

CHAPTER XXIII.

LEONORA PROHASKA.

OLD Sergeant Prohaska sat sad and musing in his old easy-chair near the stove; before him lay a copy of the *Vossische Zeitung*, which he had just perused. He laid it aside with a sigh; supporting his head on the leathern cushion, he puffed clouds of smoke from his short clay pipe. Close to him, at the small table standing in the niche of the only window which admitted light into the small, dark room, sat a young girl, busily engaged in drawing threads from a large piece of linen, and putting them carefully on the pile of lint on the table. She was scarcely eighteen years old, but her noble, pale countenance wore an expression of boldness and energy; her forehead was high, and vigorous thoughts seemed to dwell there. Large black eyes were flashing under her finely-arched eyebrows, which almost touched each other above her beautifully-chiselled, slightly-curved nose. Round her crimson lips was an expression of melancholy, and her cheeks seemed to

The night is past, and red the light
Streams o'er the dewy lea.

Up! let the coward idlers sleep!
Who envies them their rest?
We march with joyful hearts to keep
Our honored king's request.

To us he said: "My brave ones all!—
My chasseurs! where are they?"
Responsive to his patriot call
We hastened to obey.

We vowed to strike with mighty hand
As it becomes the free—
A safeguard for our native land
With Heaven's grace to be.

Sleep calmly, wives and children dear!
To God your sorrows tell.
The hour, alas! of blood is near,
But all your fears dispel.

Approved we hasten to the field;
What though the strife begins!
'Tis joy our loved ones thus to shield,
For pious courage wins.

Returning, all may not be found!
But some, in glory's grave,
Shall never hear the songs resound
Of those they died to save.

Come, glowing heart! despise the pain
Of death; for, evermore,
Shall he who falls, a kingdom gain
On heaven's eternal shore!

have been bleached by grief rather than sickness. She was tall and well formed, but her whole appearance was more remarkable for the stern and heroic character it indicated than for grace and loveliness. While she was thus at work, and engaged in preparing lint, troubled thoughts seemed to pass from time to time across her face, and she raised her eyes to heaven with an angry and reproachful expression. She impulsively cast aside the linen, and jumped up. "No, father," she exclaimed, drawing a deep breath, "I cannot bear it any longer!"

"What is it that you cannot bear any longer, Leonora?" exclaimed her father, surprised.

"To sit here and prepare lint while the whole world is astir, while every heart is swelling with patriotism and warlike enthusiasm! And I cannot do any thing, I cannot join in the universal exultation—I can do nothing but prepare lint! Father, it is heart-rending, and I cannot bear it!"

"Must not I bear it?" asked her father in a tremulous voice. "Must not I sit still behind the stove, while all my old comrades are taking up arms and marching into the field? My right leg was buried at Jena, and I must limp about now as a miserable cripple; I cannot even take revenge for the disgrace of Jena; I cannot even pay the French for my leg by cutting off the heads of some of their accursed soldiers. I am a cripple, while others are hastening into the field! When I must bear that, a girl like you ought assuredly not to complain."

"Father," said Leonora, with flashing eyes, "do not despise me because I am a girl! Did you not tell me of the heroic women of Spain and the Tyrol, and of their glorious deeds? Did you not tell me that, by their intrepid patriotism, they had set a sublime example to the men, and that by their influence their country was to be saved? Was not the heroine of Saragossa a woman? Did not women and girls fight like heroes in the gorges of the Tyrol?"

"Yes, that is true," exclaimed her father, smiling, "but then they were Spanish and Tyrolese girls. They have fire in their veins, and love their country with an undying patriotism."

"Ah, one need not be born in the South to have warm blood," exclaimed Leonora, ardently. "It is not the sun that gives love of country, and patriotic hearts may throb even under the snow."

"Have you such a heart, Leonora?" asked her father, casting on her a long and searching look.

"Father," she said, pressing her hands on her bosom, "there is something burning here like fire; and at times when I hear how all are rallying round the flag—and how the warlike enthusiasm is pervading the whole country, I feel as if the blood would burst from my heart and head. It is true I am no Spanish girl, but I am a Prussian girl!"

"Ah, I would you were a Prussian boy!" sighed her father, shaking his head. "If you were, I believe you would look well in the ranks of the volunteers; they would not likely reject the young soldier of eighteen."

"I am quite tall and strong, although I am but a girl," exclaimed Leonora, with flashing eyes; "I have seen among the soldiers who started yesterday many volunteers who were a great deal shorter and slighter than I am."

"But, at all events, they had shorter hair and a stronger voice than you have," laughed her father.

"Oh, I can cut off my hair," she said, quickly; "and as for my voice, Kalbaum, the tailor, who accompanied the volunteers, has a voice no stronger than mine, and yet he was accepted. And then—"

"Hush!" interposed her father quickly. "I hear your mother coming. Do not speak of such things when she is present. It would alarm her. Bold thoughts must be locked up in our hearts, for, if we speak of them, it looks like bragadocio; we are only allowed to speak of bold deeds. Do not forget that, my daughter, and give me a kiss!" Leonora hastened to her father, and encircling him with her arms, pressed a glowing kiss on the lips of the old invalid.

"Father," she whispered, "I believe you understand me, and can read my thoughts!"

"God alone is able to read our thoughts," said her father, solemnly, "and it is only from Him that we must not conceal any thing. But what is that? Is not your mother weeping outside?" And old Prohaska jumped up and limped, as quickly as his wooden leg permitted, toward the door.

At this moment the door was noisily opened, and a woman appeared on the threshold. Behind her was a tall, slender, and pale boy, scarcely fourteen years of age. Both entered the room with tearful eyes and loud lamentations.

"Wife, what is the matter—what has happened?" exclaimed Old Prohaska, anxiously.

"Why do you weep, my brother?" asked Leonora, hastening to the boy, and clasping him in her arms. He laid his head on her breast and wept aloud.

"What has happened?" wailed his mother. "All our hopes are blasted; we have been rejected!"

"Rejected? Where? And by whom?" asked the invalid, in amazement.

"By the military commission!" cried his wife, drying her tears with her long apron.

"What did you want of the military commission? Did you desire to become a *vivandière*, old woman?"

"No, but Charles wanted to enlist, father! Yes, you must know all now. We thought we would prepare a joyous surprise for you, but the good Lord and the military commission would not let us do so. Look, old man! I perceived very well how painful it was to you, and how it was gnawing at your heart, that your wooden leg compels you to remain here at Potsdam, and prevents your marching out with the soldiers who are hurrying to the headquarters of their king at Breslau."

"Yes, it is true, it is very sad! My general, old Blucher, under whom I fought in 1806, is also at Breslau, and what will he say when he looks for his old hussars of 1806, and does not find Prohaska! He will say, 'Prohaska has become a coward—a lazy old good-for-nothing.'"

"No, father, he will not say so," exclaimed Leonora, ardently; "if he knows you, he cannot say so.—But speak, mother, tell us what makes you weep, and what has so afflicted my dear brother?"

"Both of us noticed father's secret grief, and comprehended how painful it was for him to be unable to participate in the war," said her mother. "I had not mentioned it to any one, and to God alone I had complained how grievous it is that I have no full-grown son, who, instead of his father, might serve his king at the present time. Last night, when all of you were asleep, Charles came to my bedside. 'Mother,' he said to me, 'mother, I must tell you something! I will and must enlist! It would be an eternal disgrace for me to stay at home, particularly as father is disabled, and cannot fight any more. Mother, the honor of the family is at stake; I must enlist or die!'"

"Ah, you are a true brother of mine," exclaimed Leonora, with a radiant face, drawing the boy closer to her heart.

"And what did you reply to Charles, mother?" asked the invalid.

"You are my only son, and my heart would break if I should lose you. But you are right; it would be a disgrace for our whole family if it did not furnish a single soldier to the king and the fatherland, and if no substitute should enlist in your father's place, and revenge him on the French for crippling him at Jena. I will go with you to the military commission to-morrow, and we will pray the gentlemen to accept you, although you are still under age. We will pray them until they overlook your youth and enroll your name. But say nothing about it to father until we have been successful; then, tell him all."

"And you really went with him to the commission?" asked the old man, hastily.

His wife responded by nodding and sighing, and burst again into tears.

"Yes, father," exclaimed the boy, raising his head from Leonora's shoulder, and drying his eyes with an angry gesture, "we went to the military commission. We begged, implored, and wept! It was all in vain! They said they were not allowed to accept boys of fourteen; I was too young, and looked too feeble. In our despair we went to Eylert, the preacher, and begged him to intercede for me. He is always kind to me, and often praises me for my industry in preparing for confirmation. I revealed my whole heart to him; I told him I must consider myself disgraced, if now, that every one who is not a coward is taking the sword, I am compelled to go to school. I told him I should not dare to raise my eyes, and should think all the inhabitants would point with their fingers at me; the children in the streets would deride me, and the old men would contemptuously avert their heads when I passed them."

"Ah, my beloved brother," exclaimed Leonora, enthusiastically, "hitherto I have loved you as a child, but henceforth I shall love as a hero!"

"But it was all in vain," cried Charles, sobbing aloud in his grief and anger. "Even M. Eylert could not give us any comfort. He said it was impossible for the commission to accept me, for, though they overlooked my youth and my somewhat feeble health, they could not enroll me because I had not yet been confirmed. But as we begged so very hard, and shed so many tears, M. Eylert had at last pity on me, and

went with us once more to the military commission. But it was of no avail. I am under age and have no certificate of confirmation, and M. Eylert's intercession was fruitless.* They rejected me! Father, what am I to do now? I am doomed to remain here at Potsdam, with my tall figure, which will charge me with cowardice in the eyes of every one, while my schoolmates, who are much shorter than I am, are allowed to enlist and fight for their country. Oh, mother, why am I not your eldest child? Then I should be preserved from the disgrace of running about as a coward, or of being obliged to have my certificate of birth constantly in my pocket!"

"My brother," said Leonora, laying her strong white hand on her brother's light hair, "if I could give you the four years by which I am older than you, I would do so, though it should cost me my life, for I comprehend your grief. But I am innocent of your affliction, and I pray you, therefore, not to be angry with me. It was God's will that I should be older, and have your place. You must take into consideration that the war may last a long time; six months hence you will be confirmed, and then it will be time for you to enlist in the king's army, and fight for liberty. Besides, my dear brother, it is not even settled yet whether all these warlike preparations are really intended for France. To be sure, every one is in hope that such is the case, but as yet no one is sure of it, for the king has not declared his intentions, and he is still at peace with France."

"No, the king has declared his intentions," cried Charles, impetuously. "And that is exactly what causes my distress and my despair. It is certain now that there will be war with France. You do not know, then, what has occurred?"

"No," exclaimed father and daughter at the same time, "we do not—we have not yet seen any one. Tell us the news, Charles."

"Well, we heard already at the office of the military commission that a courier had just arrived from Breslau, and brought a proclamation, addressed by the king to his people; they said it had immediately been sent to the printing-office, and was to be posted on all the street corners. The courier, besides, brought the news that the Emperor of Russia had arrived at Breslau, and that the first visit was to Baron von Stein, who secretly lived at Breslau."

"Hurrah!" shouted old Prohaska. "Prussia is safe now,

* Eylert, "Frederick William III.," vol. ii., p. 160.

for Baron von Stein is back again, and he will know how to expel Napoleon and his French from the country. Where Minister von Stein is he tolerates no French, and that is the reason why Bonaparte hates him, and has always been afraid of him. My boy, this is glorious news! Stein is back again; now we shall be all right! Have you any other news?"

"Yes, there is a great deal yet, father, but the tears burst from my eyes when I think of it, because I am unable to participate in the struggle."

"Oh, what is it?" begged Leonora. "What else has happened at Breslau?"

"Well," said Charles, in a tremulous and melancholy voice, "the courier reports that many hundreds of volunteers are arriving every day, not only from all parts of Prussia, but the whole of Germany, and that the city is rejoicing as though a festival were to be celebrated, and not as though we were on the eve of a terrible war. Above all, there is Major von Lützow, round whose standard hosts of young men are rallying, enlisting a corps of volunteer riflemen, to whom he has given the name of 'The Legion of Vengeance.' They are to wear a black uniform as sign of the sorrow and disgrace that have weighed down the fatherland since 1806, and which they intend to avenge before discarding it."

"Oh, that is a grand idea," exclaimed Leonora, with flashing eyes. "To march out in mourning—to rush to the battlefield like angels of death and shout, 'We are the legion of avengers, sent by Prussia to atone for her disgrace! Our uniform is black, but we intend to dye it red in the blood of the French!' And then to fight exultantly in the thickest of the fray for the fatherland, and for our queen, whose heart was broken by the national dishonor and wretchedness! Oh, it must be blissful, indeed, to march with that legion to avenge the tears of Queen Louisa, and—"

"But Leonora!" cried her mother, staring in amazement at the young girl who stood before her with glowing cheeks, panting bosom, and uplifted right arm, as if she had just drawn the sword—"but, Leonora! what is the matter with you? What does your impulsiveness mean? Has Charles infected you with his enthusiasm? Do you want to increase the excitement and despair of the poor boy? He cannot join the 'Legion of Vengeance;' he cannot be one of Lützow's riflemen!"

"No," said Leonora, vehemently and almost triumphantly, "he cannot be one of Lützow's riflemen!"

"Leonora!" cried her father, in a warning tone, "Leonora, what are you saying?"

She started and dropped her arm. "It is true," she muttered to herself, "we should not betray our thoughts; God alone must know them."

Her father limped to her, and, laying his hands on her shoulder, looked into her excited and glowing face. "Come, my daughter," he said, "let us go out into the street and read what the king says to his people. For I believe the king's proclamation must have been printed by this time. Come, Leonora!"

"No, it is unnecessary for you to go into the street for that purpose, father," said Charles, "we have brought a copy of the proclamation; the man who was to post them gave us one for you, saying it would no doubt gladden your heart. Where did you leave it, mother?"

"I put it into my pocket. Here it is!" said the mother, taking a large printed sheet from the pocket hanging under her apron. "There, father, read it."

The old man took the paper and handed it to Leonora. "Read it to us, my child," he said, tenderly. "I like best to hear from your lips what the king says to his people."

CHAPTER XXIV.

JOAN OF ORLEANS.

LEONORA took the paper and read as follows, with crimson cheeks, and her heart aglow with enthusiasm:

"*To my People!*—I need not state the causes of the impending war either to my faithful people or to the Germans in general. Unprejudiced Europe is fully aware of them. We succumbed to the superior strength of France. The peace which wrested from me one-half of my subjects, did not confer any blessings upon us, but inflicted deeper wounds upon us than war itself. The enemy was bent on exhausting the resources of the country; the principal fortresses remained in his hands; agriculture was paralyzed, and so were the manufactures of our cities, which had formerly reached so proud an eminence; trade was everywhere obstructed, and the sources of prosperity were thus almost entirely ruined. The country was rapidly impoverished. By the most conscientious fulfil-