

a prophetess with her beaming face and uplifted arms. But after a while her arms dropped, her eyes turned to earth again, and the inspired prophetess was once more transformed into the unhappy woman, who feared she would die beneath the burden of her grief. She burst again into tears, and repeated again and again that terrible accusation, although every word of it struck her heart like a dagger. Gradually, however, the reviled woman, conscious of her innocence, became the proud and pure queen! With quiet dignity she stretched out her hand toward the countess, who rushed to her, pressed her lips on the royal hand, and sobbing asked to be forgiven.

"I have nothing to forgive," said Louisa, with a faint smile. "I know your intentions were good. Oh, believe me, during hours of great affliction the soul sees and comprehends many things that were hitherto concealed from it. Thus I understood in the outburst of my despair why all this had occurred, and why I had to undergo all these sufferings. Napoleon's poisoned arrow might have fallen powerless at my feet, if your uncle had not instructed you to pick it up and make me feel it. Hush! Do not utter a word of apology! Your uncle, General von Zastrow, is a patriot in his way, and intended to teach me by your intervention how to become a good patriot in his sense—that is to say, to hate Russia, and to turn away from this alliance, for the sake of which I have been insulted. It was policy that induced the Emperor Napoleon to invent these calumnies, and it was policy again that induced your uncle to have you communicate them to me. This is a consolation; for, as it is, I am suffering only for the sake of my people, and you made me a martyr of the German cause. But I will bear all without complaining, however painful it may be; I do not wish it to cease if the welfare and happiness of Prussia should be delayed thereby but a single hour. I shall not ask the king to break off the alliance with Russia. Queen Louisa yesterday believed an alliance with Russia to be necessary and advantageous to the welfare and honor of Prussia; she will not change her mind to-day because Louisa, the woman, is charged with a dishonorable love for the Emperor of Russia. The woman may die of this calumny, but dying she will still be a queen, and say, 'I die for my country, and for my people! May my death be advantageous to Prussia!' Go to your uncle, countess, and tell him so! And now give me the numbers of the journal, and the

pamphlet too; I will take them to the king. My fate, as well as that of Prussia, is in his hands. He alone can absolve me from the charge preferred against me. Give me the papers!"

 CHAPTER XXIV.

THE JUSTIFICATION.

THE king sat at his desk, assiduously engaged in writing, when the door opened, and the queen entered. Her whole bearing breathed an unwonted, solemn earnestness; her head was proudly erect, her cheeks pale, and a melancholy smile was playing on her lips. In her left hand she held a roll of papers. The king rose hastily to meet his wife with a kindly greeting. Louisa gave him her right hand, and laid her head for a moment on his shoulder. Looking into her husband's face with a sweet, touching expression, "Do you love me, Frederick?" she asked in so low and gentle a voice that he scarcely heard it. Frederick William smiled, and, instead of replying to her, imprinted a kiss on her fair brow.

"Do you believe in me?" said Louisa. "Oh, my lord and king, I implore you by every thing that is sacred—by the memory of our children—tell me, sincerely and frankly, as if standing before God, do you believe in me? Do you believe in my love—in my virtue?"

"Louisa," exclaimed the king, indignantly and almost aghast, "this question is too grave to be a jest, and too ludicrous to be grave."

"And yet I am in earnest," exclaimed the queen, in an outburst of excitement, which she was no longer able to restrain. "Look at these papers, Frederick. They contain a terrible charge against your wife—the mother of your children—the queen of our people. They accuse the wife of a disgraceful *liaison*, and the queen of the most infamous selfishness. Frederick, they charge me with loving the Emperor Alexander, and with having induced you, for the purpose of gratifying this passion, to enter into the alliance with Russia. Now, you know the disgrace weighing me down, of which all Germany is aware by this time, and in which the malicious and evil-disposed will surely believe, even though the virtuous and compassionate may refuse to credit it. Read these

papers, my husband; read them in my presence, and if your features express but a shadow of doubt—if you fix your eyes but for a moment on me with an uncertain expression—let me die, and hide my head in the grave!”

She offered the papers to the king, but Frederick William only glanced at them, and then laying them on the table, took from one of its drawers other papers. “See, Louisa,” he said in his blunt, dry manner, “these are the same numbers of the *Telegraph*; I have already had them for a week, and read every word of them.”

The queen unfolded them. “It is true,” she said, shuddering; “they are the same papers; I read there again the terrible words, ‘Queen Louisa insists on continuing the alliance with Russia, only because her heart has formed an alliance with the fine-looking Emperor Alexander, and because she is passionately enamoured of him.’ Oh, my husband, these words have engraved themselves as a stigma on my forehead, and should your eyes behold it also, let me expunge it by sacrificing my life. Tell me the truth, Frederick! Have I deserved it—have I ever sinned by a word—nay, by a look? I have often thought and said, that there is a vestige of truth at the bottom of every rumor—that it may be greatly exaggerated, but cannot be entirely false. Is there any foundation whatever for this slander? Consider well, my husband, and if you should find that I have sinned by a gesture, by a smile, banish me from your presence. Tell me that I am unworthy of being called your wife; tear the bonds of friendship that unite you with the Emperor Alexander, and oppose him as an enemy, menacing and demanding satisfaction. There must be no stain on your honor, and if you believe the statements of these papers, show to the world that you will punish the faithless wife and spurn the treacherous friend!”

The king put his hands on the glowing cheeks of his wife, and, raising her head, gazed at her with a long and tender look. “Your friends had no mercy on you, then?” he asked. “They had to inform you pitilessly of what I wished so anxiously to conceal from you? I would willingly have cut off my right hand if I could have expunged with the blood trickling from the wound those lies from the public mind. But the world has now as little mercy on us as fate. Affliction has hitherto surrounded your beauty with the glory of a martyr; but mean men have been instigated to make you a penitent sinner—a Magdalen of the martyr.”

“My beloved Frederick,” cried the queen, “you evade my question; you do not reply to me! Tell me the truth. Do you believe in me? Or do you deem me guilty?”

At this moment a low rap at the door interrupted them. The king listened, and then turned smilingly to his wife. “It is Minister von Zastrow, who comes with General Bertrand,” he said. “I have granted an audience to the Frenchman at this hour, to receive the letter and the peace offers of Napoleon. He is proposing to me an alliance with France, and he, as well as his adherents here, I suppose, count on my having read those papers, knowing in what sense malicious men are interpreting our alliance with Russia. The reply that I shall make to Napoleon’s envoy will be also a reply to your question; hence you shall hear it, Louisa. Enter my cabinet; the *portière* will conceal you from the eyes of my visitors while you will hear every thing that is said.” He took the queen’s arm and conducted her quickly into the adjoining room; hastily rolled an easy-chair toward the door, and requested her by a wave of his hand to sit down on it. He then lowered the thick velvet *portière*, and, taking leave of his wife with a smile, returned to his room.

Louisa gazed after him. “Oh,” she whispered, “how could I deceive and betray him?—him whom I love as the cause of all my happiness, and who has rendered my life sacred and glorious! Oh, my husband and my children! my conscience is clear, and accuses me of no guilt! Will you believe it, Frederick? Will those infamous slanders not leave a vestige of mistrust in your mind? But hush, hush! the envoy is there already! I will listen to what the king replies to him.” She bent her head closer, and her large blue eyes with their searching glances seemed to pierce the heavy velvet, so that she might not only hear but see what was going on in the room.

In obedience to a sign made by the king, the door of the anteroom had opened, and General Bertrand, accompanied by General von Zastrow, entered. The king, standing in the middle of the room, returned the deep, respectful obeisances of the two gentlemen by a careless nod, and fixed his quiet eyes searchingly on the French general.

“Sire,” said General von Zastrow, in a loud and solemn voice, “General Bertrand, adjutant of his majesty the Emperor Napoleon, in accordance with the gracious leave of your majesty, has appeared here in order to deliver to you an autograph letter from his imperial master.”

"I am glad to see General Bertrand, and to make his acquaintance," said Frederick William, composedly; "I like the brave; and not merely the French army, but all men, know you to be a brave officer."

General Bertrand blushed. "Ah, sire," he said, "if I have not deserved this praise hitherto, your royal and kindly words will stimulate me in the future to strive with unflagging zeal to become worthy of it. I deem myself happy because my august master the emperor selected me to be the bearer of his letter and of his proposition, for he thereby enables me to do homage to the noblest and best of kings—to the exalted sovereign who bears prosperity and adversity with equal dignity. Your majesty will permit me to deliver the letter of my emperor into your hands." He approached the king, and, presenting to him the large letter to which the imperial seal had been affixed, reverentially bent his knee.

"Oh, no," said Frederick William, quickly, "a brave soldier must not humble himself in this manner; rise, general!"

General Bertrand rose, holding the imperial letter still in his hands, for the king had not yet taken it. Looking at him inquiringly, "Sire," he said, "may I request your majesty to receive the letter of my emperor?"

"Ah, I forgot," exclaimed the king. "You are the bearer of a letter the Emperor Napoleon has addressed to me. Let me confess my want of skill: I am unable to read your emperor's handwriting very rapidly, and it is disagreeable slowly to decipher such a letter. Moreover, what the emperor has to say to me will, doubtless, sound better when uttered by your lips, than in the black words on the paper. I, therefore, request you to read it to me."

"Sire," exclaimed General Bertrand, "I shall not dare to break the seal of a letter addressed to your majesty, and not to me."

"Oh, you may do so," said the king, "I permit you to break the seal. What the Emperor Napoleon and I have to write to each other need not be sealed. Everybody may know it. And, I suppose his letters will be only a sort of continuation of the bulletins he issued in Potsdam and Berlin. Such bulletins and letters belong to the world and history, which will judge them."

"Oh," whispered the queen, who had heard every word, "oh, why cannot I see him in his proud calmness and dignity, and thank him for his noble words!" She seized the *portière*

with her slender fingers and pushed it aside a little, so as to be able to see what was going on in the other room. The king, perhaps, had noticed the slight rustling, for he glanced quickly at the curtain; it opened immediately, the noble and beautiful face of the queen appeared; she nodded with radiant eyes a smiling greeting to her husband, and kissed her hand to him; her head then disappeared from the aperture, and the folds of dark velvet closed again. General Bertrand and General von Zastrow had seen nothing. Both stood with their backs toward the door, and respect prevented them from looking around toward the slight noise that reached their ears for a moment.

A smile illuminated the king's face. "Well," he asked, almost jestingly, turning to General Bertrand, "you have not broken the seal yet? Do so, for you ought to understand that I am anxious to hear the contents of this letter."

"Sire, inasmuch as you command me, I obey," said Bertrand. With a quick pressure of his hand he broke the seal and opened the letter.

"Now let me hear it," said the king, gliding slowly and carelessly into the easy-chair standing at the side of the desk. "There are two chairs; take seats, gentlemen!"

"Your majesty will permit me to stand. My master the emperor is not accustomed to have his letters read in another position."

"Yes, he may require his subjects to pay to him the deference of standing when one of his letters is being read," said the king. "You may stand, therefore, if you please. General von Zastrow, sit down." The king said this in so stern and imperious a tone that General von Zastrow felt resistance impossible, and that he would have to obey the king's order. He took a chair in silence, inwardly aghast at this disrespectful breach of etiquette.

"Read," said the king, dryly. General Bertrand unfolded the letter and read as follows:

"Your majesty will receive this letter at the hands of my Adjutant-General Bertrand, who enjoys my friendship. I, therefore, request you to repose entire confidence in every thing that he says, and I flatter myself that his mission will be agreeable to you.

"Bertrand will communicate to your majesty my views about the present state of your affairs. I desire to set bounds to the misfortunes of your family, and to organize, as soon as

possible, the Prussian monarchy, whose mediating power is necessary for the tranquillity of Europe.

"Bertrand will also communicate to you the easiest and quickest way in which this can be brought about, and I hope your majesty will let me know that you have taken the step which will accomplish this purpose in the best manner, and which, at the same time, will agree with the welfare of your subjects; that is to say, that you accept the peace which I am offering to you. At all events, I beg your majesty to feel convinced that I am sincerely disposed to resume our former relations, and that I also wish to come to an understanding with Russia and England, provided these powers should be animated with the same desire. I should detest myself if I were to be the cause of so much bloodshed. But how can I help it? The conclusion of peace is therefore in the hands of your majesty, and it would be the happiest day of my life if you accept my present propositions.

"NAPOLEON."

"You have to make oral explanations to this letter of your emperor?" asked the king, when Bertrand paused.

"Yes, sire, my master the emperor intrusted me with further communications to you," said Bertrand. "But, in the first place, I beg leave of your majesty to deliver the imperial letter into your hands." He approached the king and presented the paper to him with a respectful bow.

The king did not take it, but pointed to his desk. "Lay it there," he said, carelessly. "The purpose of this letter is accomplished; I know its contents, and that is all I care about. And now, general, communicate to me as briefly as possible the verbal commissions with which the emperor has intrusted you."

"Sire, his majesty the emperor authorized me to repeat to you that it was his liveliest wish to resume his former amicable relations with Prussia, and that he would shrink from no sacrifice to effect it. The emperor longs for nothing more ardently than to restore your states to your majesty, and to conduct you back to your capital."

"As his vassal?" asked the king, smiling sarcastically.

"No, sire, as a free and independent king."

"Not as Napoleon's ally, then?"

"Yes, sir, as the emperor's ally, but as free and independent as he is himself. It is true, the emperor hopes and wishes that Prussia will be friendly toward France; he relies on your

majesty's assistance in his struggle with Russia, which, in that case, will soon bow to the united will of France and Prussia, and be compelled to accept a treaty of peace. In return, the emperor will surrender to the just wishes of your majesty seditious Poland, which, as the emperor has become satisfied, is unable to bear an independent existence. The rebellious provinces of Prussian Poland shall speedily be compelled to yield unconditional obedience to the Prussian sceptre, and your country shall occupy once more the position due to her in the council of European nations. It will be unnecessary for her to make for this purpose any sacrifices to the friends and allies of France; all her fortresses and provinces shall be fully restored, and so soon as the treaty of peace will have been definitively concluded, the French troops will evacuate the Prussian territory."

While General Bertrand was speaking, the face of Minister von Zastrow had brightened, and was now really radiant with joy. Animated by the cheering words of the Frenchman, he rose from his seat, and looked at the king with clasped hands and imploring eyes. But the countenance of Frederick William remained impenetrable and cold; not the slightest expression of joy or gratification was to be read in it.

"Are you done, general?" asked the king, after a pause.

"Yes, sire. I am waiting for your majesty's reply."

"This reply will be brief and decisive," exclaimed Frederick William, loudly, rising slowly and with truly royal dignity. "I will not accept this alliance and this peace!"

"Your majesty," said General von Zastrow, in dismay, forgetful of the requirements of etiquette, "your majesty, that is impossible! You cannot be in earnest; I beseech you first to hear the opinion of your ministers, and to consult a cabinet council."

"Silence!" said the king, indignantly; "the only voices that I ought to consult with regard to this question are not those of my ministers, but those of my conscience and honor. It behooves the king alone to decide upon war or peace. I repeat, therefore, I will not accept this peace nor enter into the alliance offered under such circumstances. I might content myself with this declaration, but I shall tell you the reasons of my refusal that you may repeat them to your emperor. I cannot accept, for it would be a defeat and disgrace more humiliating than the loss of a battle. What, sir! I am to receive by the grace and *bon plaisir* of your emperor