

the gift of a position to which I am entitled by my birth! The Emperor Napoleon condescends to restore my states after forcibly expelling me from them! If I were to accept this offer, I should thereby condemn myself; and this war, into which I entered so reluctantly, because I foresaw its disastrous consequences, would be nothing but a reckless adventure, abandoned by myself because unsuccessful. If I allowed Napoleon to reinstate me in my rights, what would I be but his vassal? Not a king by the grace of God, but a king by the grace of Napoleon—not the ruler of a free and independent German state, but the governor of a French province—the despised oppressor of an enslaved people, robbed of their honor, independence, and nationality. Now, I commenced this war for the sake of my own honor and that of my people. I commenced it to set bounds to French cupidity and thirst for conquest; to preserve to Germany her German and to Prussia her Prussian character, and to drive back the Confederation of the Rhine beyond the frontier of the Rhine. The fortune of war has not sustained me in these efforts, and victory perched upon the eagles of France. But the Prussian eagle is not yet dead; he may still hope to rise again, and, endowed with renewed vigor, reconquer what belongs to him. What was taken by the sword can be reconquered only by the sword. My honor, as well as that of my army and people, was wounded on the battle-fields of Jena and Auerstadt; it cannot be healed by the balm of Napoleon's grace; it can only be redeemed by blood!"

"Sire, I beseech you, do not allow yourself to be carried away by the ardor of your heroism," exclaimed General Bertrand, feelingly. "Remember that after the rejection of this peace the Emperor Napoleon will be a relentless enemy of yours, and leave nothing undone in order to annihilate Prussia. Your majesty ought also to take into consideration that you lack an army—that your forces have been dispersed, and that your fortresses have surrendered."

"Colberg and Graudenz are still holding out," exclaimed the king, "and so is Dantzic."

"Sire, if you reject this peace, the first step of the emperor will be to take Dantzic by assault," said General Bertrand.

"Your majesty, have mercy on Dantzic," exclaimed General von Zastrow, imploringly; "have mercy on your blockaded fortresses—on your poor distressed subjects! So soon as your majesty accepts this peace, the Emperor Napoleon intends

withdrawing all the French troops from Prussian territory. Oh, pray take into consideration how dreadfully your people have suffered by the heavy contributions, and the enormous supplies to the troops! Remember that they are overwhelmed with wretchedness, and are kneeling and crying to God and to their king to restore peace."

"O my God," murmured the queen, "inspire him with the true decision, and grant that he may perceive and choose what is right!" She knelt down behind the curtain as if to hear better the king's words, that to her were the words of God. The king did not seem to notice his minister's supplication; his eyes glanced at him coldly and disdainfully, and were then fixed gravely on the face of the French general.

"I am not quite done with my reply to your propositions," he said. "I have told you the reasons why I cannot accept peace. It only remains to explain why, though the terms were honorable, I could and would not be allowed to enter into this alliance. By virtue of it I should be obliged to espouse the cause of France against her enemies, and to wage war against Russia, my ally. I am to violate the only sure compact remaining to me in order to become a mere cipher in the hands of Napoleon! I am to betray him who has been faithful to me! The Emperor of Russia is my personal friend. At the grave of Frederick the Great I swore with him to maintain the alliance of both our hearts and our states, and no other voice induced me to take this step but my inclination, my policy, and my reason. The Emperor of Russia, true to our mutual oath, renewed his protestations of friendship in the hour of danger, and his army is ready to uphold our common cause. If, now that France is offering peace to me at the expense of Russia, I were to accept it, I should commit a perfidious act, and, as a Prussian soldier, as a friend of the Emperor Alexander, I must decidedly reject any idea of such a desertion. A German keeps his word, and does not trifle with treaties he has sworn to. German fealty has not yet become an empty sound, and France will be obliged to admit that she is struggling with an adversary who does not sell his honor for provinces or for money. Now you know all I had to communicate. Tell Napoleon that intrigues and slanders cannot separate me from my alliance with the Emperor of Russia any more than adulation and advantageous offers. My resolution will remain as firm as a rock. And now, good-by, general!"

He waved his hand to Bertrand, and received with proud calmness the respectful bows with which the French general withdrew.

No sooner had the door closed than the queen appeared. Her eyes filled with tears, and stretching out her arms toward her husband, seemed a picture of beauty, grace, and love. The king hastened to her and pressed her firmly against his heart. "Are you satisfied with my answer, Louisa?" he asked. "Do you know now what I think of those wretched calumnies?"

The queen bent and kissed his hand. "I thank you, my beloved husband," she whispered tenderly. "Wise and kind as you always are, you knew how to comfort my heart, and by your heroic words to fill my soul with enthusiasm and delight. My husband and king, you have restored my honor. I care no longer for the abuse of the world, but shall always think of this sacred hour, for my king believes in me, and my husband still loves his Louisa; he knows that the mother of his children is innocent, and may freely raise her eyes to heaven."

"I know more than that," said the king, laying his hand on his wife's head, as if blessing her; "I know that in these times of adversity you are the only hope left me; I know that I derive courage and consolation from you, and that in my misfortunes I still deem myself fortunate, because you are by my side—the angel of my life!"

"Ah, Frederick," exclaimed the queen, bursting into tears, "Frederick, how rich and happy you make me! Am I not an enviable wife, possessed as I am of such a husband!" In passionate tenderness, she threw her arms about him, and in loving embrace rested long on his breast.

Some one rapped repeatedly and discreetly at the door. Louisa, blushing, raised her head and dropped her arms. The king ordered the person to walk in. It was General von Zastrow who entered, pale and gloomy. Frederick William smilingly beckoned him to approach.

"You are dissatisfied with me, Zastrow?" he said, in a pleasant tone; "you believe it would be better to make peace?"

"Your majesty, I am afraid you have rejected an advantageous alliance, and will, perhaps, be compelled soon to accept by far more rigorous terms."

"You do not know, then, that large Russian forces are advancing, and that the Emperor Alexander himself probably leads his troops against the enemy?"

"Pardon me, sire, but I do not believe in the friendship of Russia. Your majesty uttered words so generous to-day, that my eyes filled with tears of admiration, and I felt proud as a man and subject, although my heart as a general and minister was overwhelmed with sorrow. May Russia deserve your fidelity! may she not disappoint your hopes, and commit as, you said, a perfidious act, by entering into an alliance with France at the expense of Prussia! But may your majesty, above all, get an army courageous and strong enough to brave all your enemies, and restore the greatness of Prussia!"

"You do not believe, then, in this army?" asked the king, gloomily.

"Your majesty, in order to organize an army, money—a great deal of money—is indispensable."

"And you mean to say we have none?"

"Your majesty, not only your privy purse is entirely exhausted, but there is also no money in the state and district treasuries. Gold and silver seem to have wholly disappeared; stocks and commercial paper are depreciating every day, and the bankruptcy of the state will be inevitable!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the king, indignantly, "do not utter such a word! Never shall I permit such distress to be inflicted upon my poor subjects!"

He commenced rapidly pacing the room; suddenly, however, he stood still in front of the queen, who had softly withdrawn into a window-niche, where she had watched every movement of the king. "Louisa, will your repasts be as agreeable to you on porcelain plates as on gold and silver?"

The queen smiled. "The little Princess of Mecklenburg was accustomed to take her meals off porcelain," she said, "and I honestly confess that the Queen of Prussia at times envied her her plain white plates."

The king, turning again to his minister, said: "We are not yet so poor as you seem to believe; our large golden dinner-set, the heirloom of our ancestors, was safely removed from Berlin, and is now here at Memel. It embraces pieces of the highest value, for which millions have been paid. May my ancestors pardon my giving away what they collected! I am not doing so in a reckless and extravagant manner, but with profound sorrow and with a mournful heart. But it cannot be helped! General von Zastrow, I shall issue the necessary orders to have my large golden dinner-set either sold or pawned. We shall receive at least a million dollars for it."

"And the privy purse of your majesty stands greatly in need of this million," said General von Zastrow, drawing a sigh.

The king shrugged his shoulders. "Not a dollar of it shall be paid into my privy purse," he said. "The money shall be distributed among the public treasuries, that the lack of funds may be temporarily relieved, and that my poor suffering subjects need not fear that the state become bankrupt."

"But if your majesty should carry out this generous resolution," exclaimed the general, "you may soon be in danger yourself of privations."

The king cast a long, inquiring glance on his wife. Louisa smiled and nodded kindly to him. "If questions of economy and family matters are to be considered," she said, "a woman may be permitted to say a word in the council of men, and to give her opinion as a housewife. I think we are tolerating a great many superfluous and very expensive things in our private household, and, if my husband does not object, I should like to ask for a few changes."

"I shall never dare to contradict you," said Frederick, kindly. "Let me, therefore, know the changes you wish to make."

"In the first place, I think that we have too many servants, considering our present circumstances, and the small house in which we are living. As we do not give dinners, the people attached to the kitchen may be greatly diminished; most of the cooks, as well as the legion of footmen, may be discharged. It is necessary, too, to reduce the number of carriages, and to sell most of the horses standing uselessly in the stable. A plain vehicle, drawn by two good horses, is sufficient for my children, and whenever I want a ride, I believe my husband will lend me his yellow travelling-coach."

"Provided you allow me a seat at your side," said the king, smiling. "Are there any other suggestions you deem necessary?"

"I wish the servants surrounding us to appear in a plain dress, and the expensive liveries, covered with gold and silver lace, to disappear. A plain black cloth coat, trimmed with white, is sufficient. It is not, however, to signify that we are in mourning, but only to represent the Prussian colors, and on looking at them I shall always feel proud and happy, while now, on beholding the liveries covered with gold and silver, I cannot suppress my shame, for I think of the distress of our

subjects, and of the misery of our country. Let us begin, therefore, a plain, unpretending existence, my husband; let us set an example of simplicity to our people, and show them that one may be contented, though deprived of the splendors of wealth and position."

The king took her hand and pressed it against his lips. "I consent to all your wishes, Louisa," he said; "I will issue to-day the necessary orders to the steward.—You see, general, our privy purse will not lack money, for we shall realize a handsome sum by the sale of our horses, carriages, and the gold and silver lace of the liveries. Moreover, the war will not last forever, and we may, perhaps, look soon for a final decision."

"Your majesty, war, then, is absolutely unavoidable?"

"You still ask this question? Yes, the war will be continued. I will hear nothing further about peace."

"In that case," said General von Zastrow, trembling, "I must humbly request your majesty to accept my resignation; the continuation of the war, and the rejection of the peace offered to Prussia, are so contrary to my conviction, that my conscience does not permit me to assist in carrying out your plans."

"The first duty of every faithful servant is to comply with his master's orders," said the king, sternly. "I cannot accept your resignation, for I know that you are an honest servant, and that only your momentary anger has misled you. I give you, therefore, time to collect your thoughts and regain your temper. Work and activity are the best remedies for that purpose, and possibly there may soon be a favorable turn in our affairs, proving to you that you were wrong, and causing you to change your mind. Until further orders, therefore, you will remain my minister of war, but I shall give you an assistant. I shall appoint Hardenberg minister without portfolio, and give him a seat and vote in the new ministerial council which I am about to organize."

General von Zastrow started, and his face became paler. "Your majesty," he faltered in a low voice, "I—"

"The matter is settled," said the king, calmly. "I do not wish to hear further objection, general. We shall hold a meeting of the ministerial council to-morrow, and Hardenberg must be present. Good-by!"

General von Zastrow dared not contradict; he bowed in silence to the royal couple and tottered to the door.

When he had retired, the queen, turning to her husband, exclaimed, "You touched his sorest spot. He hates Hardenberg, and it will greatly torment him to have him at his side."

"He deserved some punishment," said the king, gravely. "For it was certainly owing to him that you were informed of those infamous slanders. Who laid the papers before you?"

"The Countess von Truchsess, my reader."

"Zastrow's niece! My supposition was right. It was a deep-laid intrigue, designed to drive us into the meshes of the peace party, and induce us to give up the Russian alliance."

"Do not be angry with them," said the queen, "their intentions were good."

"I know the good intentions of those so-called friends," exclaimed the king, vehemently. "They drive a dagger slowly into our breast, and when they see the wound bleeding, they excuse themselves with the pretext that their intentions were good! But he who has really honest intentions tries to spare his friend every pain. My 'intentions' were also good when I concluded to place Hardenberg in company with Zastrow. I do not like change; but if Zastrow, in the course of a few weeks, should not accustom himself to the presence of Hardenberg, he must withdraw, and Hardenberg remain."*

CHAPTER XXV.

COUNTESS MARY WALEWSKA.

NEWS of the highest importance reached Castle Finken-stein, where Napoleon had been residing since the battle of Eylau. Dantzic had fallen. It had been compelled to surrender, with its immense *matériel* and supplies. In vain had been the heroic defence of the garrison, the energy of General Kalkreuth, commander of the fortress, the ardor and courage of the soldiers, the unflagging self-abnegation of the citizens; in vain, the bloodshed, the mutilated limbs, the destruction

* The united efforts of the peace party, headed by General Zastrow and Cabinet-counsellor Beyme, did not succeed this time in keeping Hardenberg out of the cabinet. The king reposed confidence in him, and when, a few weeks later, the Emperor Alexander paid a visit to the royal couple at Memel, he distinguished Hardenberg, and ignored General von Zastrow so completely, that the latter was deeply offended. His mortification was still augmented by the fact that Hardenberg was selected to accompany the king to the camp of the united Prussian and Russian troops. General von Zastrow then sent in his resignation, for the second time, and it was accepted. Hardenberg became minister of foreign affairs in his place.

of property! Lefebvre, the French general, had drawn the circle of his besieging forces closer around the devoted city, and fresh troops poured into his ranks, while every day the garrison was becoming weaker. Only the most vigorous succor could have saved Dantzic. General Kalkreuth had long hoped for it. England, now the ally of Russia and Prussia, had promised aid, and equipped a sloop-of-war of twenty-two guns, to force the blockade, convey ammunition into the city, and destroy the pontoon-bridge of the French; but the sloop stranded, and had to surrender. The Russians, too, had promised assistance to the city. Seven thousand embarked at Pillau, and landed at Weichselmünde; but there they were attacked by Oudinot, who captured nearly one-half, and dispersed the rest.

The last hopes of Dantzic were gone; there was no relief. Lefebvre ordered a bombardment, and then sent a flag of truce to General Kalkreuth, informing him that he would take the city by assault if the fortress did not surrender. General Kalkreuth gazed mournfully at the stranded British sloop-of-war, and, pointing it out to his officers, who surrounded him in gloomy silence, said, "That is the tombstone of Dantzic!" He then sent for the bearer of the flag of truce, and the negotiations commenced. In the mean time, shells and red-hot shot were poured into the city, killing alike the soldiers on the ramparts and the citizens in their dwellings. Lamentations and shrieks, the roar of artillery, the uninterrupted peals of the tocsin, calling out the inhabitants, mingled with the crash of the falling houses, and the wails of the wounded and dying.

General Kalkreuth pitied the city; he was unwilling to add the horrors of an assault to the agony it had already undergone. He signed the capitulation, but claimed for the garrison liberty to march out without being made prisoners of war, and the surrender of their arms. Lefebvre granted these conditions, but insisted that the Prussian troops should not engage to serve against France before the expiration of a year. General Kalkreuth accepted this clause, and the gates of Dantzic opened to the French conqueror on the 24th of May, 1807.

The Emperor Napoleon received the news of this great victory at Castle Finken-stein, not far from Tilsit. His face brightened, and he immediately sent a courier to Marshal Lefebvre, to invite him to pay him a visit at the castle. But