

HANNIBAL ANTE PORTAS.

CHAPTER XL.

BLUCHER'S BIRTHDAY.

Two months had elapsed since the great battle of Leipsic, during which, to Blucher's unbounded despair, much had been spoken, much negotiated, many schemes devised, but nothing done. Owing to the slowness of the allies, Napoleon had succeeded, aside from some unfortunate engagements during the retreat, in safely returning with the remnant of his army to France; and this dilatory system of the allies seemed to be constantly adopted. The armies advanced slowly, or not at all. For weeks the headquarters had been at Frankfort-on-the-Main. There were the Emperor of Russia, the King of Prussia, the crown prince of Sweden, and Prince Schwartzberg as representative of the Emperor of Austria, besides Metternich and Hardenberg, and the whole army of diplomatists, who deemed it incumbent on them to put an end with their pens to this war which the swords of the generals had concluded by a victory. The peace party were incessantly intent on gaining the allies at headquarters over to their side, and the crown prince of Sweden and Prince Metternich stood at their head. Bernadotte cautioned the allies against the dangers in which an invasion of France would involve them; Metternich deemed it more advisable for them to conclude an advantageous peace with the angry lion Napoleon. Blucher kept murmuringly away from the headquarters, and stayed with his staff at Höchst, near his troops.

It was the 16th of December. The field-marshal was alone in his room, and sat on the sofa, in his comfortable military cloak, smoking his morning pipe. Before him lay a map of Germany, on which he fixed his eyes, and across which he eagerly moved his fingers from time to time, drawing lines here and there, and apparently conceiving plans of operation.

The door opened, and Pipe-Master Hennemann walked in.— In full gala-uniform, holding both hands behind him, he stood at the door, hoping that his field-marshal would see and ask him what he wanted. But Blucher did not look up; he was absorbed in studying his map. Christian Hennemann, therefore, ventured to interrupt him. "Field-marshal," he said, in a low and timid voice, "I—"

"Well, what do you want, Christian?" asked Blucher, lifting his eyes from the map. "What is the matter? Why do you wear your gala-uniform, and look as if you were about to go on parade? Have you become a Catholic in this Catholic country, Christian, and are you celebrating a saint's holiday?"

"Yes, field-marshal," said Christian, resolutely stepping forward, "I am celebrating the holiday of my saint, and his name is Blucher!"

"He is a queer saint," cried Blucher, laughing. "But what does it all mean, Christian?"

"It means, field-marshal, that this is your birthday, and that you are seventy-one years old to-day."

"That is true," said Blucher to himself. "My birthday! I had given strict orders not to celebrate it, and I had forgotten it myself!"

"But no one can prevent me from celebrating it, your excellency!" exclaimed Christian. "That would be very pretty, if I could not congratulate my 'Marshal Forward' on his birthday. Long live my field-marshal! And may God spare him many years to us yet, that we may catch Bonaparte at Paris; for, if 'Marshal Forward' does not do it, no one will!"

"Yes, if they would only let me!" cried Blucher, striking with his hand on the table; "but they will not! I am sitting here like a pug-dog in a deal box, and Bonaparte stands outside; I can only bark—I cannot bite him, for they will not let me out."

"They will have to, your excellency," said Hennemann, quickly, "and before many pipes are smoked. But I would request your excellency to be so kind as to smoke this pipe." He drew forth his right hand, which he had held behind him, and produced a short pipe, neatly adorned with a rose-colored ribbon terminating in a rosette with two long ends. "Field-marshal," he said, "in return for all the favors you have conferred on me, a poor boy, and for having made me, a stupid peasant-lad, pipe-master of the famous Field-Marshal

Blucher, I take the liberty of presenting you with this short pipe." And making a polite obeisance, he handed it to the general, who took it smilingly, and was about to reply, but Christian added, in a louder voice, "But your excellency must not think that this is a common pipe. In the first place, it is not made of clay."

"No," said Blucher, contemplating it; "the small tube is made of wood, and mounted with silver, sure enough; the bowl is carved out of wood, too, and there is another bowl inside."

"But it is no common wood, your excellency," said Christian, solemnly. "You remember that I requested a furlough immediately after the battle of Leipsic, and said I would go home, see my dear Mecklenburg again, and visit my brothers and sisters. Well, that was not my principal object; there was another reason why I wanted to go. I have never forgotten what my General Blucher said when I first came to him, and what he told us of his *mutting*—that he still loved her. Well, I thought it would gladden the field-marshal's heart to have a little souvenir of his mother. And, therefore, I wended my way to Rastow, where my dear field-marshal's mother is buried. I went to her grave, said my prayers, and then cut off a branch from the linden which stands on her grave. Like every other son of Mecklenburg, you ought to have a souvenir of your *mutting*. Here it is. The tube and the bowl of the pipe I carved out of the branch cut from the linden, and, that you might know what it is, I cut these letters in the wood. Read, sir."

"Sure enough, there are letters on it," cried Blucher. "They say '*Souvenir of Mutting!*'"

"Yes, that it is," said Christian; "you know, with us, those who love their mother call her as you did, and therefore I offer you this souvenir."

"Christian," said Blucher, in a tremulous voice, "that was well done, and I can tell you that you give me great joy, and that I shall not forget your kindness. This shall be my gala-pipe, and I will smoke it on gala-days only, that is to say, when we go into battle. I thank you a thousand times, Christian, my boy, and if my dear *mutting* has not forgotten me, she will look down upon her boy to-day, who is seventy-one years old, and it will gladden her to know that he has now a memorial of her—and from her grave! You were on her grave, then, Christian? How does it look?"

"It was decked with flowers, your excellency, and finches and larks were chirping in the large linden overshadowing it. The old grave-digger told me the linden had been planted on the day when Madame von Blucher was buried, and it was quite a small twig at that time."

"Yes, that is the course of things," said Blucher, mournfully; "when I saw my mother last, she was a handsome lady, and I was a boy of sixteen. I have not felt that so many years have elapsed since then, and I feel myself still as active as a lad. But they tell me I am decrepit, and that there is but a step between me and the grave."

"Well, I should like to see the giant who could cross that step," cried Christian; "a hundred thousand French corpses and Bonaparte's overturned throne lie in that step between you and the grave."

Blucher laughed. "You are a good boy, pipe-master, and in honor of you I will smoke the new pipe to-day. Fill and light it; I will—who knocks there?—Open the door, Christian."

"It is I, your excellency," said General Gneisenau, who entered the room. "You must not refuse to see me. It is true, you have forbidden any celebration, serenade, or congratulation; but you must not turn me from your door; for you know that I love you like a son, and therefore you must permit me to come and wish myself joy that Field-Marshal Blucher still lives for the welfare of Germany."

Blucher kindly shook hands with him. "Would that you were right, Gneisenau, and that I really lived for the welfare of Germany! But the gentlemen at headquarters need me no longer. I am once more a nuisance and a stumbling-block—I am, according to them, the old madcap again—the rash hussar, just because I shout, 'We must advance upon Paris!' while the *trübsalsspritzen** are croaking all the time, 'We must make peace! If we go to France, we are lost!' Gneisenau, if this state of affairs goes on for any length of time, this will be my last birthday, for I shall die of anger. I know if we make peace, the blood shed has been in vain, and our victories in vain; and in a few years, when he has recovered from his losses, Bonaparte will commence the same game, and we shall have to pass through the same series of disastrous events. But they are destitute of courage. Bernadotte does

* A favorite expression of Blucher when he alluded to the timid diplomatists who advised the allies to make peace with Napoleon.

not want us to hurt the French, and the Emperor of Austria desires to spare his dear son-in-law, and they are besieging our king and the Emperor Alexander in such a vigorous manner, that they are at a loss what to do."

"And what should *we* be here for?" inquired Gneisenau, smiling. "What would Field-Marshal Blucher be here for, if we do not march forward? No, the gentlemen who are so desirous of making peace are greatly mistaken if they believe that they are able to set at naught our successes, and that it depends on their will only to make peace or war. The wheel that is to crush Napoleon is in motion, and no human hand can arrest it. Let the *trübsalsspritzen*, as your excellency says, croak: public opinion in Germany and throughout Europe speaks louder, and it clamors for war, and we shall have it. For this reason your excellency ought not to despond, nor prevent us from celebrating your birthday in a worthy manner. Your whole army longs to present its congratulations to you, and the officers of York's corps, who intended to give your excellency a ball to-night, and had so confidently counted upon your consent that they had already made all arrangements, are in despair because you did not accept their invitation. General York himself is quite vexed at your refusal, and thinks you decline because you do not wish to meet him."

"I do not care if he is vexed, old curmudgeon that he is!" cried Blucher. "He must always have something to grumble at, and has often enough said very hard things about me. Let him do so again, for aught I care! I shall, nevertheless, not go to the ball. What should I do there? Merry I cannot be, for my indignation almost stifles my heart, and, instead of smiling on people, I would rather show them my fist. Ah, Gneisenau, men are mean and contemptible, after all, and those at headquarters are the most despicable! They want peace! Do you comprehend that, Gneisenau—peace! now that we are on the road to Paris, and only need make up our minds to destroy the power of our enemy! Oh, it is enough to make a fellow swear! To the gallows with all the *trübsalsspritzen*!—all the old women who are wearing uniforms, and who, in place of cocked hats, should rather put nightcaps on their heads!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Gneisenau, smiling, "should they do so, your excellency would tear off their nightcaps, and forcibly put their hats again on their heads. And as for the old

women, Blucher, the young hero, will in the end rout them all, and drive them from the field."

"Ah, Gneisenau, if I succeed in doing so, then I should be young again, and live to see still many a birthday," sighed Blucher. "I have conceived every thing so clearly and well—the whole plan of the campaign was already settled in my mind! Come, Gneisenau, let me show you all on the map, and then you will have to admit that Napoleon would be annihilated if we could carry this plan into execution. Come, look at the map!"

Gneisenau stood by the side of the field-marshal, and bent over the map lying on the table.

"See," said Blucher, eagerly, "here is Paris, here is the Rhine, and here are we; farther below—"

"But, your excellency," interrupted Gneisenau, surprised, "you have a very old and poor map; it is impossible to base any strategic plans on it."

"How so?" asked Blucher, in amazement.

"Because this map is certainly incorrect, your excellency; we have entirely new and very accurate maps now, made from the latest surveys."

"Ah, what do I care for your surveys?" cried Blucher, impatiently. "By your surveys, I suppose, you cannot displace the countries, cities, and rivers? Paris remains where it is, the Rhine flows where it has always flowed, and behind the Rhine lies Germany, where it has always lain?"

"Yes, but you will not find on this map the towns, villages, forests, rivers, and hills, which you will meet on your advance, and which, if not taken into consideration, might prove formidable obstacles."

"What do I care for the towns, villages, forests, rivers, and hills?" replied Blucher: "I advance all the time, and that says every thing. In the towns and villages I shall cause my troops to take up their quarters; through the forests we shall cut a road if there is none; we shall build bridges across the rivers, and run over the tops of the mountains; if the field-pieces cannot be hauled over them, we shall take them around the base. The most important thing is, that we advance, and I am quite able to consider that on my map here.—Now, then! here is Paris. Put your finger on Paris, Gneisenau." The general obeyed, and pressed the tip of his forefinger on the spot indicated. "And here," cried Blucher, pressing his own finger on the map, "here are we,

the Silesian army. Between us lies the Rhine. Put your other finger on the Rhine, Gneisenau." Gneisenau put his middle-finger on the black line marking the Rhine. "Now put your little-finger down here, between Mannheim and Kehl; there stands the army of Bohemia under Prince Schwartzberg; and up here, where I hold my thumb, in Holland, is Bulow, with his corps. See, on this side, we have therefore completely hemmed in France; and, on the other side, where the Atlantic Ocean is—or is it no longer there on your new-fangled maps?"

"Yes, your excellency," exclaimed Gneisenau, laughing, "it is still there."

"Well, then, England posts her ships there; and in the south, on the Pyrenees, stand the Spaniards, who have sworn to revenge themselves on Bonaparte. Now we advance all at the same time into France. Prince Schwartzberg penetrates with his army through Switzerland; Bulow marches through the Netherlands, after conquering them, and joins my forces; and I cross the Rhine here in three large columns with the Silesian army—the first column at Mannheim, the second at Kaub, and the third—well, now I have no finger left to—"

"Here is mine, your excellency," said Gneisenau, raising the finger marking the line of the Rhine.

But Blucher hastily pressed it down. "Do not remove that!" he cried; "what is to become of my whole plan if that finger should desert its position? Keep it there, then!—Well, here, where I hold my left thumb, at Coblenz, the third column will cross the Rhine. On the other bank we shall all unite, take Sarrebruck, advance by forced marches upon Metz, and—"

"Your excellency," shouted the pipe-master, throwing open the door, "a courier from the King of Prussia, from Frankfort-on-the-Main!"

"Let him come in!" cried Blucher, hastily throwing off his military cloak, and putting on his uniform-coat. He had not yet quite done so when the courier entered the room.

"What orders do you bring from my king and master?" inquired Blucher, meeting the officer.

"Your excellency, his majesty King Frederick William III., and his majesty the Emperor Alexander, request Field-Marshal Blucher to repair immediately to Frankfort, where the monarchs have an important communication to make to

the field-marshal. They wish your excellency to start forthwith, in order to reach Frankfort as soon as possible."

"Inform their majesties that I shall be there in two hours.—Well, Gneisenau, what do you say now?" asked Blucher, when the courier left the room.

"I say that the monarchs have at length discovered who alone can give them efficient assistance and valuable advice, and that they have, therefore, applied to Field-Marshal Blucher."

"And I tell you," shouted Blucher, in a thundering voice, "that the monarchs send for me to inform me that we are to face about and go home. If it were any thing else, they would have sent me word by an officer; but, as it is, they are afraid lest I grow furious, and so they intend to inform me in the mildest possible manner of their decision, and wish to pat my cheeks tenderly while telling me of it. But they mistake; I shall tell them the truth, as I would any one else, and they shall see that it is all the same to me whether they have a crown on their heads or a forage-cap; the truth must out, and they shall hear it, as sure as my name is Blucher! But I must dress for the occasion—it shall be a gala-day for me. With my orders on my breast, and the emperor's sword of honor at my side, I will appear before them and tell them the truth."

CHAPTER XLI.

PASSAGE OF THE RHINE.

THE Emperor Alexander and King Frederick William were in the king's cabinet, awaiting Field-Marshal Blucher, for the courier had just returned and reported that the field-marshal promised to be at Frankfort within two hours.

"The two hours have just elapsed," said Alexander, glancing at the clock, "and Blucher, who is known to be a very punctual man, will undoubtedly soon be here. Ah, there is a carriage; it is he, no doubt!"

"Yes, it is he," said the king, who had stepped to the window, and was looking out. "He is alighting with the nimbleness of a youth, in spite of his seventy-one years. He is really a hero!"

"And will your majesty be so kind as to enter into my jest? Will you assist me in it, and confirm my words?"