

information to our ambassadors. He told them that Napoleon, before setting out from Berlin, would issue a decree, absolutely prohibiting all commerce with England, and ordering, further, that all letters coming from or going to that country, addressed to an Englishman, or written in English, were to be stopped at the post-office; that all goods, the produce of English manufactures, or of English colonies, were to be confiscated, not only on the coast, but in the interior, in the houses of the merchants by whom they should be retained; that every vessel, having only touched at the English colonies, or at any of the ports of the three kingdoms, should be forbidden to enter French ports, or ports under subjection to France, and that every Englishman whatsoever, seized in France, or in the countries under subjection to her arms, should be declared a prisoner of war.* Now," added he, in a subdued tone, "I have finished my communication. You know the treaty of peace, and every thing belonging to it. You will be able to form a definite opinion with regard to it; you can, accordingly, fulfil the queen's wish, and tell her whether you would advise me to sign it. Speak! and remember that here, in this room, I am not the king, but only the queen's friend, happening to be present at your consultation. It, therefore, behoves me to be silent, and to listen."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SECRET COUNCIL OF STATE.

THE king leaned back, and, supporting his head on his arms, shaded his face with his hands, as if it were a screen that was to conceal the expression of his features. The queen turned with a sweet smile toward the two gentlemen. "My husband having permitted it," she said, "pray, speak. Let me hear your views. And as I deem the opinions of both of you equally important, I do not know whom to request to commence. Let the oldest speak first."

"Then, your majesty, I must speak," said Hardenberg, bowing low, "I know that I am seven years older than Baron von Stein. He surpasses me in wisdom as I do him in years."

* Thiers, "Consulat et Empire," vol. vii., p. 380.

"Well, speak," said Louisa. "What do you think of this treaty?"

"I think it is a new proof of the reckless pride of Bonaparte," said Hardenberg. "In order to appreciate it correctly it is necessary for us to look back into the past, and to remember how this war arose, which the emperor asserts to have been provoked by Prussia. But the king, our most gracious master, never desired war; on the contrary, he withstood, for a long while, the wishes of his ministers, his court, his people, and his army. He would have avoided the war, if Napoleon had allowed him to form a Confederation of the North, conservative in its tendencies, but not hostile to the Confederation of the Rhine. Deceived, menaced, insulted, the king continued negotiating to the last moment, and did not cease hoping that France would acknowledge that she was wrong, and yield to the remonstrances and wishes of Prussia. The king was arming, it is true, but only for the purpose of supporting his just and strictly pacific demands by such a military demonstration. Compelled by Napoleon, he had to obey the dictates of honor at last and draw his sword. The fortunes of war decided against him; he was defeated. He commenced negotiating again; for the sake of the welfare of his people he submitted to the most rigorous terms which the conqueror imposed on him; but Napoleon, instead of appreciating this, became only the more arrogant and insatiable in his demands. The king's willingness to accept those terms was of no avail; the conditions which had been imposed on him were repudiated and nullified. Every new triumph, every new capitulation of a fortress, caused the emperor to render his demands more rigorous; and he dares now to offer a treaty, which would reduce the kingdom of Prussia to a single province—which could not but render the king's position even more precarious, and would be the depth of humiliation, without offering the least prospect of a speedy and lasting recovery from our past disasters. If Prussia should accept this utterly illusory compact, she would thereby deliver herself completely into the hands of an insatiable enemy, whose ambitious schemes are well known, and deprive herself of the only support still remaining. She would betray Russia and not save herself by this treachery, but only accelerate her own utter ruin. No one can dare to advise the king to sign such a paper, and, least of all, myself, after constantly opposing an alliance with France, even at a time when it would seem—

ingly have been advantageous to Prussia. Your majesty ordered me to express my opinion, and I have done so to the best of my conviction."

The queen thanked him by a slight bow, and then turned toward Baron von Stein. "And you?" she asked, "will you communicate to me your views about this treaty which our envoys have already signed at Charlottenburg?"

"Your majesty," said Baron von Stein, quickly, "I lack the wise composure and smiling calmness of Count von Hardenberg. It was not given me to weigh the interests and the conduct of friends and foes with prudent tranquillity and magnanimous impartiality. I am no polished courtier, but only a blunt, upright German, and as such your majesty must allow me to speak to you. Well, my honest German heart revolts at what M. Napoleon is pleased to call a treaty of peace, and what, it seems to me, would be but a pact with degradation, dishonor, and disgrace. If I had been in the place of Messrs. de Zastrow and Lucchesini, I would have allowed my right hand to be cut off rather than to be prevailed upon to sign any thing so ignominious; I would have died rather than surrender at discretion in so humiliating a manner. I know full well that these gentlemen have done so only in order to save the political existence of the king and his state. But how little do they know the intentions and schemes of our powerful adversary, whom only the most determined and obstinate resistance can induce to be moderate in his exactions, and who, so soon as he has nothing to fear, shrinks from nothing! As soon as the king, according to these stipulations, has surrendered to him his fortresses and Silesian possessions, Napoleon will give notice that he resumes hostilities within ten days, and the king having not sufficient power to offer him any resistance, the loss of his last and only possessions would be the natural consequence. Napoleon would even manage matters in such a way as to leave it to other hands to carry out this last spoliation. It is well known what prospects he held out in Berlin to the deputation of the Poles, and by what words and promises he instigated them to rise. He now demands the removal of our troops from Graudenz and its environs, that is to say from Prussian Poland. He wishes to promote the insurrection in Poland, and to assist the Poles as efficiently as possible, so that we should lose these provinces during the cessation of hostilities. His majesty, moreover, is unable to enter into an engagement

concerning the withdrawal of the Russian troops, and the last fortresses, therefore, would be sacrificed in vain. But it is just as little in the power of the king to induce the Emperor of Russia to waive his just claims against the Porte, or to deprive the Hospodars of Moldavia and Wallachia of the protection pledged to them. The Russian emperor has already marched his troops into Moldavia. The struggle with the Porte has begun, and his honor will not permit him to recede from the stand he has taken. Up to this hour he has remained unwaveringly faithful, in words as well as in actions, to his Prussian ally. A large Russian army is already approaching our frontier, and it is said the Czar himself is accompanying it in order to join the Prussian forces and then attack Napoleon. By signing the treaty of Charlottenburg, however, the King of Prussia would not only have to reject the assistance offered him, but be compelled to turn his sword against him who, in his generous friendship, is coming to help him fight for the preservation of his states.

"This so-called treaty of peace would raise up two new enemies against Prussia, and without changing her old foe, France, into a firm and reliable friend. The first of these is Russia, which Prussia would have deserted in the most perfidious manner; the second is Great Britain, which would wage war against the ally of France as well as against France herself. Napoleon, by that decree against English goods, property, and subjects, throws down a new gauntlet to Great Britain, for it is the beginning of a blockade of the entire continent; and William Pitt, the great and heroic minister of King George, will assuredly accept the challenge. It will kindle anew the whole fire of his hatred and vengeance, and he will urge the full power of England against France. Now, Talleyrand has declared loudly that Napoleon would allow Prussia to maintain her existence as an independent state, only if England and Russia should make peace with him on acceptable terms. Neither, however, will do this, and Prussia, consequently, would be irretrievably lost by accepting these conditions; for she would then have three enemies and not a single ally. Not only honor, but also prudence commands us to reject the treaty. Not to obey the dictates of those two powers would be to hurl Prussia into an abyss of wretchedness, where she would not hear the sympathetic lamentations of a single ally, but the scornful laughter of the world. I hope that the king may preserve Prussia from such

consequences, and graciously permit us to maintain, amid our disasters and sorrows, a clear conscience and erect head, as it behooves men more willing to die than give up honor and liberty!

"Your majesty must pardon me if I have spoken too freely and unreservedly. But you commanded me to express my honest opinion. I have done so, and pray you to forgive me if my words have not been sufficiently delicate and well chosen."

"I have nothing to pardon, only to thank you," said the queen, "as well as Count von Hardenberg. Both of you have permitted me to look into the innermost recesses of your hearts. You have spoken according to your honest conviction: I thank you!" And turning her radiant eyes toward the king, Louisa added in a tone of profound emotion, "Your majesty, we have lost Magdeburg! But are not such men as these worth more than a fortress? Fortresses may fall, but so long as we shall have such men by our side, Prussia will not be lost!"

The king, who had been sitting all the while in the same attitude, his head supported on his arm, and his face hidden behind his hand, slowly dropped it and looked long and inquiringly at the queen. "It is your turn now to express your opinion," he said, calmly. "I believe you owe it to your advisers to tell them what you think of it. You thank those who speak to you honestly and truthfully, by answering them in the same manner. I, therefore, request the queen now to speak in her turn, and to tell us what she thinks of this treaty."

"I think, my king and husband, that I would rather be killed by the first cannon-ball discharged against France than sanction this ignominious treaty," exclaimed the queen, with glowing cheeks, and with passionate impetuosity. "I think that, in case you sign it, I should never dare to set foot again in the palace of Charlottenburg, because it would seem to me as though I were not allowed to raise my eyes either to man or to God, for the human heart turns away from the perfidious and dishonored, and God Himself has no mercy on them. I should think the walls of this house would fall upon us to hide our shame—I should shrink shudderingly from every table, because that treaty might have been signed on it which is to render us recreant to duty, and to steal our unsullied honor. No! let us be humiliated, and succumb with a clear

conscience, rather than accept the friendship and alliance of the Corsican, at the expense of principle!"

"Ah!" muttered the king, bowing his head, "if words could be transformed into swords, you would win battles for me to-day. Unfortunately, however, soldiers are necessary for that purpose, and I have no army. Your words may be the dragons' teeth from which armed warriors may spring, but they might turn against ourselves and annihilate us!" He paused and looked down musingly. The queen dared not disturb his reflections, and gazed at him in silence and with an air of tender sympathy. The two ministers looked no less grave, and waited until he would interrupt the silence and address them.

The king raised his head and looked at the clock. "Four o'clock," he said, rising more hastily than usual. "I have ordered the ministers and generals to assemble at the rooms of Minister von Haugwitz, and told them that I should be present. I like to be punctual. Let us go then, gentlemen; it is time for us to be at the conference."

The two ministers rose to take leave of the queen. Louisa gave each of them her hand, which they kissed, and she dismissed them with a grateful glance. The king kindly waved his hand, and, after they had left the room, turned to the queen. "Farewell, dear Louisa," he said, offering his hand to her; "official duties are calling me, and so long as I am king I must not neglect them. I came to you in order to dispel my cares a little by chatting with you, and instead of doing so I had to be present at a meeting of a secret council of state. The unfortunate have no time for recreation, and that may be useful and salutary, after all. Farewell, then; I must go to Haugwitz's rooms."

He was about to leave, but the queen grasped his hand, and gazed with an imploring glance searchingly at his calm and impenetrable countenance. "Oh, my husband," she said, in a voice tremulous with emotion; "you are going to leave me thus? You do not utter a word of consolation and assurance?"

The king kissed her on the forehead, and pointed to the clock. "It is high time for me to go to the conference," he said, and gently disengaging his hand hastened away.

Louisa gazed after him until he had disappeared; she then raised her hands and eyes to heaven. "O my God," she whispered, "direct his resolutions, and cause him to choose what is right! Oh, give me strength to bear my misfortunes

patiently, and not to despair and murmur, even though the king should decide on another course than the one my heart longs for, and my reason believes to be right." On casting down her eyes, she happened to see the open piano, and hastening to it her white hands commenced playing a soul-moving melody. She then sang, with tearful eyes and fervent voice: "*Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten, und hoffet auf ihn alle Zeit—*"

Scarcely an hour had elapsed—the queen was still singing at the piano when the door behind her softly opened, and the king again entered. The carpet and the full notes of the piano prevented her hearing his footsteps. The king walked rapidly to his wife, and laid his hand on her shoulder. She started, and looked up to her husband with an inquiring, anxious glance, and rose slowly from her chair.

"Louisa," said the king, solemnly, "I have just returned from the conference of the ministers at Haugwitz's rooms. Besides Prince Henry and myself, ten ministers, generals, and cabinet councillors were present. Seven advocated the ratification of the treaty of Charlottenburg; four were opposed to it. The majority, therefore, were in favor of it."

The queen turned pale, and the painful quivering of her lips betrayed her inward emotion. "There were eleven present besides you," said she, breathlessly. "Seven voted for ratifying the treaty; four were opposed to it! But what did the king say, who had to decide every thing? Did my beloved husband side with the majority?"

"The king," said Frederick William, slowly, "decided in favor of the minority."

Louisa uttered a cry, and, seizing his hand, bent over and imprinted a warm kiss on it. "Oh, my dear husband, you did not accept the ignominious Charlottenburg bargain?" she asked, joyfully. "You did not yield to the majority? My God! I thank Thee, for Thou hast fulfilled the most fervent wishes of my soul! Oh, my dear husband, if there were in my heart still a spot which love for you had not consecrated, it would be now! My whole heart is filled with pride, delight, and esteem for you. We shall not make peace, then, with the tyrant, or accept the hypocritical friendship of our mortal foe—we shall remain faithful to ourselves, to our honor, and to our ally."

"Yes, we shall reject that treaty," said the king. "We shall try to carry on the war. But let us not yield to illu-

sions; let us not endeavor to deceive ourselves by indulging in sanguine hopes! In again drawing the sword, we have to struggle for our existence, and we may possibly fail."

"Better to be buried under the ruins of the throne than to sit on it with the stigma of perfidy and dishonor!" exclaimed the queen. "Even the crown would not cover such a stain!"

"We may lose our state and our crown, and be compelled to flee as nameless beggars across the Russian frontier. Are you prepared for it?"

Louisa passionately encircled her husband's neck with her arms, and looked him in the face with an air of unutterable tenderness. "I am prepared for every thing, provided I may stay with you," she said, affectionately. "Let the worst befall us, it will find me calm and courageous, for I shall share it with you. Where you go I go. And though we should have to flee from our invincible enemy into the remotest wilds of Russia, my heart would be glad, for honor would accompany us, and love would be our comfort!"

The king laid his hand on her head, as if blessing her, and clasped her in his arms. "You are a noble and heroic woman," he said, "and I thank God from the bottom of my heart for having given me such a wife. Pray for me, Louisa; pray for all of us! I will now go to receive the envoy of Napoleon, M. Duroc, and tell him that I must reject the treaty of Charlottenburg." He pressed a kiss on the queen's brow, and then crossed the room arm-in-arm with her. When about to go, he stood still and tenderly looked at her. "Ah, Louisa," he said, "I forgot to tell you something. After informing the conference that I should not ratify the treaty, but continue the war, I commissioned Haugwitz to draw up a manifesto by which I would announce to my people the step I had resolved upon. Count von Haugwitz, however, said he was unable to draw up such a manifesto, and offered his resignation, owing to his enfeebled health, and the disease of the eyes from which he is suffering."

The queen smiled, and an emotion of joy illuminated her countenance. "You have accepted his resignation?" she asked, breathlessly.

"I have accepted it. He will set out to-day for his estates. I must at once appoint his successor; for, in times such as these, I cannot do without a minister of foreign affairs. Can you recommend any one to me whom you would deem especially qualified for the position, and in whom you have confidence?"

The queen looked in surprise at her husband, and cast down her eyes, as if she feared he would read in them thoughts conflicting with her words. "It does not behoove me to advise my sagacious and prudent husband," she said. "His wisdom will always be able to find the right man for the right place, and to appoint a minister competent to promote the interests of Prussia and her noble king."

"Then you do not know of any one whom you would recommend to me?" asked he.

Louisa looked down, and silently shook her head.

The king smiled. "Well," he said, "in that case I myself must make the selection, and I have already done so. Baron von Stein is the man whom I will appoint minister of foreign affairs." He did not give his wife time to reply, but left the room quickly, and closed the door.

The queen gazed after him, her eyes radiant with joy. "Oh," she said, "what a great and noble heart! He who conquers himself is a hero indeed. The king has overcome his own reluctance, and, contrary to his inclination, selected the man whom his head appreciates, but whom his heart does not love."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BARON VON STEIN.

ON the same day, after the king had given an audience to Grand-Marshal Duroc, and informed him that he rejected the treaty of Charlottenburg, he instructed Köckeritz and Beyme to offer the department of foreign affairs to Baron von Stein. But the baron had declined, declaring he was unable to fill so difficult a position—that he lacked the necessary knowledge of affairs and forms and the requisite skill in applying them so as to discharge the duties of so high an office in an efficient manner. The king, however, did not accept this refusal. He caused new offers to be made to him—requesting him to take charge of the department at least temporarily, and promising him a large salary, besides eight thousand dollars annually for household expenses. But Baron von Stein did not allow himself to be tempted by the brilliancy of the position, or the large compensation. He adhered to his determination, and declined a second time, proposing to the

king to appoint in his place, as minister of foreign affairs, Count von Hardenberg, that experienced and skilful statesman.

The king shook his head indignantly, and bit his lips, as he was accustomed to do whenever he was angry. "Tell Baron von Stein to come to me," he said to General von Köckeritz. "I will speak to him myself."

General von Köckeritz hastened away, and an hour afterward Baron von Stein entered the king's cabinet. Frederick William was slowly pacing his room, with his hands joined behind him. He apparently did not notice the baron's arrival, and passed him repeatedly without greeting or even looking at him. The minister, who at first had stood respectfully near the door, waiting to be accosted by the king, tired of this long silence, turned to the paintings hanging on the wall, and, while contemplating them, passing from one to another, happened to push against a chair, which made a loud noise.

The king was aroused from his meditation. He stood still before Baron von Stein, and looked with a stern air into his manly face. "I offered you twice the department of foreign affairs," he said, in his dry, abrupt manner. "Why did you not accept it?"

"Your majesty, because I did not feel capable of filling it," replied Stein, calmly, "and because there are worthier men who are better qualified for it."

The king shook his head. "Subterfuges!" he said. "Firm and bold men, such as you, do not undervalue their own importance, but appreciate it correctly. In days so grave as these, it is necessary for every one to be sincere. I want to be informed why you reject my offer. I have a right to insist on knowing your reasons. I am king still, and I believe my functionaries owe me an explanation when refusing to undertake a task which I ask them to perform. Speak, and tell me your reasons. I command you to do so."

"Your majesty," said Stein, with cold, proud equanimity, "suppose, in order to comply with your command, I should allege some pretext or other in lieu of my real reasons, and, like Count von Haugwitz, base my refusal on my pretended ill-health? How would your majesty be able to know whether I was sincere or not? Even kings are not capable of looking into the hearts of men, and no orders can reveal secrets if we desire to conceal them. But I do not wish to hide my