

turning to Köckeritz. "Take no servants with you, except Timm my chamberlain, who may render assistance to my poor Thomas. My chamberlain is reticent and faithful. Pray have your carriage stopped at the entrance of the avenue, and proceed then on foot. If you find every thing as stated in the spy's report, Timm will drive the carriage to Sans-Souci, that my good old coachman may go to bed and recover from his fright. You will tell him, however, that I wish him not to breathe a word about his adventure. You, gentlemen, will thereupon return and report to me. And you, M. Chancellor, will follow me into my cabinet."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COURIER'S RETURN.

ON reaching his cabinet, the king slowly paced his room, seemingly without noticing the presence of the chancellor. Hardenberg, who waited in silent patience, withdrew softly into a window-niche, and listened to the noise of the carriage rolling away at this moment. "The spies the king has sent out are driving to the avenue," said Hardenberg to himself. "They will, no doubt, find every thing as stated in the report, and yet all will be in vain. He will not make up his mind to enter a bold course, and while he is hesitating all of us and Prussia will perish."

While he was thus absorbed in his sombre reflections, and sadly gazing out into the dark night, he had not noticed that the king stood still at the other end of the room, and, with his arms folded on his breast, was casting searching glances on the chancellor of state. Now he crossed the room with slow steps and erect head, and stood in front of Hardenberg. "M. Chancellor," said Frederick William, in an unusually mild and gentle tone, "you are sad and discontented, are you not? You are almost despairing, and it seems to you that the King of Prussia, whom the French have again so deeply insulted and humiliated, and whom Napoleon is now threatening even with seizure, should at length revolt against such treatment, and submit no longer to it. It seems to you that, cut to the quick by so many slights, insults, and perfidies, he ought to put an end to his temporizing policy; to rise and

exclaim, 'I will die rather than bear this disgrace any longer! I will die rather than endure these humiliations.' You are right; were I, like you, so fortunate as to be nothing but a man who had to defend only his own honor and existence, I would be allowed to risk every thing in order to win every thing. But I am the king, and, moreover, the king of an unfortunate state. I must forget my own wrongs, and remember only that I have sacred duties to fulfil toward my people, and that, so far as my own person is concerned, I am not yet allowed to possess any other courage than that of resignation. I am not allowed to stake the existence of my monarchy and the welfare of my people to obtain personal satisfaction. Until I obtain the incontestable certainty that such a course would be brought to a successful issue, I must not throw down the gauntlet to France, for failure in this case would be not only my ruin, but that of my whole people. I shall wait, therefore, M. Chancellor, for an opportunity; but I believe that this course requires on my part more constancy and courage than if I, as you wish me to do, should now unreservedly forsake France and render the decision of my fate dependent on the fortune of war. It is my solemn conviction that I ought not to do this, but advance only step by step, and with the utmost caution and deliberation, for— Well, what is it?" asked the king, turning to the chamberlain, who opened the door and entered the cabinet.

"Pardon me, your majesty, for disturbing you," said the chamberlain, respectfully. "But the gentleman who has just entered the anteroom assured me that he was the bearer of important news, which admitted of no delay."

"And who is the gentleman?"

"Sire, it is Major Natzmer, whom your majesty sent recently as a courier to Old Prussia."

"Natzmer?" exclaimed the king, joyously, "admit him at once!—Ah, M. Chancellor, we shall hear now how affairs are looking in my province of Prussia, and how my troops have received York's removal from his command."

"I hope Major Natzmer will bring your majesty good and joyful news," said Hardenberg, with perfect outward calmness, while his heart was throbbing with impatience for Major Natzmer, who now entered; and, while he saluted the king, Hardenberg fixed his eyes, with an anxious expression, on the countenance of the new-comer. For a moment their eyes met. There was an inquiry in those of Hardenberg; Natz-

mer replied by a slight motion of his eyelids, and an almost imperceptible smile.

"In the first place, report to me briefly and succinctly," said the king. "Reply to all my questions as pointedly and clearly as possible. Afterward we will expatiate on the most important points. Well, then, you saw Murat and Macdonald?"

"I did, your majesty. I met the King of Naples at Elbing, and had the honor of delivering your majesty's letter to him. He received me very kindly, and was delighted at being thus assured of your friendly feelings toward France. Marshal Macdonald, to whose headquarters I then repaired, was less kind and polite. He was still exceedingly indignant at the course of General York, which he openly stigmatized as traitorous; but he was pacified when I informed him that I was the bearer of an order depriving York of his command, and was about to convey it to the camp of the Russians and Prussians."

"He raised no obstacles, then, but allowed you to pass over without hinderance to the Russian camp?"

"Yes, your majesty. While Macdonald continued his march, I rode to the Russian pickets, and was conducted by an officer, detailed by General Choplitz for this purpose, to the commander-in-chief, Prince Wittgenstein, who had established his headquarters at Heilsberg."

"What business had you at Wittgenstein's headquarters?"

"I wanted, in accordance with your orders, to ask his permission to pass through to General York; and, besides, I wished to ascertain where the Emperor Alexander had established his headquarters, that I might repair to them."

"Prince Wittgenstein, of course, gave you immediate permission to pass through his camp, did he not?"

"No, your majesty; he refused my request."

"How so? What reasons could he adduce? Did you tell him what you intended to do at York's headquarters?"

"Your majesty ordered me to tell every one what I was to do at General York's headquarters, and what punishment you intended to inflict upon him. I was therefore authorized and obliged to inform General Wittgenstein of the object of my mission."

"And he dared to resist you?"

"He did, your majesty. He declared that he would not permit me by any means to go to York, and that so long as he lived no one should bring to the general a dispatch by

which the most generous, magnanimous, and valiant general of the Prussian army was to be deprived of his command."

"Then he really prevented you from going to York?"

"Yes, your majesty; he told me I was his prisoner, and did not permit me to leave him."

"So that, at this moment, General York has not, as I desire, transferred his command to General Kleist?"

"Precisely, your majesty. General York is still in command."

"And he did not receive the order removing him from his position?"

"I was unable to deliver it, and your majesty required me to give it to none but the general himself. I was, however, a prisoner at General Wittgenstein's. He asked me whether I had received other commissions; and when he heard that I was to deliver a letter to his majesty the emperor, he immediately had a sleigh brought to the door, detailed an officer to escort me, and we set out for the imperial headquarters."

"Let us speak of that hereafter," said the king, quickly. "Tell me first whether you have heard further news about my corps. General York, then, is still in command?"

"Yes, your majesty."

"But even though he has not received the dispatches, he must have seen the news in the newspapers. For the Berlin journals contained a copy of the order superseding him, and he must have noticed it."

"I was told by General Wittgenstein, on returning from the headquarters of the Emperor of Russia, that York had been informed by the newspapers of the severe punishment which your majesty intended to inflict upon him, and that you disavowed him and the course he had taken. Accordingly, he requested General Kleist to take command of the troops. But Kleist refused to do so, alleging that he had received no direct orders from your majesty, and that the dispatches of your majesty, addressed to him personally, would determine his course, and induce him to take command of the troops."

"General Kleist was right in making this declaration," said the king. "So long as York had not received the dispatches, he remained commander-in-chief."

"He is still at the head of the army," exclaimed Natzmer, "for I bring back the dispatches addressed to Generals York

and Kleist. As I was unable to deliver them, I return them to your majesty."

The king took the papers which the major presented to him, contemplating them for a moment. He turned toward Hardenberg, and saw that heart-felt joy was beaming from his face. "Are you glad that my orders have not been carried into effect, M. Chancellor of State?" asked the king.

"Yes, your majesty," said Hardenberg, in a voice tremulous with emotion, "I am glad of it, for now it seems to me as if our night is drawing to a close, and a new morning is about to dawn upon Prussia. York took the first step for this purpose, and it will be necessary for your majesty to pursue the same course. For, as York has not been deprived of his command, the French will no longer believe that you disavow the action of your brave general, and your people and all Germany will take heart, for they will see that the era of disgrace is past, and that a German king dares at length to resist the French tyrant."

"Well, we shall see," said the king. "Now, Major Natzmer, tell me about your mission to his majesty the Emperor Alexander. I told you that it was a state secret. Did you keep it?"

"I did, your majesty."

"Well, tell me the result."

"Will your majesty permit me to withdraw?" said the chancellor, approaching the door. "As you intrusted Major Natzmer with a secret mission—"

"Oh, no, your excellency, pray remain; I wish you to hear the message I sent to the emperor, and what he replied to it. —Answer my questions now, major. Did you carry out the commission I gave you? Did you verbally lay before the emperor the message which I dared not confide to pen and paper? Did you tell the emperor that I would offer him a defensive and offensive alliance if Alexander would engage to carry on the war against Napoleon to the best of his power, and cross the Vistula and the Oder without delay? Did you make this offer to Alexander in my name?"

"I did, your majesty."

The king glanced quickly at Hardenberg, and the surprised face of his chancellor of state made him smile.

"And what did the emperor reply?" asked Frederick William, turning again to the major.

"The emperor was overjoyed at the offer, and declared his

readiness to grant all which you would stipulate now and hereafter. The Emperor Alexander imposed only a single condition."

"What was it?"

"He demanded that the fortress of Graudenz should be garrisoned by Russian troops, and insisted most obstinately on this point."

"Did you not tell him that I had made up my mind in regard to this point, and would renounce the proposed alliance if Graudenz, the most remote fortress of my kingdom, should be garrisoned by other than Prussian troops?"

"I stated this to the emperor."

"And then?"

"The emperor resolved to yield even this point, and to leave Graudenz to the Prussian troops."

A sunbeam seemed to light up the grave, calm face of the king, and the cloud that generally darkened his brow disappeared. "M. Chancellor," he said, turning to Hardenberg with a mild and kind smile, "are you now reconciled with your Fabius Cunctator? Will you forgive me for having hesitated until Natzmer would bring me Alexander's reply?"

"Oh, sire," exclaimed Hardenberg, "my soul bows in joyous admiration, and your greatness and mildness make me blush."

At this moment the door opened, and Köckeritz and Kalkreuth entered the cabinet.

"Ah," exclaimed the king, meeting them, "my two generals whom I sent out on a reconnoissance! Well, gentlemen, speak! Did you find my carriage?"

"We did, your majesty," said Field-Marshal Kalkreuth, sighing. "The report was but too true. A vile plot had been formed; we have the proofs, for we really found the carriage of your majesty in the avenue leading to Sans-Souci; the horses had been partially unhitched—"

"And my poor coachman?" asked the king. "Köckeritz, tell me what has become of my faithful Thomas?"

"We found him exactly in the condition stated in the spy's report," said General Köckeritz, hastily. "He lay in the interior of the carriage; his hands and feet firmly tied; his head covered with a cape, which had been closely fastened round his neck to prevent him from crying; it had, moreover, almost choked him when we arrived."

"But he has recovered from his fright?" asked the king, in a tone of sympathy.

"Yes, your majesty," said Köckeritz, "and he would not permit Timm to accompany him to Sans-Souci. He felt strong enough to return to Potsdam, and arrived here at the same time as we did."

"I suppose you have ordered him to say nothing about the whole affair?"

"Yes, your majesty, and he swore he would not mention it."

"And now, gentlemen, give me your opinion. Field-Marshal Kalkreuth, you have satisfied yourself now that the French really intended to seize and abduct me to-night?"

"I have unfortunately satisfied myself that they made such an attempt," said the field-marshal.

"And you, Köckeritz, believe so, too?"

"I do, your majesty; I am fully convinced that such an outrage was in contemplation."

"And you, M. Chancellor of State?"

"I was confident of the existence of this plot before coming hither, and every thing has confirmed it; yes, such an outrage was surely intended. The French meant to seize your sacred person."

"Will your majesty permit me also to reply to this question?" said Major Natzmer.

"What do you mean?" asked the king, surprised. "Have you not just arrived? How can you pass an opinion on what occurred before your arrival?"

"Your majesty, it is true I have just now come; but still I knew what was to occur here, and what an infamous transaction was planned," said Major Natzmer. "The Emperor Alexander gave me this information; he had just received from a perfectly reliable source the news that Marshal Augereau had been instructed to seize the person of your majesty. The emperor was greatly alarmed, and told me he would be unable to find any rest until he had heard that you were safe, and had left Berlin and Potsdam.* I myself set out at once in the greatest consternation, and as I left the emperor on the 13th of January, I would have arrived here much earlier if I had not heard at Landshut that Murat had issued an order to all the authorities to have me arrested and conveyed to the French headquarters.† This compelled me to take a round-about course, and now I rejoice the more heartily as I have

* Droysen's "Life of York," vol. ii., p. 120.

† Ibid.

arrived at the very time to caution your majesty, in the name of the Emperor Alexander, against the insidious designs of the French."

The king made no reply. He paced the room slowly and with his head bent down; the four gentlemen stood in silence on both sides of the cabinet. Suddenly standing in the middle of the room, with his countenance full of determination, he said: "Gentlemen, I will tell you a state secret. Will you pledge me your word of honor, all four of you, that you will keep it?"

"We will!" they all shouted at the same moment.

"Listen to me, then," added the king. "I shall leave Potsdam and repair to Breslau, whither the seat of government will be temporarily transferred. All the necessary preparations must be made from this hour with the utmost dispatch and prudence. To-morrow night I shall set out with the crown prince; the rest of the royal family will follow me on the next day. Troops will be stationed along the route; the hussars forming my escort, and the lifeguards following to Breslau. It is my duty to place myself beyond the reach of insidious attacks, and to render it impossible for the French to seize me. I will, therefore, go to Breslau!" While uttering these words, the king glanced successively at the faces of the four gentlemen. He saw that Field-Marshal Kalkreuth looked gloomy and abstracted, and opposite him the chancellor of state, with burning cheeks and radiant eyes.

"Well, Hardenberg," said the king, mildly, "have you nothing to say to me?"

"I am unable to say any thing," whispered Hardenberg, in a tremulous voice, "but I do what I have not done for many years past—I weep tears of joy! Our night is at an end; a new morning is dawning upon Prussia, and the sun of a new era will shed his beams upon all of us!"