

Conrad obeyed, but he left the door ajar, and remained close to it, ready to reënter the cabinet at the first word of his beloved master.

"Now we are alone. Speak!" said Hardenberg.

"Your excellency," whispered the soldier, advancing several steps, "the valet de chambre of Count St. Marsan—that is to say, my brother—has sent me to you. He dares not himself come, for the house of your excellency is watched by spies, and he would instantly be suspected, if he were seen entering it. I am to ask your excellency whether you will give me twenty louis d'ors for a letter from my brother which I am to deliver to you."

"This letter, then, contains highly important information?"

"Yes, your excellency; my brother says he would let you have it at so low a rate because he had so long been connected with you, and because you had always treated him in a munificent manner."

"Does your brother require me to pay that sum before I have received the letter?"

"He said he would leave that entirely to your excellency; only he thinks it would be more advantageous to you to pay the money before reading the letter."

"How so, more advantageous to me?"

"Because your excellency, after reading it, would doubtless, in your joy at having received this singular and important information, pay him a larger sum than he himself had asked."

"In that case I prefer to read the letter first," said Hardenberg, smiling, "for I must not allow your brother's generosity to surpass mine."

"Well, then, your excellency, here is the letter," said the soldier, handing a small, folded paper to the chancellor of state.

Hardenberg took it, and, as if to prevent the soldier from seeing the expression of his face while he was reading it, he stepped into the window-niche and turned his back to him. The soldier, however, fixed his lurking glances on the chancellor. He saw that a sudden shock made the whole frame of the chancellor tremble, and a triumphant smile overspread the countenance of the secret observer.

After a few minutes Hardenberg turned round again, and, carefully folding up the paper, concealed it in his bosom. "My friend," he said, "your brother was right. Twenty louis d'ors would be too low a price for this letter. We must pay more for it." He stepped to his desk, and, opening one

of the drawers, took a roll from it and counted down a number of gold-pieces on the table. "Here are thirty louis d'ors," said Hardenberg, "and one for your trouble. See whether I have counted correctly. Tell your brother to continue serving me faithfully, and furnishing me with reliable reports. He may always count on my gratitude!"

Scarcely had the soldier left the room, when Hardenberg drew the paper from his bosom and glanced over it again. "At length!" he exclaimed, joyously. "The decisive moment is at hand! Now I hope to attain my object!" He rang the bell violently. "Have my carriage brought to the front door in half an hour," he said to Conrad, as soon as he entered the room. "But my own horses are tired. Send for four post-horses. A courier is immediately to set out for Potsdam, and see to it that relay horses be in readiness for me at Steglitz and Zehlendorf!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE ATTACK.

It was six o'clock in the afternoon. The gloomy January day had already yielded to a dark, cold night, enshrouding the city and vicinity of Potsdam. The king was, as usual, to go to Sans-Souci toward nightfall. There, far from the turmoil of the world, he liked to spend his mornings and evenings, retiring from intrusive eyes into the quiet of his simple domestic life. Like his august grand-uncle, Frederick II., the king laid down his crown and the splendor of his position at the gates of the small palace of Sans-Souci, and, at this country-seat, consecrated by so many historical recollections, he was not a king, but a man, a father, and a friend. At Sans-Souci his children gathered around him every evening, and, by their mirth and tender love, endeavored to dispel the clouds from the careworn brow of their father; at Sans-Souci, Frederick William received the small circle of his intimate friends—there old General von Köckeritz, Field-Marshal Kalkreuth, Count Dohna, Chancellor von Hardenberg, and the few who had remained faithful to him, were allowed to approach without ceremonial or etiquette. Foreign guests and court visitors, however, were never received at the country palace; he saw them only in the city of Potsdam, where

he transacted government affairs. Thither the king repaired punctually at ten o'clock every morning, where took place the meetings of the cabinet, the consultations with the high functionaries, the audiences given to the foreign ambassadors, and the official levees, and there the king took his dinner in the midst of his family and the officers of his court. But as soon as the clock struck seven he entered his carriage without any attendants, and drove out to Sans-Souci. This had been his invariable habit for many years; and when the inhabitants of the street leading to his country-seat heard the roll of a carriage at that hour, they said as positively as though they heard the clock striking, "It is just seven, for the king is driving to Sans-Souci."

The coachman, as was his habit, as soon as the clock struck six, would harness two horses to the plain carriage which the king always used, and generally drove up to the small side-gate a few minutes to seven o'clock. Without giving any orders, or uttering a word, the king would enter, and noisily closing the door, give thereby the signal to start. The chime of the neighboring church had just commenced playing the first part of the old hymn of "*Ueb' immer Treu und Redlichkeit*,"* thus indicating that it was half-past six when the carriage appeared at the side-gate. The wind was howling across the palace square and through the colonnade in front of the neighboring park, hurling the snow into the face of the driver, and lifting up the cape of his cloak around his head, as if to protect him from the cold and stormy night. Thomas, the king's coachman, had just removed with some difficulty the large cape from his face, and rubbed the snow from his eyes, when he heard the side-gate open. A dark figure emerged from it and entered the carriage, and noisily closed the door. Thomas had received his accustomed signal, and, although wondering that the king had come fifteen minutes earlier than usual, he took the reins, whipped the horses, and the carriage rolled away along the route to Sans-Souci. The snow-storm drowned the roll of the wheels, and rendered the vehicle almost invisible; besides, there was no one to take particular notice of it, for only here and there some closely-muffled person was to be seen on the street, too busy with himself—too much engaged in holding fast his fluttering cloak and protecting himself from the driving snow.

The square in front of the palace was deserted. The two

* "Practise always truth and honesty."

sentinels were walking up and down with slow, measured steps in front of the main portal, now looking up to the brilliantly-lighted windows of the royal sitting-room, and now contemplating the two dim lanterns which stood on the iron railing, and whose light, struggling with the storm, seemed about to be extinguished. The side-gate of the palace remained dark and lonely, but only for a short time. From the side of the market-place a carriage slowly approached, and stopped in front of the palace, precisely on the same spot which the king's carriage had previously occupied. The coachman sat as rigidly and stiffly on the box as worthy Thomas, and the storm played with his cloak, and threw the snow into his face, precisely in the same manner. A patrol marched across the palace-square, and approached the sentinels in front of the main portal; the usual words of command were heard, the guard was relieved, and the sentinels marched off, surrendering their places to their less fortunate comrades. When they passed the side of the palace where the carriage was to be seen, they said to each other: "Ah, we are off guard a few minutes too early. It cannot be quite seven o'clock, for the king's carriage is still waiting at the gate." The driver's laugh was unheard.

It was really not yet seven—the hour when the king usually left the palace. He was still in his sitting-room, and his two old friends, General von Köckeritz and Field-Marshal Kalkreuth, were with him. A pause in their conversation set in, which seemed to have been of a very grave character, for the faces of the two old gentlemen looked serious and careworn, and the king was pacing the room slowly and with a gloomy air.

"Köckeritz," he said, after a pause, standing in front of the old general, who was his most intimate friend, and looking him full in the face, "you are really in earnest, then? You believe in the prophecies of the clairvoyante?"

"I confess, your majesty, that I cannot but believe them," said Köckeritz, sighing. "Her words, her whole manner, all her gestures, bear the stamp of truthfulness to such an extent, that I would deem it a crime against nature to believe her to be an impostor; she has, moreover, already predicted to me the most wonderful things, and in her trance read my thoughts. She has looked, as it were, into the depth of my soul, so that I cannot doubt longer that she really is a prophetess."

"And you, field-marshal—do you, too, believe in her?" asked the king.

"I do, reluctantly, and in spite of myself, but I cannot help it," said the old field-marshal, shrugging his shoulders. "This girl speaks so forcibly, with such eloquence and such fervor of expression, that one is obliged to believe in her. Your majesty knows that I have always sided with those who have deemed the alliance of Prussia with France to be indispensable for the welfare and salvation of the country, and that I entertain the highest admiration for the genius, the character, and military talents of the Emperor Napoleon; I have never concealed my conviction that Prussia is lost if your majesty renounce Napoleon, and accept the proffered hand of Russia. Still, this girl has filled me with misgivings. She cried in so heart-rending a tone, with so impressive an anxiety, 'Save the king—the king is in danger! Leave Berlin—leave Potsdam!—save the king!' that I felt a shudder pervading my limbs, and it seemed to me as though I saw already the hand which was raised menacingly against the sacred head of your majesty. I certainly do not believe that the Emperor Napoleon has any thing to do with this danger; but some officious man in authority, some adventurous general, might strike a blow on his own responsibility, and in the belief that he would gain the favor of his emperor, and anticipate his most secret wishes."

"And what do you believe?" asked the king, moodily. "Tell me, Köckeritz, what sort of danger do you think is menacing me?"

"I do not know, your majesty," said Köckeritz, almost timidly, "but I am sure there *is* danger, and I would beseech your majesty to remove the seat of government to some place where you would be safer, and where we would not be exposed to the attacks of prowling, reckless detachments of soldiers, such as we saw here to our profound regret but a few days since. Your majesty ought to go to Breslau!"

"Ah," exclaimed the king, vehemently, "Hardenberg has succeeded, then, in gaining you over to his views? You are now suddenly of opinion that I ought to remove to Breslau?"

"Your majesty, I swear to you that Chancellor von Hardenberg has not even tried to gain me over to his views, and that he assuredly would not have succeeded. I have no political motives whatever in entreating your majesty now to go to Breslau, but am actuated exclusively by my fears for your personal safety. These troops of General Grénier have greatly alarmed me; their strange expedition to Potsdam was calcu-

lated to give rise to the most serious misgivings, and when I add to this the prophecies of the clairvoyante, a profound concern for the safety of your majesty fills my heart, and I feel like imploring you on my knees to leave Potsdam and to go to Breslau!"

"Let me join in the request of General Köckeritz, your majesty," said Field-Marshal Kalkreuth, sighing; "I, who on the battle-field never knew fear, am afraid of a danger to which I am not even able to give a name."

"And, owing to these vague presentiments, I am to take a step that might endanger the peace of my country and the existence of my crown!" exclaimed the king, with unusual vehemence. "For, do not deceive yourself in regard to this point: if I go to Breslau, Napoleon, who is perpetually distrusting me, and who is well aware that my alliance with him is highly repugnant to my inclinations and my personal wishes, would deem it equivalent to an open rupture, and believe I had gone over to his enemy, the Emperor of Russia. But, what is still worse, my country, my people, will also believe this to be the case. Every one will suppose that, although I publicly branded York's defection as a crime, and removed him from the command-in-chief, I secretly connived at what he did, and that my journey to Breslau is but a continuation of York's plans. Every one will believe that our policy has undergone a change, and that the alliance with France is at an end. It was an eyesore to the people; and if they now believe themselves to be delivered from it, the most calamitous consequences might ensue. A rising against the French will take place as soon as I merely seem to give the signal for it."

"Yes, that is true," exclaimed Kalkreuth; "your majesty is right; it might, after all, be dangerous if you suddenly leave the city where you have so long resided. It might be deemed equivalent to a rupture with France, and we are, unfortunately, too weak to run so great a risk. France is the natural ally of Prussia; that is what the great Frederick said, and Napoleon is also of this opinion. By changing your system of policy, your majesty would only endanger your position and give the Emperor Napoleon grounds for treating you as an enemy. To be sure, I know that there are fools who regard France as prostrated, and utterly unable to rise again, but you will soon see her with an army of three hundred thousand men, as brilliant as the former."

"I am entirely of your opinion," said the king, thoughtfully, "the resources of France seem inexhaustible, and—"

At this moment the door of the cabinet was softly opened, and Timm the chamberlain made his appearance. "His excellency, Chancellor von Hardenberg," he said, in a loud voice, and at the same moment Hardenberg appeared on the threshold of the royal room.

"Pardon me, your majesty," he said, quickly approaching, "for availing myself of the permission you have given me of entering your cabinet without being ceremoniously announced; but pressing affairs will excuse me."

"Has any thing occurred at Berlin?" asked the king, hastily.

"No, your majesty; Berlin is, at least for the present, perfectly quiet," said Hardenberg, laying stress on every word. "But scenes of the most intense excitement and an open insurrection might have occurred at Berlin and at Potsdam if I had not fortunately arrived here in time."

"What do you mean?" inquired the king.

"I mean," replied Hardenberg, slowly and solemnly, "I mean that your majesty is at this very moment in danger of being seized and abducted by the French."

The king gave a start, and his face colored for a moment; Köckeritz and Kalkreuth exchanged glances of terror and dismay.

"You have also seen the clairvoyante, then?" asked the king, after a pause, almost indignantly. "You too have allowed yourself to be frightened by her vaticinations?"

"No, your majesty, I do not believe in them, but only in what is true and real. Will your majesty condescend to listen to me for a moment?"

"Speak, M. Chancellor of State."

"I must confess that, imitating the example set us by the French, I have my spies and agents at the legation of Count St. Marsan, and at the residence of Marshal Augereau, governor-general of the province of Brandenburg, just as well as they have theirs at the palace of your majesty, at my house, and everywhere else. I pay my spies liberally, and hence they serve me faithfully. Well, three hours since I received a message from my first and most reliable spy, and this message seemed to me so important that I immediately hastened hither in order to take the necessary steps, and, if possible, ward off the blow aimed at your majesty."

"And what blow—what danger is it?"

"I have told your majesty already that you are in danger of being carried off by the French. Will your majesty permit me to read to you what my spy (who, as I stated already, is a very reliable man) writes me about it?"

"Read!" exclaimed the king.

Hardenberg bowed, and, taking a paper from his memorandum-book, read as follows: "They intend to seize the king to-night. A courier has been dispatched to the troops of Grénier's division, which, since yesterday, is encamped at a short distance from Potsdam; he conveys to the troops the order to march to the outskirts of the city, and to wait there at a carefully designated point for the arrival of a carriage. They are then to surround this carriage, and take it at a full gallop along the road leading to Brandenburg. The king will be in this carriage—seized in a very simple manner. It has been ascertained that the king drives at seven o'clock every evening to Sans-Souci, and the most minute details of what occurs on this occasion have been reported. A man will, therefore, conceal himself shortly after nightfall near the door by which the king leaves the palace. He will approach the carriage a few minutes before seven, enter it, and noisily close the door as the king is in the habit of doing. The coachman will believe this to be the usual signal, and start. As soon as he has reached the deserted avenue outside the gate that leads to Sans-Souci, the man sitting in the carriage will open the front window, throw a cape over the coachman's head, thus blindfolding and preventing him from uttering any cries. At the same time two agents, concealed behind the trees, will approach, stop the horses, seize the coachman, draw him from the box, tie his hands and feet, and then put him into the carriage. The horses are to be half unhitched so that neither they nor the coachman will be able to stir from the spot. In the mean time another carriage will occupy the place of the former, and wait for the king at the side-gate of the palace. As soon as his majesty has entered, it will start, take at first the route of Sans-Souci, but outside of the gate will immediately turn to the left, and drive for some time at a quick trot along the narrow road near the garden. At some distance from the city the chasseurs of Grénier's division will await it, and then form its escort. The carriage is arranged in such a manner that it cannot be opened on the inside. As soon as the king has entered it, he will, therefore, be a prisoner."

"And you believe in the reliability of these statements?" asked the king, when Hardenberg paused.

"I am satisfied of it, your majesty. The reports of my spy have hitherto always proved correct and reliable. It would be impossible for me to doubt his accuracy."

The king looked at his watch. "It is already a quarter past seven," he said. "Then it is not my carriage that is waiting for me at the palace-gate, but another?"

"Yes, your majesty."

"The clairvoyante was right," muttered General Köckeritz.

"If I now enter the carriage, you believe, M. Chancellor, I would be carried off?"

"That is what my spy reports, and I have additional evidence confirming his statements. At least it is entirely correct that Grénier's chasseurs are again in the immediate vicinity of Potsdam. I confess to your majesty that, owing to this danger, I have already taken the liberty, without obtaining your consent, to take most urgent steps, and that I have conferred with the commanders of the garrison of Potsdam for this purpose. These gentlemen, like myself, felt the necessity of immediate action. Couriers and spies were sent out by them in all directions, and have brought the news that the four thousand men who, two days ago, made an attempt to occupy Potsdam forcibly, are now again approaching the city in the utmost haste. Already about fifty chasseurs are stationed behind the high fence of the last garden on the road, alluded to in the letter of my spy, and seem to wait there for the carriage. Your majesty will see all my statements confirmed if you will be gracious enough to receive the report of the officer who commanded the expedition, and who has now accompanied me to the palace. The commanders of the garrison found the proofs of the insidious intentions of the French to be so startling that they are causing at this moment all their troops to form in line, and are marching them as noiselessly as possible to the neighboring park."

"Without having previously applied to me for orders?" asked the king, quickly.

"Your majesty, the pressing danger excuses this rashness. I have engaged to solicit your majesty's consent to this measure."

"The troops shall be sent to their quarters," said the king, energetically, after a moment's reflection.

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed General Köckeritz, anxiously,

"what does your majesty intend to do? Will you expose yourself to the danger of—"

"Hush!" interrupted the king, sternly, seizing the bell and ringing. The chamberlain entered. "The officer who is waiting in the anteroom is to come in," ordered the king. A minute afterward the officer appeared, and remained in a military attitude at the door.

"Did you reconnoitre to-night?" inquired the king.

"I did, your majesty. A part of Grénier's division is rapidly approaching the city; fifty chasseurs are already on the garden road behind the last board fence."

"Return to the general commanding," ordered the king. "The troops are at once to leave the park and go back to their quarters. The whole affair is to be kept a secret, and all *éclat* to be avoided. Go!"

The officer saluted, and turned toward the door, but on opening it he looked back and cast an inquiring glance on the face of the chancellor. Hardenberg nodded almost imperceptibly. The officer went out and closed the door after him.*

"I do not wish this affair to be made public," said the king, "otherwise I should have to renounce France immediately and decidedly; but my circumstances forbid me to do so."

"But, your majesty, you are now exposing yourself to the danger of falling into the hands of the French," exclaimed General Köckeritz, anxiously. "If Grénier's troops enter Potsdam now, they would meet with no resistance whatever, as your majesty has withdrawn our own soldiers."

"The French troops will not enter Potsdam after seeing that their plan has failed, and that I do not arrive in the coach at the place where the chasseurs are waiting for me," said the king.

"Besides," exclaimed Field-Marshal Kalkreuth indignantly, "it remains to be seen whether the whole intrigue is not a mere fiction. The chancellor of state himself said that he paid his spies well. Perhaps some enterprising fellow has got up this story for the sole purpose of receiving a large reward. He could imagine that the king, after being warned,

*When the king heard that the troops had been marched to the park, he ordered them to be dismissed to their quarters; but the apprehensions of the officers were so great that they dared to obey the royal orders only partially. They marched the troops from the park to another place, where they kept them under arms during the whole night and a part of the following day.

would not drive out to Sans-Souci to-night, and that the affair therefore would be buried in the darkness of this evening."

"And does your excellency believe, too, that my spy caused four thousand men to march upon Potsdam to second his intrigue?" asked Hardenberg, smiling. "Do you believe that he is able to send detachments of chasseurs whithersoever he pleases?"

"I cannot believe in this plan; it would be too audacious!" exclaimed Field-Marshal Kalkreuth. "I ask a favor of your majesty. If this report is correct, the carriage in which you are to be abducted ought now to be at the palace-gate and await your majesty. Please permit me to go down-stairs and enter it in your place. I want to see whither they will take me."

"No," said the king—"no! I wish to avoid any thing like an open rupture with France. The time for that has not come yet."

"Oh," whispered Hardenberg to himself, sadly and reproachfully, "that time will never come! My hopes are blasted."

The king paced the room silently and musingly, with his hands folded behind him. Field-Marshal Kalkreuth and General Köckeritz followed every motion in anxious suspense. Hardenberg cast down his eyes, and his features were expressive of profound grief.

"Gentlemen," said the king, "come with me! Let us go down to my carriage!"

"Your majesty, I trust, does not intend to enter it?" exclaimed Köckeritz, in dismay.

"Come with me!" said the king, almost smilingly. "Come!"

The firm, determined tone of his majesty admitted of no resistance. The three left the cabinet with him in silence, crossed the anteroom and the lighted corridor, until they arrived at the small staircase leading to the side-gate of the palace. All was silent. Not a footman met them on the way, and only a single sentinel stood at the upper end of the passage. The king, who led the way, went quickly down and across the small hall toward the door, which he opened with a jerk. The storm swept into the hall and beat into the faces of the gentlemen. It had already blown out the two lanterns in front of the door, and an impenetrable darkness reigned outside.

"Hush, now!" whispered the king. "Step out softly and place yourselves here at the wall. No one will see you. Wait now!" He quickly stepped to the carriage, scarcely visible in the darkness, and, groping for the knob of the coach door, opened it. A moment of breathless suspense ensued for those who stood at the wall, and tried to see what was to occur. The king slammed the door, and jumped back toward the gate. At the same moment the coachman whipped the horses and the carriage rapidly sped away.

"Now, let us reënter the palace," said the king, with perfect composure. "It is a stormy night! Come!" He stepped back into the hall, and the gentlemen followed. "Well," he said, smiling, and standing still, "the coachman, in the firm belief that I am in the carriage, will take the indicated route; the chasseurs will surround the carriage and capture it. Let those who got up this miserable intrigue convince themselves to their shame that it has miscarried. They will not dare complain, and the whole affair will never be revealed."

"But suppose it should really have been your majesty's carriage?" asked Kalkreuth. "The darkness was so great that it could not be recognized."

"But the darkness did not prevent me from feeling," said the king, "and my hands served me this time instead of my eyes. I felt that it was another carriage than mine. The door-knob was much larger. But now I should like to have some news about my dear old coachman, Thomas, and learn what has become of him."

"If your majesty will permit me, I will try to ascertain if the carriage is still in the avenue outside the gate," said Kalkreuth, quickly.

"I intended to request you to do so, field-marshal," said the king. "Your coach is in readiness, is it not?"

"It is, your majesty."

"Let the servants, then, have it brought up," said the king, ascending the staircase. On arriving at the anteroom, he himself ordered the lackey in waiting to have the carriage of the field-marshal brought to the door.

"If your majesty will permit me," said General Köckeritz, "I will accompany the field-marshal."

"I ask for the same favor," said the chancellor of state, quickly.

"Accompany the field-marshal, general," said the king,