

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

thoughts from your majesty. In compliance with your request, I will lay my reasons freely and sincerely before you. But, before doing so, I must ask your majesty to grant me two things."

"Well, what are they?" inquired the king, quickly.

"In the first place, I beg leave to be seated, for I have been ill, and am still weak."

The king sat down on the divan and pointed to an easy-chair standing near. "Take a seat, and tell me your second request."

"I must beg your majesty graciously to pardon my frankness, in case my words should not meet with your approval or should appear too bold and rash."

"I wish to know the truth, and must, therefore, have the courage to hear it," said the king. "Why did you decline?"

"Your majesty, my first reason, though you refused to believe it, is and remains, that I regard Count von Hardenberg as much better qualified than myself to take charge of the department of foreign affairs, because he enjoys the confidence of those courts with which your majesty intends keeping up friendly relations. Count von Hardenberg, moreover, has the confidence of your people, who, wherever they are permitted to do so, are loudly expressing themselves in his favor, and would consider this salutary appointment a consolation and hope for the future. It seems unbecoming in me to accept an office that should be intrusted to a minister distinguished for his faithful services in this department, and, under the present circumstances perhaps, highly influential already by his very name."

"Go on, go on," said the king, impatiently. "Say no more about Hardenberg. Tell me your other reasons."

"Sire, my second reason is that, even though I accept the position, I should be unable to accomplish in it what I should deem necessary for the welfare of the state. Your majesty, so long as there is no free and direct intercourse between you and your ministers—so long as there is a cabinet government in existence, separating the king from his ministers, and exercising an injurious influence on the relations of the latter toward the subordinate officers in their departments, your ministers cannot hope to promote the welfare of the state, and to introduce and carry out such measures as they deem indispensable for the best interests of the people. Your majesty's ministers have long since recognized and felt the disastrous

influence of this government which is watching with the utmost jealousy at the door of your cabinet, and keeping every minister from it and from direct intercourse with you. They were silent so long as Prussia appeared to be in prosperous circumstances, and the inward germs of her degeneracy and decay could be concealed by a semblance of justice. But now every illusion of this character has been rudely dissipated, and it is time to beseech your majesty to abolish a system during the existence of which the calamitous condition of our state has constantly and hopelessly increased. Fearful events have followed in quick succession, and the Prussian states have been plunged into disasters from which they can be restored only by the united strength of the whole people. But although the ministers are fully conscious of this state of affairs, and though they hold in their hands the remedies that might save the kingdom, they never would be sure that they can profit by them, for they see between them and the king a power without any well-defined functions, and without responsibility, meddling with every thing and directing nothing—this power can foil the plans of the ministers at any time, reverse their measures, and counteract their advice."

"I know very well," said the king, angrily, "that, like Hardenberg, you are constantly on bad terms with Köckeritz, Beyme, and Lombard, the members of my cabinet."

"Sire, I do not attack persons, but privileges," said Stein, gravely. "If your majesty dismiss those gentlemen and select others, there would be no change for the better. If you do not permit the ministers to consult you directly concerning the affairs of their departments—if you do not reëstablish the council of state, and abolish the irresponsible cabinet, the position of your minister of foreign affairs would remain as it is now—an empty shadow. But if your majesty should gather your ministers around you as a regular council of state, and direct their loyal plans and counsels with that fatherly love for your subjects which you have manifested at all times, such a step would strengthen the confidence of your allies, restore the courage of the oppressed nation, inspire the conquered provinces with the determination of shrinking from no danger in order to deliver themselves from the yoke of the oppressor, and counteract, in the countries remaining as yet intact, that discouragement which cannot but prevent the people from making any heroic efforts in self-defence. Such, sire," added Stein, drawing a deep breath, "are my honest

opinions and convictions. I lay them before your majesty with the sincerity and earnestness which the threatening state of affairs renders it incumbent on me to manifest. My determination to share the fate of the monarchy, and of your majesty's house, whatever may be in store for them, is well known. But if you are unwilling to give up a system that I am satisfied has already brought so many calamities upon the country, and will continue to do so—if the cabinet is to remain, and if the council of state, without which I believe Prussia cannot be saved, is not organized—I most humbly beg your majesty to accept my refusal."

"You want to threaten me!" exclaimed the king. "You think, perhaps, you are alone able to save Prussia?"

"No, your majesty," said Stein, looking the king in the face; "no, I only believe that the present cabinet government is destined to ruin her."

The king looked down for a while musingly. "Well, what is your idea about the new council of state which you propose?" he asked after a pause. "Who is to belong to it? What is to be its object?"

"Its object is to be the intermediate voice between the people and the king; to lay before him the laws and ordinances, in order to obtain his approval and signature; to publish such of them as he has sanctioned, and to be responsible to him for the administration of the country. But for all these reasons it would be indispensable that the ministers should be admitted to the king at any time, and be consulted as to any resolutions which he would take and in reference to any changes he would decide upon in the general policy of the government. The ministers of foreign affairs, of war, and of finance, would form the nucleus of this council, and be as much as possible near the king's person. If your majesty should travel, one of them at least would have to accompany you."

"That is to say, you would depose me," said the king, a deep blush mantling his cheeks. "The ministers are to govern alone, and I am to have only the right of being a sort of writing-machine to sign their decrees."

"No, your majesty, the king is to have the deciding voice in regard to every thing; but he must graciously refrain from deciding any thing without having listened to the opinions of his ministers."

"And if I approve your proposition—if I assemble in my cabinet every day a council of state, consisting of the minis-

ters," said the king, with seeming calmness, "would you then be inclined to accept the position I have offered you, and become minister of foreign affairs?"

"Sire," said Stein, firmly, "it would not be enough for your majesty to appoint new ministers, and hold daily consultations with them, but you would have also to dismiss, formally and forever, the gentlemen who have hitherto monopolized your confidence. Unless Count von Haugwitz and Lombard be dismissed from the civil service—unless Beyme, who is suspected by and disagreeable to the Russian court, and hated by a very large majority of our people, be deprived of his present office, the ministers cannot rely on any certain efficiency in their positions, and even the council of state would offer them no guaranty whatever against the continued secret cabinet consisting of Messrs. von Haugwitz, Lombard, and Beyme."

"Enough," exclaimed the king, rising hastily, and pacing the room. "I have listened to you to the end, because I wished to see how far your audacity would go, and to gain a clear insight into your whole character. I was already prejudiced against you. It is true, I knew you were a thoughtful, talented, and bold man, but, at the same time, I believed you to be somewhat eccentric; in short, I regarded you as a man who, because he always thinks only his own opinion to be correct, is unable to fill a position in which he would constantly come in conflict with others, and soon be irritated and discouraged by the clash of opinions prevailing there. I overcame these prejudices, because I have always striven to select the servants of the state, not according to the promptings of personal whims, but of sensible reasons. I was advised to appoint you minister of foreign affairs; and (please take notice of what I am about to tell you now) those who advised me to do so—those who advocated your appointment most strenuously, were precisely the ones whom you are now attacking, and are bent upon overthrowing. I yielded! I offered you the department of foreign affairs. You declined the position on the pretext of not being familiar enough with the details of the department. Your refusal was greatly embarrassing to me, for I still believed that your services ought to be preserved to the state and to myself. I overlooked your ungracious refusal, and sent for you to speak freely and openly with you. I have conversed with you, and now know you better!"

The king, walking up and down, uttered these words with increasing excitement, and in a voice growing louder and louder, without looking once at Stein, who had risen from his seat, and, drawing himself up to his full height, listened to this angry outburst. The king stood still before him, and, fixing his piercing eyes on the calm, cold face of the baron, added, "I have found out, to my regret, that my original opinion of your character was not erroneous; that my prejudices against you were just, and that you ought to be considered an obstinate, refractory, and disobedient servant of the state, who, boastfully relying on his genius and talents, so far from aiming at the welfare of his country, is actuated solely by his whims, his passions, and personal hatred. Such men are precisely those whose conduct is most injurious to the interests of the monarchy."

"Your majesty," exclaimed Stein, impetuously, "your majesty, I—"

"Silence," ejaculated the king, in an imperious voice, "silence while I am speaking! I really feel sorry that you have compelled me to speak to you so plainly and unreservedly; but as you are always boasting of being a truthful man, I have told you my opinion in unvarnished language, and will add that, if you should be unwilling to change your disrespectful conduct, the state cannot count very confidently of profiting further by your services."

"Your majesty, I cannot change my conduct," exclaimed Stein, pale with hidden anger, which he could no longer repress. "As you believe me to be an obstinate, refractory, and disobedient servant of the state, who, boastfully relying on his genius and talents, so far from aiming at the welfare of his country, is actuated solely by his whims, his passions, and personal hatred—"

"Ah," interrupted the king, laughing scornfully, "you have an excellent memory, for I believe you are repeating my own words!"

"Sire, this will show you that my conduct is not always disrespectful, but that I set so high a value on your royal words that they are immediately engraved upon my memory," said Baron von Stein, smiling. "But, inasmuch as I am also of your majesty's opinion that such officials as you have described me to be are most injurious to the interests of the monarchy, I must request your majesty to accept my declination, and I hope it will be granted immediately."

"You have pronounced your own sentence, and I do not know how to add any thing to it!" replied the king.

Baron von Stein bowed. "I thank your majesty most humbly," he said. "Now I must beg that my dismissal from the service be communicated to me in the usual form. I have the honor to take leave of your majesty."

Without waiting for the king's reply, the baron bowed a second time, and left the room with measured steps. He crossed the anteroom rapidly, and then entered the apartment contiguous to the hall. A royal *valet de chambre* hastened to meet him. "Your excellency," he said, "the queen begs you to be so kind as to go immediately to her. She instructed me to wait here till your return from the king, and ordered me to announce you directly to her majesty."

"Announce me, then," said Baron von Stein, following the footman with a mournful air.

The queen was in her cabinet, and rose from her divan when Baron von Stein entered. She offered her hand to the minister with a smile. "I begged you to come to me," she said, "because I intended to be the first to wish you—nay, ourselves—joy of your new position. The king has informed me that he would intrust the office of Count von Haugwitz to you, and I tell you truly that this is as a beam of light for me in the gloom of our present circumstances. I know that you are a true and faithful patriot; that you have the welfare of Prussia, of Germany, and of our dynasty at heart, and that you have the will and the ability to help us all—this is the reason why I wish ourselves joy of—"

"Pardon me, your majesty, for daring to interrupt you," said Baron von Stein, in a low, melancholy voice; "but I cannot accept your congratulations. I was not appointed minister of foreign affairs, but the king has just granted my request to be dismissed from the service."

The queen started, and turned pale. "You did not accept the position which the king offered to you?" she asked. "Oh, then I was mistaken in you, too! There is, alas! no more fidelity or constancy on earth!" She pressed her hand against her aching forehead, and tottered back a few steps, to sink exhausted on the divan.

Baron von Stein approached, and his face seemed to be radiant with energy and determination. "No, queen," he said, loudly and firmly—"no; you were not mistaken in me, and if your majesty hitherto believed me to be a faithful and

reliable man, I am sure you only did me justice. Fealty does not change, however, and he who has once been found reliable will be so forever. No; let me repeat once more, your majesty was not mistaken in me, although I rejected the position offered to me. I fearlessly and truthfully stated to his majesty the conditions on which alone I could accept it. The king was unwilling to submit to these conditions; he was angry at them and reproached me in such a manner as to leave me no choice but to present him my humble declination, which he granted immediately. I did not refuse his offer because the situation of the country frightened me, but because, above all, I had to remain faithful to myself, and obey the promptings of my conviction. My love, my fealty, my soul, belong to Prussia and the royal dynasty. I retire into obscurity, and shall wait for the voice of Prussia and of my king. When he calls me—when he can profit by services such as I am able conscientiously to perform—when he permits me to be faithful to myself and to my principles, that all my energy and faculties may be devoted to the welfare of my country, I shall gladly be ready to obey his call and enter upon those services. I would come to him, though from the most remote regions, and even should death menace me at every step. A true man does not shrink from danger or death, but from hypocrisy and falsehood, whether it concerns himself or others; he will not stoop to the tricks of diplomacy and dally with that which ought to be either forcibly removed from his path or carefully avoided, but with which he never ought to enter into compromise or alliance."

"Now I understand you," said the queen, gently and mournfully. "You did not wish to enter into an alliance with the secret friends of the French in our suite. The king was unwilling to sacrifice Haugwitz, Beyme, and Lombard to you, and hence you withdraw from the service. You did right, and it makes my heart ache to be compelled to admit it. So long as those three men are here, there will be a policy of continued vacillation and hesitancy, and what you would do one day those three men would annul the next. Oh! the king is so generous, so faithful and modest! He believes in the disinterestedness of Minister von Haugwitz, in his honesty and sagacity; for this reason, he will not altogether give him up, and he listens still to his advice, although Haugwitz is no longer at the head of the foreign department. Because the king himself is taciturn, and thinks and feels more in his

head and heart than is uttered by his lips, Beyme's eloquence and quick perception fill him with respect; and because he is so very modest, and always believes others to be more sagacious than himself, he esteems Lombard's abilities highly, and wishes to preserve his services to the state. You know what I think of Lombard, and that at Stettin I was carried away by my anger at his conduct, more than was compatible with prudence. I caused the man to be arrested, whom I knew to be ready at that moment to betray me and the whole of Prussia, and whom I suspected of being in the pay of the French emperor. But you know also that my act was repudiated, and that immediate steps were taken to annul it. A special courier was sent to Stettin to procure the release of Lombard, and to convey him under a safe-escort to Küstrin; the messenger even took an autograph letter from the king to him, in which his majesty regretted the occurrence as arising from mere mistake. I do not tell you this in order to complain of it, but to show you how deep-rooted is the influence of those men, and how time is required to destroy it. But the time will come—believe me, it will—when Prussia will extend her hand toward you, and need your strong arm and firm will. Promise me that you will wait, and not give up to despair—that you will not enter the service of another monarch, so that, when Prussia calls you, you may be at liberty to respond."

"I promise it to your majesty," said Stein, solemnly. "I will wait; blessed be the hour when Prussia needs me, and when I shall be able to serve her again!"

"Yes, blessed be that hour!" exclaimed the queen, and, raising her eyes piously to heaven, she whispered, "God grant that it may come soon, for then a change in our circumstances will have taken place, and we shall have passed from present incertitude to firm determination. Oh, how much distress—how many disappointments and mortifications—until that change shall come! May we have strength to bear, and courage to overcome them!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE QUEEN AT THE PEASANT'S COTTAGE.

It was a stormy night. The wind was howling through the pines, and driving the snow in dense clouds from the highway leading through the forest. There was no sound