

of the imperial cabinet. Suddenly the emperor, pale and calm as usual, walked in, followed by Marshal Augereau. All eyes were fixed upon the emperor, whose lips were to proclaim the events of the future.

Advancing into the middle of the room, he raised his head, and sternly glanced along the line of generals. "Gentlemen," he said, in a loud voice, "I have changed my plan. We shall not pass over to the right bank of the Elbe, but turn toward Leipsic to-morrow. May those who have occasioned this movement never regret it!"*

A shout of joy burst forth when the emperor paused. The generals surrounded him, now that they had attained their object, to thank him for his magnanimity, and then they cheerfully looked at each other, shook hands, and exclaimed in voices trembling with emotion, "We shall again embrace our parents, our wives, our children, our friends!"†

"Ah, Augereau," said the emperor, mournfully, "you see I could not act otherwise; it was their will! But you, who are of my opinion that this retrograde movement is a calamity, will be able to testify in my favor if the future shows that I am right. You will state that I was compelled to pursue a path which I knew would lead to destruction!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BATTLE OF LEIPSIC.

THE struggle had already been going on for two days. On the 15th and 16th of October the Austrians, Russians, Prussians, and Swedes, had fought a number of engagements with the French between Halle and Leipsic. The Austrians, or the army of Bohemia, commanded by Schwartzberg, the general-in-chief, had been defeated by the French at Wachau on the 15th of October; but the Prussians and Russians, under Blucher, had gained a brilliant victory at Möckern on the 16th of October; and though the Swedes, under Bernadotte, had not participated in the battle, and had, as usual, managed on that day to keep away from the carnage, they had at the same time contrived to participate in the glory of victory.

*Napoleon's words.—Constant, vol. v., p. 269.

†Ibid.

The French had not gained a single decisive battle during these two days, and yet Napoleon himself was at the head of his forces, directing their movements. Thousands of his soldiers lay on the blood-stained field of Wachau, and thousands more were mown down at Möckern. His army was melting away hour by hour, while that of his enemies constantly increased. Fresh reserves were moved up; the battle array of the allies grew more imposing and overwhelming, and the great, decisive battle was drawing nigh.

It was the evening of the second day, the 16th of October. Napoleon, who had his headquarters on the preceding day at Reudnitz, four miles from Leipsic, removed them for the night into the open field, from which the city could be seen, and behind it the numerous fires of the allies gleamed through the gathering shades. Beside the emperor's tent a large camp-fire was kindled, and near it, on a small field-stool, covered with red morocco, sat Napoleon, his gray overcoat closely buttoned up, his three-cornered hat drawn over his forehead, and his arms folded on his breast. His guards, who were encamping in the plain in wide circles around him, could distinctly see him, partially illuminated by the camp-fire. That bent, dark form was their only hope—a hope which did not look up to the stars shining above them, but which was satisfied with a mortal, who they believed could guide and protect them. And he indeed could save them from death by discontinuing the struggle, by accepting peace, though at the heaviest cost—at the sacrifice of all his possessions outside of France.

Two forms approached the camp-fire. It was only when they stood by the emperor's side, that he perceived them and looked up. He recognized the grave faces of Marshal Berthier and Count Daru.

"What do you want?" he asked, in a husky voice.

"Sire," said Berthier, solemnly, "we come, as envoys of all the superior officers of the army, to lay our humble requests before your majesty."

"Have you any thing to request?" asked Napoleon, sneeringly. "I thought I had fulfilled at Duben all the wishes of my generals; I gave up my plan against Berlin and the right bank of the Elbe, and marched to Leipsic, in order to take the direct road to France. Are my generals not yet satisfied?"

"Sire, who could suppose that on this road we would meet

all the corps of the allies?" sighed the Prince of Neufchatel. "Even your majesty did not know it."

"I did not," replied Napoleon, "but my star forewarned me, and I conceived the plan of going to Berlin. You overcame my will; what do you still want?"

"Sire," said Berthier, almost timidly, "we want to implore your majesty to offer an armistice and peace to the allies. Our troops are dreadfully exhausted by these days of incessant fighting, and are, besides, discouraged by the continued victories of our enemies. The generals, too, are disheartened, the more so as we are unable to continue the struggle two days longer, because our ammunition begins to fail. We have recently used such a vast amount that scarcely enough remains for a single day. Sire, if we, however, continue to fight and are defeated, the road to France is open to our enemies, and your majesty cannot prevent the allies from marching directly upon Paris, for France has no soldiers to defend her when our army is routed. Let your majesty, therefore, have mercy on your country and your people; discontinue the war, and make proposals of peace!"

"Yes, sire," said Daru, "become anew the benefactor of your country, overcome your great heart for the welfare of your people and your army, whose last columns are assembled around you, and await life or death from your lips. The terrible, unforeseen event has taken us by surprise; we were not sufficiently prepared. We have no ambulances, no hospitals; all the elements of victory are wanting, for when the soldier knows that, after the battle, if he should be wounded or taken sick, he will find a good bed, careful treatment, and medical attendance, he goes with a feeling of some sort of security into battle; but we are destitute of these necessities. Your majesty knows full well that this is no fault of mine, but still it is so, and that we lack almost every thing. Your majesty, therefore, will be gracious enough to take a resolution which, it is true, is painful and deplorable, but under the circumstances indispensable."

Napoleon listened to the two gentlemen with calmness and attention. When Count Daru was silent, he fixed a sarcastic eye first on him, then on Berthier. "Have you any thing else to say?" he then asked. The two gentlemen bowed in silence.

"Well, then," said Napoleon, rising, and, with his arms folded, "I will reply to both of you. Berthier, you know that I do not attach to your opinion in such matters as much

as a straw's value; you may, therefore, save yourself the trouble of speaking! As to you, Count Daru, it is your task to wield the pen, and not the sword; you are incapable of passing an opinion on this question. As to those who are of the same way of thinking, and whose envoys you are, tell them as my determined and final answer simply, 'They shall obey!'"*

He turned his back upon them and entered his tent. Constant and Roustan had taken pains to give it as comfortable and elegant an appearance as possible. A beautiful Turkish carpet covered the floor. On the table in the middle of the tent were placed the emperor's supper, consisting of some cold viands on silver plates and dishes. On another table was an inkstand, papers, books, and maps; and in a nook, formed by curtains and draperies, stood the emperor's field-bed. The sight of this snug little room, and the stillness surrounding him, seemed to do him good; the solitude allowed him to let the mask fall from his face, and to permit the melancholy and painful thoughts which filled his soul to reflect themselves in his features. With a sigh resembling a groan he sank down on the easy-chair. "They want to crush me to earth," he murmured—"to transform the giant into a pigmy, because they are too much afraid of his strength. Their fear has at length made brave men of these allies, and they have resolved to put me on the bed of Procrustes, and to reduce me to the size of a common man, like themselves. Will it be necessary to submit to this? Must I allow them to cut off my limbs, to save my life?" He paused, and became absorbed deeper in his reflections.

Suddenly he was interrupted by approaching footsteps. The curtain of the tent was drawn back, and one of the emperor's adjutants appeared. "Sire," he said, "the Austrian General Meerfeldt, who was taken prisoner by your majesty's troops at Wachau, has just arrived under escort, and awaits your orders."

The emperor rose more quickly than usual. "Fate responds to my questions and doubts," he said to himself, hastily pacing his tent floor. "I endeavored to find an expedient, and a mediator appears between myself and my enemies. All is not yet lost, then, for Fate seems still to be my ally." He turned with a quick motion of his head toward the adjutant. "Admit General Meerfeldt. I will see him."

* Napoleon's words.—Vide "Memoirs of the Duchess d'Abrantes," vol. xvi., p. 386.

A few minutes afterward the Austrian general entered the tent. The emperor quickly met him, and gazed with a strange, triumphant look into the embarrassed face of the count. "I believe we are old acquaintances," said Napoleon, "for, if I am not mistaken, it was you who, in 1797, solicited the armistice of Leoben, and you participated, too, in the negotiations which terminated in the treaty of Campo-Formio."

"Yes, sire, you are right; I had at that time the good fortune to become acquainted with General Bonaparte," said Count Meerfeldt, with a deep bow; "he was just entering a career which has led him from victory to victory, and adorned his head with well-merited laurels."

"Yes, you were one of the signers of the treaty of Campo-Formio," exclaimed Napoleon. "But that was not all. Was it not you who wished to present me, in the name of the emperor of Austria, with some magnificent gifts? What was it you came to offer me then?"

"Sire," said the count, in confusion, "I had orders to repeat that which Count Cobenzl had already vainly proposed to General Bonaparte. I had orders to offer him, in the emperor's name, a principality in Germany, several millions in ready money, and a team of six white horses."

"I declined the principality in Germany because I thought that one ought either to inherit or conquer sovereignties, but never accept them as gifts, for he who accepts a gift always remains the moral vassal of the giver. I rejected the millions because I would not allow myself to be bribed; but I did accept the six horses, and with them made my entry into Germany and came to Rastadt."

"It was the first triumphal procession of your majesty in Germany, and, like Julius Cæsar, you could say, 'I came, saw, and conquered!'"

"Since then circumstances have greatly changed," said the emperor, thoughtfully; "General Bonaparte became the Emperor Napoleon, and the latter did what General Bonaparte refused to do: he accepted at the hands of the Emperor of Austria a gift more precious than principalities, for it was a beautiful young wife. Ah, general, you are my prisoner, and I ought not to release you, but send you to Paris, that you might have the good fortune of kissing the hand of the Empress of France, the daughter of my enemy, and of seeing whether the little fair-haired King of Rome looks like his

grandfather. But no, I will set you at liberty, I will make you my negotiator! You were one of those with whom I concluded, in the name of France, the first peace with Austria; I, therefore, commission you now to mediate my last peace; for I want to wage no more wars—I am tired of this unceasing bloodshed; I ask naught but to repose in peace, and dream of the happiness of France, after having dreamed of its glory. Go, repeat this to the emperor, your master; tell him that I desire no more conquests, but repose. Tell him that I long for nothing more ardently than peace, and that I am ready to conclude it, even before our swords have crossed."

"Sire," said Count Meerfeldt, hesitatingly, "if I repeat all this to the emperor, he will ask me what guaranties your majesty offers him, and what cessions of territory you propose to make."

"Cessions of territory!" exclaimed Napoleon. "Yes, that is it! You want to render me powerless; that is all you are fighting for; that is why the Russians and Swedes are in Germany; that is why the Germans accept subsidies at the hands of England!—all to attain a single object: to deprive me of my power, and narrow the boundaries of France. But do you think that the Russians, the Swedes, and the English, will require no indemnities for services rendered, and that they will very conveniently find them in the territories which you propose to wrest from me? What will Germany gain thereby? She will have rendered France, her natural ally, so powerless that she can never assist her, and, in return, she will have secured a footing in Germany to her three natural enemies, Russia—that is, barbarism; England—that is, foreign industry and commerce in colonial goods; Sweden—that is, navigation on the northern shores. But you will do all this rather than leave me in possession of my power, though I tell you that I wish to fight no more, but long for repose. Is it not so?"

"Sire," said Count Meerfeldt, in a low voice, "the allied sovereigns are, perhaps, familiar with the words of Cæsar, who said that laurels, if they were not to wither, should be often bathed in hostile blood, and fed every year with soil from new fields of victory. Your majesty being the modern Cæsar, the allies may be afraid lest you should adopt this maxim."

"Yes," cried Napoleon, "you are afraid of the very sleep of the lion; you fear that you will never be easy before having

pared his nails and cut his mane. Well, then, after you have placed him in this predicament, what will be the consequence? Have the allied sovereigns reflected? You think only of repairing, by a single stroke, the calamities of twenty years; and, carried away by this idea, you never perceive the changes which time has made around you, and that for Austria to gain now, at the expense of France, is to lose. Tell your sovereign to take that into consideration, Count Meerfeldt; it is neither Austria, nor France, nor Prussia, singly, that will be able to arrest on the Vistula the inundation of a half-nomadic people essentially conquering, and whose dominions extend to China. I comprehend, however, that in order to make peace, I must make sacrifices and I am ready to do so.* For the very purpose of stating this to the Emperor Francis, I set you at liberty, provided you give me your parole to serve no longer in this campaign against France."

"Sire, to fight against France has been so painful a duty that I joyfully give my word to serve no longer unless permitted to do so for France—that is to say, for your majesty."

"You may go, then, and lay my proposals before the Emperor Francis. You will tell him this: I offer to evacuate all fortresses in Germany to the Rhine, and consent to the dissolution of the Confederation of the Rhine. I am ready to restore Illyria and Spain to their former sovereigns. I further consent to the independence of Italy and Holland. If England refuses to grant peace on the seas, we will try to negotiate it, and Austria is to be the mediator."†

"Sire, these are such satisfactory promises," cried Count Meerfeldt, "that I am afraid my mere word will be insufficient to convince my master that you really intend to grant so much."

"I will give you a letter to the Emperor Francis, in which I shall make these proposals," said Napoleon, quickly. "Yes, I will write once more to the emperor. Our political alliance is broken, but between your master and me there is another bond, which is indissoluble. That is what I invoke, for I always place confidence in the regard of my father-in-law."

He went to his desk, and penned a few lines with a hasty hand, folded, sealed, and directed the letter. "Here," he said, approaching the count, "is my letter to my father-in-

* Napoleon's words.—Fain, "Manuscript de 1813," vol. i., pp. 412, 414.

† Ibid.

law. You will immediately repair to him, and deliver it into his hands. The emperor will communicate it to the other sovereigns, and they will take their resolutions accordingly. Tell him that I shall not attack to-morrow, but discontinue further hostilities until I have received his answer; and that I shall certainly expect him to return an answer by to-morrow. Adieu, general! When on my behalf you speak to the two emperors of an armistice, I doubt not the voice which strikes their ears will be eloquent indeed in recollections."*

"It is my last effort," murmured the emperor to himself, when Count Meerfeldt had left; "if it fail, nothing but a struggle of life and death remains to me, and, by Heaven, I will certainly fight it out! The crisis is at hand, and I cannot evade it. I will meet it with my eyes open. The laurels of Marengo and Austerlitz are not yet withered. To-morrow there will be a cessation of hostilities, and on the day after to-morrow peace, or war to the last!"

On the 17th of October no hostilities took place. Napoleon awaited the reply of his father-in-law. But it did not come; it was deemed unnecessary to observe the forms of courtesy toward him before whom, only a year ago, they had prostrated themselves so often in the dust.

The battle recommenced on the 18th of October. The booming of a thousand cannon was the answer of the allies. Napoleon, with only three hundred cannon, replied that he understood this answer to his peace propositions. Upward of three hundred thousand soldiers of the allies filled the plains around Leipsic. Napoleon had scarcely one hundred and twenty thousand to oppose to them, and his men were exhausted and discouraged. But he appeared on this day along the whole line, encouraging his troops by his cheerful countenance and his brief addresses. He seemed to infuse fresh courage and enthusiasm into the hearts of the French. They arose with the heroism of former days, and plunged into the thickest of the fight; the earth trembled beneath the thunder of cannon, the cheers of the victors, and the imprecations of the vanquished. The French did not yield an inch; they stood like a wall, broken here and there, but the gaps filled up again in a moment, and those who had taken the places of the fallen exhibited the same devoted heroism, for Napoleon was there.

And Blucher was also there. He halted opposite the enemy

* Napoleon's words.—Vide Beitzke, vol. ii., p. 592.

with his Silesian army (one-half of which he had placed under the crown prince of Sweden), composed of Russians and Prussians. Blucher, too, fired the hearts of his men by energetic words, and they fought with matchless bravery, for they fought before the eyes of their general. He shared with them every fatigue and danger; he drank with them, when he was thirsty, from one bottle; lighted his pipe from their pipes, and spoke to them, not in the condescending tone of a master, but in their own unreserved and cordial manner. Rushing onward with shouts of victory, they attacked the enemy with irresistible impetuosity, forcing the French to fall back, step by step.

"Every thing is going on right, Gneisenau!" exclaimed Blucher. "Bonaparte cannot hold out; he must at length retreat. He is contracting the circle of his troops more and more, and advancing toward Leipsic. Ah, I understand, M. Bonaparte; you want to march through Leipsic and keep open the passage across the Saale! But it won't do—it won't do! For Blucher is here, and his eyes are yet good.—A courier! Come here! Ride to General York! He is to set out this very night and occupy the banks of the Saale, and impede as much as possible the retreat of the enemy, who intends to fall back across the Saale.—Another courier! Ride to General Langeron! He is to return to-night to the right bank of the Partha, support General Sacken, and, as soon as the enemy begins to retreat, pursue him with the utmost energy."

"But, general," said Gneisenau, when the courier galloped off, "as yet Napoleon does not seem to think of retreating. He maintains his position and offers a bold front."

"He will not do so to-morrow," said Blucher, laconically. "If we do to-day what we can, he is annihilated. God grant that our victory may be followed up, and that they may not grow soft-hearted again at headquarters! The Emperor of Austria never forgets that Bonaparte is his son-in-law; nor the crown prince of Sweden that he is a native of France, and he would like to spare his countrymen further bloodshed; nor the Emperor of Russia, that at Erfurt he plighted eternal fidelity to Napoleon, and kissed him as his brother. But our king, I believe, will always remember that Bonaparte humiliated and oppressed us, and that Queen Louisa died of grief and despair. He will not suffer the others to make peace too early, and cause us to shed our blood and spend our

strength for nothing. We must be indemnified, and it is by no means enough for us merely to gain a victory over Bonaparte. He must surrender all that he has taken from us. Germany must have satisfaction, and I must have mine, too; for the anger I have felt for years has almost killed me. I want to be even with him, and shall not rest before he is hurled from his throne.—What is going on there? Why are they cheering yonder? Look, Gneisenau, one of the enemy's columns is advancing upon us. Do you hear the music? What does it mean?"

"It means, general," shouted an orderly, who galloped up, "that the Saxons are coming over to us. With thirty-two field-pieces, and drums beating, they have left the lines of the French, and, when these tried to prevent them, they turned their bayonets against their former comrades."

Blucher's eye lit up. "Well," he said, "now they will no longer extol Bonaparte's extraordinary luck. To-day at least he has none. The Saxons have felt at last that they are Germans, and wish to purge themselves of their disgrace. I say, Gneisenau, Bonaparte must retreat to-morrow." And what Blucher said here to Gneisenau was what Berthier said to Napoleon: "The battle is lost! We must retreat."

Night came. It is true, the French remained on the field; they did not flee, but they had no strength to continue the battle; their ammunition was exhausted, for they had discharged on this day an incredible amount of cannon-shot. Napoleon felt that he had certainly to retreat, and submit to what was inevitable. At the camp-fire, near the turf-mill, sat the emperor; his generals surrounded him, and listened in silence to his words, falling from his lips slowly and sadly. He ordered dispositions to be made for a retreat, and Berthier repeated the orders to his two adjutants, who were kneeling on the other side of the camp-fire, and writing them down. Suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, Napoleon paused, and his head dropped on his breast. The emperor had fallen asleep!

His generals, respecting this respite from sorrow and misfortune, preserved silence. The fire shed a blood-red lustre over the group; at times the flames flickered up higher, and illuminated the form of the emperor, who, with his head on his breast, his arms hanging down on both sides of the camp-stool, his body gently moving to and fro, was still wrapped in slumber. At times, when the fire blazed

up, and shed a flood of light on the plain, shadows were seen emerging from the gloom, and a long line moved past. It was a portion of the imperial army already retreating toward Leipsic.

A quarter of an hour thus elapsed when Napoleon gave a slight start, and, raising his head, cast a long look of astonishment on the persons surrounding him. His sleep had made him for an instant forget his troubles, but the sombre glances of his generals and the noise of the troops filing by, reminded him of what had happened. His eye resumed its calm expression, and, in a firm, sonorous voice he recommenced giving his orders. Suddenly a whizzing sound was in the air above him—a grenade fell to the ground close to the emperor, burrowed into the earth, and scattered the camp-fire.

"It is a cold night," said the emperor, composedly; "make up the fire again, and add fresh fuel!"

The adjutants ran to collect the firebrands, and the generals themselves hastened to pile on the fuel. But another whizzing sound rent the air, and another grenade fell into the fire, which had just blazed up again; it almost extinguished the flames, and remained in the midst of the coals.

Napoleon gazed musingly on the ball, and strange thoughts probably filled his soul at the sight of this messenger at his feet.* "It is enough," he said calmly; "no more fire may be kindled! My horse! To Leipsic! I will spend the night there." The horses were brought; attended by Berthier, Caulaincourt, and a few orderlies, the emperor rode to Leipsic, and took up his quarters at the Hotel de Prusse.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE NINETEENTH OF OCTOBER.

It was eight o'clock on the following morning. A dense fog covered Leipsic as with an impenetrable veil, and extended far over the landscape. No one could see as yet, in the darkness of the night, what had been done by friend or foe. At times the allies heard loud explosions, and saw flashes on the side of the French; then all was dark and silent again. Suddenly, however, a bright glare illuminated

*Beitzke, vol. ii., p. 615.

the night, for in the French camp large fires blazed, and, like a flaming serpent, stretched our far into the plain.

"Ha!" said Blucher; "Gneisenau, I was right after all: Bonaparte is retreating. Do you know the meaning of those fires? The French have placed their caissons on both sides of the road, and set them on fire, that they may serve as beacons to the retreating troops. See! they reach up to the city of Leipsic. It is as I said; the French intend to march through that city, and retreat across the Saale. Well, I think General York will await them there, and Langeron will finish them. But come, Gneisenau, the fog is clearing. Let us ride to yonder knoll; we shall be able to see better there."

With the nimbleness of a lad Blucher mounted his horse, and, no longer restraining his impatience, he galloped off. Gneisenau rode by his side, and at some distance behind him trotted the pipe-master, with the iron box on the pommel of his saddle.

They reached the crest of the knoll and stopped. The fog had disappeared, and they could distinctly see a field of horror and desolation as far as their eyes reached. The immense plain was covered far and wide with piles of corpses; rivulets of blood intersected the down-trodden soil; fragments of wagons, cannon, and vast heaps of horses, lay in wild disorder, and all around the horizon gleamed the dying fires of upward of twenty villages.

Blucher cast a mournful look on this harrowing spectacle. "Gneisenau," he said, "it is almost impossible for one to rejoice over this victory, for it costs too many tears—too much blood. How those poor brave men are lying there, dead or dying, and have not even a grave at which their mothers and wives may weep! May the good God in heaven have mercy on their souls, and comfort those who are weeping for them!" He took off his cap, and, shading his face with it, uttered a short, low prayer for the repose of the dead. With a quick jerk he then put on his cap again. "Well," he said, "we have prayed, and we will now try to find that accursed Bonaparte, who is at the bottom of all this carnage, and—"

At this moment the pipe-master galloped up to his general.

"Well, what do you want, Christian?"

"The morning pipe," said Christian, presenting the short pipe to his master.