

ing you; above all, I have to inform his majesty, the king, of this important intelligence, and receive his orders in regard to it. But then I beg leave to see Count St. Marsan at his residence, to confer with him as to the measures to be taken concerning this terrible event."

"I will await you at whatever hour of the night it may be," said Count St. Marsan; "I am now about to return to my residence."

"And I to the king!" exclaimed Hardenberg, taking leave.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DEFECTION OF GENERAL YORK.

KING FREDERICK WILLIAM had just returned to his cabinet after attending to the last business, which he never neglected to perform on any day of the year; that is to say, he had repaired to the bedrooms of his children, and bidden the little sleepers "good-night" by gently kissing them. In former times he did this by the side of his wife, with a happy heart and a smiling face; it had been, as it were, the last seal both pressed, at the close of every day of their common happiness, upon the foreheads of their sleeping children. But since Louisa had left him, to bid this "good-night" had become, as it were, a sacred pilgrimage to his most precious recollections. When he passed through the silent corridors at night, and entered the rooms of his sons and daughters, he thought of her who had left him three years before, but whom he believed he saw, with her sweet smile and loving eyes. He took pains to remind such of his children as he found awake of their dear departed parent, whispering to them, "Remember your noble mother, whose eyes behold you." And on the lips of those asleep he never failed to press two kisses—one for himself and the other for Louisa.

The king had just returned to his cabinet, and, like a dying glimmer of twilight, a faint smile was illuminating his countenance, which, since the queen's death, had grown grave and sad. He seated himself on the sofa where she had so often sat by his side, and cast a mournful glance upon the vacant place beside him. "Alone! Always alone!" he said in a low voice. "Nothing around me but intrigues, quarrels,

and malice! No one who loves me! Alone!" With a quick motion he turned his head toward the side of the wall where hung over his desk the portrait of Queen Louisa, in her white dress, and a rose on her bosom. "Where are you, then, Louisa!" he exclaimed; "why did you leave me, though you had sworn to bear joy and grief with me? You are not here to share them, and—" Suddenly the king paused and turned his eyes toward the door. It seemed to him as though he heard hasty footsteps, and some one softly rapping at his door. Who, at this unusual hour, could ask for admittance? Who could dare now interrupt his solitude, when it was well understood he desired to be left alone?

The rapping was repeated, louder than before, and a timid, imploring voice asked, "Has his majesty returned to his cabinet?"

"It is Timm, my chamberlain," said the king. "What can he want of me?"

Ordering him in a loud tone to walk in, the door was immediately opened, and the chamberlain appeared on the threshold. "Pardon me, sire," he said, but his excellency Chancellor von Hardenberg is in the anteroom, and urgently requests your majesty to grant him an immediate audience."

"Hardenberg!" exclaimed the king, anxiously. "What has happened; what—" He interrupted himself: "I will see the chancellor. Admit him at once."

The chamberlain withdrew. The king arose and advanced several steps toward the door; then, as if ashamed of his own impatience, he stopped, while his face expressed the agitation of his mind.

Hardenberg entered, and, closing the door rapidly, approached the king. "Your majesty," he said, "I beg pardon for daring to disturb you at so late an hour; but the extraordinary importance of the news I bring to you will be my excuse. I was at the supper-table of Marshal Augereau, in company with the French ambassador, Count St. Marsan, when important dispatches, just arrived from the army, were delivered to the ambassador."

"A battle has been fought, has it not? Has my corps been routed?" asked the king, breathlessly.

"No, your majesty, there has been no battle. A much more extraordinary event has taken place, General von York has concluded a convention with the Russian General Diebitsch, and signed a treaty by which the troops commanded

by York separate from the French, and engage to remain neutral for two months."

"That is not true!" exclaimed the king. "A mere rumor!—an impossibility!"

"Your majesty, it is but too true. I myself have read the autograph letters in which Generals York and Massenbach inform Marshal Macdonald of their resolution not to obey his orders longer."

The king pressed his hands against his temple, and exclaimed, in a tremulous voice: "Oh, this is enough to throw one into a state of apoplexy!* It is unheard of, contrary to military law, contrary to all international obligations! It is open rebellion, revolutionary resistance to his king and commander-in-chief! A general who dares commit so terrible a crime must be tried by court-martial, and sentence of death passed upon him. I cannot pardon him!"

"Your majesty," said Hardenberg, in dismay, "it is possible that General York may have committed a crime against discipline, but, nevertheless, it is an heroic and magnanimous deed, and no Prussian court-martial will dare inflict punishment on him. We do not yet know the urgent circumstances obliging the general to make this decision; we do not yet know from what dangers he may have preserved the Prussian army by his quick and resolute step."

"But we know that he has committed an unparalleled crime against discipline!"

"A crime by which he may perhaps have saved Prussia from utter destruction! The general will be able to justify his deed."

"But it seems that he does not even deem it necessary to inform me of his proceedings," exclaimed the king, indignantly. "He appears to have made himself dictator, and as he does not recognize my military laws, he refuses also to acknowledge me as commander-in-chief, to whom he owes obedience."

"Your majesty, I believe there is his justification already," said Hardenberg, pointing at Timm the chamberlain, who reentered the room at this moment.

"Well, what is it, Timm?" asked the king, hastily.

"Your majesty, a courier from General von York has just arrived; he is bearer of dispatches, which he is to deliver to your majesty in person."

*The king's own words.—Vide Droysen's "Life of York," vol. ii., p. 36.

"Who is the courier?" asked the king.

"The general's aide-de-camp, Major Thile."

"Let him come in," said the king.

The jingle of spurs, and heavy, weary footsteps were heard approaching; Major von Thile entered. His uniform was covered with dust and mud; his hair hung in wet locks upon his forehead, and there shone in his mustache the snow-flakes with which the stormy night had adorned it.

"Did you arrive now?" asked the king, eying him closely.

"I did, your majesty, and, agreeably to the orders of General von York, have had myself driven directly to the royal palace, for the general deemed it of the highest importance that I should deliver my dispatches as soon as possible to your majesty. Hence I rode night and day, and, my horse breaking down to-day, I was obliged to take a carriage."

"But the French courier reached Berlin earlier than you did," said the king, gruffly. "How does that happen? Have the French quicker horses or more devoted soldiers?"

"No, your majesty, their road to Berlin was shorter than mine, that is all. As I could not ride across the French camp, I had to take a roundabout road by way of Gumbinnen. This caused a delay of four hours."

"Give me your dispatches," said the king.

Major Thile handed him a large sealed paper. The king extended his hand to take it, but suddenly withdrew it again and started back.

"No," he said, "it does not behoove a king to receive letters from a traitorous subject—a rebellious soldier. Take this dispatch, M. Chancellor; open and read it to me. Give it to his excellency."

Major Thile handed Hardenberg the letter, and, while he was doing so, the eyes of the two men met. The major's eyes expressed an anxious question, those of Hardenberg made him a sad and painful reply, and both were unable to restrain a sigh.

"Read," said the king, stepping into the window-niche, folding his hands on his breast, and placing himself so that the curtains shaded his face, and screened it from the two gentlemen.

Hardenberg unfolded the paper and read as follows:

"To his Majesty the King:—TAUROGGEN, December 30, 1812.—Placed in a very unfavorable position by setting out at a later day than the marshal did, and being ordered to march from Mitau to Tilsit, for the sole purpose of covering the re-

treat of the seventh division, I have been compelled, on account of impassable roads, and very severe weather, to conclude with the Russian commander, Major-General Diebitsch, the enclosed convention, which I beg leave to lay before your majesty. Firmly convinced that a continuation of the march would have unavoidably brought about the dissolution of the whole corps, and the loss of its entire artillery and baggage, as was the case of the retreat of the grand army, I believe it was incumbent upon me, as your majesty's faithful subject, to regard your interest, and no longer that of your ally, for whom our auxiliary corps would only have been sacrificed without being able to afford him any real assistance in the desperate predicament in which he was placed. The convention imposes no obligations whatever upon your majesty, but it preserves to you a corps that gives value to the old alliance, or a new one, if such should be concluded, and prevents your majesty from being at the mercy of an ally at whose hands you would have to receive as a gift the preservation or restoration of your states. I would willingly lay my head at the feet of your majesty if I have erred; I would die with the joyous conviction of having at least committed no act contrary to my duty as a faithful subject and a true Prussian. Now or never is the time for your majesty to extricate yourself from the thralldom of an ally whose intentions in regard to Prussia are veiled in impenetrable darkness, and justify the most serious alarm. That consideration has guided me. God grant it may be for the salvation of the country!—YORK.*

A pause ensued. The king still stood with folded arms in the window-niche, his face shaded by the curtains, and inaccessible to the anxious and searching glances of Hardenberg and the major.

"Does your majesty now command me to read the convention?" asked the minister.

"No," said the king, sternly, "what do I care for a convention drawn up by a traitor? I would not be at liberty to accept it even though it should secure me new provinces.—Major Thile!"

"Your majesty!" said the major, advancing a few steps with stiff, military bearing.

"Were you present at the negotiations preceding this convention? Are you familiar with the circumstances that led to it?"

*Droysen's "Life of York," vol. i., p. 493.

"Yes, your majesty; General von York deigned to repose implicit confidence in me; I am perfectly familiar with the course of the negotiations, and was present when the convention was concluded. I observed the inward struggles of the general; I witnessed the terrible conflict that took place in his breast between his duty as a soldier and his conscience as a faithful subject of your majesty. As a soldier he was conscious of the crime he was about to commit against discipline; as a faithful subject, he felt that he ought to commit it if he wished to avoid plunging a corps of ten thousand men, belonging to your majesty alone, into utter and irretrievable destruction."

"Did the negotiations last a long time? Speak! I want to know all; but, understand me well, the truth. No protestations! Speak now!"

"Yes, your majesty, the negotiations had been going on for some time; in fact, ever since the so-called 'grand army' made its appearance in miserable, ragged, and starving squads—mere crowds of woe-begone, famished beggars—while the splendid and powerful Russian forces were constantly approaching closer to our positions and the Prussian frontier. The Russian generals, Prince Wittgenstein and General Diebitsch, were sending one messenger after another to York and informing him of the dangers of his position, surrounded on all sides by Russian troops. They advised him therefore to yield, unless he wished needlessly to expose the soldiers of your majesty to inevitable destruction. They urged him, for the salvation of Prussia, to grasp the saving hand that was being held out to him, and compel Prussia to forsake an utterly ruined ally, who, in order to secure a brief respite, would assuredly not hesitate to sacrifice for his own benefit Prussia's last strength and resources. But the general was still unable to make up his mind to take a step which might be disavowed by your majesty. In the mean time, however, the news came that Memel had been taken and occupied by the Russians, and Prince Wittgenstein simultaneously sent word that he had placed a corps of fifty thousand men on the banks of the Niemen, and was ready to pursue the French army, which would now seek safety in Prussia. Prince Wittgenstein, therefore, demanded categorically whether York would leave the French army, or whether he was to be considered a part of it, and an enemy of Russia."

"And what did York reply?" asked the king, hastily.

"Your majesty, he was silent. Even we, his confidants, did not know what decision he had come to. Suddenly a messenger from Marshal Macdonald, who had succeeded in getting into our lines, appeared at York's headquarters. He informed the general that the French troops of the marshal were near Piktupöhnen, and brought orders that York should march to that place, where Macdonald would await him, and that the French and Prussian forces should then be united. Henceforth further hesitation was out of the question. The messengers, both of the Russian General Diebitsch and the French Marshal Macdonald, were at his headquarters, and insisted that he should make up his mind as to the course to be pursued by his corps. York either had to set out at once and force a passage through the Russian lines, in order to join the French marshal at Piktupöhnen, or to refuse to obey the marshal's orders, and, instead of marching upon Piktupöhnen, join the Russians, and proceed to Prussia. But General York had not yet made up his mind. Toward nightfall another messenger from General Diebitsch arrived at his headquarters. This messenger was Lieutenant-Colonel Clausewitz, whom Diebitsch had sent to insist again on a categorical reply. York received him sullenly, and said to him: 'Keep aloof from me. I do not wish to have any thing to do with you. Your accursed Cossacks have allowed a messenger from Macdonald to pass through your lines, and he has brought me orders to march upon Piktupöhnen, and there join him. All doubts are at an end. Your troops do not arrive; you are too weak; I decline continuing negotiations which would cost me my head.'"

"Did the general really say so?" asked the king, quickly. "Do you tell me the truth?"

"Yes, your majesty, it is the whole truth. General York said so; I was present when Clausewitz came to him. I remained with Colonel Röden in the room when Clausewitz, at last, at his urgent request, received from General York permission to deliver to him at least the letters he had brought with him from Generals d'Anvray and Diebitsch. The general read them; he then fixed his piercing eyes on Clausewitz, and said: 'Clausewitz, you are a Prussian! Do you believe that General d'Anvray's letter is sincere, and that Wittgenstein's troops will be on the Niemen on the 31st of December? Can you give me your word of honor upon it?' Lieutenant-

* York's own words.—Vide Droysen, vol. i., p. 486.

Colonel Clausewitz gave him his word of honor. York was silent, and repeatedly paced the room, absorbed in his reflections; he then gave Clausewitz his hand, and said in a firm voice, and with a sublime air, 'You have me! Tell General Diebitsch that we will hold an interview in the morning at the mill of Poscherun, and that I have made up my mind to forsake the French and their cause. I will not go to Piktupöhnen!' When he said so, we who witnessed that great moment were no longer able to restrain our transports. Forgetful alike of etiquette and discipline, Röden, Clausewitz, and myself, rushed up to the general to embrace him, thanking him with tearful eyes, and telling him that he had fulfilled the most ardent wishes of the whole corps, and that all Prussian officers would receive with heart-felt rejoicings the news that we were to be delivered from the French alliance. But York gazed on us with grave, gloomy eyes, and said, with a faint smile: 'It is all very well for you, young men, to talk in this way. But the head of your old commander is tottering on his shoulders.'* In the morning he summoned all the officers of his corps to his headquarters, and informed them in an affecting speech of the decision he had come to."

"What did he say?" asked the king. "Can you repeat his words to me?"

"I can, your majesty; for, after returning to my room, I wrote down the speech I had heard in my memorandum-book, and I believe every word of it was engraven in my memory."

"Have you your memorandum-book here?"

"I have, your majesty."

"Read!"

Major Thile drew his memorandum-book from his breast-pocket, and read as follows: "Gentlemen, the French army has been annihilated by Heaven's avenging hand; the time has come for us to recover our independence by uniting with the Russian army. Let those who share my sentiments, and are ready to sacrifice their lives for the fatherland and for liberty, follow me; those who are unwilling to do so may remain with the French. Let the issue of our cause be whatever it may, I shall always esteem and honor even those who do not share my sentiments, and who prefer to remain. If we succeed, the king may, perhaps, pardon me for what I have done; if we are unsuccessful, then I must lose my head. In that case, I pray my friends to take care of my wife and

* This whole scene is historical.—Vide Droysen, vol. i., p. 487.

children.' Your majesty," said Major Thile, closing his memorandum-book, "that was the whole speech."

"And what did the officers reply to it?" asked the king. "Mind! the truth!—I want to know the truth!"

"And I am courageous enough to tell you the truth, although I am afraid that your majesty will be displeased. All the officers received the general's speech with unbounded transports and with tears of joy. They shook hands, they embraced, and greeted each other, as if they had suddenly returned from a foreign country to their beloved fatherland; as if their tongues had suddenly been loosened, and liberty to use the language of their country had been restored to them. No one thought of remaining with the French; every one was animated with enthusiasm at the thought that he should at length risk his life for the cause of his country and his king; every one had in his heart, and on his lips, a fervent prayer for the new sacred cause which he was to serve again, and an imprecation for that which he had been obliged to serve. When the general exclaimed, in a ringing voice, 'Let us then, with the assistance of Providence, enter upon and achieve the task of liberation,' all shouted 'Amen! We will die rather than serve the enemy longer!' Your majesty, I have now told you nothing but the whole truth. If the general deserves punishment, all the officers of his corps deserve it. He called upon us to part with him if we did not share his convictions. But none of us did so, for his convictions were ours, and we are ready to share his punishment, too, if your majesty should punish York for what he did, as a noble and devoted patriot!"

"Your remarks are impertinent, major," said the king, sternly. "I will not allow myself to be dazzled by your tirades. Go! You need repose. Report to me early in the morning. You will then return with dispatches to the army. Good-by!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE WARNING.

"WELL, M. Chancellor," said the king, when Thile had left the room, "tell me your opinion—the best way by which we may counteract this senseless and rash step, and succeed in preserving our country from the disastrous consequences."

"Your majesty, then, is not willing to approve of the bold act York has taken?" asked Hardenberg.

"I hope you did not indulge for a moment in such a belief," exclaimed the king. "York was perhaps justified in preserving his troops from being needlessly sacrificed; but he should have based his conduct solely on this idea, and from it have explained his action. Instead of doing so, he justifies it by political motives, and thereby compromises and endangers my own position. Now, I am myself entirely at the mercy of France, and utterly destitute of means to brave the anger of Napoleon."*

"No," said Hardenberg, "your majesty is not entirely at the mercy of France, and Napoleon's anger must no longer be allowed to terrify Prussia. You have only to raise your voice and call out your faithful subjects, and the whole nation will rise as one man; thousands will rally round their king, and you will enter with an invincible army upon the holy war of liberation. It will not be with a visible army only that you will take the field—an invisible army will accompany you—the army of minds and hearts, the grand army whose chief-tain is public opinion, whose soldier is every beggar on the street, whose cannon is every word that is uttered, every love-greeting and every blessing. Oh, your majesty, this 'grand army' will pave the way for you, and will enlist everywhere new recruits, fill your military chests, clothe and feed your soldiers, and, under your colors, fight the enemy whom all Germany—all Europe hates intensely, and whose yoke every one feels weighing upon his neck. Oh, let me assure your majesty that it is only for you to be willing, and all Prussia will rally round you for the war of liberation!"

"But I must not be willing," said the king; "it is contrary to my honor and my conscience. I pledged my word to the Emperor Napoleon; I am his ally; I am deeply impressed with the sanctity of my existing treaties with France, and feel, as every man of honor would, that the obligation to maintain them inviolate is only rendered the more sacred by the disasters which have overwhelmed the imperial armies. Besides, you look at things in a light by far too partial and rose-colored. Do not confound your enthusiastic hopes with stern reality. The 'grand army of public opinion,' to which you refer, is an ally which cannot be depended upon—it is fickle, turning with every wind—it is an ally prodigal of

* The king's words.—Vide Droysen, vol. i., p. 488.