall; and now the tall, slender form of a Prussian officer, with a bandaged head and arm, appeared on the threshold of the room. When he beheld the immovable body on the floor, his pale face expressed surprise and compassion.

"An officer of the queen's dragoons!" he ejaculated, and in the next moment he was by his side. He knelt down, and placed his hand inquiringly on the heart and forehead of the prostrate officer.

"He is warm still," he murmured, "and it seems to me his heart is yet beating. Perhaps, perhaps he only fainted from loss of blood, just as I did before my wounds had been dressed. Let us see."

He hastily drew a flask from his bosom, and pouring some of its contents into his hand, he washed with it the forehead and temples of his poor comrade.

A slight shudder now pervaded his whole frame, and he looked with a half-unconscious, dreamy glance into the face of the stranger, who had bent over him with an air of heart-felt sympathy.

"Where am I?" he asked, in a low, tremulous voice.

"With a comrade," said the other, kindly. "With a companion in misfortune who is wounded, and a fugitive like you. I am an officer of the Hohenlohe regiment, and fought at Jena. Since last night I have been wandering about, constantly exposed to the danger of falling into the hands of the enemy. My name is Pückler—it is a good Prussian name. You see, therefore, it is a friend who is assisting his poor comrade, and you need not fear any thing. Now, tell me what I can do for you?"

"Water, water!" groaned the wounded officer, "water!"

"You had better take some of my wine here," said the other; "it will quench your thirst, and invigorate you at the same time."

He held the flask to the lips of his comrade, and made him sip a little of his wine.

"Now it is enough," he said, withdrawing the flask from his lips. "Since you have quenched your thirst, comrade, would you not like to eat a piece of bread and some meat? Ah, you smile; you are surprised because I guess your wishes and know your sufferings. You need not wonder at it, however, comrade, for I have undergone just the same torture as you. Above all, you must eat something."

While speaking, he had produced from his knapsack a loaf of bread and a piece of roast chicken, and cutting a few slices from both, placed them tenderly in the mouth of the sufferer, looking on with smiling joy while the other moved his jaws, slowly at first, but soon more rapidly and eagerly.

"Now another draught of wine, comrade," he said, "and then, I may dare to give you some more food. Hush! do not say a word—it is a sacred work you are doing now, a work by which you are just about to save a human life. You must not, therefore, interrupt it by any superfluous protestations of gratitude. Moreover, your words are written in your eyes, and you cannot tell me any thing better and more beautiful than what I am reading therein. Drink! So! And here is a piece of bread and a wing of the chicken. While you are eating, I will look around in the yard and garden to find there some water to wash your wounds."

Without waiting for a reply, he hastily left the officer alone with the piece of bread, the wing of the chicken, and the flask. When he returned, about fifteen minutes later, with a jar filled with water, the bread and meat had disappeared; but instead of the pale, immovable, and cadaverous being, he found seated on the floor a young man with flashing eyes, a faint blush on his cheeks, and a gentle smile on his lips.

"You have saved me," he said, extending his hand toward his returning comrade. "I should have died of hunger and exhaustion, if you had not relieved me so mercifully."

"Comrade," said the officer, smiling, "you have just repeated the same words which I addressed two hours ago to another comrade whom I met on the retreat; or, to speak more correctly, who found me lying in the ditch. The lucky fellow had got a horse; he offered me a seat behind him. But I saw that the animal was too weak to carry both of

hence I did not accept his offer, but I took the refreshments which he gave to me, and with which he not only saved my life, but yours too. You are, therefore, under no obligations to me, but to him alone."

"You are as kind as you are generous," said the other, gently, involuntarily raising his hand toward his forehead.

"And I see that you are in pain," exclaimed the officer, "and that the wound in your head is burning. Mine has been dressed already, and my shattered arm bandaged—for I received both wounds yesterday in the early part of the battle, and the surgeon attended to them while the bullets were hissing around us."

"I was wounded only when every thing was lost," sighed the other. "A member of the accursed imperial guard struck me down."

"I hope you gave him a receipt in full for your wounds?" asked the officer, while tenderly washing the wound with the water he had brought along in the broken jar.

The other officer looked up to him with flashing eyes.

"I gave him a receipt which he has already shown to God Himself," he said, "provided there is a God for these accursed French. My sword cleft his skull, but I fell together with him."

"Your wound here in the forehead is of no consequence," said the officer; "the stroke only cut the skin. Let us put this moistened handkerchief on it."

"Oh, now I am better," said the other; "now that the wound burns less painfully, I feel that life is circulating again through all my veins."

"And what about your arm?"

"A lancer pierced it. I hope he was kind enough not to touch the bone, so that the arm need not be amputated. It is true, it pains severely; but, you see, I can move it a little, which proves that it is not shattered. Now, comrade, do me still another favor—assist me in rising."

"Here, lean firmly on me. There! I will lift you up—now you are on your legs again. Lean on me still, for you might become dizzy."

"No, I shall not. I feel again well and strong enough to take the burden of life on my shoulders. Thank God! I am able to stand again. For, however crushed and trampled under foot we may be, we will submit to our fate manfully, and stand erect. The conqueror and tyrant shall not succeed in bending our heads, although he has broken our hearts. Ah,

comrade, that was a terrible day when all Prussia sank in ruins!"

"You were in the thickest of the fray? The regiment of the queen's dragoons fought at Auerstadt, I believe?"

"Yes, it fought at Auerstadt, or rather it did the same as all the other regiments—it deserted. Only a few squadrons complied with the urgent exhortations of the king, who led us against the squares of the enemy near Hassenhausen. His own horse was shot; we officers stood our ground, but the dragoons ran away.* Ah, I wept with rage, and if my tears could have been transformed into bullets, they would not have been directed against the enemy, but against our own cowardly dragoons. The battle would have been won if our soldiers had not disgracefully taken to their heels. All shouts, orders, supplications, were in vain; the soldiers were running, although no enemy pursued them; the panic had rendered them perfectly crazy."

"And do you really believe, comrade, that we owe the loss of the battle exclusively to the cowardice of the soldiers?" asked the officer. "Did our generals do their duty? Ah, you look gloomy, and do not reply. Then you agree with me? Let us, however, speak of all these things afterward, but first of ourselves."

"Yes, first of ourselves!" exclaimed the other, starting from his gloomy reflections. "Count Pückler, you were kind enough to tell me your name, when you relieved an unknown sufferer in so humane a manner, and thereby saved his life. Now permit me to tell you my name, too, so that you may know at least who will always revere your memory with affection and gratitude. I am Second-Lieutenant Ferdinand von Schill. You see, it is a very humble name; still I had solemnly vowed that it should not be unknown in the battles that were to be fought."

"And I see it written on your brow, comrade, that you will at some future time make up for what fate has now prevented you from accomplishing," said Count Pückler, kindly offering his hand to Lieutenant von Schill. "Yet now let us not think of the future, but of the present. We are disabled, and will be helpless as soon as the wound-fever sets in; and we may be sure that that will be to-night. We must, therefore, find a place of refuge; for, if we remain here, without assistance, and without food, we shall surely be lost."

"You are right; we must leave this house," said Schill;

* Historical.

"we must try to reach a city or village. Come, let us go. You are armed, and I have got a sabre, too. Let us go, but previously let us swear that we will not surrender to the French, but rather die, even should it be necessary to commit suicide! You have a knife, and when you cut some bread for me, I saw that it was very sharp. Will you give it to me?"

"What for?"

"I want to stab myself, as soon as I see that I cannot escape from the enemy!"

"And I? What is to become of me?"

"Before killing myself, I will stab you with my sabre. Will that content you?"

"It will. Be careful, however, to hit my heart; do not merely wound, but kill me."

"Ah, I see that we understand each other, and that the same heart is pulsating in our breast!" exclaimed Schill, joyfully. "Let us die, rather than be captured by the enemy and depend on the mercy of the Corsican tyrant! Now, comrade, let us go! For you are right; the wound-fever will set in toward evening, and without assistance we shall be lost."

"Come," said Pückler, "place your uninjured arm in mine. It seems fate has destined us for each other, for it has ruined your right arm and my left arm; thus we can walk at least side by side, mutually supporting ourselves. I shall be your right hand, and you will lend me your left arm when I have to embrace anybody. But, it is true, no one will now care for our embrace; every one will mock and deride us, and try to read in the bloody handwriting on our foreheads: 'He is also one of the vanquished Prussians!'"

"Comrade, did you not tell me a little while ago, that it would be better for us to attend to our own affairs, before talking about other matters?"

"It is true; let us go!"

And, leaning on each other, the two officers left the house.

CHAPTER II.

THE GERMAN SONG.

It was a sunny morning in autumn; the two wounded officers were inhaling the bracing air in long draughts, and their eyes were wandering over the transparent sky and the picturesque landscape.

"And to think that my eyes would never more have seen all this, if you had not had mercy on me!" said Schill, with a grateful glance at his companion.

"Ah, my friend," sighed Pückler, mournfully, "we shall not always behold the sky and this beautiful, silent scene, but it may easily happen that we shall see much misery to-day, and that you will curse your eyes for being compelled to perceive it! Still you are right—it is better to live, even in anguish and distress, than to die in anguish and distress; for he who lives has still a future before him, and is able to strive in it for revenge and compensation for the past. Let us desery our immediate future from the hill yonder, and there decide on the direction we shall take."

They walked toward the neighboring hill. Frequently they had to stop on the way; frequently they sank down exhausted; but their will and youthful energy overcame their weakness, and finally they reached their destination: they stood on the summit, and were able to survey the whole country for miles around.

"Yonder, where that dreadful smoke is rising, is the battle-field of Auerstadt!" said Schill, after a long pause, during which they had taken breath.

"Yes, and beyond those hills is Jena," said Pückler, sadly. "Those are two melancholy names for a Prussian ear, and, like Ulysses, I should like to close mine so as not to hear that siren voice of death any more; for, I tell you, whenever I hear those two names, I am driven to despair, and would like to throw myself into that abyss!"

"My friend, it seems to me we are already in the abyss, and our first and most earnest endeavors should be directed toward saving us from it," said Schill, shrugging his shoulders. "Our first step should be to get safely through the enemy's lines, in order to escape from the dangers to which a