

There is a note on the table which I want you to finish. I shall return soon.

The emperor took his hat, and, opening the door leading into the adjoining room, he called out: "Gentlemen of the staff—to the parade!"

## CHAPTER LI.

### FREDERICK STAPS.

THE bands played, and shouts of "*Vive l'Empereur!*" burst from the troops. Napoleon had emerged from the palace door, and the welcome was as a sunbeam brightening his cold and emotionless face. He slowly descended the steps of the outside staircase, with his eyes on the soldiers, and he did not notice the young man who stood below, presenting to him a petition with his left hand, while he concealed his right under his cloak.

"Sire," said the young man, loudly and urgently, "sire, here is a petition, and I request your majesty to listen to me for a moment. I—"

Napoleon passed on the other side without having heard these words. The youth, holding the petition still in his hand, was about to follow him, but Marshal Bessières, who walked behind, kept him back. "If you present a petition to the emperor," he said, "wait here until the parade is over, when he will return this way." The marshal proceeded, but the young man took no notice of his order, and mingled boldly with the emperor's suite.

General Rapp at length laid his hand on the youth's shoulder, and said:

"Sir, you must withdraw. This is no place for you."

"I have to present a petition to the emperor which cannot be delayed," said the young man, in a gentle voice, "pray permit me to give it to him at once."

"I tell you it is out of place here," exclaimed the general, vehemently. Beckoning to one of the second lieutenants, he said: "Conduct this man away from here."

"Come, sir," said the lieutenant; "stand back, soldiers; let this man pass." In spite of himself, he was soon hurried to the rear.

"I must attain my object—I must fulfil my oath," he muttered to himself. "Napoleon must die to-day, and Frederick Staps shall be his executioner. Forward!" He elbowed himself through the crowd that had assembled behind the soldiers, and, standing on tiptoe, tried to descry the emperor and his marshals while walking into the semicircle formed by the troops.

No one noticed that, seeing a passage in the ranks of the soldiers, Staps advanced, cautiously and quickly as a snake, until he was again inside the semicircle. "Fate is favorable to me," he muttered, "and the moment is at hand when I will deliver Germany!" He approached the emperor, who was just coming down the front from the other side. "Sire," he exclaimed, stretching out his paper toward Napoleon, "take my petition, and listen to me a few minutes."

The emperor looked for a moment on the pale countenance of the young man. "I do not understand you," he said; "apply to General Rapp."

Staps apparently had not heard Napoleon's words; he approached still closer, and put his right hand under his cloak. "Sire, listen to me," he exclaimed, "I—" A strong hand grasped his arm and pushed him back.

"Did you not hear that you are to apply to General Rapp?" asked Marshal Bessières. "Why did you come the second time to a place where you do not belong? Leave immediately, or you will be arrested!"

"I am going," muttered Staps, and turned to pass through the ranks of the soldiers.

At this moment a dark suspicion arose in the mind of Bessières, for which he was unable to give any good reasons, but which alarmed him. He beckoned to two soldiers, and, pointing at Staps, who was pressing his way outside, he said, "Arrest that man, and bring him hither!" His order was obeyed in a moment, and the soldiers, holding Staps by the arms, dragged him to the marshal, whom the Duke de Rovigo and General Rapp had now joined.

"Why did you have me arrested, general?" asked Staps, in a firm, calm voice.

"Because I distrust you," replied Bessières. "Take off your cloak!"

Staps hesitated. "Take off your cloak!" repeated Bessières; and, not obeying, the soldiers violently tore the cloak from his shoulders, and, as they did so, something flashed.

It was the blade of a large knife, in a belt with which he had fastened his black velvet coat.

"He is saved and I am lost!" muttered Staps to himself, and dropped his head on his breast.

"What is the meaning of this knife?" asked General Rapp. "What did you want to do with it?"

Staps slowly raised his head and lifted up his arm to point at the emperor, who was standing but a few steps from them.

"I intended to punish him," he said, solemnly.

"An assassin! an assassin!" cried the marshals, in dismay, thronging around him.

The emperor, perhaps, had heard these cries, for he approached.

"What is going on here?" he asked, as his eyes turned to the pale face of the young man.

"Sire," said Bessières, with an air of horror, "you see here a criminal who was about to assassinate you! Here is the knife with which he intended to perpetrate the deed."

Not a feature of the emperor's countenance changed; not a muscle quivered or betrayed any inward emotion. "Hush," he said, in a low, imperious voice. "Take the man into the palace! I will examine him after the parade is over. Let Savary and Rapp accompany him.—Come, marshals!"

While Savary and Rapp, with the soldiers who surrounded Staps, hastened into the palace, Napoleon, escorted by his marshals, walked slowly down the front. He did not finish the parade a minute earlier than usual. Ascending the staircase, he stood on the landing, and received again the salutations of the military. He then stepped into the lower hall of the palace. But there he accelerated his steps, and, hurrying through the anterooms, entered the apartment contiguous to his cabinet.

An hour had passed since he had admired, in this room, M. Mälzl's chess-player and postilion, and now he looked wonderingly at the young man who had tried to assassinate him. "He is really but a child, and looks very innocent," exclaimed the emperor, shrugging his shoulders; "I do not believe that he is an assassin."

"Sire, here is the knife that was found on his person," said Savary, handing it to the emperor.

"That is, indeed, a strong proof of his intention," replied Napoleon. "But who tells you that this knife was designed for me? I will myself speak to the man. Rapp, are you

sufficiently familiar with the German language to be my interpreter?"

"Yes, sire, I speak German."

"Come, then," said the emperor, quickly approaching Staps, whose hands had been tied behind him.

"Whence do you come, and what is your name?"

"I come from Naumburg, and my name is Frederick Staps," was the calm reply.

"What is your father?"

"He is a clergyman."

"A clergyman! and he has taught his son so little religion! For I am told you intended to assassinate me. Is that true?"

"It was the last means that I had resolved upon to save my unfortunate native land," replied Staps, in a gentle voice. "But before doing so, I was determined to try another."

"What?"

"To implore you, in the name of my country, humanity, and your own future, to give peace to the world," responded Staps, enthusiastically. "I hoped that Heaven would impart strength to my words, so that they would be able to move your heart; that your eyes would see the fountains of blood your accursed hand has opened on the peaceful plains of Germany; that the armies of the dead lying in our fields might satisfy your desire for war. Sire, have mercy on Germany and on yourself! There are thousands of unburied corpses accusing Napoleon as their murderer! Our cities and villages are filled with weeping mothers, and widows, and children, arraigning you as the destroyer of their sons, husbands, and fathers. Sire, have mercy on your own conscience, and restore peace to the world!"

"He is assuredly insane," murmured Napoleon to himself. At this moment he cast his eyes on a miniature, fastened to a string, and lying on the table.

"What locket is that?" he asked.

"Sire," replied Rapp, "we took it from the assassin; he wore it on his neck."

Napoleon examined it. It contained the portrait of a beautiful woman. "Whose portrait is it?"

"Sire," said Staps, in a solemn voice, "it is the portrait of my betrothed—my dearly beloved Anna."

"What!" exclaimed the emperor. "You have a sweet-heart—you have a mother and a father—you are in the flower

of your life—and yet you intended to commit so horrible a crime! For you will not deny that murder is a crime.”

“Murder in ordinary cases is one of the greatest crimes,” said Staps, in his calm, gentle voice. “But to take your life—to rid the world of Napoleon—is no murder and no crime; it is an act of justice—nay, it is a sacred duty! If I had killed you, no one would have called me an assassin; my attempt is criminal because it did not succeed. That is what one of our own great poets says concerning certain actions:

‘Conceived and unsuccessful—there’s the crime!  
Accomplished, it becomes a deed immortal.  
And what succeeds will surely be forgiven,  
For God’s own verdict lies in the result!’\* ”

“And God, then, has decided against you,” said Napoleon, quickly.

“No, God delays only the execution of the blow, and perhaps I am not the right instrument. He will choose another, and my successors will know better how to find your heart. Believe me, the Germans know how to do their duty; and to rid Germany of her tyrant, and restore peace to her people, is their duty.”

“You have read a good deal, I suppose?” asked the emperor. “And it seems books have excited your imagination. What were your favorite works?”

“Sire, historical works,” said Staps, calmly. “I derived from them the courage required for my deed.”

“You know something of Brutus, then?” asked Napoleon, with a compassionate smile.

“There were two Brutuses. The last Brutus killed the tyrant, and died for liberty. Mankind have not ceased admiring him, as France has not ceased admiring the Maid of Orleans. She delivered her country from its enemies, but she was captured, and perished. I intended to do what that heroic maid did—save my native land from oppression, but God decreed that her destiny, and not her deed, should be mine.”

“Does your father know of your folly?”

“Neither he nor my betrothed, nor any one else, knew of my purpose. I came hither alone, and alone I intended to accomplish it. Not until I had succeeded was its revelation to

\* “Gedacht bloss und missglückt—ist’s nur ein Frevel,  
Vollbracht, ist’s ein unsterblich Unternehmen,  
Und was nur glückt, das wird dann auch verziehen,  
Denn jeder Ausgang—ist ein Gottes-Urtheil!”

SCHILLER.

be made. And the news would have come to those I love as a pledge of peace—that the deluge of blood was over, and Germany saved!”

“Your father and your betrothed will now receive bad tidings of you. Are you not afraid of grieving them?”

“Both of them will weep for me—so will many other Germans, and their tears will water the flowers upon my grave.”

“You believe, then, that I shall have you executed?”

“I should consider it but natural for you.”

“But it may please me to pardon you. Tell me, in that case, what you would do?”

“Accomplish my purpose,” replied Staps, calmly. “I have sworn to kill you. I must fulfil my oath or die!”

“Ah, you have either a morbid mind or a morbid body!” exclaimed Napoleon, vehemently.

“No, I have neither one nor the other,” replied Staps, composedly; “my mind is healthy, and so is my body.”

“Send for Corvisart,” ordered the emperor, turning to his suite. “But let no one dare tell him what is transpiring here.”

An adjutant hastened out, and Napoleon turned again to Staps. “Are you a freemason or one of the Illuminati?”

“Neither.”

“Did you ever hear of Moreau and Pichegru?”

“I did.”

“And what do you think of these men, who tried to take my life?”

“I think that they were afraid of death.”

“Did you know Schill and Dörnberg?”

Staps hesitated a moment, and replied: “I knew Schill. I saw him on the day after the battle of Jena, and we swore to devote our thoughts, our energies, and our lives, to the German fatherland, and never to grow weary in our struggle against the tyrant. There were three of us who took this oath. The first was Count Pückler, who shot himself; the second was shot, Fredinand von Schill; the third will also be shot, Frederick Staps!”

“He is insane,” repeated Napoleon, shuddering involuntarily at the tranquillity of the prisoner.

The door opened, and the emperor’s physician, M. de Corvisart, entered.

“Corvisart, come hither,” the emperor said, vehemently. “Examine this young man, and tell me what is the matter

with him." The marshals and generals stepped aside, and the physician approached the prisoner, whose hands had been untied a moment previously. "Examine his pulse, Corvisart; examine him carefully and tell me whether he has a fever, or is insane."

Staps quietly stretched out his hand; Corvisart took it and laid his fingers on the pulse. Silence reigned in the room. The marshals and generals in full uniform surrounded the group; in the midst stood the emperor, whose face was sadder to-day than usual; at his side was Staps, with his gentle countenance and radiant look turned toward heaven, his right hand resting in that of the physician, who marked every pulsation with profound attention.

It was a scene worthy an artist's pencil. All were looking at the physician and waited breathlessly for his decision.

"Sire," said Corvisart, after a long pause, "this young man is in perfectly good health; his pulse is regular; there is nothing indicative of insanity in his eyes; his complexion is good, and in fact there is nothing in his appearance to denote the slightest indisposition."

"Ah," exclaimed Staps, with a triumphant smile, "you see that I was right. I am neither insane nor ill."

Napoleon stamped with anger, as his eyes flashed fire. "He is insane, Corvisart!" he exclaimed; "examine him again."

Corvisart, did so, and in a short time said: "Sire, I cannot but repeat my previous statement; I do not find a trace of fever or insanity. His pulse is perfectly regular."

"Well, then," said Napoleon, frowning, "this healthy person just tried to assassinate me!"

"Assassinate you!" ejaculated Corvisart in dismay. "Unfortunate young man, what could induce you to attempt such a crime?"

"The misfortunes and sufferings of my country," replied Staps. "I desired to deliver it from the tyrant who has been bringing misery, disgrace, and degradation on Germany for the last ten years. My attempt was vain, but some one else will succeed in what I have failed to accomplish. I have no actual accomplices, but the heart of every German is my accomplice, and the knife which dropped from my hand to-day will fall into another's. All Germany is in conspiracy. You may kill me, but thousands are ready to do what I failed to accomplish."

The emperor indeed listened to such words, but with a dark and angry countenance. He beckoned the Duke de Rovigo to his side.

"Savary," he said, "take this boy away, and subject him to a close examination. Try to discover his accomplices. If he name them, I will pardon him."

"Sire, you have the right to execute me, but I do not give you the right to despise me," exclaimed Staps.

"Take him away!" repeated the emperor, "and report to me what he says." Saluting the marshals with a wave of his hand, and, casting a last glance on Staps, he walked by and opened the door of the cabinet, where Minister Champagny was awaiting his return.

"Champagny," said the emperor, wearily sitting down on an easy-chair, "did you not tell me the Prince von Lichtenstein had informed you that frequent propositions to assassinate me had been made to him?"

"Yes, sire," replied Champagny, "and the prince told me he had invariably rejected them with horror."

"Nevertheless, an attempt has been made. A young man, scarcely twenty years old, with the face of a sick girl, came hither to-day to stab me with a kitchen-knife, as he would a goose or a calf."

"Merciful Heaven, that is terrible!" exclaimed Champagny, turning pale. "The life of your majesty was really endangered, then?"

"If the knife which an assassin aims at your breast endangers your life, mine was endangered," said the emperor, with a gloomy smile. "It seems my marshals were somewhat distrustful, and did not believe so confidently in the love and admiration of the spectators as I did, and that saved my life."

"It is, perhaps, only a false suspicion, sire; the knife, it may be, was not intended for your majesty."

"Oh, it was! I personally examined the young man. He confesses his purpose; he boasts of it, and says if I pardoned him he would attempt the same thing."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Champagny.

"Yes, horrible!" repeated the emperor, musingly, "the more so as he assures me with the utmost tranquillity that every German shares his hatred of me; that the whole land is but a hotbed of conspiracy, and that thousands of hands are already armed to pierce my heart. And this young man is in perfect health, bodily and mentally, according to Corvisart,

who twice examined him; his pulse is regular, and not in the least feverish. Ah, these Germans have gall in their veins instead of blood! They are fanatics, and of such we ought to beware." He dropped his head on his breast. After some time he turned toward the minister, who was sitting opposite him in respectful silence. "Champagny," he said, hastily, "we must make peace. I am bent on putting an end to the war, and on leaving the country. Return to Vienna, and send immediately for the Austrian plenipotentiaries. You have already agreed as to the chief points; it is the war contribution alone that still prevents both sides from coming to a definite understanding. You ask for fifty millions more than the Austrians offer to pay; well, compromise with them; induce the ambassadors to assent to the payment of seventy-five millions, and make peace. I am satisfied with the stipulations of the last draft of the treaty; add to it whatever you may deem prudent. I rely altogether on you; but, at all events, make peace! Hasten to Vienna. Good-by."

The Duke de Cadore left the emperor's cabinet. Napoleon was still moodily sitting in his easy-chair, when he murmured: "Ah, these Germans! They cannot be trusted! They are dangerous fanatics, capable of perpetrating the foulest and most cowardly crime, and of sanctifying it on the altar of duty."

## CHAPTER LII

### AN EXECUTION.

NAPOLEON had passed a sleepless night. The image of this pale youth, with his determined patriotism, who frankly confessed that his object had been assassination, and regretted that the attempt was unsuccessful, stood as a grim sentinel by the emperor's couch, forbidding sleep to his eyes or peace to his mind.

It was scarcely dawn when he rose, sad and weary, and called his *valet de chambre* to dress him. His lips scarcely touching the cup of chocolate presented to him, he pushed it impatiently aside. Contrary to his usual manner with the servants, he left his bedroom without a pleasant glance or a kind word, and repaired to his cabinet. The candelabras on

the mantel-piece were lit, for it was still dark; and a bright fire was burning, but the room was not yet warm.

"Germany is a cold, disagreeable country," exclaimed Napoleon, shuddering, and warming his feet at the fire. "We are only in the early part of October, but it is already like mid-winter. The sun himself seems to put on the sheep-skin which every German pulls over his ears. In truth, it is a wretched country; I wish I could turn my back on it to-morrow, and bid adieu to these wild dreamers. When so slow and cold-blooded a nation gets excited, it resembles a bull in the arena, whose fury is kindled by a red handkerchief. Such is Germany at this time, and I must step out of the way if I do not wish to be pierced or trampled to death. That would be inglorious!"

A low rapping at the door was heard. The emperor started. "Come in!" he shouted, in an imperious voice.

The door opened immediately, and Constant appeared. "Pardon me, sire, but it is so early that none of the chamberlains are yet in the anteroom."

"Well, what is it?" asked Napoleon, impatiently. "Quick, what is the matter?"

"Sire, the Duke de Cadore has just arrived from Vienna and desires to be admitted."

"Show him in immediately," ordered the emperor, who, in his impatience, hurried to the door to receive the minister.

Champagny entered, carrying under his arm a large portfolio.

"Well, Champagny, what brings you hither at so early an hour? What has occurred? What did you do last night?"

"Sire," said Champagny, composedly, "I have made peace."

"What? Peace!" exclaimed Napoleon, and his countenance brightened, as if the morning had suddenly cast on him its earliest golden beams. "Peace! And the treaty has already been signed?"

"Yes, sire, and I bring it to your majesty."

"Signed! But how did you do that?"

"Sire, as soon as I reached Vienna last night, I sent for the Prince von Lichtenstein and Count Budna, and locked myself with them in my room. We had a long and exciting discussion; but I saw that the plenipotentiaries had received fresh instructions from their emperor, and that he had ordered them to make peace. I extorted million by million from them; at one o'clock in the morning I had already made